

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	EDU/31/24

Committee: Education

Date: 21 November 2024

Report Title: National Improvement Framework (NIF) Annual Report

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The report provides a progress report on key improvement priorities achieved by the Education & Learning Service for session 2023/24 and identifies key improvement priorities planned for session 2024/25.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the Education and Learning Annual Report 2023-2024 (Appendix 1);
- ii. Note the steps being taken to secure continuous improvement in session 2024/25 (Appendix 1).
- iii. Note that this progress report and Improvement Plan has been submitted to the Scottish Government, in line with the Local Authority's statutory requirements.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The Annual Service Plan and Report – National Improvement Framework will be delivered within agreed central education and devolved school budgets.

3.2 Legal

The Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000 requires that, as the Education Authority, Highland Council has a duty to:

- Enhance equity and promote a reduction in inequalities of educational outcome experienced by pupils because of socio-economic disadvantage.
- Endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education with a view to achieving the strategic priorities of the National Improvement Framework.
- Undertake annual planning and reporting and annual school improvement planning to address the four priorities of the National Improvement Framework.

- Ensure strategic decisions are taken with due regard as to how they will address, or help to address, the disparity of educational outcomes which exist between the most and least disadvantaged and at the same time raise attainment for all.

3.4 Risk - There is a strategic risk of not improving outcomes for learners. Changes to our service delivery and enhanced data scrutiny, along with early intervention will reduce potential risk.

3.5 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

3.6 Gaelic - The National Improvement Framework applies equally to Gaelic Medium education and learning.

4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 10 October 2024. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there will be positive impacts on all children and young people from the introduction of the framework. All children and young people should experience high quality teaching and learning which should provide improved outcomes. It has therefore been concluded that a full impact assessment is not required.

4.3.3 Impact Assessment Area Conclusion of Screening

Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young People – <i>Positive</i> • Children affected by disability – <i>Positive</i> • Older adults – <i>no impact</i>
Socio-economic	<i>Positive</i>
Human Rights	<i>Positive</i>
Children's Rights and Well-being	<i>Positive</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<i>no impact</i>
Climate Change	<i>no impact</i>
Data Rights	<i>no impact</i>

5. Background

- 5.1 The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 places a duty on the education authority to annually prepare and publish a report on its success in meeting the objectives set out in the most recently published Education Local Improvement Plan. The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 amended the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 placing new duties on education authorities relating to the preparation and publication of annual plans and reports linked to the National Improvement Framework.
- 5.2 The National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan for Scottish Education have been designed to deliver excellence and equity in education, and to reflect both the vision and approach of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).
- 5.3 Excellence and equity are outlined by the Scottish Government as:
- Excellence through raising attainment: ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to shape their future as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.
 - Achieving equity: ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap.
- 5.4 The three further strategic frameworks which run in tandem with Curriculum for Excellence and support the aims of the NIF include the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW).
- 5.5 The National Improvement Framework Plan sets out a clear vision for delivering Excellence and Equity across the five national priorities:
- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education
 - Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing
 - Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people
 - Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people
 - Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Progress in Highland on delivering against these themes in 2023/24 is included in the Annual Report at Appendix 1.

6. Key Successes, Summary of Progress and Next Steps

6.1 Stretch Aims

- 6.1.1 As reported to Members in November 2023, three-year stretch targets have been set for the Local Authority. Every Local Authority in Scotland was required to set ambitious, achievable stretch aims for progress in overall attainment and towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap. In setting Stretch Aims, the local authority

has been supported and challenged through professional dialogue with colleagues from Education Scotland to drive improved outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty across Highland.

- 6.1.2 Stretch Aims have been set for 2023-2026 and these relate to core measures determined by Scottish Government and core plus measures identified by the local authority. Section 3 of Highland's NIF Plan (Appendix 1) provides an evaluation of progress against each measure.
- 6.1.3 There is an overall positive trend predicted for both Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum for Excellence levels (ACEL). Similarly, improvements have been made in the local stretch aim for 3+ awards and SCQF Level 6 in S6.
- 6.2 **Review of Service Improvement Plan 2023-24 and Next Steps**
 - 6.2.1 Section 4 in the NIF Plan (Appendix 1) provides an overview of work undertaken last session to support service improvement. The Education Service has reviewed progress from last session as part of a range of ongoing methods of self-evaluation. In addition, officers have reviewed school standards and quality reports and school improvement plans to identify where further improvement is required.
 - 6.2.2 Priorities for session 2024-25 under the required five priority areas in the National Improvement Framework are set out in section 5 of the NIF Plan (Appendix 1) We have reviewed the number of key priorities for this session to enable officers and Headteachers to focus on key activities to support all children and young people to realise their full potential. The service has already commenced work on the agreed actions.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 15 October 2024

Author: Fiona Grant – Chief Officer, Secondary

Background Papers:

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Highland Council National Improvement Framework Plan 2024-25

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN 2024-25

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1. INTRODUCTION

This National Improvement Framework Plan (NIF) sets out a clear vision for Highland based on delivering Excellence and Equity across the five national priorities:

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people
- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

The drivers of improvement in the outcomes achieved by children and young people through education are:

- **School and ELC Leadership:** how we develop and support our head teachers and how we develop leadership across all parts of our school community
- **Teacher and Practitioner Professionalism:** how we support teachers and practitioners in their professional development
- **Parent/Carer Involvement and Engagement:** how we ensure the maximum benefit of parent and carer involvement and engagement in children's learning and in the life of the school
- **Curriculum and Assessment:** how we gather information about children's progress and how we use this information to support improving outcomes for all
- **School and ELC Improvement:** every school and ELC has a responsibility to evaluate how well it is doing against the National Improvement priorities and other performance measures. These are evaluated by the schools themselves, by the local authority and by HMI inspections
- **Performance Information:** how we gather data and analyse information to help us target areas for improvement, show where we have been successful and where we may need to do more

2. THE HIGHLAND CONTEXT

<h3>Geography</h3> <p>Highland covers one third of the land area of Scotland. It is nearly the size of Belgium.</p> <p>19,492 Pupils live in Urban and Small Towns</p> <p>10,590 Pupils live in a Rural area</p> <p>65% of people in Highland live in remote rural, accessible rural areas or remote small towns.</p>	<h3>Schools</h3> <p>In session 2024-25, there are</p> <p>196 schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 29 secondary schools ➤ 164 primary schools ➤ 3 special schools 	<h3>Free School Meals & Clothing Grants</h3> <p>3,349 Pupils are entitled to Free School Meals</p> <p>11.17% of pupils are entitled to claim a Clothing Grant</p>	<h3>Care Experienced Children & Young People</h3> <p>There are 608 Care Experienced Children & Young People in Highland That's 2.3%</p>
<h3>Gaelic Medium Education</h3> <p>The Highland Council is the largest provider of Gaelic Medium Education.</p> <p>6.7% of pupils in P1-P7 in Highland are in GME settings.</p> <p>2,201 total pupils in GME 3-18</p> <p>Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig</p>	<h3>Pupils</h3> <p>There are</p> <p>14,000 Secondary School pupils</p> <p>15,893 Primary School pupils</p> <p>188 Special School pupils in Highland.</p> <p>Overall attendance is 89.6% National average for 2022/23 was 90%</p>	<h3>Deprivation & Poverty</h3> <p>3,107 School-aged children live in 20% most deprived areas in Highland</p> <p>10.3% Pupils live in SIMD1&2</p> <p>1 in 5 children are affected by poverty.</p>	<h3>Additional Support for Learning</h3> <p>12,804 Pupils have one or more recorded need(s) for ASFL (all sectors). That's 42.18%</p> <p>7.46% English as an Additional Language</p>
<h3>Colleges & University</h3> <p>33% of young people leave school to go into Higher Education.</p> <p>20.5% leave school to go to Further Education.</p>		<h3>Education & Training</h3> <p>In May 2024, 10,154 16-19 year olds were in education, employment or training.</p> <p>That's 94.6%</p> <p>2,238 Modern Apprentices are in training.</p> <p>363 young people aged 16-19 are not participating (NEET), with 190 unconfirmed.</p>	

3. STRETCH AIMS

The core stretch aims, highlighted below, have been developed to improve outcomes for all children and young people whilst closing the poverty-related attainment gap. They articulate ambitious but also achievable aims and take into account evidence-based self-evaluation, collaboration between and across school planning. They have been supported and challenged through professional dialogue with Education Scotland to drive improved outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty across Highland.

ACEL Literacy combined P1, P4 & P7				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2022-23 Actual	65%	53%	77%	24pp**
2023-24 Provisional *	69%	56%	76%	20pp
2023-24	67%	56%	77%	21pp
2024-25	69%	58%	78%	20pp
2025-26 Stretch Aim	71%	60%	79%	19pp

Key for tables:

	Actual Attainment		Provisional Attainment		Stretch Aim
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* Provisional attainment for 2023/24. This is not yet validated and will be published in December 2024

** pp = percentage point

Additional information and rational for aims (Literacy)

Projected 23/24 attainment indicates literacy has increased by 4% from last session, outstripping our stretch aim by 2%. Whilst this year's aim has been achieved, we are continuing our improvement activity to ensure we continue to meet the aim set for 2025-26.

Attainment of the quintile 1 cohort has increased by 3% which meets the stretch aim for 23/24.

While projected attainment for our least deprived has reduced by 1%, the percentage of children in our most deprived data zones have improved by 3% and our gap reduced by 4 percentage points. We are continuing our improvement activity to ensure we continue to improve, to meet or exceed the stretch target, with the aim that there is a continued increase in Quintile 1 and 5, to reduce the gap by 2 percentage points or more by 2025/26.

ACEL Numeracy combined P1, P4 & P7				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2022-23 Actual	72%	59%	80%	21pp
2023-24 Provisional **	74%	61%	84%	23pp
2023-24	75%	62%	80%	18pp
2024-25	77%	64%	81%	17pp
2025-26 (Revised Aims)	79%	66%	82%	16pp

Additional information and rationale for aims (Numeracy)

Projected numeracy attainment for our least deprived has improved significantly beyond the aim set for 2023-24, with an increase of 4% on the previous year. Projected 23/24 numeracy attainment indicates an improvement of 2% overall, just missing the stretch aim by 1%. Similarly, the projected numeracy attainment of our most deprived cohorts has increased by 2% missing the stretch aim by 1%. We will work to increase the improvement trajectory in the coming session with a particular focus on closing the attainment gap by achieving faster improvement for Quintile 1.

Senior Phase: the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more award at SCQF level 5 based on Insight (All SCQF Awards) information				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2022-23 Actual	87%	75%	93%	18pp
2023-24	90%	73%	96%	23pp
2024-25	91%	75%	97%	22pp
2025-26 Stretch aim	92%	78%	98%	20pp

Additional information and rational for aims (School Leavers)

Leavers data for the 2024 cohort will not be available until February 2025. The commentary below outlines how the original stretch aims were set in September 2023.

Highland's attainment for 1 or more award at SCQF 5 in 2022 was the highest it had been in 5 years, with 87% of the cohort achieving 1 award at Level 5. The stretch target 2023-24 was set at 90% which was a 3 % increase on the previous year's target. Over session 2024-25 and 2025-26 the aim is to continue this incremental increase of 1% to give a Stretch Aim of 92%, which is 7%

above the Highland data in 2019. For quintile 1, Highland data in 2022 shows 75% for the measure. Meeting the stretch aim by 25/26 will require an incremental increase by 3% which is 10% higher than our figures pre Covid.

Senior Phase: the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more award at SCQF level 6 based on Insight (All SCQF Awards) information				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2022-23 Actual	61%	44%	73%	29pp
2023-24	65%	38%	76%	38pp
2024-25	67%	42%	78%	36pp
2025-26 Stretch aim	68%	46%	80%	34pp

Additional information and rationale for aims

Leavers data for the 2024 cohort will not be available until February 2025. The commentary below outlines how the original stretch aims were set in September 2023.

Overall attainment in this measure for the past five years has fluctuated from 58% to 64% with no trend emerging. The stretch aim is set to improve attainment in 2023-24 by 1% on the 2021/22 figure. We have then set an aim of increasing incrementally to the stretch aim of 68% in 2025-26.

Participation Measure: the proportion of 16-19 olds participating in education, employment or training based on the Annual Participation Measure produced by Skills Development Scotland				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2022-23 Actual	93.0%	86.8%	96.4%	9.6pp
2023-24 Actual	93.8%	88.5%	96.6%	8.1pp
2023-24	94.9%	88.7%	97.8%	9.1pp
2024-25	95.9%	91.0%	98.0%	7.0pp
2025-26 Stretch aim	96.9%	92.5%	98.5%	6.0pp

Additional information and rationale for aims

Highland has consistently performed above the national average for overall participation and has set a stretch aim target of 96.9% for 2025-26 which is 2% higher than the highest overall level of 94.9% recorded in 2022-23.

Highland has consistently performed above the national average for the gap between most and least deprived young adults (16-19 year olds) participating in education, training or employment. We aim to reduce the gap to 6% by 2025- 26 which is a 3.1% improvement on 2022-23 and 1.2% improvement on the smallest gap of 7.2% recorded in 2019-20. Our focus will remain on improving participation for the most deprived through targeted, bespoke and flexible approaches and early intervention.

Health & Wellbeing Measure: Attendance				
Annual Trajectory	Primary Overall	Primary SIMD Q1	Primary SIMD Q5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2022-23 Actual	92.0	89.2	93.7	4.5
2023-24 Provisional **	92.3	89.1	94.2	5.1
2023-24	92.0	89.0	93.0	4.0
2024-25	93.5	91.0	94.0	3.0
2025-26 Stretch aim	95.0	93.0	95.0	2.0

Annual Trajectory	Secondary Overall	Secondary SIMD Q1	Secondary SIMD Q5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2022-23 Actual	86.8	81.0	90.4	9.4
2023-24 Provisional **	86.0	80.2	90.3	10.1
2023-24	87.0	81.0	90.0	9.0
2024-25	88.5	83.5	91.5	8.0
2025-26 Stretch aim	90.0	86.0	93.0	7.0

Additional information and rationale for aims

- In primary, overall attendance decreased significantly between 2021 (95%) and 2022 (90%). It recovered to 92% in 2023 and we aim to return to the pre-pandemic level of 95% by 2025. Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 attendance followed a similar trajectory. We aim to

increase Quintile 1 attendance to 93% by 2025, 1% above the pre-pandemic level and 1% more than Highland has achieved to date. We aim to decrease the gap to 2%. Provisional attendance information for 2023-24 indicates a small increase in overall attendance, with SIMD 5 attendance increasing and no change significant change in SIMD 1 attendance

- In secondary, overall attendance decreased significantly between 2021 (90%) and 2022 (86.8%). It recovered to 87% in 2023 and we aim to return to the pre-pandemic level of 90% by 2025. Quintile 1 attendance decreased from 86% in 2021 to 80% in 2022. In 2023, Quintile 1 attendance was 81%. We aim to increase Quintile 1 attendance to 86% by 2025, returning to the pre-pandemic level. We aim to reduce the gap to 7%. Overall attendance has continued to decline in secondary schools in 2023-24. To meet the target set for 2025/26, there will be focused work on understanding and addressing the barriers to improving school attendance in our secondary schools during the coming session.

Core Plus Stretch Aims

Senior Phase: the proportion of S6 attaining 3+L6 award at SCQF level 6 based on Insight (All SCQF Awards) information (cumulative, S6 based on S6 roll)				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2022-23 Actual	72%	42%	80%	51pp
2023-24 Actual	73%	51%	82%	31pp
2023-24	73%	43.0%	82%	39pp
2024-25	75%	47.0%	83.5%	36.5pp
2025-26 Stretch aim	78%	50%	84%	34pp

Additional information and rationale for local aims

S6 attainment is a focus for the Local Authority as it is well below National in most measures. The stretch aim was set in 2023 when the overall attainment for the S6 cohort was at 72% which is 6% points lower than National. Our three-year stretch aim is set at 78% which was the National attainment for this measure in 2023. In 2024, Highland’s S6 attainment for 3+L6 awards increased to 73% in line with the stretch aim set. In 2024, Quintile 1 attainment for this measure significantly exceeded the stretch aim with 51% of the cohort achieving this measure. This was a 9% increase from 2023. This stretch aim was therefore achieved in 1 year. We are now looking to consolidate or improve on this measure in the coming session. Our Quintile 5 attainment met the stretch aim set for 2023-24 with attainment reported at 82%. The stretch aim for 2025 is set to improve by a further 1.5% over the session.

4. PROGRESS DURING SESSION 2023/24 WITH OUR PRIORITIES

Section 4.1 - Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education

Embedding children's rights - Putting children's rights at the core of planning and service delivery:

- The Education and Learning Service Plan now includes specific actions to address inequality.
- The Highland Integrated Children's Services Board has a Children's Rights and Participation Improvement Group, chaired by the Principal Educational Psychologist, that supports UNCRC and The Promise in partnership with other organisations and services.
- Schools in Highland are engaged with the Rights Respecting Schools Programme and deliver specific improvement activity around children's rights.
- Staff training on UNCRC is included in Equality, Diversity and Children's Rights training, alongside training on positive relationships and bullying prevention. Training is included in the Staff Development Calendar and bespoke training is delivered on request from individual schools and services.
- Work on integrating Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments into the work of the Council continues to progress, in line with corporate and directorate policies. A process of Integrated Impact Assessments has also been created and implemented across The Highland Council and from 1 July 2024 all changes to policy, guidance and service delivery will require an Integrated Impact Assessment. This process includes Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments, where managers are required to identify the UNCRC Articles that link with the policy/service change.
- We will continue to encourage and support more schools to become Rights Respecting Schools (RRS), providing dedicated support from the Collaborative Improvement Team and brokering support from the schools currently engaged in RRS. In primary 10 schools have registered for bronze, 59 have achieved bronze, 28 have achieved silver, 8 have achieved gold with one re-accredited. In secondary, 11 have achieved bronze, 11 have registered for silver, 2 have achieved silver, 1 has achieved gold. 3 Special Schools have achieved bronze. For 3-18, 1 school has registered for bronze, 1 has achieved bronze.

Equality and Non-discrimination - ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to be the best they can be:

- Information on Children's Rights is now available in a variety of languages including BSL.
- Our Positive Relationships Anti-Bullying Guidance was created by young people from Skye and is in line with Scottish Government Guidance.
- A Highland bullying survey is available for schools to use to assess the extent of discrimination and bullying in their school, where and why.
- A revised process is in place for the use of specialist placements for children with ASN, to standardise decision making across Highland and ensure the presumption of mainstream as a first principle, as required by the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000).
- Empowering children - giving children the knowledge and confidence to use their rights and hold organisations to account.
- A Children and Young People's Guide to UNCRC is available on the Wellbeing Highland Website.
- Partnership working with groups such as Highland One World provide resources and

training to support the Sustainable Development Goals and to engage with children and young people on topics that are important to them.

- All children in secondary school can self-refer to counselling services.
- Regular engagement with the Highland Youth Parliament enables their views to be sought and represented and allows for ongoing dialogue and feedback.
- Work is ongoing to develop a child friendly complaints procedure within the guidance provided by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman in readiness for the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law.

Participation - listen to children and take their views seriously:

- The Children's Participation Strategy was launched in August 2024 after extensive consultation with children and young people of all ages. This is now being progressed, with young people, to create a clear process for children to inform and influence decision making in Highland.
- Schools, supported by officers, continue to develop the effectiveness of their pupil councils to shape decision making at a school level.
- Outcomes from The Highland Lifestyle Survey inform and impact on decision-making.
- The Lifestyle Survey is undertaken every 2 years with P7, S2 and S4 students. In 2023 when the survey was last undertaken, 73% of pupils reported receiving lessons on children's rights. With the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scot's law, it is intended that schools will have a greater focus on this area of work and promote children's rights much more through lessons, across the curriculum. The Lifestyle Survey will be undertaken in spring 2025 and will provide updated data on this measure.
- Partnership with organisations such as Inspiring Young Voices, youth groups, young carers' organisations, Growing2gether etc, provide direct support and advocacy for children and young people who are marginalised. They support specific groups of children and young people to access their rights and represent their specific needs within Highland Council strategic groups.
- Psychological Services have produced guidance on how to gather the views of children who require different approaches due to their learning and sensory needs.
- Pupils from several schools have collaborated with officers to create 'Our SHANARRI School', a self-evaluation tool that can be used with pupils to provide a baseline for pupil wellbeing, before initiating any support programmes.
- Programmes running in Highland schools to promote children's rights include UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools, Highland Council's My Rights to Wellbeing and Resilient Kids, and Scottish Government peer-led programmes such as Mentors for Violence Prevention.

Section 4.2 - Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing

- Data from the biennial Highland Lifestyle survey shows:
 - Reduction in number of pupils reporting being in trouble with the police.
 - An increase in the number of pupils reporting daily exercise of one hour or more.
 - Decrease in the number of pupils reporting less than 6 hours of sleep on a school night and an increase in the number reporting 7 or more hours of sleep.
 - A decrease in the number of pupils reporting that they do not brush their teeth at all each day.
 - An increase in the number of S2 and S4 pupils reporting that they never drink alcohol and have never taken drugs.
 - Increase in multiple measures relating to children's rights and participation.
 - Increase in the number of pupils reporting feeling healthy, active, nurtured,

achieving and responsible.

- A range of tailored mentoring, counselling and support has been provided to young people across Highland secondary schools to improve attendance, engagement and attainment.
- Self-assessment tools such as Our SHANARRI School and INCLUDE are promoted through the <https://www.wellbeinghighland.co.uk/> website. This includes advice and information for practitioners to support a Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing. These self-assessment tools have been highlighted by Education Scotland as examples of good practice for practitioners and we will continue to advocate their use in schools while updating the links to support a Whole School Approach.
- A range of training is available on a regular basis through the staff development calendar. This includes training on Mental Health and Wellbeing, Trauma Informed Practice, Understanding the Teenage Brain, Promoting Positive Relationships, Equality, Diversity and Children's Rights etc. A wide range of regularly delivered training on these topics and ad hoc, bespoke training for settings is delivered by The Psychological Service.
- The Military Liaison Group is led by a member of the Psychological Service, who delivers the operational work relating to the Education section of the Armed Forces Covenant. This work is supported by a multi-agency group called the Military Liaison Group (Education) and is reflected on the Highland Council Armed Forces Website.

Section 4.3 - Closing the gap between most and least disadvantaged children and young people

- Implement revised Parental Engagement Strategy produced working with partners to support parents and carers to support their children's development, learning and achievement from birth to adulthood, using evidence-informed strategies.
- Officers participate in national Scottish Attainment Challenge reference group, sharing best practice in relation to closing the poverty-related the attainment gap with schools.
- Training specifically focused on strategies to improve primary attainment for disadvantaged pupils delivered to leaders and practitioners.
- Increased collaboration and impact, working with partners via Integrated Children's Services work.
- As part of the Highland Primary attainment programme (see section 4.5), all schools have considered pupil attainment in relation to the attainment gap and those children requiring additional intervention and tracking to support improvement as part of this analysis and review during attainment meetings at school and Local Authority level.

Section 4.4 - Improvement in skills and sustained positive school leaver destinations for all young people

2023/24 Progress supporting strategic outcomes:

- Developing the young workforce activity has been embedded into a number of strategic plans across the council which have been developed throughout the 23/24 session: this included two portfolios within **The Highland Council Delivery Plan: Work Force for the Future & Person-Centred Solutions** which focus on the Highland Economy and developing learner pathways to ensure all young people in Highland understand and know how to take advantage of work related learning opportunities through their school curriculum and community. In addition, the **Community Learning & Development Plan 24-27**, Priority Theme 4 focuses on Employment, Volunteering and Training with an aim to progress towards economic independence through learners gaining recognised qualifications allowing them to progress to training, volunteering or employment. The **Community Wealth Building Strategy** takes a people centred approach to economic development, to retain greater wealth and maximise spending within and for the communities in Highland.
- Our schools programme in partnership with UHI and 5 external training companies has continued with around 200 courses from SCQF Level 1 to Level 7 to schools with face to face, online or a blended delivery models. Introducing the Highland Council Virtual Timetable allows schools to offer the range of courses within set columns as well as equity across Highland for rural schools to access courses not delivered locally.
- Over 600 pupils are undertaking Foundation Apprenticeships in Automotive, Business, Children & Young People, Healthcare, Creative Digital Media, Software Development, Hospitality & Construction, including 2 of which are also delivered in Gaelic. Foundation Apprenticeships give pupils work based learning opportunities to develop skills for their future.
- A bespoke mentoring offer through the program **My Future My Success** has been developed to support young people who are at risk of not achieving a positive destination. This offer takes a person-centred approach supporting the removal of barriers to learning and positive destinations for each young person referred.
- Collaboration with DYW and other key partners will develop sector-learning offers through The Highland Council Operational Delivery Plan. The Highland Mentoring Model has been used to ensure that young people have direct contact with industry through mentoring and work placements to better understand the career opportunities available to them within Highland and the wider economy.

Section 4.5 – Improvement in attainment, particularly literacy and numeracy

- The draft Collaborative Improvement Framework has been used to guide officer engagement with schools around self-evaluation and improvement activity. This document outlines a transparent process and structure to align support and challenge based on school need.
- Collaborative Lead Officers continue to working directly with schools to support improved use of data, self-evaluation, target setting, and tracking and monitoring attainment.
- A bespoke tracking analysis tool for secondary schools was developed over the session to support a consistent approach to assembling and analysing tracking data to inform planning attainment interventions and

- support with bespoke cohorts/ groups.
- Improved datasets issued to schools to indicate pupil specific data showing individual student attainment profiles
- A Progress & Achievement module was introduced to all primary schools in session 23/24 with training and guidelines issued to allow all schools to enter and analyse predictions in November 2023. This data was used during attainment meetings with class teachers as well as with Collaborative Lead Officers and Head Teachers February 2024 to discuss attainment cohorts as well as individual pupil progress. All schools also entered tracking information for all pupils in P1,4,7 in May to support transition as well as provide a pilot of data entry prior to the new session roll out for all stages.
- Attainment meetings were held in November with every Secondary School to review attainment and discuss development require to support improvements in attainment.
- Literacy and numeracy resources and interventions support developed by Literacy and Numeracy Development officer with targeted Career Long Professional Learning where required - Literacy for All' an example of this.
- Highland Digital School and schools/college/employer partnership programme has supported widening of access to course in the senior phase
- A pilot group of 40 primary schools using the full Progress & Achievement tracking system in SEEMiS. This pilot helped frame a with feedback informing the draft Tracking Monitoring and Review policy which will be used in schools in session 2024/24. Included in this policy is the Highland Attainment programme setting out clear, common approaches to attainment meetings, a common assessment calendar and TMR timelines and use of data to inform the raising attainment agenda.
- Across all schools there has been a focus on Learning & Teaching Events and training which support leadership and differentiation in the classroom with new policy, training and support tools for schools to monitor and improve classroom practice to raise attainment.

Section 4.6 – Workforce Development: Professional Learning and Leadership

2023/2024 Improvement Activity to support schools :

- A pilot has been undertaken to establish a Professional Learning and Leadership Academy (PLLA). The PLLA included a New and Acting Headteacher Network. Survey feedback from the sessions indicated that our headteachers felt very well supported in carrying out their role through the network.
- An online resource has been created to support professional learning and leadership at all levels to better enable the service to support teachers and practitioners in their professional development.
- A number of professional learning networks have been created to enhance leadership development at all levels and provide all practitioners across the system with a peer network.
- In June 2024 the Education Service distributed the refreshed LNCT 35 **Highland Policy and Guidance on Professional Review and Development for Teachers**. The revised and refreshed policy enabled the service to start the new

session (24/25) with renewed expectations of PRD and PU for all practitioners registered with the GTCS.

- The renewed focus has been promoted alongside the developing career stage networks (Early Career, Middle Leader, Deputy Head etc.) and SCQF level 11 courses that will be provided by the Education Service.
- Classroom practitioners have been offered a range of training sessions in literacy and numeracy, delivered by our Literacy & Numeracy Development Officers
- To support classroom practitioners in the assessment and moderation of literacy and numeracy, over 100 Quality Assessment and Moderation Support Officers have been trained in facilitating Associated School Group moderation.
- Training sessions have been offered during session 2023/4 for My Rights to Wellbeing and Resilient Kids by Psychological Services. These programmes will continue to be offered through the HC Staff Development Calendar.
- Learning and teaching spotlight sessions have been running throughout the session to support the development of the learning, teaching & assessment framework

5. STRATEGIC NIF IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024-2025

We have identified the following key areas of focus for this improvement plan. These address the priorities identified above.

This plan outlines the intended outcomes and planned actions to support delivery of the NIF priorities in 2024/2025. In addition, the Education Service has identified a further local priority.

National Priority		
Section 5.1 - Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education		
Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?
Children's Rights are realised in all schools and early years settings.	<p>Develop a strong ethos & culture of rights & respect based on UNCRC.</p> <p>Work with schools, ELC settings, Pupil Councils, Parent Councils, Parent Forum and young people to further develop a shared understanding of UNCRC and the role stakeholders and partners play in ensuring its successful incorporation into the culture, ethos and life of the school or setting.</p>	<p>All schools and ELC settings will be compliant with the articles of the UNCRC as incorporated into Scottish law.</p> <p>Increasing percentage of schools including UNCRC in Standards and Quality Reports and School Improvement Planning.</p>
<p>Improve children and young people's involvement in decision making.</p> <p>Embed a culture of collaboration to equip all children and young people to lead change, influence improvement and thrive in and beyond school.</p>	<p>Improve our approaches to youth democracy including reviewing the role of The Highland Youth Parliament.</p> <p>Deliver Youth Charter awareness raising session and roll out the Charter to schools and partners.</p> <p>Promote Rights Respecting Schools resources & continue to actively engage with schools and nurseries.</p> <p>Embed child friendly complaints toolkit.</p>	<p>All schools and partners aware of the Highlands approach to youth democracy.</p> <p>Increasing percentage of schools registered for, and achieving levels of, UNICEF UK RSS accreditation.</p> <p>Feedback from Schools and ELC settings around capturing voice guidance.</p> <p>Number of complaints made and resolved.</p>

	Review practice and develop guidance on capturing children's and young people's voices with support services.	
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National Priority		
Section 5.2 - Improvement in children and young peoples' health and wellbeing		
Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?
Children and young people have their needs identified, assessed and met by skilled and confident staff working in effective multi-agency collaboration.	<p>Refresh the local implementation of GIRFEC to reflect the revised national guidance.</p> <p>Engage with COSLA and Scottish Government on the next iteration of the joint Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and associated delivery and workforce action plans with a focus on the needs of children and young people.</p> <p>Work with NHS Highland to improve the NDAS diagnostic pathway, combining social and clinical approaches to supporting children and young people.</p>	<p>Quality Improvement activity evidence that multi-agency assessment and planning processes learning are evident in school practice.</p> <p>Reductions in the numbers of children and young people waiting for NHS assessments.</p>
Children and Young People report improvements in their health and wellbeing, with all schools having a robust approach to reducing bullying and improving	Work with Headteachers to implement revised relationships and behaviour guidance based on the Scottish Government's action plan, supported by professional development in Building Positive Relationships and Restorative Approaches.	<p>Revised Relationships guidance is implemented, and schools report use in Standards and Quality reports.</p> <p>The Building Positive Relationships and</p>

relationships.	Ensure our policies and procedures align with the National 'Respect for All' anti-bullying guidance.	Restorative Approaches personal development programme is implemented, with majority of participating schools reporting positive impact.
Schools report less challenging behaviour and improved relationships that support engagement in learning.	<p>Review and refresh the working group including trade unions, professional body, Health and Safety and staff representation, to identify and implement clear actions to reduce incidents</p> <p>Conduct baseline survey with employees on behaviour and relationships</p> <p>Develop approaches to responding to and managing distressed and challenging behaviours.</p>	<p>Reduction in frequency and seriousness of challenging behaviours.</p> <p>Evidence of effective interventions in place to manage challenging behaviour in schools and ELC settings.</p>
School attendance levels across all Highland sectors are increased.	<p>Review and implement the Local Authority attendance framework including pathway and appropriate interventions.</p> <p>Ensure the implementation of the revised attendance procedures and all supporting frameworks and resources and plan for further improvement actions.</p> <p>Engage in Education Scotland's 'test of change' improvement activity on secondary school attendance</p> <p>Use data and implementation within an attendance framework to support and challenge schools to increase attendance.</p>	<p>Local Authority Stretch Aim measure - attendance</p> <p>Increase attendance will improve in line with agreed stretch aim.</p> <p>All stakeholders will implement the revised 'Staged Intervention Framework for Attendance' training and related materials.</p>

Deliver a high quality school counselling service.	Six monthly evaluation of school counselling service using pre and post measures.	% of children reporting an improved outcome following counselling
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National Priority		
Section 5.3 - Closing the gap between most and least disadvantaged children and young people		
Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?
Improvement in attainment of children and young people affected by poverty.	<p>Further develop and implement Literacy For All in targeted schools and nurseries.</p> <p>Develop consistent approaches to teaching of literacy & numeracy</p> <p>Develop literacy and numeracy networks for sharing effective practice.</p> <p>Develop secondary curricular networks for sharing effective practice.</p> <p>Conduct Achievement, attainment and Improvement meetings with all primary & secondary schools with a focus on outcomes for the attainment gaps</p> <p>Develop effective data systems to support and inform planning for improvement in relation to equity and use effectively</p>	<p>Increase in Q1 Literacy and Numeracy Attainment ACEL P1, 4, 7 combined.</p> <p>Increase in literacy and numeracy attainment of school leavers. Increase in literacy and numeracy family learning opportunities.</p> <p>Increase in Q1 positive destinations.</p>

Improved Early Intervention & intensive / focused support as necessary to meet the needs of all learners.	Further build capacity of Headteachers, senior leaders and education practitioners in gathering, interrogating and employing data effectively to identify gaps and measure the impact of interventions to improve outcomes for children and young people.	Local Authority Stretch Aim measure - attainment. Quantitative and qualitative comments within Standard & Quality reports and Collaborative Review Feedback. Evaluative gradings in Standards and Quality Reports.
Children and young people will benefit from their parents and carers being involved in the life and work of their school.	Implement and embed Parental Engagement Strategy.	Best practice is identified and shared between schools and parent forums.

National Priority		
Section 5.4 - Improvement in skills and sustained positive school leaver destinations for all young people		
Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?
Improvement in positive destination outcomes for all, particularly those impacted by poverty.	<p>Improve approaches to destination planning in schools.</p> <p>Work in closer collaboration with relevant services and partners, in line with agreed target operating model.</p> <p>Increase awareness of the variety of pathways available to young people.</p>	<p>Local Authority Stretch Aim measure positive destinations</p> <p>Improvements in Q1 destinations.</p> <p>Improvements in FSM destinations</p> <p>More opportunities will be available for young people to undertake vocational learning.</p>

	<p>Review labour market information and align learning experiences to future workforce opportunities in Highland</p> <p>Align with activity in The Workforce For the Future Portfolio to create a new offer to support those at highest risk of disengaging from education and for those impacted by poverty.</p>	Increased understanding amongst partners of appropriate post school provision.
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National Priority		
Section 5.5 - Improvement in attainment, particularly literacy and numeracy		
Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?
High quality central officer support for school leaders	Restructure central officer support to schools to align strategic & operational management	High quality central officer support for school leaders
Attainment and achievement are raised through improved quality of learning and teaching and a shared understanding of highly effective practice.	Support the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Framework through professional learning and resources, improving approaches to self-evaluation and practice in learning, teaching, assessment and moderation.	Local Authority Stretch Aim measure - attainment Evaluative gradings in Standards and Quality Reports of learning, teaching & attainment
The quality of educational provision is improved in all schools and ELC settings.	<p>Undertake planned quality improvement activity at a universal, focused and intensive level using a risk-based approach.</p> <p>Update the Highland Council Raising Attainment Strategy to more closely align with the NIF drivers</p>	<p>Increase in the number of 'good' or better evaluations of the 4 core quality indicators by Education Scotland.</p> <p>Local Authority Stretch Aim measure - attainment</p>

	<p>for improvement and the creation of a Raising Attainment Board to have strategic oversight of raising attainment activity and outcomes</p> <p>Conduct Achievement, attainment and Improvement meetings with all schools with a focus on the overall attainment of young people. In Primary Schols focusing on ACEL performance information and in secondary schools focusing on 3@5 and 3@6 Q1/FSM performance and Local Authority stretch aim measures. Review the curriculum, widening opportunities and increasing the number of Foundation Apprenticeships and National Progression Awards available in schools</p> <p>Work with schools and ELC settings to ensure that high quality approaches and effective use of data is being used to successfully impact on pupil attainment.</p> <p>Establish a Performance Board with a focus on identifying and providing appropriate interventions for schools requiring additional support.</p>	SCQF Attainment measures
The number of children achieving developmental milestones is increased.	Embed work to support development in all ELC settings through a programme of professional learning.	Developmental milestone data.
Expand development of digital learning and access to digital senior phase courses through the digital school to improve equity and breadth of choice	Respond to identified demand from young people in their senior phase certificate choices by increasing the curriculum offering in the Digital School.	Increased choice of opportunity and numbers of young people accessing online learning.

Local Priority**Section 5.6 - Leadership & Professional Learning**

Improvement Outcome	Planned Action	How will we know?
Children and young people's outcomes are improved through further development of the knowledge, understanding and skills of school leaders, teachers and practitioners.	Maintain a professional learning programme for all ELC and school staff to include opportunities for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Probationers,• Early Year Class teachers• Class teachers,• Middle leaders & Senior leaders,• Supply staff,• Support Staff• ELC Staff at all levels• Explore increasing opportunities for collaboration at subject level• Where possible, support staff to gain qualifications in order to realise career progression and promotion Improved professional Support high quality professional learning for staff at all levels with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy and health & wellbeing.	Quarterly professional learning reports show improvements in evaluations. Professional learning evaluations Improvement in core Quality Indicators and Care Inspectorate Gradings and HMIe Inspections Improved collaboration and confidence of staff Staff with more highly skilled expertise School improvement professional learning activities
High quality central officer support for school leaders	Support high quality professional learning for central officers	Improved overall quality assurance in schools, which directly impacts on all aspects of delivery