

Summarised inspection findings

Culloden Academy

The Highland Council

24 March 2026

Key contextual information

School Name: Culloden Academy

Council: The Highland Council

SEED number: 5143934

Roll (Sep 2025): 1108

Culloden Academy is located to the east of Inverness and links with six associated primary schools. These are Ardersier, Balloch, Cradlehall, Croy, Duncan Forbes and Smithton. The headteacher has been in post for five months and is supported by four depute headteachers.

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

Exclusions are generally in line with the national average and have decreased significantly over the last four years.

In September 2024, 7.6% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2024, 12.6% of pupils live in the 30% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2024, the school reported that 45% of pupils had additional support needs.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements.

The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Staff and young people demonstrate warm, positive relationships that reflect the school values of kindness and respect. In almost all lessons, young people learn in calm, supportive environments. In a majority of lessons, teachers establish clear routines and expectations, which support young people's readiness to learn. Almost all young people across the school behave well. A few young people are sensitively and appropriately supported if they become dysregulated.
- Staff have worked together to design the Culloden Classroom Climate. This learning, teaching and assessment framework provides all teachers with a clear and coherent structure for delivering lessons. Almost all teachers apply this structure when planning and delivering learning. However, the consistency of its use is variable across the school. As a next step, senior leaders should develop further the application of each individual element of this framework. This should be underpinned by high-quality professional learning and outward looking practice to support this work. This should support all staff to develop a consistent understanding of effective learning and teaching, and young people to experience high-quality learning in all lessons.
- In almost all lessons, teachers share the purpose and the criteria for how young people can measure their success in learning. Where these are most effective, young people are clear on the knowledge they will develop and how they can demonstrate success in learning. In a majority of lessons, the purpose of the learning or how to be successful is not always clear or focuses on the completion of tasks. Teachers in a few lessons provide differentiated success criteria that appropriately support young people at different stages of learning. In these lessons, teachers reflect on the purpose of the learning throughout the lesson and explicitly link the learning to young people's achievement of a level. As a result, these young people demonstrate a clear understanding of what they are learning and what they need to do to achieve success at their level.
- Most lessons in the broad general education (BGE), and a minority in the senior phase are overly teacher led. This limits opportunities for young people to take an active role in their learning, resulting in them being passive participants. Teachers now need to broaden the range of learning approaches which promote greater independence, creativity and leadership of learning.
- Across the school, most young people experience the same tasks and activities delivered at the same pace. As a result, young people are not always working at the correct level of challenge.

Teachers need to make more effective adaptations within lessons to meet the varied needs and abilities of learners. In a few lessons, teachers provide helpful scaffolding for tasks that supports young people's understanding. Teachers should now ensure that adaptive practice is embedded in their lesson planning. As planned, senior leaders and support for learning staff should continue to work together to provide professional learning to strengthen this aspect of pedagogy.

- Most teachers use digital technology regularly to support learning in class and at home. All young people have a personal digital device and access to online platforms where staff provide helpful tasks and support materials. Staff should now develop further the use of technology to promote stimulating learning activities in the classroom.
- Teachers are at an early stage of embedding meta-skills within daily learning and teaching. A few departments integrate these effectively into lessons, enabling young people to make clear connections between their learning and the skills they are developing. Senior leaders have recently introduced an online platform that allows young people to record the skills they gain through classroom activities. Teachers should continue to embed meta-skills within course planning to ensure there is meaningful progression and communication of skills development.
- In all lessons, teachers use questioning regularly to check for understanding. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning very effectively to extend young people's thinking. Questioning practice remains variable across the school. As planned, senior leaders should continue to support teachers to develop questioning techniques that promote higher order thinking, deeper reflection and more extended learner responses.
- In a majority of lessons, teachers use formative approaches to check for understanding. A minority of teachers are skilled in the use of varied formative assessment approaches, with a few using this information to adapt lessons. In a few lessons, teachers use plenaries successfully to check for understanding. Senior leaders are well placed to build upon recent staff training and share these examples of strong practice. This should support all teachers to better use all forms of formative assessment more widely and utilise this information with greater effect to adapt teaching in the short, medium and long term.
- All teachers use summative assessment effectively to monitor young people's progress and to inform feedback to young people at key points in the year. Young people value learner conversations where they discuss their progress. Most young people in the senior phase understand their next steps following summative assessment but would value more specific, regular feedback. The majority of young people in the BGE are aware of their working levels. Young people in the BGE would benefit from more regular and specific feedback on their learning. This should help them identify the next steps to take to make appropriate progress.
- In the BGE, departments use experiences, outcomes and benchmarks appropriately to plan effectively for learning and teaching. Senior leaders have identified that further engagement with moderation within and outwith school is an important next step for teachers. This will further support planning of assessment and reliability and validity of professional judgements. This should better inform tracking data and planning for learning.

- A few teachers in most departments have Qualification Scotland roles. They work with colleagues in school to share their expertise and develop a shared understanding of national standards. This has led to improved reliability in assessment judgements in the senior phase.
- All departments have introduced new tracking systems to monitor young people's progress in learning in the BGE, but the effectiveness of these systems is variable. Teachers use a shared set of expectations on tracking and monitoring and a shared language of achievement of a level well. Teachers across the stages are not yet using tracking information consistently to plan learning or target support. Senior leaders should, as planned, continue to support departments to use the data more effectively to improve planning and progression for individual and identified groups of learners.
- Senior leaders have introduced a robust tracking system to support whole school monitoring in the senior phase. This is being used well by senior and middle leaders to identify young people at risk not attaining. Senior leaders should develop a clear, shared understanding of roles and responsibilities around planning, tracking and monitoring to ensure all teachers use this data effectively. This should support a consistent approach to planning learning and teaching approaches more effectively for young people, including interventions at class, department and whole school level in these cohorts.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

BGE

- By the end of S3, young people are making strong progress in literacy and numeracy.
- From 2021/22 to 2024/25, by the end of S3, most young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level in literacy. In 2024/25, almost all achieved CfE third level in numeracy. This is in line with local and national measures. In 2024/25, most young people achieved CfE fourth level in literacy and a majority achieved CfE fourth level in numeracy. This is considerably above local and national measures for literacy, in line for numeracy and shows a four-year pattern of improvement.
- Teachers with responsibility for literacy and numeracy engage well in moderation activities within their departments. This supports the quality of assessments and the reliability of their judgments.
- By the end of S3, most young people who require additional support with their learning achieved CfE third level in literacy and numeracy and fourth level in literacy. A majority of young people achieved CfE fourth level in numeracy.
- Senior leaders recognised the need to improve outcomes for young people who require additional support with their learning. They are now benefiting from an improved, appropriate curriculum, robust tracking and regular review process.

Senior Phase

- Senior leaders, and those with responsibility for literacy and numeracy, have recognised that attainment in literacy and numeracy has fluctuated from 2019/20. Currently, young people tend to achieve awards in literacy and numeracy through course awards only. Senior leaders have introduced a robust tracking system to monitor young people's progress. They have also increased the opportunities for young people to achieve in literacy and numeracy beyond course awards. Senior and middle leaders now track more carefully young people's achievement in literacy and numeracy and use this data effectively to ensure that all young people are supported to achieve the highest level of literacy and numeracy on leaving school. Senior leaders provided data to show that this is beginning to show improvements in attainment.

Literacy – Leavers

- From 2019/20 to 2023/24, most young people who left school achieved Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy and a majority achieved SCQF level 6 or better. This is broadly in line with the virtual comparator (VC).

Cohorts

- In 2024/25, in S4, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is significantly lower than the VC, having previously been in line or significantly higher than the VC. There is a three-year pattern of decline from 2022/23.
- In S5, based on the S4 roll, from 2020/21 to 2024/25, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is significantly lower than the VC in 2024/25, having been previously in line. From 2022/23 to 2024/25, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy, in line with the VC.
- By S6, based on S4, from 2020/21 to 2024/25, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy, in line with the VC, with the exception of 2022/23, and showing a three-year pattern of improvement. From 2023/24, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy. This is in line with the VC band shows a three-year pattern of improvement.

ASN

- From 2019/20 to 2021/22 and in 2024/25, the majority of young people with additional support needs left school with SCQF level 5 or better in literacy, below the VC. From 2019/20 to 2024/25, a minority of young people left school with SCQF level 6 in literacy. This is in line with the VC in 2023/24, having been above the VC in 2022/23.

Numeracy- Leavers

- From 2019/20 to 2023/24, the majority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy, significantly lower or much lower than the VC. From 2019/20 to 2023/24, a minority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy, in line with the VC for four of the five years.

Cohorts

- In S4, from 2022/23 to 2024/25, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy, significantly lower than the VC.
- By S5, based on S4, from 2021/22 to 2024/25, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This is significantly lower or much lower than the VC from 2020/21 to 2022/23 and in 2024/25. From 2020/21 to 2024/25 a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy. This is significantly lower than the VC for three out of the five years but shows a four-year pattern of improvement from 2021/22.
- By S6, based on S4, in 2024/25, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This is in line with the VC having previously been significantly lower or much lower than the VC. From 2020/21 to 2024/25, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy. This is in line with the VC, having been previously significantly lower than the VC. There is a three-year pattern of improvement at SCQF levels 5 and 6.

ASN

- From 2019/20 to 2023/24, a minority of young people with additional support needs left school with SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This is below the VC but shows a three-year pattern of improvement from 2021/22. From 2020/21 to 2023/24, a few young people left school with SCQF level 6 in numeracy, below the VC.

National Qualifications

- In 2024/25, the percentage of young people presented for National 5 (N5) English was in line with the national average and above the national average for Higher English. Most young people presented achieved grade A to C in N5 and Higher English, above the national average.
- In 2024/25, the percentage of young people presented for N5 Mathematics in S4 was below the national average. In 2025/25, the percentage of young people presented for N5 Applications of Mathematics was above the national average. Almost all young people presented achieved grade A-C, above the national average. In 2024/25, the percentage of young people presented for Higher Mathematics was above the national average. Most young people presented achieved a grade A to C in Higher Mathematics, above the national average. In 2024/25, the percentage of young people presented for Higher Applications of Mathematics was in line with the national average. The majority of young people achieved grade A-C, above the national average.

Attendance

- Senior and middle leaders track and monitor regularly attendance and provide a range of supports for identified young people. These include individual support for young people and families from appointed staff, learning opportunities within the community and part-time timetables. As a result, the attendance of a few identified young people has improved.

Attainment over time

BGE

- Senior leaders provided data which showed most young people in 2024/25 achieved CfE third level by the end of S3 in a minority of curricular areas and a minority of young people achieve CfE fourth level in a minority of curricular areas. Senior leaders have introduced robust, regular BGE tracking with key questions to support interrogation of data and identification of young people off track in their learning. This should enable staff to better support young people through appropriate, targeted interventions. Senior leaders should, as planned, continue to enable teachers to moderate with colleagues within school, across the local authority and with local primary schools. This will support staff to become more confident in their professional judgement of achievement of a level across all curricular areas and demonstrate more effectively attainment over time in the BGE.

Improving attainment for all

- Senior leaders recognise the need to raise attainment, particularly for the lowest attaining 20% of young people. They are working with staff to ensure more aspirational coursing, greater course completion, improved curricular pathways and close monitoring and tracking of, and support for, young people at risk of not achieving. As a result, school data is beginning to show improved outcomes for identified cohorts of young people.

Leavers

- In 2023/24 when compared using average complementary tariff scores, attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of young people is significantly lower than the VC, having previously been in line in 2022/23. In 2023/24, the attainment of the middle 60% attaining young people was in line with the VC, having previously been significantly lower in 2022/23. There is a three-year pattern of decline for the lowest and highest attaining 20% of young people. This is the lowest attainment in the five-year period. From 2021/22 to 2023/24, the attainment of the highest 20% attaining young people was in line with the VC.

Cohorts

- From 2020/21 to 2024/25, when compared using average complementary tariff points, the attainment of young people in S4 is generally in line with the VC. In 2024/25, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% is in line with the VC, having previously been significantly lower than the VC. From 2020/21 to 2024/25, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% is in line with the VC.
- In S5, based on the S4 roll, in 2024/25, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people is significantly lower than the VC. This was previously in line with the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and showing a three-year pattern of improvement from 2021/22. From 2021/22 to 2024/25, the attainment of the highest attaining 20% is in line with the VC. There is no clear pattern of improvement for young people in S5.
- By S6, in 2024/25, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20%, middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC. There is a three-year pattern of improvement for the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% but a four-year decline for the highest attaining 20% of young people.

ASN

- When compared using average complementary tariff scores, overall, young people who required additional support with their learning, and who left school between 2019/20 to 2023/24, attained broadly in line with the VC. Attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of young people fluctuates over the five-year period and is below the VC. Attainment of the middle attaining 60%, and highest attaining 20% of young people is broadly in line with the VC.
- Senior leaders recognised the need to raise attainment for young people who require additional support with their learning. They have introduced an ASN tracker, weekly review meetings and more appropriate curriculum pathways. As a result, school data is beginning to show improvements in attainment and achievement for these young people.

Breadth and Depth

- A minority of young people in S4 and S5 were presented at National 4 and National 5 in one or two subject areas.
- In S4, in 2024/25, most young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 5C, the majority achieved three or more awards, and a minority achieved five or more to seven or more awards. This is in line with the VC but shows a decline since 2022/23. In 2024/25, a majority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 5A, and a minority achieved two or more to five or more awards. This is in line with the VC, having previously been significantly lower than the VC for five or more awards.

- By S5, in 2024/25 a minority of young people achieved three or more to five or more awards at level 5A or better, significantly lower than the VC. In 2024/25, the majority of young people achieved one or more or two or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better, in line with the VC. In 2023/24 and 2024/25 a minority of young people achieved four or more or five or more awards at SCQF level 6C. This is significantly lower than the VC. From 2021/22 to 2024/25, a minority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better, significantly lower than the VC.
- By S6, in 2024/25 the majority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better and a minority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better. This is in line with the VC and shows a three-year pattern of improvement. In 2024/25, a minority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better. This is in line with the VC having been significantly lower than the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24. In 2024/25, a few young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 7A or better. This is in line with the VC in 2024/25, having been significantly lower than the VC in 2023/24.
- By S5 and S6 young people gain an increasing number of awards beyond NQs and Skills for Work courses. Senior leaders have developed a range of curricular pathways. For example, a few young people gain awards in Criminology, Legal Studies, and Furniture Making. As planned, senior leaders should continue to work with staff to provide a wider range of pathways to better meet the needs of a greater number of young people and support raising attainment.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Most young people successfully develop a range of skills, including teamwork and confidence, by participating in a wide range of activities that support achievement. Staff, working effectively with partners, have created rich contexts for achievement within the school and the wider local community. Young people develop communication skills, empathy and an appreciation for the local environment through participating in environmental groups, volunteering, outdoor learning, Activities Days and a variety of excursions. Young people extend their technical skills through participating in concerts and a biennial school show. Over 100 young people each year participate in and gain accreditation through organised science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities.
- Staff work creatively with Active Schools to extend opportunities for participation in a range of sporting activities. A few young people have achieved sporting success at local, regional and national levels. A few young people have assumed sports leadership roles that involve them training and mentoring children in primary schools. As a result, young people develop skills for learning, life and work. A few young people gain leadership and organisational skills within the school's Young Enterprise teams. There is a significant uptake of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme where young people develop teamwork, self-reliance and awareness of others through volunteering to serve others. This engagement is well-matched to the school value of community.
- Currently, staff have limited data to identify how many young people are participating in wider achievement. As planned, senior leaders should now implement a strategic approach to track and monitor how many young people are taking part in the programme of activities and identify and support those at risk of missing out. This should include tracking the skills and

qualities that young people develop. They should link this work to the wider whole school approach to recording how meta-skills are developed.

- Senior leaders have established effective partnerships with employers and colleges. These partnerships have widened opportunities for achievement for young people. This flexibility allows a few young people in the senior phase to gain relevant skills for life and work. All young people in S2 gain employability awards.
- Staff celebrate effectively achievements of young people through social media, newsletters, noticeboards, awarding of house points and assemblies. Awards ceremonies increasingly celebrate the diversity of achievements. As planned staff should now develop further how young people can consistently share in school the breadth of achievements they gain in the wider community.

Equity for all learners

- In 2023/24, young people leaving school and living in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles one and two performed in line with the national establishment. Young people in SIMD four performed significantly higher than the VC.
- Staff, across the school, worked collegiately to develop a rights-based approach. This work reflects the clear focus staff have on supporting equity for all young people. Almost all staff have a strong understanding of the social, cultural and economic context of the school community. Senior leaders have implemented effective processes that identify which young people face additional barriers to their learning. Staff now use an effective tracking system to monitor the progress of young people. Senior leaders should now, as planned, further develop the strategic approach to evaluating the attainment and attendance of groups of young people.
- Senior leaders have established effective partnerships that reduce the impact of barriers to learning, such as lack of confidence or heightened anxiety. Additionally, a few targeted young people benefit from mentoring support, specialist advice on mental health issues and tailored careers advice. These interventions are supporting young people to make progress and achieve.
- Young people with additional support needs are supported very well by specialist staff. A few young people who are supported by staff in an Attainment Hub now attend school more regularly and enjoy increased attainment. Staff across the school now receive clearer information on young people facing barriers to learning and what strategies may best support them. There is scope for staff across the school to apply more consistently the suggested strategies to meet the needs of all learners. When reviewing attainment, staff in all departments now focus more clearly on how young people with additional support needs attain. As a result, appropriate interventions and supports are put in place.
- Senior leaders have used Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) effectively. They accurately identify young people facing potential barriers in their learning. Funding is used to employ staff to support the targeted group. These young people benefit from a nurturing approach, ongoing family engagement and individual mentoring. As a result, attendance has improved, motivation and attainment have increased and self-confidence has been boosted. Overall, PEF funded interventions support reducing the poverty-related attainment gap.

- Staff have implemented well an effective range of measures to remove financial barriers faced by young people. These include the use of the School Fund and other finance streams to support participation in activities. Young people access school uniform and physical education (PE) kit free of charge and there is a well-attended breakfast club. All young people have a digital device. Staff use their strong knowledge of the school community to support families at times of crisis. As a result of interventions, the costs of the school day have been reduced and young people facing deprivation have equitable access to learning opportunities across the school.
- From 2021/22 to 2023/24, almost all young people moved on to a positive destination. This is in line with the VC for two of the four years. A majority of young people go to higher or further education on leaving school. Young people who face barriers are supported well to move to a positive destination when leaving school. The school's extensive links with employers and other organisations provide supports that prepare young people for life after school. A few targeted young people engage in a supportive programme, 'My Future Friday', and receive individual careers advice and mentoring. This builds their confidence and awareness when selecting their destination on leaving school.

Other relevant evidence

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school.
- Young people benefit significantly from the work of library staff. They are welcomed to the library at break and lunchtime and enjoy being in a calm and relaxed social environment. All young people are encouraged to participate in reading for pleasure. A few young people have roles in a Library Pupil Group. The library staff effectively support reading for pleasure through accessing gifted books. They successfully led the school's application to gain Reading School status.
- Young people from S1-3 receive their full entitlement to religious and moral education. Senior leaders should now ensure that all young people from S1-6 receive this entitlement. Young people experience their entitlement to high-quality physical education.
- Young people from S1 to S3 receive their entitlement to modern language learning in French and Spanish as part of the Language Learning in Scotland 1+2 approach.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.

On behalf of His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.