Achieving Excellence and Equity

2026 National Improvement Framework

Improvement Plan

December 2025

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Achieving Excellence and Equity

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2026 National Improvement Framework

Improvement Plan

This Improvement Plan provides the full details of the new actions that will be taken to deliver the seven outcomes set out in the 2026 National Improvement Framework, (NIF) the evidence to support them, and how we will measure progress. As well as the actions set out below, you can also find an update on progress with actions from the 2025 National Improvement Framework and improvement plan. This provides information on progress with ongoing commitments in the Programme for Government (PfG) including:

- Providing local authorities £186.5 million to deliver our joint commitment to restore teacher numbers to 2023 levels, freeze learning hours, and reduce class contact time.
- Supporting the recruitment, retention and training of the ASN workforce, backed by an additional £29 million in 2025-26 in local and national programmes.
- Working with the teacher unions, and COSLA to agree our approach to delivering a reduction in class contact time at pace – helping to ease teacher workload and create space for them to drive improvement and reform and improve outcomes.
- Continuing the Curriculum Improvement Cycle to update and strengthen Scotland's national curriculum for every child and young person.
- Working with Qualifications Scotland to rationalise the qualifications offer in the senior phase to support clearer learner pathways, more flexible modular courses and deliver an improved and more inclusive educational experience.

Outcome 1 - a globally respected, empowered and responsive education and skills system with clear accountability at every level that supports children, young people and adult learners to thrive. The system enables the development of their knowledge, skills, values and attributes that give them the best opportunity to succeed and contribute to Scotland's society and economy.

What the evidence is telling us

Work is well underway to establish His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) underpinned by the Education (Scotland) Act 2025. This marks a significant shift in Scotland's approach to quality assurance and improvement. A transition plan is in place to support the smooth transition for inspection functions to

move from Education Scotland to HMIE, safeguarding continuity and public confidence.

In March 2025, HMIE published a thematic inspection of local authority approaches to supporting school improvement. The report found that, across Scotland, there was much to commend, with strong examples of strategic leadership, robust data-driven self-evaluation, and collaborative cultures where schools and local authorities work together to improve outcomes for children and young people. Positive relationships, grounded in professional trust and respect, underpin many of these successes. In particular, effective leadership at all levels – central officers, school leaders, and middle leaders – emerges as a critical driver of sustainable improvement.

However, the report also identifies significant challenges. There is notable variability in the consistency and quality of support provided to schools, both within and across local authorities. Self-evaluation processes are not always rigorous enough to maximise the progress of children and young people. Leadership development at all levels remains uneven and this is essential for building capacity for continuous improvement.

The Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland have jointly developed the Early Learning and Childcare Quality Improvement Framework to strengthen consistency, reduce bureaucracy and provide clarity for providers. The framework streamlines quality indicators from 28 to 11 and was launched in January 2025, followed by pilot testing with stakeholders settings. The framework is being used by the Care Inspectorate and HMIE when carrying out inspections from September 2025. The implementation of the framework is supported by ongoing engagement with the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) sector to ensure the framework delivers high-quality, improvement-focused inspection across ELC.

HMIE is developing a framework for inspecting local authorities and this will be published in draft in 2026.

The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and Education Scotland has developed a new framework "How Good Is Our Education Authority?" to support self-evaluation within local authorities, and to encourage collaborative working across groups of local authorities to identify strengths and support areas for improvement. The use of the framework aims to promote partnership working, collaboration has identified a number of key strengths including, leadership and strategic planning, and inclusive and supportive practices. It has also identified some points of action to help deliver sustainable improvements for all children and young people. These include strengthening collaboration and knowledge sharing, enhancing digital learning strategies, and improving data utilisation. All local authorities are committed to working collaboratively to bring about system improvement. There is, however, an understanding that there are numerous factors across Scotland which inevitably contribute to variability and that change and improvement is an ongoing, continuous process.

The targeting and implementation of local improvement activity is key to the delivery of the NIF. Local authority plans, informed by school improvement planning, identified a number of common themes which relate to the NIF priorities and

outcomes. Almost every plan emphasises improving educational outcomes and closing attainment gaps, as well as preparing young people for life beyond school, including employment, training, and further education. Promoting mental health, resilience, and wellbeing for children, young people, and staff is a core theme.

Findings from HMIE school inspections, tell us that the quality of strategic planning for continuous improvement varies considerably, with notable strengths evident in the majority of schools and persistent challenges in others. Where practice is strongest, senior leaders articulate a clear, ambitious vision for improvement and lead change with confidence and empathy. They foster a culture of trust and collaboration, ensuring that improvement priorities are well understood and shared by staff, children, and families. Leadership teams operate cohesively with clearly defined remits, using robust self-evaluation and quality assurance processes to inform decision-making. These schools demonstrate a systematic use of data, research and stakeholder feedback to shape improvement plans that are streamlined, measurable, and aligned with the national priorities set out in the NIF.

A comprehensive review of school inspections is underway. This review covers the inspection framework, the models used, the frequency of inspections, and the reporting arrangements. The aim is to strengthen the role of inspection as a driver of improvement and public assurance on the quality of education in schools in Scotland. The review is informed by extensive stakeholder engagement, including consultation with children and young people. Significant stakeholder engagement took place between January and May 2025, which informed a public consultation 'School Inspections are Changing: Shape What's Next' which launched on 3 September 2025. In addition, a significant programme of engagement with children and young people is underway.

The 2025 School Estate Statistics, which were published in September, show that the proportion of schools in "good" or "satisfactory" condition has increased to a record 92%, compared to 62.7% in 2007. However, despite this significant progress, there is still more to be done - with 8% of schools in an unsatisfactory condition.

During the passage of the Scottish Languages Act 2025, it became clear that current arrangements are not supporting the development or long-term sustainability of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO). In particular, there are limitations on the student roll - linked to its position as the sole higher and further education institution delivering training entirely in the medium of Gaelic. Size also impacts on the current criteria for an independent, degree-awarding body, and university status, as the current conditions are designed for majority languages and apply to all higher and further education institutions in Scotland.

The 2023 Withers' report of the skills delivery landscape highlighted a fragmented skills landscape in Scotland, inconsistent terminology across sectors, and a recommendation to develop a single national framework with consistent language.

What we will do to deliver

We committed within the Programme for Government (PfG) to appoint an experienced headteacher to set out priorities for future reform of school education, and announced in September that John Wilson, the recently retired headteacher of Broughton High School, Edinburgh will undertake the role. Drawing on his experience of 30 years of working in the education system, Mr Wilson will provide a report and recommendations to Ministers by the end of March 2026 focused on three areas of school reform – improvement, funding and governance.

An improved education system will continue to be supported through our £2bn Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP), the details of which were set out in the 2025 Improvement Plan. 34 school projects will have started construction by autumn 2026. The LEIP will deliver 47 school infrastructure projects across Scotland by the end of 2027-28.

In 2026 HMIE will publish a draft new inspection framework for school inspections, the content of which is currently being developed. This will be further informed by the analysis of the public consultation which closed on 26 November 2025.

HMIE will review and update school inspection models to implement the new inspection framework, taking account of findings of the public consultation.

HMIE will extend its work with local authorities to support improvement across Scotland.

Taking forward a review of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig as required by Section 32 of the Scottish Languages Act 2025, with the aim of providing it with a secure future; and to take other action to support its development.

Scottish Government will work with key strategic partners to develop a high level architecture for skills setting out our priorities and a shared language. This will not replace existing frameworks, but provide a structure that helps bring more consistency across the system.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with our partners in local government to ensure that the improvement planning process adds value at all levels in order to support positive outcomes for children and young people.

How we will measure progress

Monitoring of progress towards the key NIF measures through the NIF Interactive Evidence Report (NIFIER)

We will continue to use PISA assessment, and our position when compared with other developed nations as a measure of the success of our education system. This will be complemented going forward with specific data to compare in reading literacy, maths and science compared to other nations, via the TIMSS and PIRLS studies.

We will use data from the Scottish Household Survey on school and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting satisfaction levels as an indicator that the reforms we are introducing are leading to improvements. The data collected includes measuring satisfaction levels amongst the general public and more specifically, in households where a school aged child is present.

We will use the evidence from HMIE inspections to assess performance at individual school, local authority, and national levels, enhancing quality and supporting improvements. This aims to promote the highest standards of learning, leading to better outcomes for all learners.

We will use data on positive destinations for school leavers in assessing the extent to which our children and young people are being provided with the best opportunity to succeed and contribute to Scotland's society and economy.

We will measure the success of the Learning Estate Investment Programme by delivering state-of-the-art schools which will benefit tens of thousands of pupils across Scotland. We also aim to see the percentage of pupils in "poor" or "bad" condition schools continue to decrease each year within the school estate statistics.

The review of SMO will deliver practical recommendations and findings to inform future decisions by Ministers on future support and development of SMO which will in turn support strong and clear outcomes.

We will have achieved agreement on our priorities for skills, in a high level architecture to which other frameworks and skills programmes can align.

Outcome 2 - young people experiencing the benefit of schools and early years settings working in excellent partnerships with wider children's services and other partners, families, and communities, in line with the GIRFEC approach.

What the evidence is telling us

Evidence from Public Health Scotland[1] shows that a number of cohorts of young children have been negatively affected by the Covid pandemic, with a disproportionate impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Since 2020, evidence has shown that there has been an increase in speech, language and communication (SLC) developmental concerns recorded at the 13-15 months, 27-30 month and 4-5 year child health reviews. There is evidence to suggest that the presence of known risk factors for preventable SLC needs can have a lesser impact when supportive factors, such as positive adult-child interactions and responsiveness, are in place.

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections tell us that, most schools have reported positive changes in parental perceptions, with high levels of parental satisfaction with their child's school experience. In the best examples, parents feel there are caring and respectful relationships between staff and pupils and there is a

[1] Speech, language and communication development among children in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic

welcoming ethos. This contributes to children and young people's wellbeing and sense of belonging. In fewer than half of schools, however, parental involvement in strategic decision-making and self-evaluation remains limited. Although consultation takes place, parental views do not always have a clear influence on school priorities. These schools should strengthen approaches to ensure parental contributions meaningfully shape strategic decisions and improvement planning.

Community involvement and partnership working are key strengths in the majority of schools. Effective collaboration with parents, local organisations and national bodies enhances the breadth and relevance of opportunities available to children and young people. These partnerships provide access to sporting, cultural and creative activities, vocational learning and accredited programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Dynamic Youth Award. Children and young people benefit from opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their communities through charity fundraising, environmental projects, intergenerational work and cultural events, helping them to develop as responsible citizens and effective contributors. Where practice is strongest, partnership working contributes well to schools' strategic planning for improvement.

The data on uptake rates of funded ELC for eligible two-year-olds, reported in the ELC Census, has shown significant variation between local authorities. This highlights the need for continued, sustained improvement at a local level. This has been highlighted as a key priority in our continued focus on tackling child poverty. Data shows concerns around speech, language and communication (SLC) development at key child health review stages. These concerns are more pronounced in disadvantaged cohorts, highlighting the importance of early identification and responsive adult-child interactions.

What we will do to deliver

The Scottish Government will continue to utilise established relationships with parents and carers and children and young people on education policy priorities as part of an overarching approach to engaging with those who are impacted by changes to policies, ensuring their voices are listened to and views considered as part of policy development and the ongoing reform of school education.

An improvement dashboard has been co-designed in partnership with local authorities, as part of the Outcomes and Measurement Framework (OMF) for Funded ELC. This is now available to all 32 local authorities. The Scottish Government and the Improvement Service (IS) are now considering next steps to develop the project further, to provide richer insights into the delivery of funded ELC in Scotland. As part of this, the Scottish Government will work with the IS and local authorities to explore future support for strategic workforce planning.

We know that it is important for all children to experience high-quality play opportunities supported by adults who are skilled in the use of child-centred play pedagogy. We will continue to work with local authorities to support the use of Realising the Ambition: Being Me, our internationally recognised national practice guidance for early years, across the early level Curriculum for Excellence. We will use outputs from the HMIE 2025-26 inspection programme and stakeholder

feedback to improve evidence on the implementation of play pedagogy and to identify areas for further improvement.

Scottish Government published the Early Years Speech, Language and Communication Action Plan on 2 December, supporting practitioners to embed our "Chatting Together" messages in all ELC settings and early intervention approaches in partnership with families and communities. This Action Plan will strengthen collaboration between health visitors, ELC practitioners and local authorities to ensure SLC needs are identified early and addressed consistently across Scotland.

Scottish Government will continue to work with local authorities and partners to maximise uptake of funded ELC to all eligible children, particularly those facing the most disadvantage.

How we will measure progress

Work on eligible two-year-olds currently reports through the Tackling Child Poverty Programme.

Progress on Speech Language and Communication will be monitored through child health review data on SLC concerns, inspection evidence, and practitioner feedback on the implementation of the SLC Action Plan.

Outcome 3 - inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment which gives young people the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to society, shape a sustainable future, while celebrating and supporting progression for all.

What the evidence is telling us

This years "Achievement of CfE Level" (ACEL) data published on 9 December confirmed that the attainment gap for both literacy and numeracy in primary has reduced in 2024-25 to reach its lowest ever level (19.4 percentage points for literacy, and 16.6 percentage points for numeracy). For pupils in P1, P4 and P7 combined, the proportion achieving the expected levels in literacy and numeracy in 2024-25 reached the highest overall level to date. For our S3 pupils, the proportions achieving Third Level or better in literacy and numeracy are at their highest ever level.

The number of passes in vocational and technical qualifications and awards, such as construction, hospitality and business, has reached a record high of 110,380 this year. This represents a year-on-year increase of 22.6% compared to 2024. The pass rate for National 5 and Highers was also up, when compared to both last year and the pre-pandemic set of results, back in 2019.

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections tell us that, across the majority of schools, progression pathways in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are well-established and aligned with Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes. The majority of secondary schools have a clear commitment to delivering a broad general education (BGE) aligned with CfE principles, with young people accessing a wide range of curricular areas in S1 and

S2, with increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary learning, sustainability, and skills for learning, life and work.

In the senior phase, many secondary schools offer a range of qualifications, including Foundation Apprenticeships and National Progression Awards. These vocational and technical qualifications are often delivered in partnership with colleges and employers, contributing to a more inclusive and responsive curriculum. Evidence demonstrates a commitment to parity of esteem in these secondary schools, with innovative courses supporting skills development and future employment opportunities.

The evidence-gathering and analysis conducted by Education Scotland as part of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle reinforced many of these points but it also confirmed that there is a need to make improvements. In particular, the need to declutter the curriculum, to clarify and improve the position of knowledge and to improve how we address cross-curricular knowledge and skills. In relation to Gaelic, the evidence tells us that the current approach to the design of the Gaelic Medium Education (GME) curriculum - a translation of the English language curriculum - does not capture or adequately reflect the experience and culture of Gaelic communities.

What we will do to deliver

The reforms to curriculum, qualifications and assessment will gather pace in 2026. The combined timeline for the reform programme, published in June 2025, provides further detail on the key activities up to 2031. The reforms are being taken forward as an integrated programme to guarantee close alignment between curriculum and qualifications reform, to ensure a coherent, consistent and relevant journey for all pupils through school.

In relation to our curriculum reforms a key highlight in 2026 will be the publication of a draft evolved “technical framework” covering all curricular areas. Detailed evidence and analysis papers will be published alongside a package of communication and engagement to support implementation. As we implement these reforms, all key partners will retain a strong focus on our shared end goals: to ensure the curriculum remains forward looking and supports high quality teaching and learning; to improve the position of knowledge; to provide clarity on progression; to support successful transitions across early years, primary and secondary, and; to build a strong alignment between Broad General Education (BGE) and the Senior Phase.

In relation to the qualifications, progress has been made and work will continue to deliver the SG response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (IRQA) which will update qualifications and assessment and improve the learner experience. SQA consulted with practitioners on the removal of written exams from three practical National 5 courses (Practical Cake Craft, Metal working and Woodworking) which is being implemented in the 2025/26 academic session. Engagement is ongoing with development teams to consider the position for a further two subject areas from 2026/27. This supports work to rebalance assessment and review what forms of assessment are most appropriate across the range of qualifications.

SQA has also conducted a limited pilot of digital assessment processes alongside the 2025 exam diet to consider the viability of increasing the use of digital assessments. Qualifications Scotland is currently reviewing no/low uptake qualifications. Evidence gathering continues across all product types to assess design principles, relevance, demand, and effectiveness. An initial workshop was held as a sub-group of the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) in October/November 2025. This work will support the intention to create clearer and more coherent learner pathways.

In relation to Gaelic, our aim is to develop a Gaelic medium curriculum which more clearly reflects the history, culture and society of Gaelic communities. This will strengthen engagement of GME learners with their communities, particularly with regard to the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to Gaelic communities and society, and to support a sustainable future for the language. The Gaelic medium curriculum developed through these reforms will not be a translation of the English curriculum but it will includes ongoing language acquisition, learning about Scottish history, the richness of Gaelic culture and concepts unique to Gaelic, such as the environmental stewardship inherent in dùthchas.

Organisations from across the education system will guide the reforms through the Curriculum and Assessment Board, and Education Reform Programme Board. The Scottish Government will continue to chair a Curriculum and Qualifications Reform Assurance Board, to ensure all elements remain aligned and coordinated.

How we will measure progress

Monitoring of progress towards the key NIF measures through the NIF Interactive Evidence Report (NIFIER).

The Scottish Government has commissioned work to develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy which will propose a structured approach to systematically monitor progress and evaluate the impact of Curriculum, Qualifications and Assessment reform project (as well as the wider Education Reform Programme) over time. This project includes the development of a theory of change model, data mapping and an evaluability assessment.

Our Curriculum and Qualifications Reform Assurance Board will maintain a key role in overseeing all aspects of implementation, including our approach to monitoring and evaluation.

In relation to Gaelic, the Scottish Government will work with local government and other partners to ensure that data on subject availability and pupil uptake across GME settings in Scotland is robustly captured and maintained, including for digital learning offers/platforms. As set out in the Scottish Languages Act 2025, we will start the process of identifying, designating and supporting Areas of Linguistic Significance.

Outcome 4 - high levels of achievement across the curriculum for all learners, with action to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

What the evidence is telling us

Local authorities' stretch aims for 2023/24 – 2025/26 demonstrate local ambition for improvement and accelerating progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap over three years across a set of core measures (a sub-set of the 13 key NIF measures of the poverty-related attainment gap).

The interim evaluation report and a school-based survey report (published in August 2025) which drew on almost 1,000 responses from 600 schools highlighted that Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding had contributed towards 'clear evidence that progress has been made, with two thirds of respondents noting a great/moderate improvement in attainment in literacy, and three fifths in numeracy.' Key factors identified as contributing to progress were 'increased/specialist staffing/resources, the ability to target interventions/approaches, and focusing on pupil wellbeing/needs/readiness to learn'.

Within each of the measures, there continues to be variation in outcomes for children and young people between different local authorities. There are a number of societal and socio-economic factors which influence attainment, which can impact on learning and achievement. Local authorities face different pressures and challenges, for example due to their geography, levels of deprivation, staffing levels, funding levels, and local priorities. These factors need to be considered when comparing performance.

Data demonstrates the National Improving Writing Programme (NIWP) is contributing to significant improvement in writing attainment locally and nationally, with ripple effects also being seen across numeracy, reading, listening and talking. Participating local authorities have been working towards combined and local stretch aims, with 8 of the initial 10 local authorities now achieving 70% or more in ACEL first level writing, and participating schools evidencing substantial improvements at first level and across other primary levels. The first level writing national average has increased to 74% from 70% in 2021/22.

There was recognition that NIWP has been proven to be a successful model for embedding a Quality Improvement (QI) approach and is being adopted beyond writing with local leads applying it to other curriculum areas. Continuing with NIWP in 2026/27 would ensure more schools who need it have access and time to fully embed it, increasing sustainability nationally, before moving national QI focus to another subject area .

Alongside this, the national Quality Improvement for Senior Leaders programme is supporting school leaders to apply the rigour of QI approaches to their local improvement priorities, and support practitioners to better understand data in classrooms. Positive feedback from Cohort 1 has resulted in an additional cohort for 2026.

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections tell us that robust tracking of attainment in literacy and numeracy is evident in the majority of schools, where systematic processes provide accurate overviews of progress for individuals, groups, and cohorts. These schools link tracking data to improvement planning and targeted interventions, resulting in measurable impact. However, variability persists. In around a third of schools, tracking systems are either newly introduced or lack coherence, limiting leaders' ability to analyse trends or monitor the impact of interventions. Tracking across all curricular areas is even less developed overall, with many schools at an early stage of implementation. However, this is more advanced in secondary schools, where systems for tracking across all curriculum areas are generally better established. Targeted interventions are a strong feature in schools where data is used effectively to identify gaps and plan support. In these settings, interventions, often supported by Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), address barriers to learning and accelerate progress, particularly for children affected by poverty or additional support needs. Evidence from these schools shows clear improvements in attainment and engagement.

The HMIE thematic inspection of local authorities found that most local authorities have an accurate understanding of the performance, capacity, and context of each of their schools. In these authorities, officers ensure that their understanding of school performance is accurately informed by a wide range of qualitative and quantitative evidence. This enables them to monitor and maintain a strong understanding of each school's capacity for improvement and areas of risk. Officers interrogate attainment, attendance, and exclusion data regularly, looking for patterns or dips in performance. They review the impact of the school's use of Pupil Equity Fund on attainment. A few local authorities use data very well to provide targeted support to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy, including closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Their use of a central database enables officers to share information with support providers such as a central pedagogy team, enabling them to prioritise bespoke support accordingly for individual or groups of schools.

Personalised intervention is often needed to improve positive destinations for hardest to reach pupils.

Insight is the benchmarking tool for analysing attainment data in the senior phase, accessible by secondary schools and local authorities. The value of Insight and the potential to enhance it was specifically referenced in the 2021 Muir report.

Frontline support in the use of Insight (provided free of charge to schools and local authorities via the Insight Professional Advisor) receives extremely positive feedback about the support provided, and it remains in high demand. Over the course of school session 2024-25, the Insight Advisor provided support sessions to approximately 100 different schools across almost all local authorities. Eight Local Authority sessions were delivered to local authority staff. A six-part webinar "course" was added to the Advisor offer in session 2024-25, with 450 school leaders signing up for the initial cohort. Over 130 participants enrolled in the Cohort 2 sessions which ran following the September 2025 Update. Due to the ongoing demand for this support, an additional Insight Advisor will take up post in early 2026. As well as providing Advisor support, the new appointee will contribute to ASN developments.

What we will do to deliver

Building on the £1 billion investment in the Scottish Attainment Challenge over the 2021/22 – 2025/26 parliamentary term, we will invest up to £200 million in 2026/27 to continue the SAC programme for a further year, providing certainty of support for schools and local authorities beyond the Scottish Parliamentary elections. This will enable continued targeted local support to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap. During this period, Scottish Government officials will engage with the Scottish education system to develop options for continued work to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty in the longer term.

We will proceed with planning for implementation of the National Improving Writing Programme for 2026/27; continuing to support local authorities who participated in the initial stages of the Programme (Waves 1-4) and identifying new local authorities for Wave 5.

We will work with schools during academic year 2025/26 to amplify good practice that supports school leavers to enter positive destinations.

Insight, the senior phase benchmarking tool, will be refreshed to include updated measures, new analysis, and fresh user interface.

How we will measure progress

Monitoring of progress towards the key NIF measures and a reduction in the poverty-related attainment gap through the NIF Interactive Evidence Report (NIFIER); monitoring of progress towards stretch aims; continued evaluation activities; support and challenge from Education Scotland; and policy engagement with local authorities and schools.

Feedback will be gathered informally in the first instance through Insight support sessions in 26/27. Formal feedback will be gathered during 2027 to ensure the Insight tool is fit for purpose and to identify future improvements.

Outcome 5 – highly skilled teachers and school-leaders driving excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all, especially those with additional support needs.

What the evidence is telling us

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections tell us that the majority of schools have established shared frameworks that support consistent, high-quality learning and teaching. In the most effective practice, staff collaborate to define what constitutes a high-quality lesson and use this shared understanding to plan and deliver learning that is coherent and responsive. Teachers reflect on their practice and engage in professional dialogue, contributing to a culture of continuous improvement. However, in a minority of schools, the quality of learning and teaching remains variable. There is a continuing need to ensure teaching approaches both

support and challenge children and young people effectively, enabling them to make sustained progress in their learning.

The majority of primary schools demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting children and young people who require additional help with their learning. In these settings, staff plan and deliver targeted interventions effectively, often in collaboration with support for learning assistants. These approaches are informed by assessment data, enabling timely and appropriate support. However, learning is not always sufficiently differentiated to meet individual needs, particularly in secondary schools. Teachers and senior leaders would benefit from more consistent sharing of effective practice.

Across all sectors, most children and young people demonstrate motivation and enthusiasm for learning, engaging well in lessons and working effectively both independently and collaboratively. In schools where practice is strongest, teachers plan regular opportunities for personalisation and choice, enabling learners to select contexts for learning, decide how to present their work and contribute to planning next steps. In these settings, they engage enthusiastically in leadership roles within and beyond the classroom.

Learning through play is widely recognised as an important approach across primary schools. A number of schools demonstrate strong practice at Early Level, with well-planned environments, a balance of child-led and adult-initiated experiences, and effective use of observations to inform next steps. This, however, is not yet consistent across all schools. There should be a continued focus on professional learning and engagement with national guidance to ensure play is progressive, developmentally appropriate, and embedded as a core approach to learning, particularly at Early Level.

The number of children being identified as having additional support needs (ASN) is growing, with 43% of our school population now being identified as having ASN compared to 10% in 2010, and 19% of children (registered as having ASN) in funded ELC compared to 14% in 2019. The growth in need presents a significant challenge at all levels of the system. We now have a far greater understanding across society, and specifically in schools, about ASN and how needs are identified and supported.

Pupils with ASN are more likely to have poorer educational experiences and outcomes against existing measures in terms of attendance, exclusions, and attainment, and less likely to progress to a positive destination. There is also a strong link between ASN and poverty - across Scotland the proportion of pupils with an additional need in Scotland’s most deprived areas is almost double that in the least deprived areas. We know from qualitative evidence that children and young people and their families are in some cases struggling to navigate the system and to get the support they need.

An Audit Scotland briefing note in February 2025 on additional support for learning (ASL) found that gaps in data hinder an understanding of ASL and its complexity across Scotland. Audit Scotland recommended that better quality data is fundamental to understanding pupils’ additional support needs and the resources required to provide support. The Scottish Government and local authorities should:

In the next 6–12 months

- agree how they collect and record data on pupils' additional support needs, including collecting data required to inform the national measurement framework for ASL that is being developed. National data should be recorded more consistently and should allow for a better understanding of where multiple or complex needs exist and how demographic and equalities issues impact on learning needs.

In the next 12–24 months

- roll out a national measurement framework that better demonstrates the outcomes for pupils with additional support needs. The outcomes should reflect all children's statutory right to an education that develops their 'personality, talents and abilities to the full'.
- annually publish data that enables them to better identify the scale, complexity and nature of additional support needs (Scottish Government only).

In the longer term

- using the national measurement framework, publish clear and transparent annual reports on outcomes for pupils who receive ASL.

These recommendations were accepted by the Scottish Government and COSLA.

What we will do to deliver

We have commissioned Enquire, the National Advice and Information Service on ASL, to improve communication of the key information which different audiences need to meet the needs of children with additional support needs. This includes children and young people, parents and carers and the teaching profession.

Following a series of reports by Audit Scotland, the Children's Commissioner, and the Education, Children and Young People Committee of the Scottish Parliament, we agreed to a review of ASL, which is due to commence in 2026.

Following on from the data summit on ASL which was held in November 2025, a data improvement plan will be developed to set out the short, medium and long-term actions that can be taken to implement data improvements in ASL. This work will form a core part of the wider ASL Review.

Scottish Government will work with Education Scotland, SMO and Stòrlann on the career-long professional learning (CLPL) offer for GME teachers, including for immersion techniques and Gaelic language support.

We are working with the ELC sector to understand the challenges experienced by local authorities and funded providers in meeting the needs of all children in ELC settings, and to identify priority actions to address these challenges. Future work around agreed priorities, including training and qualifications, local authority support for funded providers of ELC and national guidance and resources, will take account of the duties and role of local authorities in identifying and meeting the additional support needs of children in ELC settings.

In order to ensure that the childcare profession has the knowledge, skills, experience and confidence to deliver the appropriate support for an increasing prevalence of additional support needs and speech, language and communication needs we will ensure that skills related to ASN are embedded within the qualifications required for registration for those entering the profession. We will also work with partners to review the available Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) resources on ASN, and promote these through the SG-funded SSSC online CPL Portal.

Recognising the importance of supporting our teachers, we have established the Centre for Teaching Excellence, hosted by the University of Glasgow, with several research hubs across the country, including one dedicated to inclusive and diverse classrooms with a focus on ASN. The Centre will ensure teachers including those in GME, are armed with the latest research on teaching practices, filling a critical gap linking research and evidence to help develop their practice. This will help them to deliver excellent learning and teaching to improve learning outcomes for children and young people across Scotland.

How we will measure progress

Progress with the ASL Action Plan will be monitored by the ASL Project Board.

The ASL National Measurement Framework, the first iteration of which has now been embedded within the NIF Interactive Evidence Report, will support the data improvement work, and will help to develop an understanding of ASL and its complexity across Scotland.

A monitoring and evaluation strategy has been embedded into the work of the Centre for Teaching Excellence, to ensure we are monitoring progress, impact and effectiveness of its work

Outcome 6 - improving relationships and behaviour, and attendance, with increased engagement in learning and a culture of dignity and respect for all.

What the evidence is telling us

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections tell us that there is a strong national commitment to creating positive, inclusive and engaging learning environments across almost all schools. Positive and nurturing relationships between staff and learners are a strong feature of practice nationally. In almost all schools, staff know children and young people well as individuals and demonstrate care and respect in their interactions. These relationships are underpinned by shared school values and by a commitment to children's rights.

Respectful and supportive relationships across the school community are a strong feature across almost all schools. In most schools, there are effective strategies ensuring all learners are included and engaged, and children and young people are supported to overcome barriers. In most schools, children and young people demonstrate positive behaviours, interacting well during learning activities across the school day. In the most effective practice, senior leaders and staff manage situations sensitively to help children engage with their learning or regulate their behaviour.

Restorative and trauma-informed approaches are increasingly becoming embedded across schools, resulting in improvements in behaviour and reducing exclusions. In the majority of schools, children and young people feel safe, respected and valued, supported through effective anti-bullying procedures and policies. For a minority of schools, a next step is for senior leaders to work with the whole school community to refresh anti-bullying policies.

The Behaviour in Scottish Schools: Research report 2023 (BISSR) is the latest[2] in time series research established in 2006 and reporting the views of support staff, teachers, headteachers, and local authority staff on pupils' relationships and behaviour in schools. The research published in 2023 also contained a range of specific questions about the impact of COVID-19. The research found that whilst the majority of staff in 2023 still perceive that all or most pupils are generally well-behaved around the school and in the classroom, there has been a general worsening of pupil behaviour since 2016 with primary and secondary staff having experienced decreases in most positive behaviours and increases in most of the low level disruptive, disengagement and serious disruptive behaviours around the school.

In line with the broader picture, most staff reported that behaviour is worse than before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began, both in the classroom (77%) and around the school (80%). School staff considered COVID-19 to have had a negative impact on behaviour, particularly for those pupils whose transition - either between early years and primary or primary and secondary - was disrupted.

What we will do to deliver

In June, we published new guidance for schools on use of consequences, setting out guidance on how schools can work with their whole school community to develop expectations for behaviour, and to implement responses where these expectations aren't met.

Over the next year the Scottish Government will deliver a number of actions to support schools, young people and their families:

- We will publish a whole school approach on addressing racism and racist incidents in schools in early 2026.
- We are also updating our national attendance guidance to support improvements in attendance, which we will publish in Spring 2026.
- We have begun work to improve recording and monitoring of behaviour, and will publish principles for recording and monitoring incidents in summer 2026.
- We are updating our national guidance on preventing and managing exclusions, which we will publish in summer 2026.
- We are developing new guidance for schools on vaping and substance use, which we will publish in spring 2026.
- We will support key messaging to parents around relationships and behaviour to support their interactions with school.

[2] Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

How we will measure progress

The progress in implementing the joint Action Plan on Relationships and Behaviour in schools will be published annually, with the second report due in Spring 2026. This will include contributions to delivery across all partners, including member of the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools, such as Education Scotland.

It is expected that local authorities will record and monitor all incidents in schools, including those which are related to bullying and behaviour and violence.

In addition to local monitoring and review of data, national level data will be available via the next iteration of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research. The sixth wave of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research will be carried out in 2026 with publication early 2027.

Data will also be available on the experiences of bullying via the findings of the Health Behaviour in School Age Children Study, which also reports children and young people's experiences of school, including feelings of acceptance, trust and caring from teachers and their experiences of enjoying being with their classmates, felt accepted by them, and if they were kind and helpful.

We are in the process of commissioning an independent review of the gender based violence in schools framework to establish further areas for improvement.

We will use the following methods to track the progression of the Scottish Government programmes of work: UNCRC, Anti-Racism in Education, LGBT Inclusive Education Implementation, Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning, Equally Safe Delivery Plan, Mentors in Violence Prevention and Hate Crime Strategy:

- Professional learning uptake and feedback.
- Website statistics
- Collaboration with stakeholders.

We will use the National Statistics on Attendance and Absence, published annually, and containing data on local authority attendance and absence rates, to measure impact. This includes data on persistent absence.

This is in addition to local authorities own management information on attendance and absence which is available on an ongoing basis and published in a fortnightly school absence management information dashboard.

Outcome 7 – an education system engaging in digital technology to enhance all aspects of learning and teaching, supported by a digitally-skilled workforce, and tackling digital inequality.

What the evidence is telling us

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections tell us that, in almost all schools, digital technology is being used effectively to enrich learning and teaching. Teachers routinely integrate tools such as interactive whiteboards, tablets, and online platforms to consolidate learning, develop digital literacy, and remove barriers for those requiring additional support. In the most effective practice, digital approaches are creative and embedded across the curriculum, enabling children and young people to develop advanced skills such as coding, programming, and multimedia production. These approaches are helping to prepare children and young people well for learning, life, and work. A few schools still make limited or inconsistent use of digital technology. In these settings, digital tools are often used only for presentation rather than to deepen learning, and planned progression in digital skills is not always evident.

Whilst we know that local authorities continue to invest in their digital infrastructure, we also know that access to devices, connectivity and digital services are variable across councils and sometimes across individual schools. In some areas, that can limit the potential application of technologies to support learning and teaching and may inhibit the development of digital literacy amongst learners.

Evidence on the impact of Artificial Intelligence on education, and society more broadly, continues to grow. Findings from research carried out by ADES and Staff College and the Children's Parliament point to a need for clear guidance and professional development for teachers on the use of AI in education Available evidence from children and young people shows a broad range of views and experiences in relation to AI. The evidence also points to the need for children and young people to have the opportunity to learn about AI and develop the skills and knowledge that they need to live in a world in which AI is ubiquitous.

What we will do to deliver

We will bring forward a strategic approach to digital across the education sector, which will seek to bring greater coherence and alignment across education partners. Through a focus on key aspects of digital infrastructure - devices and connectivity; digital services and the skills of the education workforce – we will seek to build a platform for sector-wide digital innovation and transformation.

In partnership with local government, in 2026 we will identify and agree a model for provision of national digital services to replace the current Glow offering when it reaches the end of its current contractual arrangements in 2028, ensuring our schools, teachers and learners continue to have access to the digital services they need for learning and teaching.

Progress projects arising from rounds 10 and 11 of the Scottish Government's technology accelerator programme, CivTech, which seek to deliver innovative digital approaches to issues related to teacher workload.

Supporting Time for Inclusive Education, including their new Digital Discourse Initiative – supporting schools to equip children and young people with skills to navigate digital media and counter the impacts of disinformation and online hate.

We are undertaking a rapid online learning review which is due to complete in December and will inform future activity for 2026 in relation to online learning provision in Scotland's schools.

To ensure that teachers are equipped to grasp the opportunities that AI presents, as well as navigate the inherent risks, we are working at pace to develop and publish a set of guidelines and guardrails for teachers on the ethical use of AI in schools. This is being developed with the EIS and in consultation with local authorities and other stakeholders.

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle, led by Education Scotland, will continue to consider the skills, knowledge and understanding that children and young people will be required to develop in relation to AI and how this should be managed within an updated curriculum.

Alongside consideration of all curriculum areas, including Technologies where Computing Science is located, the Curriculum Improvement Cycle is also considering a number of cross-curricular themes, including Digital Skills. This will ensure that our curriculum reflects and meets the needs of children and young people in the 21st Century.

How we will measure progress

In 2026 we will seek to establish fuller and richer data regarding all aspects of technology provision in our schools, helping to build a baseline against which future progress can be measured.

Data on digital resources from the PISA background questionnaires will be included in the NIF Interactive Evidence Report (NIFIER)

Measuring the attainment gap

Progress towards 2025/26 local authority stretch aims

Since the pandemic, ACEL data has improved compared to 2020/21, first returning towards pre-pandemic levels, and building on that improvement across 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. The improvement over this period shows local authorities collectively making progress towards their stretch aims for 2025/26. However, as in previous years, progress varies between individual local authorities.

Looking across the core stretch aims, the 2024/25 ACEL data for primary school show record high overall attainment for literacy (75%) and for numeracy, the highest to date, equal with 2023/24 (80%) and record low poverty related attainment gaps (literacy 19.4 percentage points; numeracy 16.6pp). This indicates that in aggregate, local authorities are making progress towards their stretch aims for both overall attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

For school leavers with one or more awards at SCQF levels 5 and 6 the gap increased between 2022/23 and 2023/24 (from 16.6pp to 18.1pp; and from 31.5pp to 31.8pp respectively) meaning greater progress is needed if local authorities are to make progress towards their 2025/26 stretch aims. It is encouraging, however, that in this year's exam results, which feed into school leaver attainment data, the pass rate for National 5 and Highers was up and the poverty-related attainment gap at National 5 and Higher had narrowed. Alongside this, young people were awarded over 100,000 SQA vocational and technical qualifications in 2025, also an encouraging sign for future progress towards senior phase stretch aims.

For the Annual Participation Measure, Skills Development Scotland data published in August 2025 showed that compared to 2024 the poverty-related participation gap had widened by 0.2pp to 8.4pp, with the gap at its second narrowest since 2016/17.

16 key NIF measures

Refreshed National Improvement Interactive Evidence Report (NIFIER) dashboard and changes to the key NIF measures

We have reviewed and updated the National Improvement Interactive Evidence Report (NIFIER) dashboard to take into account the changes to the NIF in 2025, the Scottish Government's commitment to introduce the first Additional Support for Learning National Measurement Framework (ASL NMF), and efforts to improve the quality of statistics. The refreshed dashboard now includes:

- updated evidence and revised measures to better track progress towards the seven outcomes in the 2025 NIF
- integrated ASL NMF to ensure equal focus on reducing both poverty-related and additional support needs-related attainment gaps
- simpler design and better functionality to make it easier to use

There are now 16 key NIF measures which cover child development, wellbeing, literacy, numeracy, attainment, participation, and attendance. These are:

1. **Changed** Percentage of children reviewed who had no concerns about any aspects of their development at their 27-30 month review
2. Percentage of children (aged 4-12 years) with a Total Strength and Difficulties Score of 14 or more (slightly raised, high or very high)
3. **Changed** Mean WEMWBS scores for 13-15 year olds
4. Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils (combined) achieving expected CfE Levels for Literacy
5. Percentage of S3 pupils achieving CfE Third Level or better for Literacy
6. Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils (combined) achieving expected CfE Levels for Numeracy
7. Percentage of S3 pupils achieving CfE Third Level or better for Numeracy
8. Percentage of secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes in National Qualifications at SCQF L4 or better
9. Percentage of secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes in National Qualifications at SCQF L5 or better
10. Percentage of secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes in National Qualifications at SCQF L6 or better
11. **New** Percentage of senior phase secondary school leavers achieving five or more passes at SCQF L4 or better under the all SCQF measure
12. **New** Percentage of senior phase secondary school leavers achieving five or more passes at SCQF L5 or better under the all SCQF measure
13. **New** Percentage of senior phase secondary school leavers achieving five or more passes at SCQF L6 or better under the all SCQF measure
14. Percentage of 16-19 year olds participating in Education, Training or Employment
15. Percentage of secondary school leavers in a positive initial destination
16. Percentage attendance across all schools

The 27-30 month review measure has been updated to better align with the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF). It now includes children with no concerns plus those with no concerns but some incomplete domains. The calculation also changes from “all children” to “children reviewed.”

The previous measure on children’s difficulties scores (age 13 and 15) has been replaced with a new measure based on the Scottish Health Survey: Mean Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) score for 13–15 year olds. Data is collected annually, but because of small sample sizes, results are pooled over four years. Currently, data is available for 2017–2021 combined, and updates will occur every four years.

Three new attainment measures under the All SCQF measure have been added to better align those reported in the NIF and the LGBF. These look at the percentage of senior phase school leavers achieving five or more passes at SCQF Levels 4 or better, 5 or better, and 6 or better. These measures provide a broader picture of attainment, including a wider range of awards, and set an ambitious benchmark for many young people.

Progress over time in the 16 key NIF measures

Only one data point is available for Mean WEMWBS scores for 13-15 year olds so analysis of progress over time is not available for this measure. In addition, due to a

change in methodology, only one data point is available for Percentage of 16-19 year olds participating in Education, Training or Employment so analysis of progress over time is not available for this measure.

Of the 14 measures where multiple years of data are available, there has broadly been a narrowing of the gap in 6 of the measures, and a widening of the gap in 8 of the measures over time.

Percentage of children reviewed who had no concerns about any aspects of their development at their 27-30 month review

A number of changes to the approach to development assessments and recording of outcomes were implemented in April 2017. The decline in the percentage reporting ‘no concerns’ around 2017/18 is mainly due to this change. Trends in this measure should therefore be interpreted carefully.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in how reviews were delivered, as well as in the circumstances of daily life for many children in 2020/21 and 2021/22. It is therefore possible that both factors relating to assessment and recording, and genuine changes in the occurrence of developmental problems are contributing to the changes in the trends.

There was a small increase in the percentage of children reviewed with no developmental concerns in 2023/24 (83.3%) compared with 2022/23 (82.1%). In addition, the gap between children living in the most and least deprived areas of Scotland has decreased from 16.7 percentage points in 2022/23 to 15.6 percentage points in 2023/24.

Percentage of children (aged 4-12 years) with a Total Strength and Difficulties Score of 14 or more (slightly raised, high or very high)

The proportion of children aged 4-12 with a slightly raised, high or very high total difficulties score is similar between 2023 and 2024 (both 20%). However the gap between children in the most deprived and least deprived areas has increased slightly from 15 percentage points in 2023 to 16 percentage points in 2024. Although there was an increase in the percentage of children in both the most and least deprived areas with a slightly raised, high or very high total difficulties score, the increase was larger for those in the most deprived areas.

Mean WEMWBS scores for 13-15 year olds

The lowest WEMWBS score possible is 14 and the highest is 70 with a higher WEMWBS score indicating better mental wellbeing. Over 2017-2021 the average WEMWBS score for 13-15 year olds was 50.8. The gap between children from the most deprived and least deprived areas was negligible (0.2) with 13-15 year olds in the most deprived areas scoring an average of 51.2 and 13-15 year olds in the least deprived areas scoring an average of 51.4.

Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils (combined) achieving expected CfE Levels for Literacy and Numeracy

In 2024/25, the percentage of primary pupils achieving expected levels in literacy increased from 74% in 2023/24 to 74.5% in 2024/25, the highest level to date. In addition, the gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy reduced in 2024-25 to reach its lowest ever level (19.4 percentage points). Attainment improved in both the least and most deprived areas, by a greater amount in the most deprived areas, leading to a narrowing of the gap.

The percentage of primary pupils achieving expected levels in numeracy was the same for 2023/24 and 2024/25 (both 80.3%) and represents the joint highest level to date. The gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in numeracy narrowed in 2024-25 to reach its lowest ever level (16.6 percentage points). This was due to an increase in attainment among pupils in the most deprived areas and a slight decrease in attainment for pupils in the least deprived areas.

Percentage of S3 pupils achieving CfE Third Level or better for Literacy and Numeracy

In 2024/25, the percentage of S3 pupils achieving expected levels in literacy increased from 88.3% in 2023/24 to 89.8% in 2024/25, the highest level to date. The gap between the proportion of S3 pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved third level or better in literacy reduced in 2024-25 to reach its lowest level ever (10.8 percentage points). Attainment improved in both the least and most deprived areas but by a greater amount in the most deprived areas, leading to a narrowing of the gap.

In 2024/25, the percentage of S3 pupils achieving expected levels in numeracy increased from 90.3% in 2023/24 to 90.9% in 2024/25, the highest level to date. The gap between the proportion of S3 pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved third level or better in numeracy also reduced in 2024-25 to reach its lowest level since records began (11.6 percentage points). Attainment improved in both the least and most deprived areas but by a greater amount in the most deprived areas, leading to a narrowing of the gap.

Percentage of secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes in National Qualifications at SCQF L4 or better, SCQF L5 or better and SCQF L6 or better

The data presented here is based on school leavers achieving 1+ National Qualifications at SCQF Levels 4 to 6. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to changes to the way in which National Qualification results at SCQF Levels 5 to 7 were determined. This attainment data considers all of the attainment which a school leaver gains over their time at school. This means the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 may be based on a combination of different approaches to determining results.

At SCQF Level 4 or better, 95.2% of secondary school leavers achieved 1+ National Qualifications in 2023/24, lower than the 96% in 2022/23.The gap between the

proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas has increased from 5.9 percentage points in 2022/23 to 7.3 percentage points in 2023/24. The proportion attaining one pass or more in National Qualifications at this level decreased for school leavers from the most deprived areas between 2022/23 and 2023/24 which has led to the gap widening.

At SCQF Level 5 or better, 83.5% of secondary school leavers achieved 1+ National Qualifications in 2023/24, lower than the 84.8% in 2022/23. The gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas has increased from 20.2 percentage points in 2022/23 to 22.7 percentage points in 2023/24. The proportion attaining 1 pass or more in National Qualifications at this level decreased for school leavers from both the most and the least deprived areas between 2022/23 and 2023/24. But it decreased by more for those from the most deprived areas, which has led to the gap between the two groups widening.

At SCQF Level 6 or better, 57.4% of secondary school leavers achieved 1+ National Qualifications in 2023/24, lower than the 57.9% in 2022/23. The gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas has increased from 36.8 percentage points in 2022/23 to 38.4 percentage points in 2023/24. The proportion attaining one pass or more in National Qualifications at this level decreased for school leavers from the most deprived areas but increased for school leavers from the least deprived areas between 2022/23 and 2023/24 which has led to the gap widening.

Percentage of senior phase secondary school leavers achieving five or more passes at SCQF L4 or better, SCQF L5 or better and SCQF L6 or better under the all SCQF measure

The data presented here is based on school leavers achieving 5+ passes at SCQF Levels 4 to 6 for All SCQF qualifications. It covers school leavers' attainment from: qualifications included in the National Qualifications measure, additional qualifications awarded by the SQA and qualifications and learning programmes, from a range of other providers. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to changes to the way in which National Qualification results at SCQF Levels 5 to 7 were determined. This attainment data considers all of the attainment which a school leaver gains over their time at school. This means the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 may be based on a combination of different approaches to determining results.

At SCQF Level 4 or better, 84.1% of senior phase secondary school leavers achieved 5+ passes under the ALL SCQF measure in 2023/24, lower than the 85% in 2022/23. The gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas has increased from 17.4 percentage points in 2022/23 to 19 percentage points in 2023/24. The proportion attaining five or more passes under the ALL SCQF measure at this level decreased for school leavers from the most deprived areas between 2022/23 and 2023/24 which has led to the gap widening.

At SCQF Level 5 or better, 66.6% of senior phase secondary school leavers achieved 5+ passes under the ALL SCQF measure in 2023/24, slightly higher than

the 66.3% in 2022/23. The gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas has increased slightly from 34.1 percentage points in 2022/23 to 35 percentage points in 2023/24. The proportion attaining five or more passes under the ALL SCQF measure at this level decreased slightly for school leavers from the most deprived areas and increased for school leavers from the least deprived areas between 2022/23 and 2023/24 which has led to the gap widening.

At SCQF Level 6 or better, 39% of senior phase secondary school leavers achieved 5+ passes under the ALL SCQF measure in 2023/24, higher than the 37.9% in 2022/23. The gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas has increased from 37.9 percentage points in 2022/23 to 39.7 percentage points in 2023/24. The proportion attaining five or more passes under the ALL SCQF measure at this level increased for both school leavers from the most deprived areas and the least deprived areas between 2022/23 and 2023/24, however the increase was larger for those from the least deprived areas which has led to the gap widening.

Percentage of 16-19 year olds participating in Education, Training or Employment

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) data was included within the 2025 Annual Participation Measure (APM) dataset for the first time. This created a change in the participation measure data which means comparisons to previous years cannot be made on a like for like basis. Therefore for NIF reporting purposes, 2025 is the new baseline for this measure and analysis of progress over time is not available. The full time series is available in the Annual Participation Measure statistics however comparisons to previous years should be interpreted with care due to the absence of HMRC data in previous years.

In 2025, 93.3% of 19-19 year olds were participating in Education, Training or Employment. The gap between the proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, employment or training in the most and least deprived areas was 8.6 percentage points in 2025.

Percentage of secondary school leavers in a positive initial destination

This measure provides information on the outcomes for young people approximately three months after the end of the academic year (the first Monday in October). Positive destination includes higher education, further education, training, employment, voluntary work and Personal Skills Development

The time series includes years where school leaver destinations have been affected – either directly or indirectly – by the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of COVID-19 should therefore be kept in mind when considering changes over time in school leavers' destinations. The greatest effect of the pandemic on school leaver destinations is likely to have been seen in 2019/20. However, it is likely that there has been some ongoing impact on the destinations of some 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leavers. The pandemic may also have influenced some pupils' decisions on when to leave school.

95.7% of secondary school leavers were in a positive initial destination in 2023/24, slightly lower than the 95.9% in 2022/23. The gap in the proportion of school leavers in an initial positive destination has increased from 3.7 percentage points in 2022/23 to 4.3 percentage points in 2023/24. This was due to a decrease for school leavers from the most deprived areas and slight increase for school leavers from the least deprived areas between 2022/23 and 2023/24 which has led to the gap widening.

Percentage attendance across all schools

Percentage attendance across all sectors was 91.0% in 2024/25, an increase compared to that in 2023/24 (90.3%). The gap in attendance rates between children living in the most and least deprived areas of Scotland has decreased from 6.7 percentage points in 2023/24 to 6.5 percentage points in 2024/25. Attendance improved in both the least and most deprived areas but by a greater amount in the most deprived areas, leading to a narrowing of the gap.

Summary charts of change over time in the key measures are set out below, while the remaining sub-measures can be seen in the NIF Interactive Evidence Report (NIFIER).

Chart 1. Percentage of children reviewed who had no concerns about any aspects of their development at their 27-30 month review at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap

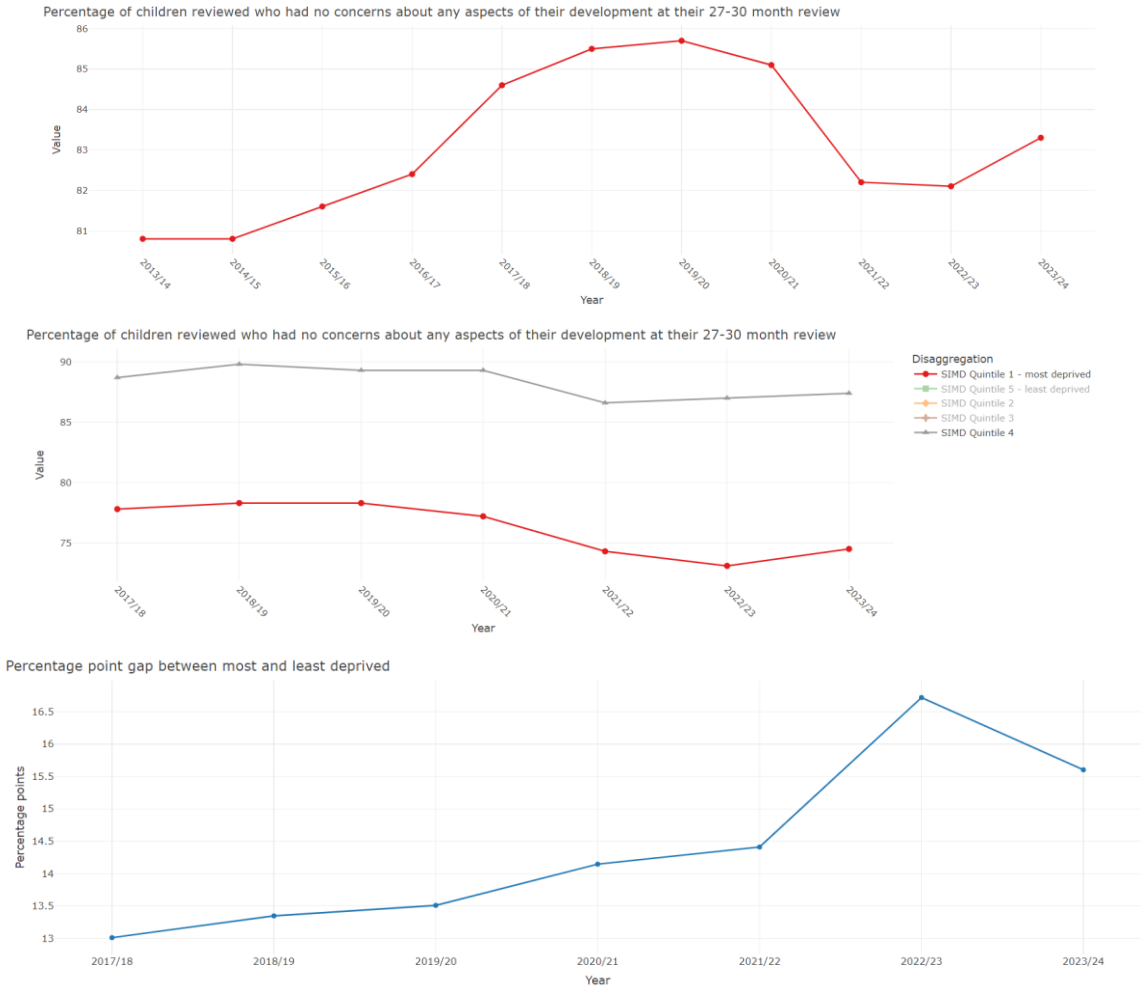
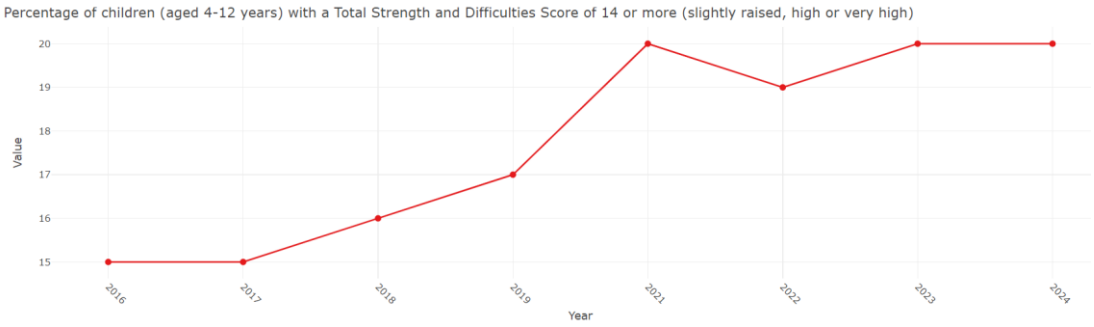


Chart 2. Percentage of children (aged 4-12 years) with a Total Strength and Difficulties Score of 14 or more (slightly raised, high or very high) at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap



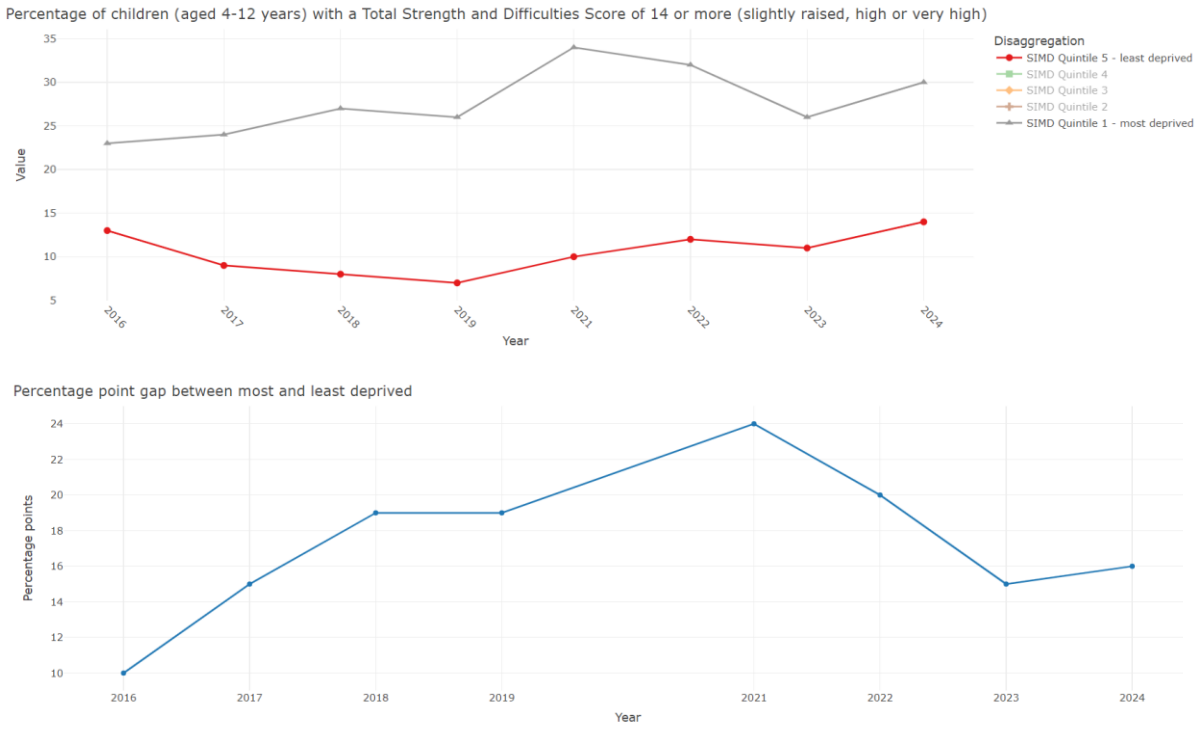


Chart 3. Mean WEMWBS scores for 13-15 year olds at Scotland-level and by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived), 2017-2021

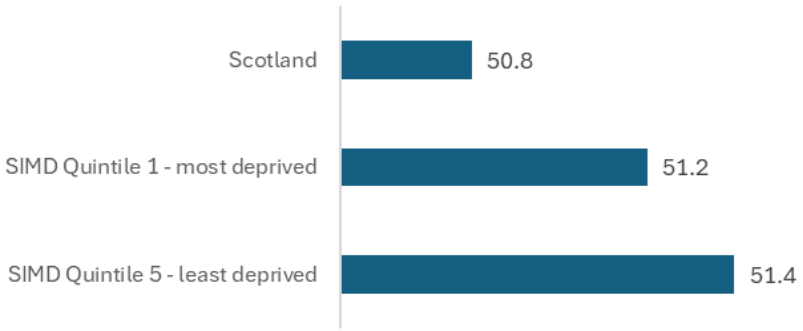
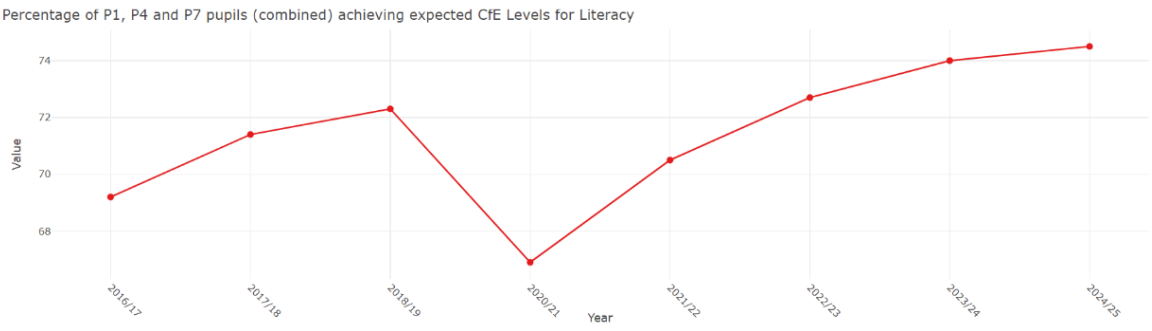


Chart 4. Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils (combined) achieving expected CfE Levels for Literacy at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the poverty-related attainment gap



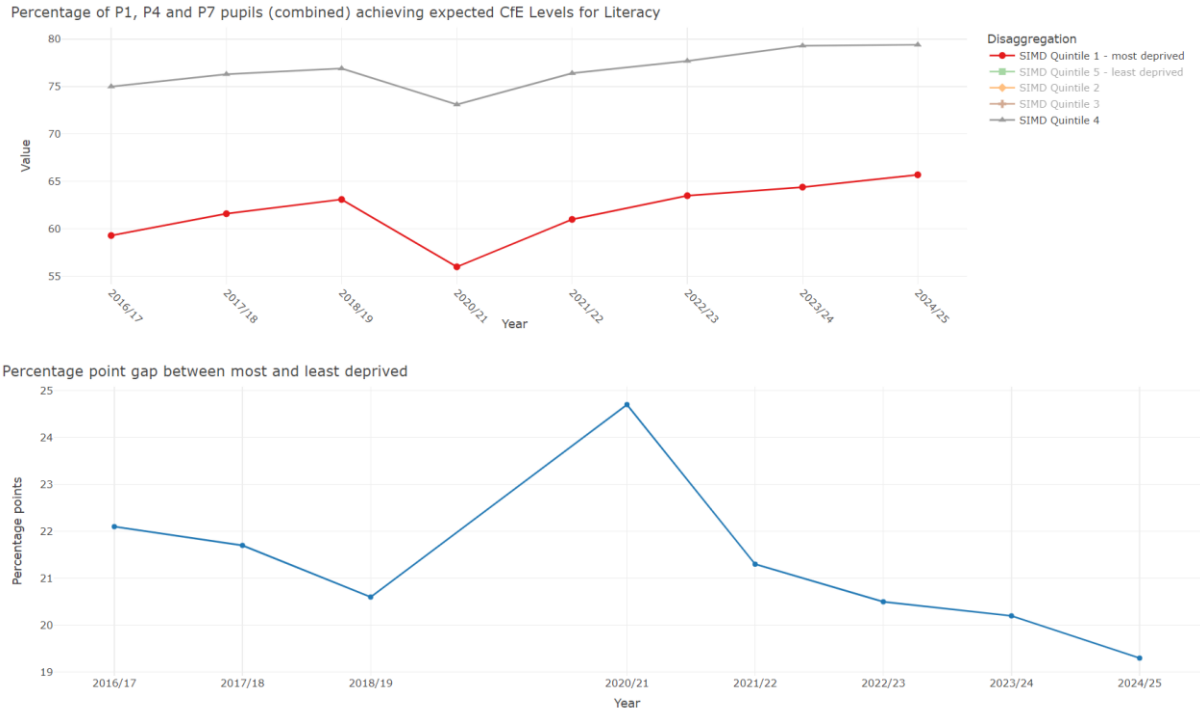
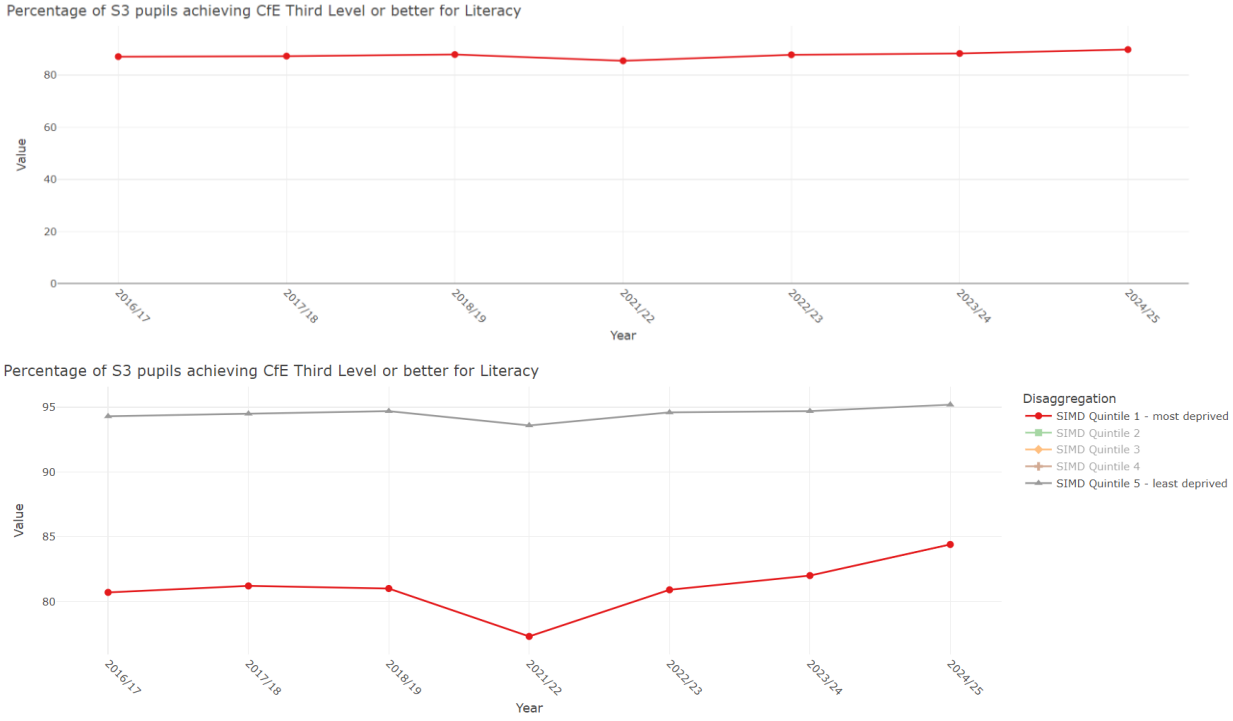


Chart 5. Percentage of S3 pupils achieving CfE Third Level or better for Literacy at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the poverty-related attainment gap



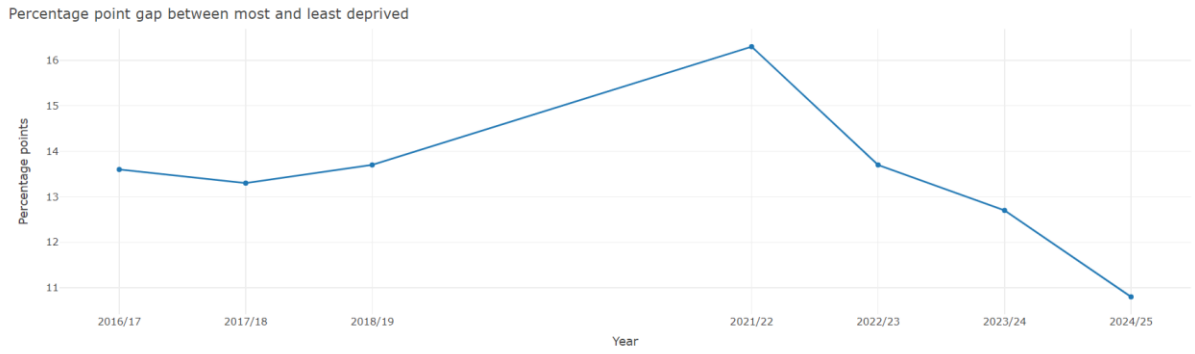


Chart 6. Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils (combined) achieving expected CfE Levels for Numeracy at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the poverty-related attainment gap

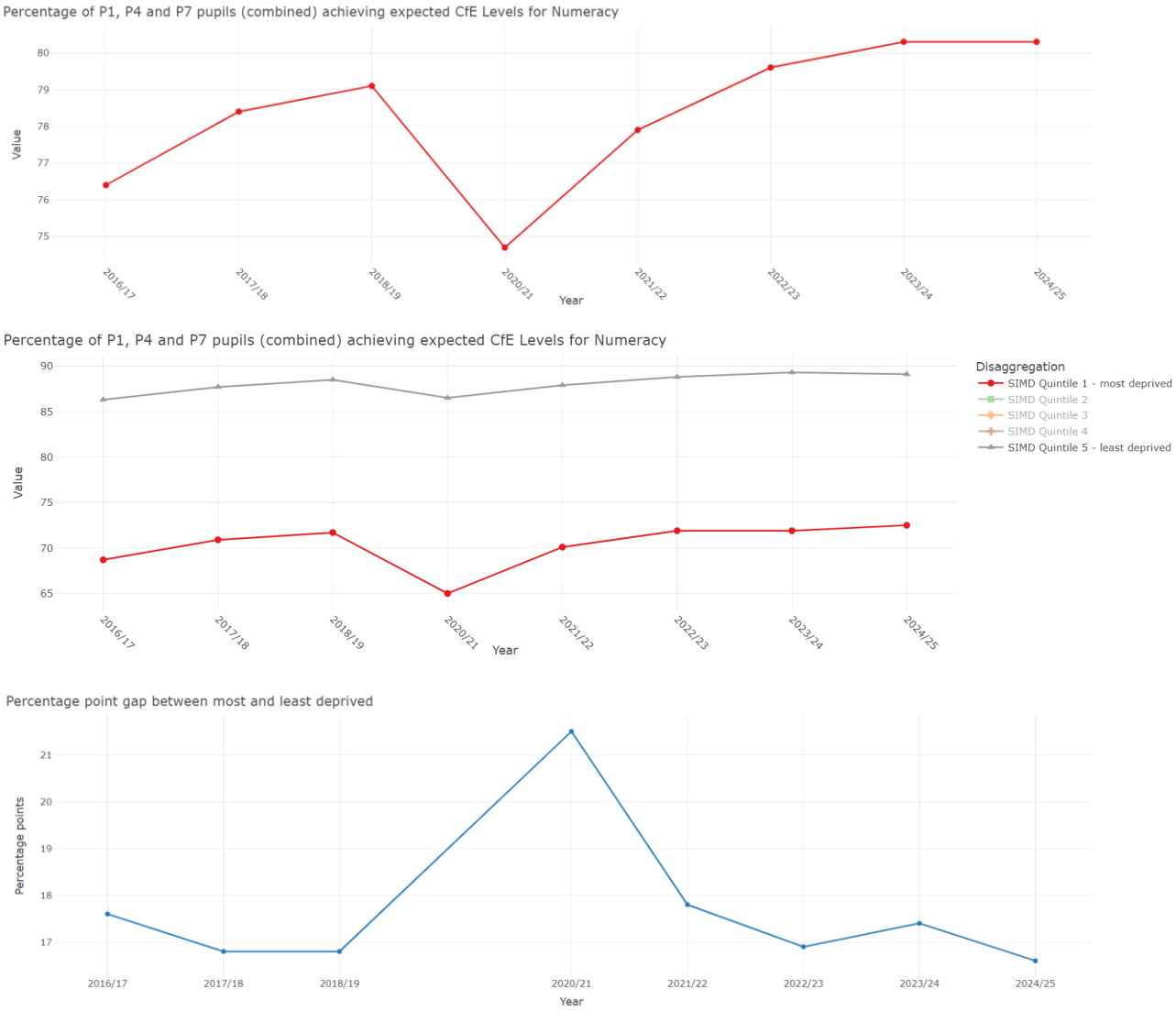
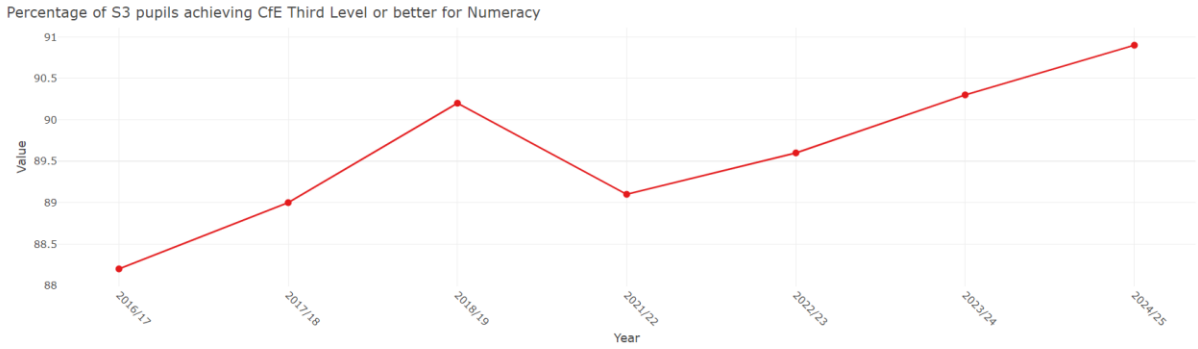
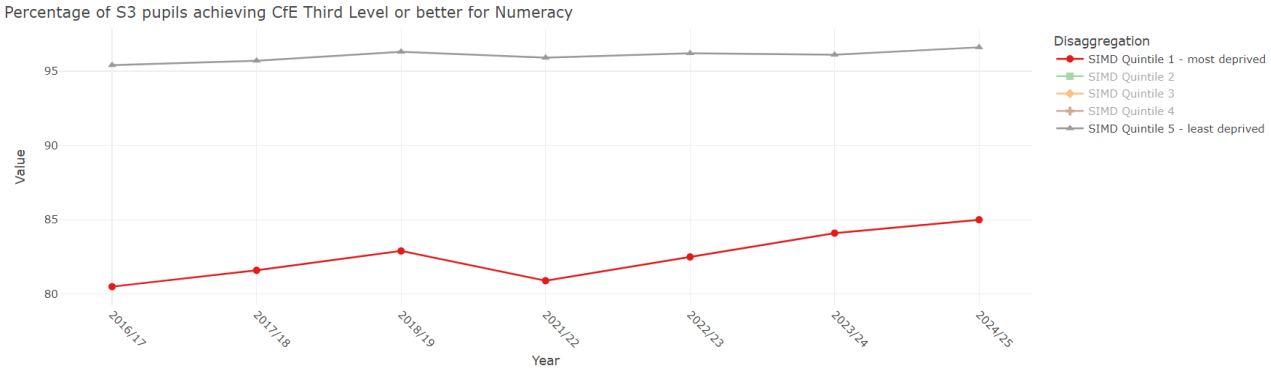


Chart 7. Percentage of S3 pupils achieving CfE Third Level or better for Numeracy at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the poverty-related attainment gap





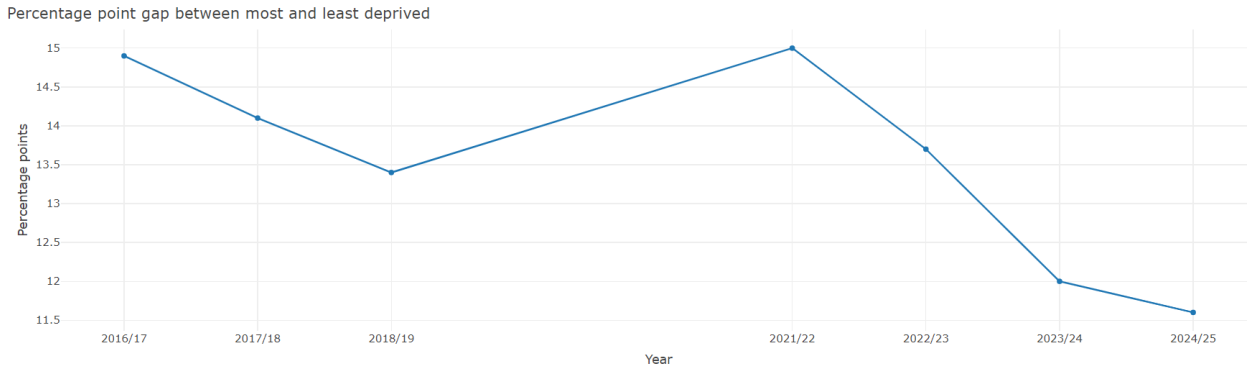
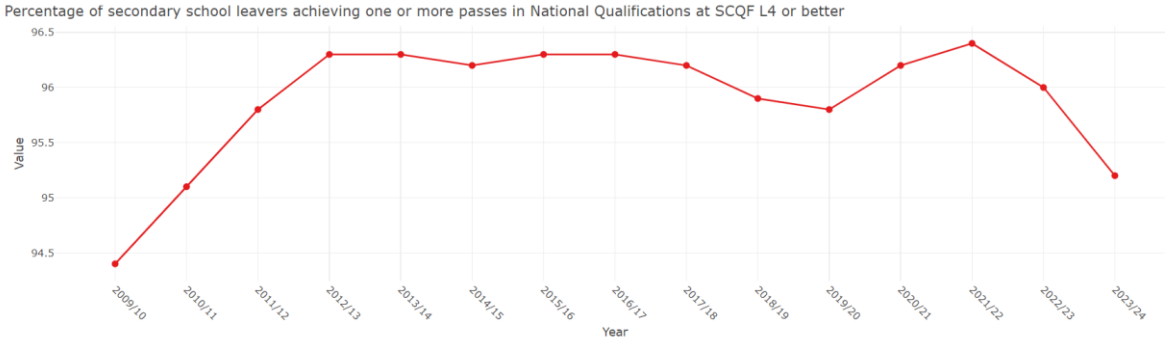


Chart 8. Percentage of secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes in National Qualifications at SCQF L4 or better at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap



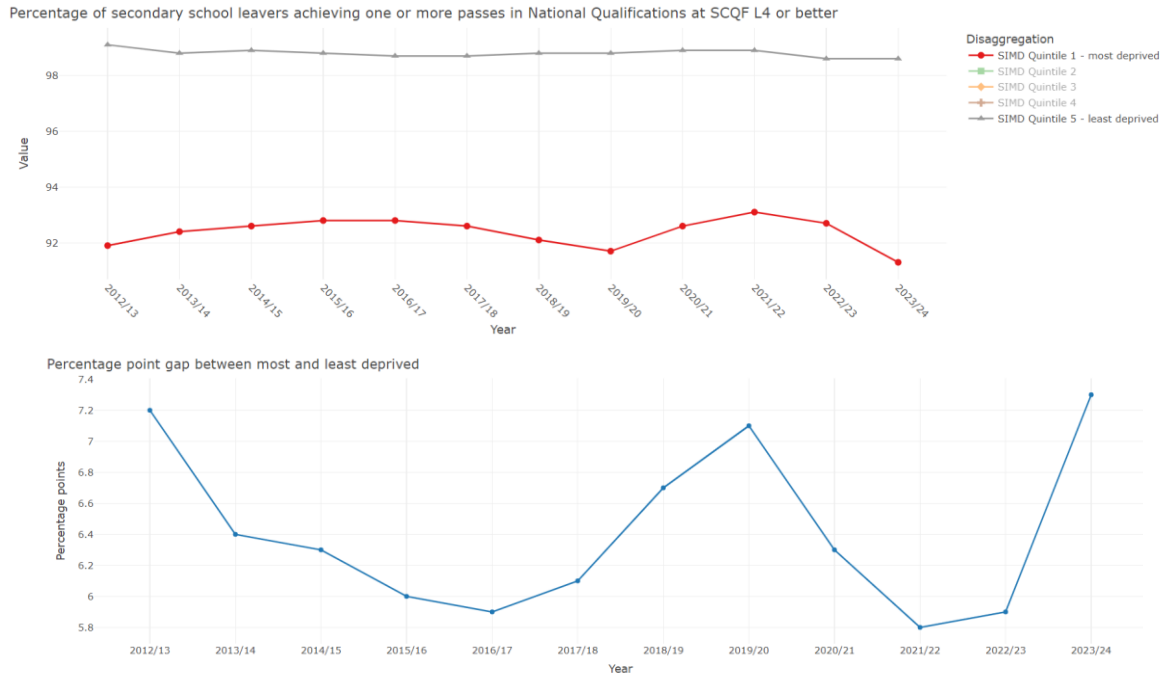
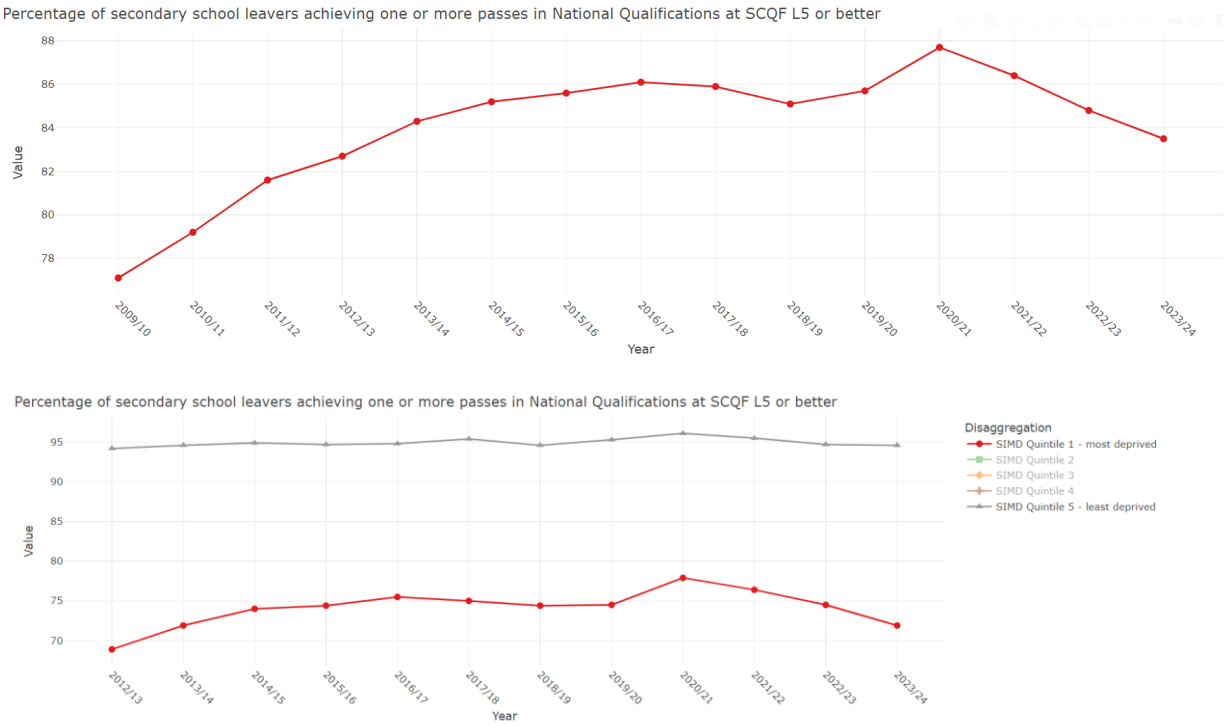


Chart 9. Percentage of secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes in National Qualifications at SCQF L5 or better at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap



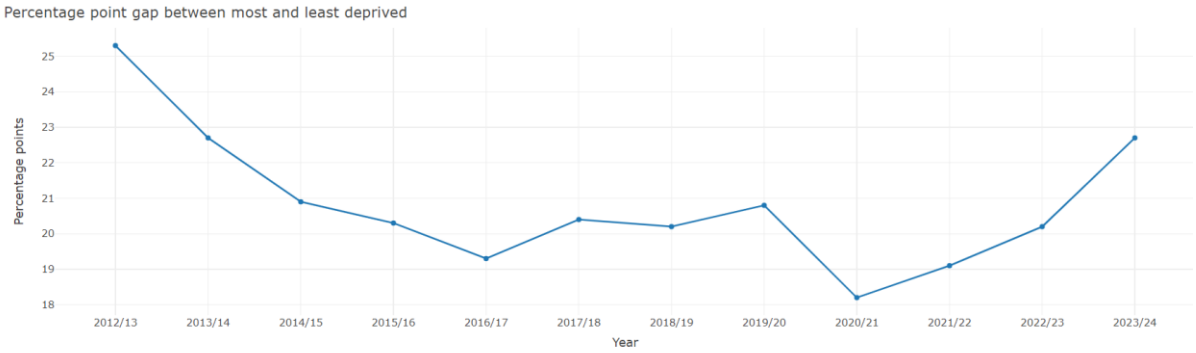


Chart 10. Percentage of secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes in National Qualifications at SCQF L6 or better at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap

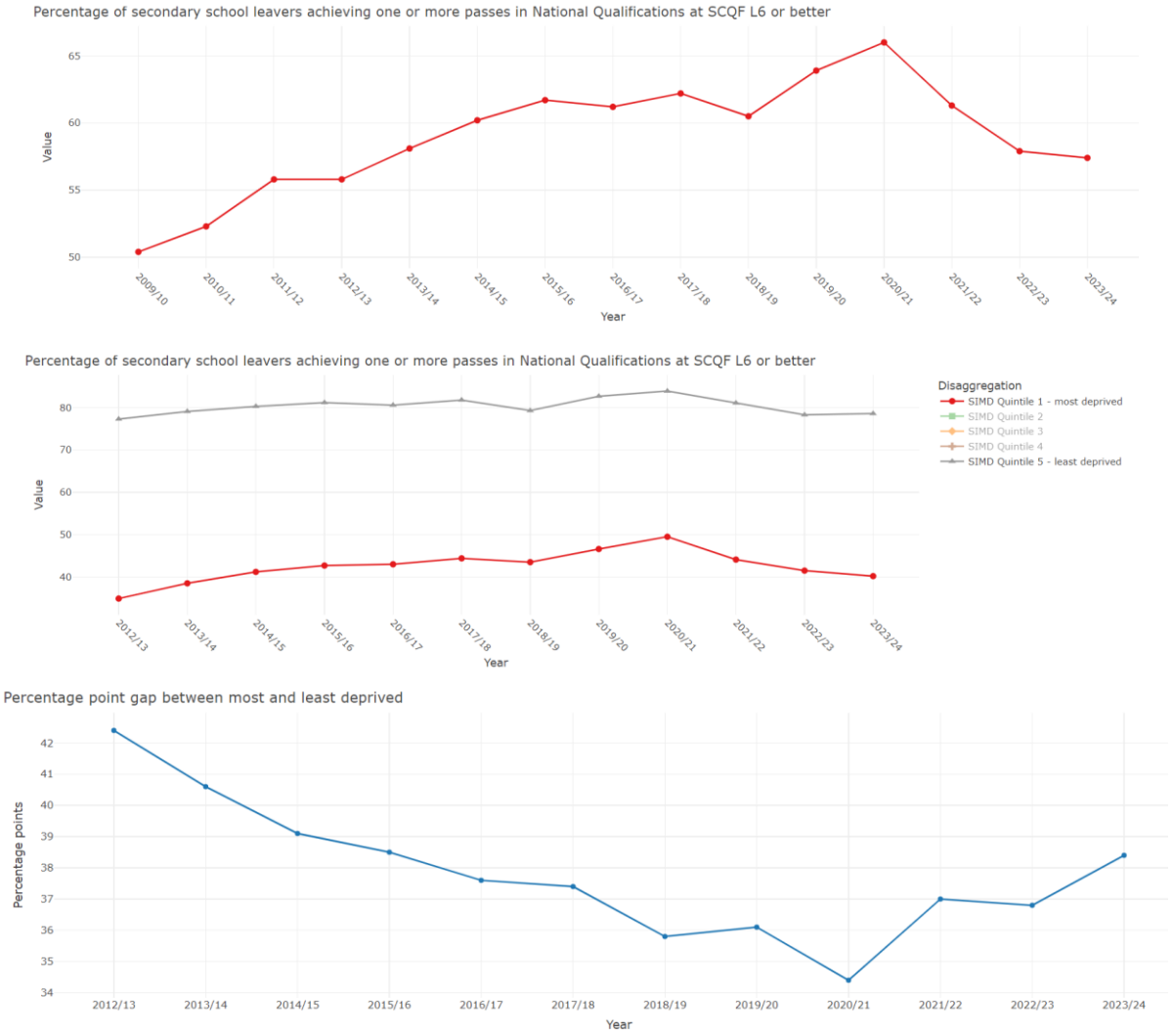


Chart 11. Percentage of senior phase secondary school leavers achieving five or more passes at SCQF L4 or better under the all SCQF measure at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap

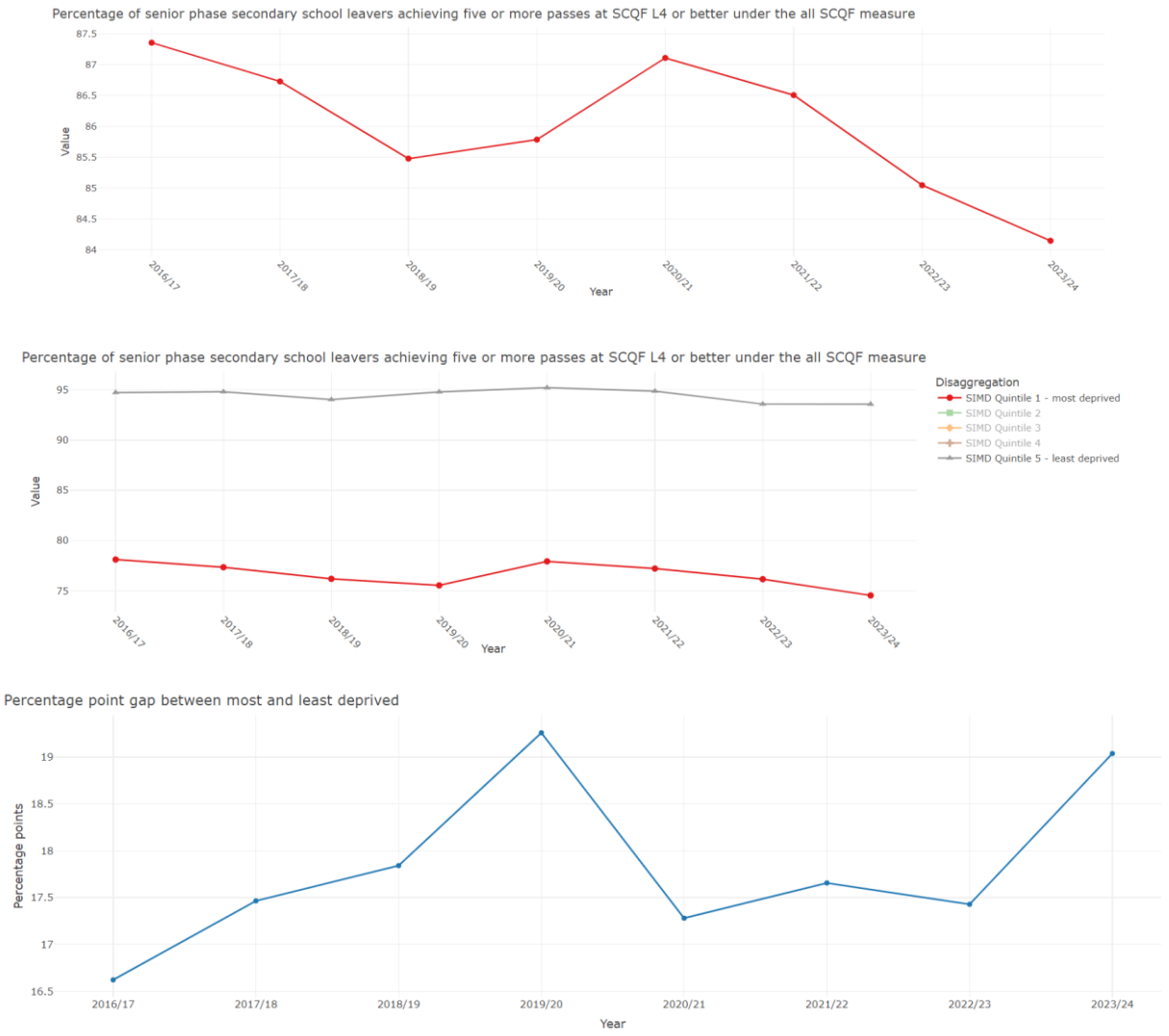
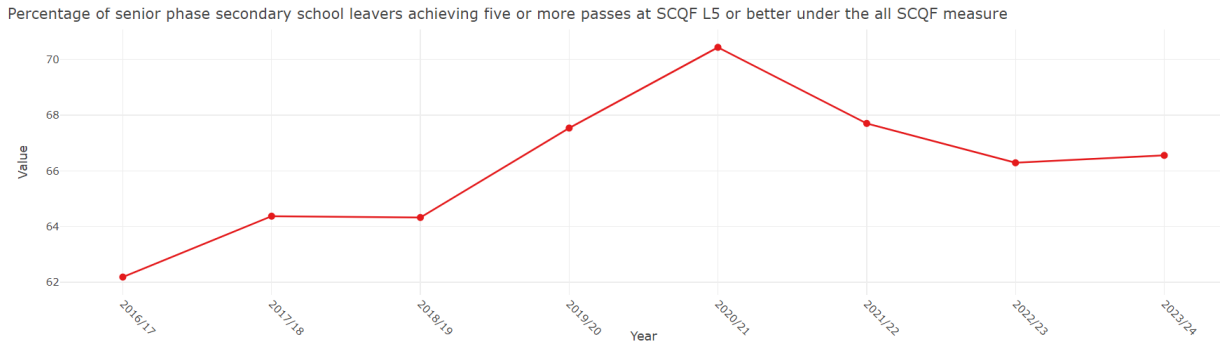


Chart 12. Percentage of senior phase secondary school leavers achieving five or more passes at SCQF L5 or better under the all SCQF measure at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap



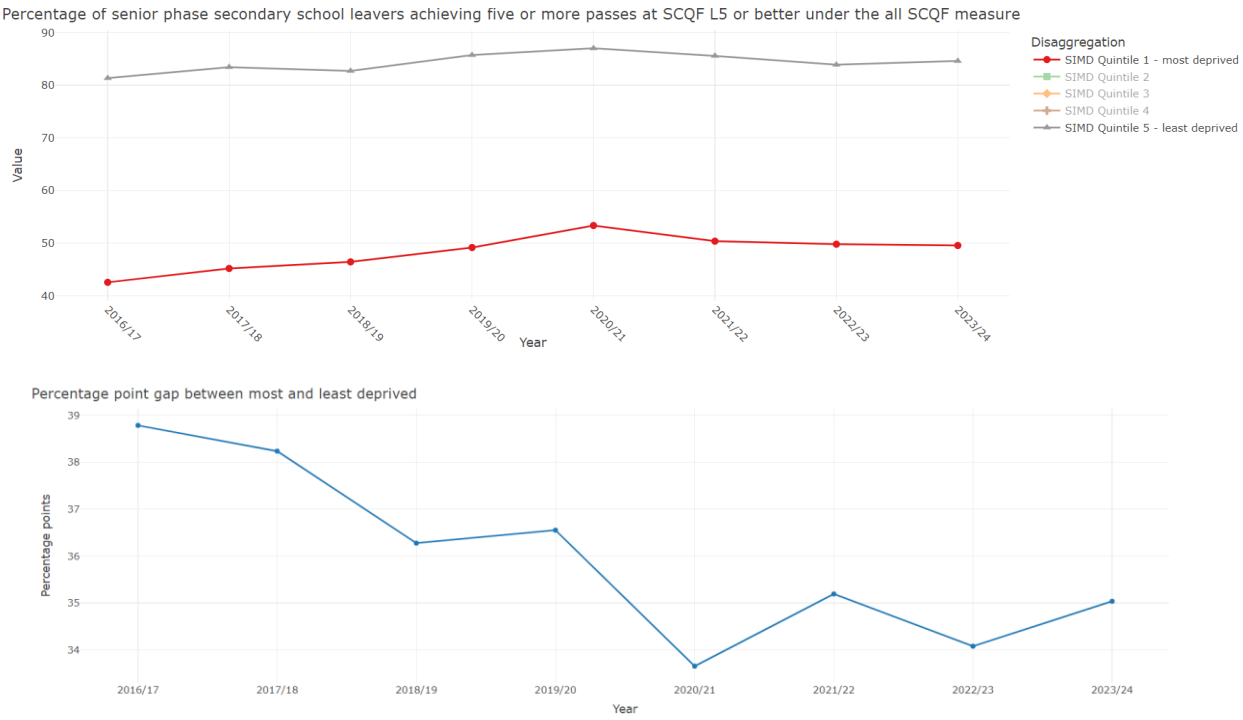
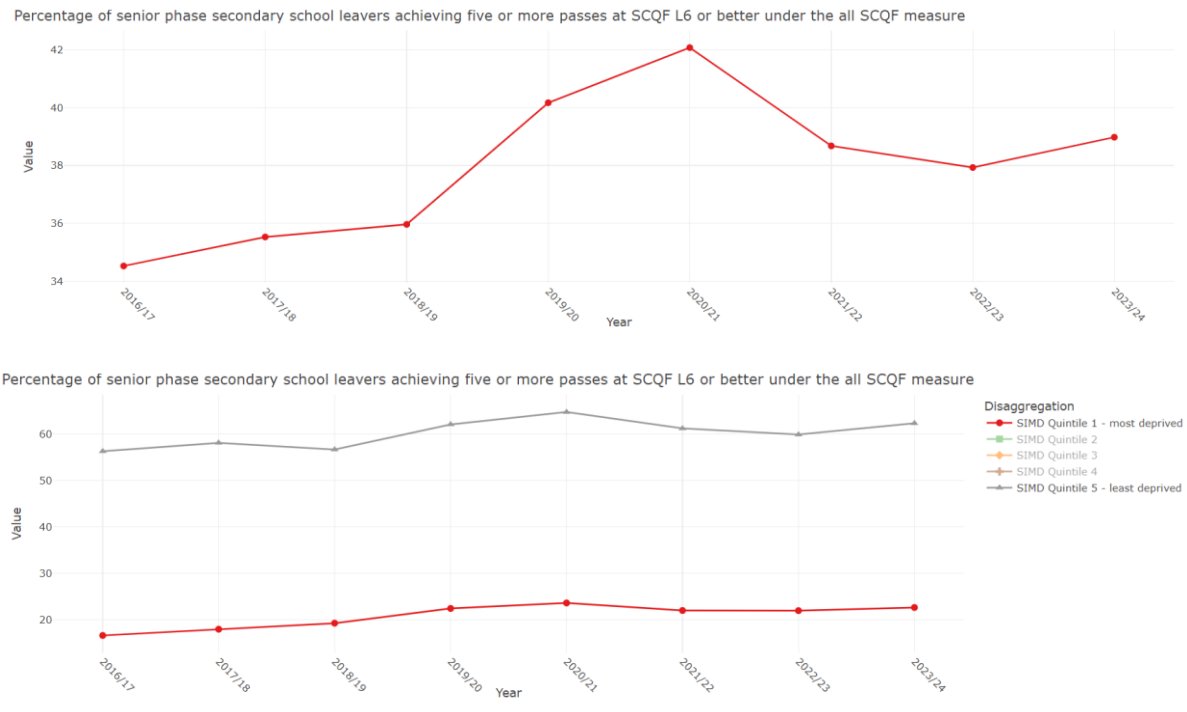


Chart 13. Percentage of senior phase secondary school leavers achieving five or more passes at SCQF L6 or better under the all SCQF measure at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap



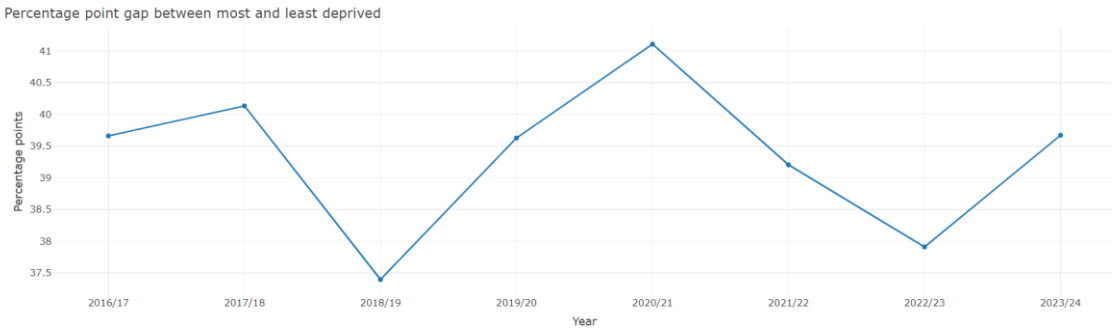


Chart 14. Percentage of 16-19 year olds participating in Education, Training or Employment at Scotland-level and by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived), 2025

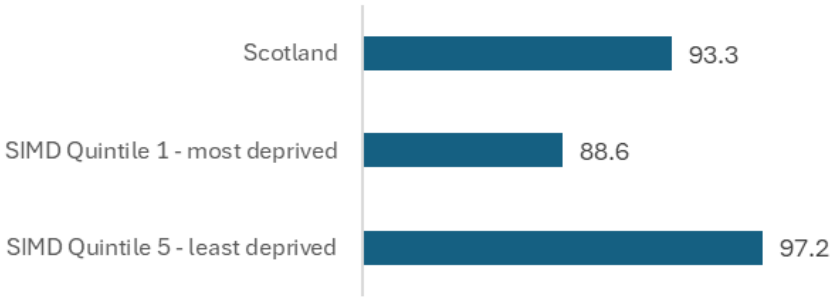
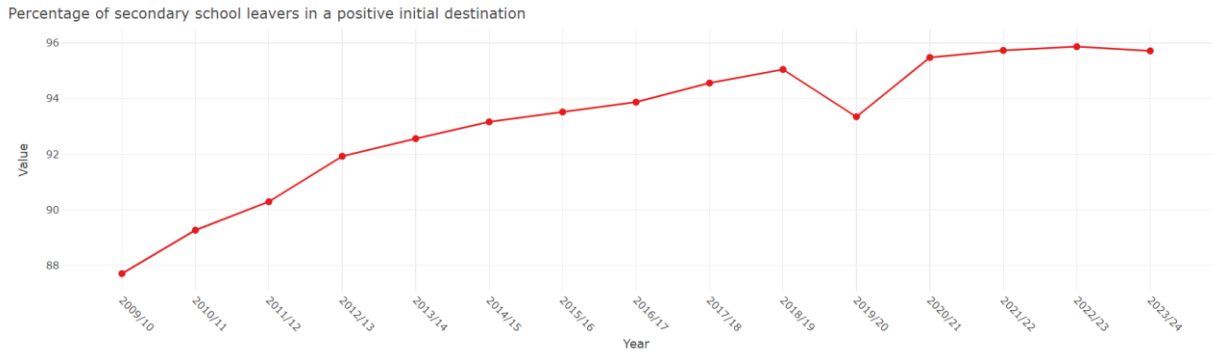
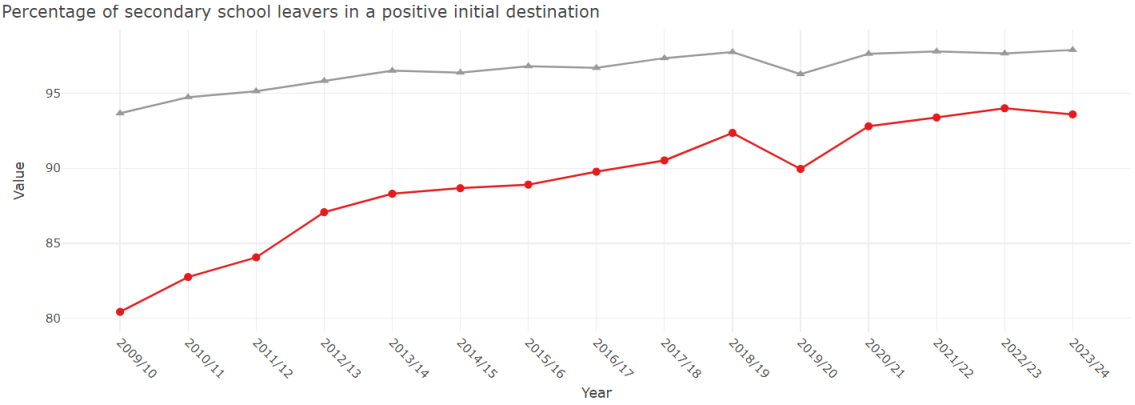


Chart 15. Percentage of secondary school leavers in a positive initial destination at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap





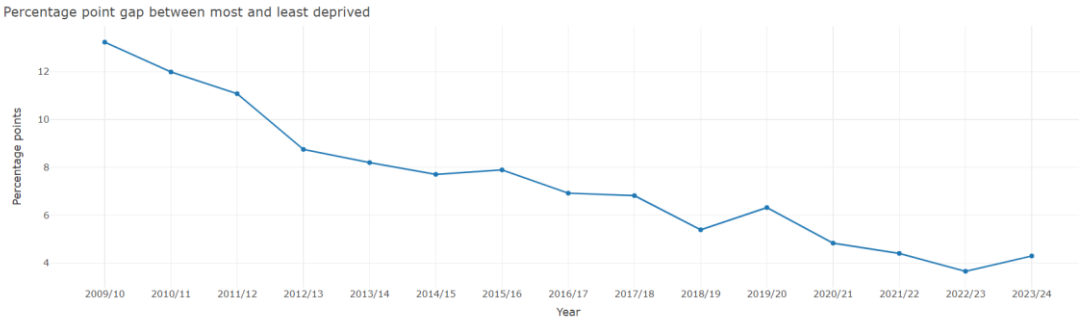
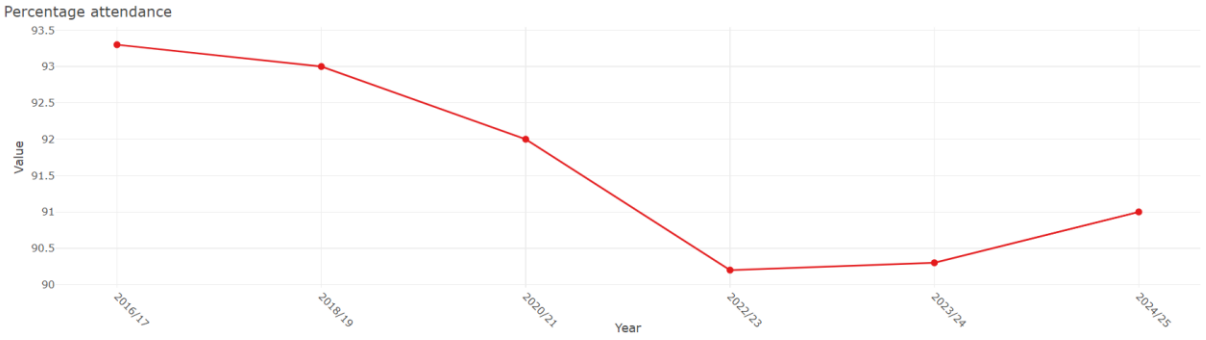
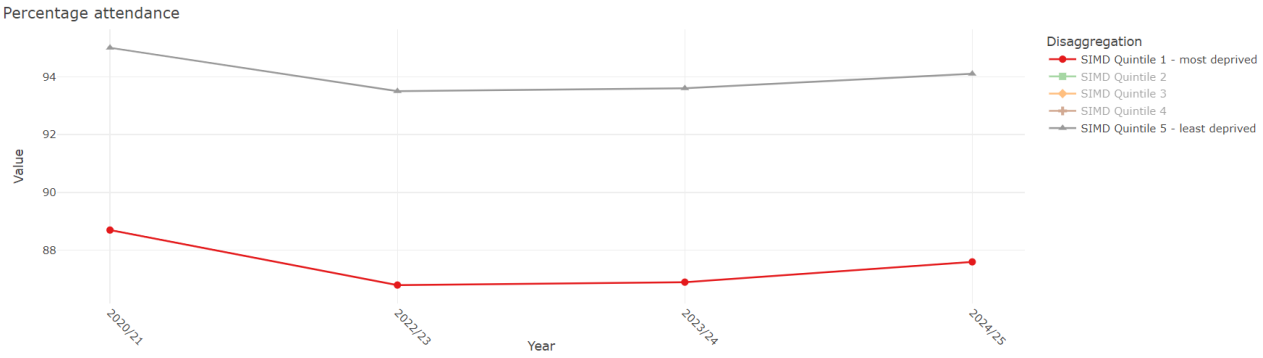
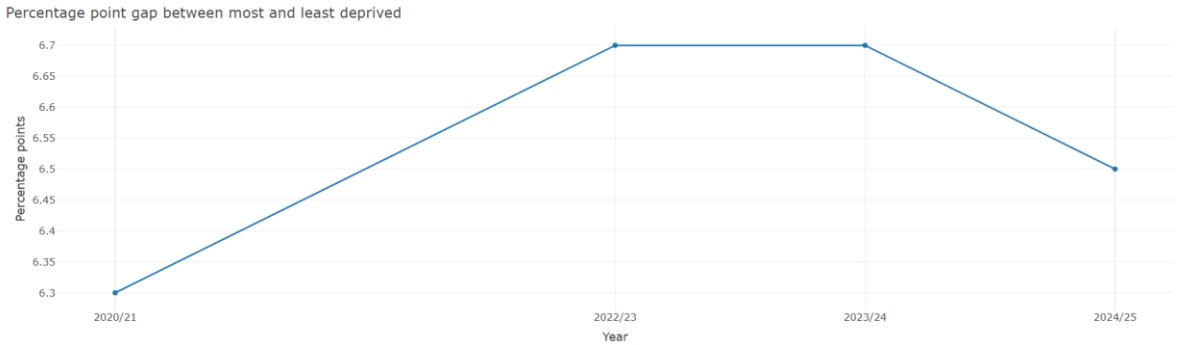


Chart 16. Percentage attendance across all schools at Scotland-level, by SIMD (most deprived and least deprived) and the gap







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