

Summarised inspection findings

St Machar Academy

Aberdeen City Council

21 April 2026

Key contextual information

School Name:	St Machar Academy
Council:	Aberdeen City Council
SEED number:	5246431
Roll (February 2026):	1022 young people

St Machar Academy is a non-denominational secondary school serving the north side of Aberdeen City. The headteacher has been in post for four years and is supported by five deputy headteachers, as well as a school support service manager.

Attendance is generally in line with the national average, although it has been decreasing from 2020/21 to 2023/24. Exclusions are generally above the national average.

In September 2024, 29.4% of young people were registered for free school meals. In September 2024, most young people lived in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles two to four.

In September 2024, the school reported that 66.8% of young people had additional support needs.

Only around a third of young people in the 2022/23 S4 cohort still attended the school for S6. Senior leaders recognise increasing young people's stay on rate as an important improvement priority.

1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher has focused appropriately on developing a more positive culture across the school. She and her senior leaders identify several key areas for improvement and are working with staff to begin to take them forward. Senior leaders have created an ethos where most staff are now eager to contribute to change. Senior leaders and all staff now need to accelerate the pace of change. This should support much needed improvements in learning and teaching, and young people's wellbeing and inclusion.
- The headteacher worked well with a few stakeholders in 2023 to review and refresh the school's vision and values. The shared language of 'I belong; we achieve: creating opportunities through community and partnership' is increasingly being used across the school. The principles of 'I belong' demonstrates staff's ambition to create an inclusive culture that values individuals, whilst 'we achieve' recognises the need for young people's attainment and achievement to increase. Staff ensure the statement is visible and referred to regularly in communications, assemblies and classes. This helps a majority of young people to understand 'I belong, we achieve' and its relevance to their school experiences. A few staff and young people need to demonstrate the school principles in their daily interactions and attitudes more consistently.
- Senior leaders developed an appropriate school improvement plan (SIP) that broadly reflects local and national priorities. They consulted with a few stakeholders to shape these priorities, including young people, parents, staff and partners. There is significant scope to involve all stakeholders further in shaping SIP priorities. This would ensure all stakeholders feel informed and involved in the process of change. Senior leaders should ensure that SIP priorities are more specific, timely and measurable. They need to develop more rigorous approaches to reviewing fully the ongoing progress of planned improvements. Faculty improvement plans (FIPs) do not yet align with whole school priorities and are of variable quality across the school. Senior leaders need to work with middle leaders to develop a more consistent approach to FIPs. This will help all leaders to take forward positive change across all areas of the school.
- Senior leaders and most staff engage in helpful self-evaluation activities to gather evidence of the quality of the school's work. These include reviews of attainment data, lesson observations, and gathering learner views. Senior and middle leaders support teachers to use data more purposefully as part of their work. This includes through the well-considered 'data in a day' event, where they observe lessons, provide feedback, and support teachers to use data more effectively. School leaders should create a whole school quality assurance calendar. This will help to establish expectations of activities to be undertaken by all staff. This will help senior leaders' confidence in the evidence underpinning faculty and whole-school improvement.

- A majority of middle leaders lead change well in departments and encourage teachers to take on leadership roles. Middle leaders work together well to review approaches and share good practice in learning and teaching, tracking young people's progress in learning and in implementing improvement within their departments. They should extend this approach to ensure that they provide positive challenge to each other in order to continue to drive improvements further. They should increasingly look outwards to learn from effective practice adopted by schools in and beyond the local area.
- Almost all staff are part of improvement groups aligned to SIP priorities. Whilst this ensures almost all staff are part of taking forward change, the pace and impact of this work needs to be accelerated. A minority of staff lead improvement initiatives well, such as those who develop young people's skills and oracy, and provide outdoor or project-based learning. Positively, school leaders encourage teachers to 'try and test' new ideas and approaches. They should now work with staff to identify measurable outcomes for all planned improvements. This will help staff to monitor, review and evaluate the outcomes being achieved.
- Senior and middle leaders conduct annual professional review and development meetings with all teachers, linked well to professional standards. Most staff identify areas of development successfully, linked to FIPs. They benefit from professional learning (PL) aligned to projects undertaken by groups of teachers. A few staff participated in effective 'externships' in growth sectors like hospitality and the creative industries. This allowed them to develop better young people's learning in real-life contexts. Senior leaders should continue to develop staffs' access to a broader range of well-planned PL opportunities.
- A few young people in the senior phase have positive leadership roles. These include buddying, classroom support and assisting at school events. Young people in S1–3, lead aspects of their learning during project-based learning activities and through curriculum challenge weeks. These opportunities result in young people's teamwork, leadership and sense of responsibility improving. Senior leaders and staff need to increase opportunities for more young people to be involved in leading change across the school. Most young people have regular chances to share their views on the school, through providing feedback on learning or whole school surveys. Staff now need to consider how they share the ways that young people's views influence change meaningfully, at classroom, faculty and whole-school levels. Senior leaders should consider how to ensure all young people have the opportunity to influence change further, for example, by initiating a pupil council.
- Senior leaders use pupil equity funding (PEF) suitably to provide targeted and universal supports to young people. Senior leaders should ensure that they plan for PEF spending rigorously, including a detailed budget with clear measures of success. Parents, and other stakeholders, should be consulted meaningfully in planning for the allocation of PEF.
- Senior leaders and staff have a clear vision for developing the curriculum in line with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) priorities. They very successfully promote parity of esteem between academic, vocational and technical pathways. As a result, almost all young people access strong learning pathways in the senior phase, which are planned well to meet their needs. Senior and middle leaders work closely and effectively with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) staff to help young people to achieve positive initial post-school destinations.

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

- A majority of staff foster positive relationships with young people. This supports a calm learning environment. All staff should now ensure they maintain consistently high expectations of all young people regarding their timekeeping, use of mobile phones and behaviour. This will help to develop further all young people's respect for learning.
- A majority of young people behave well in classes. On occasion, a minority of young people disengage from learning and engage in low level disruptive behaviour. In a few instances, a few young people demonstrate more dysregulated behaviours, significantly disrupting the learning of others. A majority of teachers respond to these situations calmly and sensitively to support young people to reengage with their learning. Senior leaders and staff should now work together to agree and apply consistent procedures to address situations where young people's behaviours impact negatively on their peers. This will ensure that the learning environment is consistently respectful.
- Young people demonstrate high levels of engagement in a few lessons, when learning is appropriately challenging and the pace of learning is matched well to their ability. Staff have focused recently on increasing learner engagement through creating more opportunities for active learning. Whilst staff work on project-based learning is at an early stage, young people are beginning to show increased engagement during these activities. Most young people are motivated well by paired or group work activities. However, across the school, a majority of learning is overly teacher-led, with all young people completing the same activities, at the same pace. This too often leads to young people being passive in their learning. All staff should extend the use of rich contexts for learning to provide motivating and enjoyable learning experiences for all young people.
- Most teachers access helpful guidance on young people's learning needs and strategies to support them. A majority of teachers demonstrate awareness of this information during lessons. A minority of teachers plan learning appropriately to meet learners' individual needs. All staff should use recent professional learning on adaptive teaching approaches more effectively to ensure young people are supported and challenged appropriately in their learning.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is too variable across the school. A minority of teachers provide high-quality learning experiences. Senior leaders should now consider how best practice can be shared widely and embedded across the school. Most staff are beginning to use collaborative time and ongoing professional learning well, to plan ways to improve learning and teaching.

- Senior leaders and staff have worked together well to create the St Machar Lesson. This helps most staff to apply classroom routines and lesson structures more consistently. For example, almost all teachers now routinely share the purpose of learning and measures of success. A minority of teachers plan appropriate plenaries to help young people to reflect on the progress they have made towards success criteria. As a next step, a majority of teachers should ensure they review young people's ongoing progress towards measures of success during and at the end of learning. This will help young people to identify their progress in learning more confidently.
- Most teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. A majority link activities to prior learning to help young people make connections in their learning. A few teachers explain to young people how learning develops important skills. A majority of teachers use questioning well to check for understanding. A minority of teachers provide questions that stimulate young people's interests, often linked skilfully to real-life contexts. This practice should be extended to develop young people's higher-order thinking skills further. A few teachers use digital technology imaginatively to motivate and engage young people in their learning. A majority of young people use digital platforms well to access resources, submit work and to receive valuable feedback from their teachers.
- Senior leaders and staff identified correctly the need to improve the range of assessment tools used across the school. In the broad general education (BGE), staff are increasing their confidence in using national Benchmarks to plan relevant assessment activities. They use information from summative and standardised assessments well to gather evidence of young people's progress. Young people in the senior phase undertake regular summative assessments that provide clear evidence of their attainment across courses. A majority of teachers provide helpful feedback to young people following formal assessments and signpost them towards additional revision materials. This helps to prepare young people for the demands of final exams and assessments.
- A few teachers use a range of helpful formative assessment strategies effectively to check for learners' understanding. This includes the well-considered use of show-me boards and digital quizzes. Almost all teachers require further professional learning relating to formative assessment. This will help them to use techniques regularly to gather important information relating to young people's progress. They should use this information to adapt the learning to meet the needs of all young people better.
- A minority of teachers are Qualification Scotland appointees. They use the knowledge and experiences gained from taking part in this role well to help to develop a shared understanding of national standards across the school. Teachers in almost all departments undertake helpful verification activities to apply national standards consistently. Teachers in a few departments have adopted strong moderation activities for courses in the BGE, including in relation to literacy and numeracy. There is a significant need for this to be extended across the school and to other curricular areas to improve teacher confidence in applying their professional judgements. Senior and middle leaders need to extend opportunities for teachers to engage in ongoing moderation activities in and beyond the school. This is particularly important for smaller departments with one or two members of staff.
- Teachers in most departments are developing their use of pupil profiles. This is beginning to help young people to record their targets and next steps in learning, based on purposeful

learner conversations with their teachers. In a few departments, pupil profiles and learner conversations are used effectively to support young people to reflect meaningfully on their progress. Senior leaders should continue to review the approach and embed highly effective practice widely.

- Teachers plan learning over the short and medium term well using Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes and National Qualification (NQ) course specification guidance. Teachers in almost all departments track young people's progress in learning appropriately. Middle leaders and teachers use information to encourage young people not on track with their learning to attend supported study and to access additional learning materials. Whilst young people value these approaches, teachers and middle leaders need to extend their use of appropriate interventions in the classroom that support all young people's progress and attainment. Positively, teachers in a few departments are beginning to use tracking data over time to make planned improvements to courses and to provide increased challenge to young people in the BGE.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Senior leaders and staff have developed a strong senior phase curriculum, designed well to meet the needs of young people. It draws from a range of Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) courses and beyond, delivered by teachers and partners. The curriculum supports young people's raised attainment and is providing them with important skills for learning, life and work. Staff should build on this positive work on the senior phase by reviewing and making improvements to the BGE curriculum to meet the needs of all learners better.
- Young people in S1 and S2 experience learning across all curricular areas. In addition, they receive two periods as part of the 'Crew' curriculum. The 'Crew' curriculum is intended to support young people's wellbeing and the development of community across the school. Currently, the quality of delivery and content is too variable to achieve these aims fully. Young people in S1 also select from masterclasses to support their skills development in different areas of interest. They are not yet able to discuss these skills sufficiently. Young people at the end of S2, select subjects from within faculty groupings. This approach means that not all young people continue their learning across all curricular areas throughout the BGE. For example, young people in S1 and S2 study French but do not continue this subject into S3, and do not receive learning in relation to a second modern language. As a result, no young people continue their learning in modern languages into the senior phase. Senior leaders should ensure they meet Scottish Government's Language Learning in Scotland: a 1+2 Approach policy fully. They should continue to work with the local authority to address staffing issues that impact on young people's access to their full curricular entitlements.
- Senior and middle leaders should work with staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the BGE. They should ensure young people experience learning which is relevant, progressive and offers appropriate breadth and depth. Staff should work to increase the challenge young people experience in their learning in order to prepare them fully for the senior phase.
- Staff in the science and mathematics department are beginning to develop numeracy as a responsibility of all. Senior leaders recognise that there is significant scope to develop further how all staff contribute to literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing as a responsibility of all. This will ensure young people recognise more clearly the skills they are demonstrating across their learning.
- Senior leaders are at the early stages of implementing a skills strategy. They have identified St Machar's six key skills, which are aligned well to the meta-skills. Staff should continue to embed the St Machar's six key skills and build on this to support all young people to reflect on their developing skills on an ongoing basis. Most young people currently use the My World of Work learner profile well to record their attainment, qualities and planned post-school destinations. This approach should be extended to include a profile of young people's skills development over time.
- Young people in S1-4 receive their entitlement to Religious and Moral Education (RME). Young people in S1-5 receive two periods of high-quality learning in physical education (PE).
- Young people select seven courses in S4 and up to five in S5 and S6. Senior leaders and staff have very successfully developed the curriculum offered to young people in the senior phase.

Young people select from a range of meaningful SCQF courses, beyond NQs, which provide breadth and depth to their learning, and strong progressive learning pathways. Many of these pathways are supported by highly effective work with a range of partners, including local colleges. Young people also access additional courses provided by effective consortium arrangements between secondary schools across Aberdeen City. There is clear evidence that the broad curriculum supports young people's raised attainment and provides them with important skills for learning, life and work.

- Staff foster highly effective partnerships that result in positive learning experiences and outcomes for young people. Partners are a key part of the life and work of the school. For example, staff maintain strong working relationships with key local employers, including John Clark Motor Group, NHS Grampian, Aberlour, Bon Accord and Deloitte UK. Local employers support young people effectively to develop a range of industry standard employability skills. They also offer a range of work experience opportunities for young people aligned to their skills, ambitions and aspirations. An increasing number of young people annually benefit from work experience through placements, apprenticeships and the 'Career Ready' programme.
- Staff and partners monitor young people carefully as they plan for post-school destinations. Young people at risk of not achieving positive destinations are provided with well-planned and extensive targeted interventions to ensure they are prepared for their post-school life.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Staff use a variety of effective approaches to communicate regularly with parents and families, including social media and text messages. Parents appreciate the termly community newsletter, and weekly website updates, which highlight key events and celebrate young people's successes and achievements. A few parents would like more regular updates on their child's progress in learning, and more timely notice of any changes to scheduled events.
- A few parents welcomed the opportunity to attend the helpful community conference event where they shared their views on the school and helped staff consider improvement priorities. Almost all parents are not yet engaged meaningfully in school improvement planning or self-evaluation activities. There is currently no active Parent Council. Senior leaders should, as planned, continue to explore more creative ways to engage parents meaningfully in these aspects of the school's work. This will help to ensure that the views of the wider parent forum are better represented and influence positive change within the school.
- A few parents enjoy events that allow them to visit and participate in school activities. These include the 'Getting it right for every child' year group evenings. These provide strategies to enable parents to be more confident in supporting their child's wellbeing and reducing barriers to learning. A few parents volunteer and help staff with different projects. For example, providing valuable outdoor learning opportunities for young people through the farm and allotment projects.

2.1 Safeguarding

- 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 that need to be addressed as a matter for urgency.
- Following the inspection the education authority, working with the school, have taken forward areas for improvement in safeguarding which required urgent action. HM Inspectors have reviewed information relating to these areas for improvement. HM Inspectors are satisfied with the response taken by the education authority and do not require any further information.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

weak

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- A majority of staff use the shared language of 'I belong, we achieve' to encourage positive, respectful relationships with young people. A majority of young people recognise that they have a trusted adult to speak to when they feel worried or upset. A majority of young people feel that staff engage with them positively and encourage them to be considerate of others.
- Senior leaders developed recently a helpful whole-school strategy to support young people's wellbeing. Whilst at an early stage, there are some indications of improvements. For example, staff are now developing their knowledge of trauma-informed practice. This supports a majority of staff to help young people to manage their emotions and navigate challenges better. Senior and middle leaders should continue to embed and monitor closely the progress of the wellbeing strategy. A few staff accessed additional professional learning relating to inclusive practice. This is beginning to help them to develop whole school nurturing principles and restorative approaches across the school.
- Staff in the wellbeing hub provide a range of support for young people who need wellbeing or learning support. They help young people regulate and return to their planned learning quickly. Staff in the wellbeing hub provide well-considered interventions for a few young people focusing on their literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing skills. This is increasing the confidence of a few identified young people and helping to address gaps in their learning.
- A majority of young people feels their school helps them to feel safe. However, a minority of young people demonstrate behaviours that impact on other young people's safety and wellbeing. As a significant priority, senior leaders and staff need to urgently improve a minority of young people's sense of safety. All staff should monitor social areas and corridors routinely. They need to address a minority of young people who avoid lessons through in-school truancy. Senior leaders and Principal Teachers of guidance (PTGs) need to ensure they know the whereabouts of young people at all times to ensure their safety. Senior leaders need to improve their procedures for promoting positive behaviour and ensure all staff address situations confidently and consistently. This should help all young people to feel safe and have a stronger sense of belonging to the school.
- A majority of young people are developing an understanding of the wellbeing indicators and their relevance to their daily lives. However, all staff need to develop and employ a more consistent language of wellbeing. PTGs conduct bi-annual wellbeing check ins and attendance

reviews with all young people. Senior leaders and PTGs should consider how they gather wellbeing data systematically that informs universal and targeted support on an ongoing basis.

- Senior and middle leaders are beginning to improve approaches to meet their statutory duties in relation to wellbeing, equality and inclusion. However, many of these approaches are at an early stage and do not yet fully align with national guidance. As a result, staff are not yet able to evidence clearly the impact on young people. Senior and middle leaders need to work together with staff and young people to take forward aspects which require prompt action to improve outcomes.
- PTGs and Additional Support for Learning (ASfL) staff know young people's needs and individual circumstances well. They respond proactively to the pastoral needs of their caseload. They work effectively with a range of partners to offer helpful interventions for young people needing support with their wellbeing. Senior leaders have begun to create helpful systems to monitor and evaluate interventions to support young people in their learning, and to monitor the progress of targeted groups of young people. A majority of young people who access interventions achieve positive outcomes. This includes increased confidence, resilience, improved behaviour and engagement in learning.
- Senior leaders, PTGs and ASfL staff should continue to improve the quality of target setting for young people. They need to ensure that targets reflect young people's progress across all aspects of school life. PTGs and ASfL staff should also ensure that young people's progress is reviewed regularly through appropriately timed planning meetings. Timings should reflect the need and level of support for the individual young person. This should support young people to make sufficient progress towards anticipated outcomes.
- Senior and middle leaders share appropriate information with staff regarding young people's wellbeing or learning needs. A majority of teachers are not using this information sufficiently to plan learning that appropriately meets the needs of all young people. As a result, young people with barriers to their learning are not being supported well enough in the classroom. Moving forward, senior and middle leaders need to work together to ensure that teachers make effective use of the information they are provided with.
- Young people learn about their health and wellbeing and develop important career management skills through personal and social education (PSE). Senior leaders and PTGs should continue to review and improve the quality of the PSE curriculum and young people's learning experiences. They should extend opportunities for young people and partners to play an active role in planning, evaluating and reviewing PSE. This will ensure that young people's learning is consistently relevant and progressive. There is considerable scope for PSE to reflect more clearly issues and topics affecting the school and local community directly.
- Attendance is generally in line with the national average, although it has been decreasing from 2020/21 to 2023/24. A few approaches to support improved attendance for a few young people have led to gradual improvements. These include interventions that provide sport and physical activity to reengage young people in learning. However, a significant minority of young people do not regularly attend lessons, arrive significantly late to class, or are in school but not in class. Senior and middle leaders need to prioritise improving the attendance and timekeeping of these young people, as an urgent priority. They need to improve their

immediate response to absences, ensuring they are recorded accurately, and followed up in a timely manner. A few young people attend school on a part-time timetable. Senior and middle leaders need to reduce the use of part-time timetables, considering the rationale for a young person accessing this as part of a package of support. Staff should review arrangements more regularly with the aspiration of returning young people to full-time education as soon as possible. They should ensure the attendance of young people following a part-time timetable is recorded accurately, using appropriate SEEMiS codes.

- A few young people access almost all of their learning through the alternative curriculum (AC) class. A majority of young people in the senior phase who access the AC attend a few mainstream classes. Young people in the AC are supported well by staff and a designated pupil support assistant. This results in most young people being calm, ready to learn and engaged in lessons. Senior leaders should review the process for allocating young people to the AC class. They should demonstrate clear planning for all young people in the AC with the aspiration of returning them to mainstream learning, where appropriate. This will support young people's inclusion and progress in learning further.
- Staff have developed well-considered supports for young people who are care-experienced (CEYP) and young carers. They consider all CEYP for a coordinated support plan and document this process clearly. Senior leaders and PTGs work well with partners, including MCR pathways mentoring initiative, to provide thoughtful support for CEYP. PTGs established a supportive group for young carers designed to recognise the roles they carry out, and to support them at school. Senior leaders and PTGs should continue to provide appropriate supports for particular groups and individuals which focus on improving their attendance, engagement in learning attainment and achievement.
- Senior leaders and staff have begun to take steps to address barriers to young people's sense of inclusion and to promote equality. Staff and young people organised a few helpful events to celebrate diversity and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights. Staff and young people now need to work together to create a more respectful and inclusive environment across the school which supports all young people to thrive. Staff need to develop a planned approach to young people's learning about challenging discrimination and prejudice. Most young people do not yet understand the protected characteristics well. All young people require further support to recognise and celebrate difference in their school, local and global communities.
- Senior leaders and staff need to urgently review their approaches to addressing bullying. A minority of teachers and young people do not believe bullying incidents are currently addressed well. Senior leaders and PTGs developed an anti-bullying policy recently. They should continue this initial work to ensure it reflects all young people's views and national guidance fully. A few young people experience discriminatory behaviours from peers. Staff should offer young people appropriate support to address these issues. This will help young people feel respected and valued.
- 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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the local authority school meals provider that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

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

Broad General Education (BGE)

- Most young people attained CfE third level in literacy, by the end of S3 from 2021/22 to 2024/25. A majority of young people attained CfE fourth level in literacy in 2024/25. This is an improvement from a minority of young people who attained reading and writing in 2022/23 and 2023/24. Most young people attained CfE third level in numeracy, by the end of S3, from 2021/22 to 2024/25, apart from 2022/23 when it was almost all young people. A majority of young people attained CfE fourth level in numeracy from 2021/22 to 2024/25.
- Staff have focused appropriately on improving young people's numeracy skills through additional learning in the BGE. Young people in S1-3 develop their numeric skills well through appropriate activities and tasks. Staff regularly moderate young people's literacy and numeracy work to ensure teacher professional judgements reflect national standards. They should now increase moderation work with primary colleagues, to increase shared understanding of applying national Benchmarks. Senior leaders demonstrate through rigorous data analysis that assessment data for literacy and numeracy is reliable.

Senior Phase

Literacy and Numeracy (Leavers)

- Most leavers achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy from 2019/20 to 2023/24, apart from 2020/21 when it was a majority of young people. This is in line with the virtual comparator (VC), apart from 2021/22 and 2023/24, when it was significantly higher. A minority of leavers achieved SCQF level 6 from 2019/20 to 2023/24, which is in line with the VC, apart from 2022/23 when it was significantly lower.
- A majority of leavers achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2019/20 to 2023/24, apart from 2022/23 when it was a minority of leavers. This is in line with the VC, apart from 2022/23 when it was significantly much lower. A minority of leavers achieved SCQF level 6 from 2019/20 to 2023/24, apart from 2022/23 when it was a few leavers. This is in line with the VC, apart from 2019/20 when it was significantly higher and 2022/23 when it was significantly lower than the VC.
- Most leavers who require additional support with their learning (ASN) attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in 2022/23 and 2023/24. This is above the VC. A minority of leavers with ASN achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This is above the VC in four

out of the five years till 2023/24. A minority of leavers with ASN achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2021/22 to 2023/24. This is broadly in line with the VC in 2023/24. A few leavers with ASN achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy in 2022/23 and 2023/24. This was a minority of leavers in the three years before this. This is above the VC in 2023/24.

- There is no consistent pattern of improvement in leaver's attainment at SCQF level 6 in literacy and numeracy over time.
- Senior leaders and staff track young people systematically to ensure positive outcomes in literacy and numeracy. They target young people at risk of disengaging for helpful interventions. Young people generally attain well in literacy and numeracy as a result.

Literacy and Numeracy (cohorts)

- At S4, most young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in three of the past five years. This is significantly much higher than the VC for the past three years. By S5, based on the S5 roll, most young people attained SCQF level 5 or better over the last five years. This measure has been increasing over the past four years and was significantly much higher than the VC in 2024/25. A minority of young people attained SCQF level 6 over the past five years. This is in line with the VC in 2023/24 and 2024/25, with notable increases from 2021/22 to 2024/25. By S6, based on the S6 roll, a majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in three of the past five years. This increased to most young people in 2024/25, which is significantly much higher than the VC.
- At S4, a majority of young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in the last three years. This is in line with the VC and an improvement from a minority in 2020/21 and 2021/22. At S5, based on the S5 roll, a majority of young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in four of the past five years. This is in line with the VC, apart from 2022/23 when it was significantly much lower than the VC. A minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in three of the past five years, which is in line with the VC, apart from 2021/22 and 2024/25 when it was significantly lower than the VC. By S6, based on the S6 roll, a minority of young people attained SCQF level 6 over the last five years. This is in line with the VC.
- There is a notable difference between the percentage of young people in S4 and S5 attaining the unit award in numeracy at SCQF level 5 and the full course award.

National Qualifications (NQs)

- Senior leaders and staff need to improve young people's attainment in NQs in both English and mathematics.
- A majority of young people in S4 presented for National 5 (N5) English achieved a grade A-C pass in the last three years. This is below national figures. The number of young people in S5 attaining a grade A-C pass in Higher English has decreased over time. Staff need to reduce the number of young people achieving a grade D or no award in Higher English.
- The number of young people in S4 being presented for N5 Applications of Mathematics is routinely above national figures. However, young people's attainment is below national figures. A minority of young people in S4 presented for N5 Mathematics achieved a grade A-C pass in

the last three years, with high numbers of young people not attaining an award. Attainment in Higher Mathematics is routinely below national figures. Staff need to reduce the number of young people achieving a grade D or no award in NQ mathematics courses.

- In 2024/25, a significant minority of young people were dual or double presented for courses in mathematics. This approach did not result in positive outcomes for young people. Teachers in mathematics are not presenting young people in this way moving forward.

Attainment over time

BGE

- In 2024/25, by the end of S3, most young people achieved CfE third level in most curricular areas, beyond literacy and numeracy. Middle leaders recognise the need for staff in a majority of departments to continue to develop the range of assessment approaches and regular moderation activities being used. This will help to increase the reliability of teacher professional judgements across the school. Senior leaders should continue to make improvements to the BGE curriculum in order to promote increased challenge and depth of learning further. This has the potential to accelerate young people's progress.

Senior Phase

- When compared using average complementary tariff points, the attainment of leavers has been above the VC in three out of five years from 2019/20 to 2023/24. The attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of leavers is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24. There is no consistent pattern of improvement to either measure. The highest attaining 20% of leavers achieved significantly lower than the VC in 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. This increased to being in line with the VC in 2023/24. The attainment of leavers with ASN, when using average complementary tariff points, has been above the VC in four out of five years in the period from 2019/20 to 2023/24.
- In S4, when compared using average complementary tariff points, the performance of the lowest attaining 20%, middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people is generally in line with the VC for the five-year period from 2020/21 to 2024/25. By S5, based on the S5 roll, attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people is generally in line with the VC for the same five-year period. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people has been significantly lower or significantly much lower than the VC in three out of the five years from 2020/21 to 2024/25. By S6 based on the S6 roll, attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people is generally in line with the VC. The highest attaining 20% of young people attained in line with the VC, apart from 2020/21 when this was significantly much lower and 2022/23 when it was significantly lower than the VC.

Breadth and depth

- Senior leaders recognise the need to take prompt action to improve young people's attainment in NQs. They are working with middle leaders to rigorously track young people's progress to support more young people to achieve grade A-C passes in NQs. Senior leaders should continue to develop their approaches to reviewing attainment across the school, ensuring a relentless focus on addressing barriers to young people achieving positive outcomes. They should develop a raising attainment strategy, which outlines the roles and responsibilities of all staff for raising attainment.

National Qualifications (NQs) and Skills for Work courses

- At S4, the percentage of young people achieving between three or more and seven or more courses, at SCQF level 4 or better has decreased from 2021/22 to 2024/25. This is now significantly lower than the VC. A minority of young people attained three or more to five or more courses, at SCQF level 5C or better from 2021/22 to 2024/25. This has been significantly lower than the VC for the four-year period. A minority of young people attain one or more courses, and a few young people attained two or more to six or more courses, at SCQF level 5A from 2022/23 to 2024/25. This was significantly lower than the VC in 2024/25.
- By S5, based on S5, there are declines in young people's attainment at SCQF level 5C and 5A and SCQF level 6C and 6A from 2020/21 to 2024/25. A minority of young people attained two or more to four or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better over the last four years, which is significantly lower or much lower than the VC. A minority of young people attained one or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better over the past three years, significantly lower than the VC in 2024/25. A few young people attained one or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 6A in the last two years, significantly lower than the VC.
- By S6, based on S6, a majority of young people attained two or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better in 2023/24 and 2024/25. This is in line with the VC. A minority of young people achieved one or more to two or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25. A minority of young people achieved one or more award at SCQF level 7C or better in three of the past five years. For both SCQF level 6A and SCQF level 7C, this is broadly in line with the VC.

All SCQF courses

- The curricular offer in the senior phase is extensive, wide ranging and supports young people well to prepare for the world of work. Staff ensure changes to the curriculum align closely with growth sectors, and use attainment data, planned post-school destination information and labour market information carefully to review and refine the offer successfully. PTGs use data effectively to support young people to pursue appropriate learning pathways. Staff in most departments have broadened their learning pathway offers to include a number of vocational and technical qualifications, such as Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression awards, and Skills for Work awards. The range of courses available to young people is also supported well by the Aberdeen City 'ABZ campus'. Increasing numbers of young people access courses offered in secondary schools across Aberdeen through aligned timetable and consortium arrangements. This is providing young people with an increasing range of well-considered courses that is raising their attainment beyond NQs.
- At S4, most young people attain one or more to four or more awards, and a majority attain five or more to six or more awards, at SCQF level 4 or better from 2022/23 to 2024/25. This is broadly in line with the VC. There are increases in the percentage of young people attaining SCQF level 5 courses over time. In 2024/25, a majority of young people attained two or more to four or more awards at SCQF level 5 or better, above the VC. A minority attained five or more to eight or more awards at SCQF level 5 or better, broadly in the line with the VC.
- By S5, there are increases in the percentage of young people attaining SCQF level 5 and 6 awards from 2021/22 to 2024/25. Almost all young people achieved one or more awards, and most young people attained two or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 5 or

better in 2024/25. This is above the VC. Most young people achieved one or more awards, and a majority achieved two or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 6 or better in 2024/25. This is greater than the VC.

- By S6, there have been increases in the percentage of young people attaining three or more to eight or more awards at SCQF level 6 or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This has been above the VC for the last two years. A minority of young people attained one or more awards at SCQF level 7 from 2021/22 to 2024/25. There have been increases in this measure over the past four years, but it remains below the VC.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Most young people participate in at least one meaningful achievement activity within or outwith school. Young people gain confidence and skills from activities, including developing their communication skills and ability to work as part of a team. The number of young people gaining national and school awards for achievements is growing steadily over time. For example, young people gain independence and interpersonal skills from their successful participation in the Youth Achievement, Dynamic Youth and the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards. A significant range of partners support staff well in the delivery of achievement activities across the school. Staff should continue to develop a more coordinated approach with partners to providing achievement activities for young people. This, along with the recently introduced St Machar's six key skills, will help young people to communicate the positive impact of achievements on their skills development.
- A minority of young people contribute to school life and their communities well through volunteering. A few skills ambassadors support their school by helping to organise events and to welcome visitors. A few young people gain leadership, presentation and self-management skills through a range of high-quality sports programmes. These include those offered by Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust, Football Academy, Active Schools and the PE department. There is significant scope to develop further opportunities for young people's leadership, building on the positive examples in these programmes. This would enable more young people to participate in meaningful, school-wide leadership roles.
- Young people benefit from staff tracking many of their achievements and skills. Staff are beginning to use achievement trackers to identify and address young people who may be missing out on activities to support achievements. Staff should continue to develop current systems, in conjunction with key partners, to ensure they capture all of young people's achievements and skills.
- Young people value the range of ways that staff celebrate their achievements. Staff use displays, awards, and events well to recognise young people's achievements and progress and to support their increased sense of pride. Many young people communicate effectively how their achievements are supporting their progress towards post-school destinations.

Equity for all learners

- A majority of young people reside in SIMD deciles 1-3. Senior leaders and staff have a clear understanding of the social, cultural, and economic context of the school community. Staff are committed to removing costs associated with the school day. They should continue to refine their approaches to providing young people with items they require for school, such as school uniform and food, in a discrete and respectful way.

- The attainment of school leavers who live in SIMD deciles 1 – 2 was in line with national data from 2019/20 to 2023/24, apart from decile 1 in 2022/23 which was significantly higher than national data, when compared using average complementary tariff points. In 2023/24, attainment of school leavers in SIMD decile 3 was significantly lower than national data. Staff should continue to identify barriers to young people achieving positive outcomes and address them proactively.
- Senior leaders use a majority of PEF allocation to fund staff who work with young people to support improved engagement, attendance and attainment. This includes staff in the Alternative Delivery Team who prioritise young people's wellbeing to support positive outcomes for identified young people. PEF has also been used to fund partnerships to extend young people's learning pathways and achievement opportunities. Staff also purchase study materials and resources to help young people, and use funding to remove financial barriers to help learners access residential events. This supports young people to progress in their learning and to access positive learning and life experiences. Most PEF support is offered universally to all young people across the school.
- A few young people make suggestions on the use of PEF to support school improvements. This has resulted in an increase in learner selected texts for the library, and the development of the Esports classroom and relevant courses. Senior leaders should extend young people's opportunities to contribute to the planning for PEF. This will ensure young people feel consulted and active participants in positive changes across the school.
- As an important next step, senior leaders need to improve their strategic approach to PEF. They need to consider how they involve stakeholders directly in the planning for PEF interventions. They should identify appropriate interventions, which are planned with clear, specific and measurable outcomes. This will allow them to measure and evaluate fully how interventions result in the poverty-related attainment gap being reduced through the accelerated progress of targeted young people. It is important that senior leaders develop a clear PEF plan which evidences the planning and evaluation processes for the use of PEF. This should outline clearly the roles of staff, the time scale for interventions, and the desired outcomes for targeted young people.
- Most young people stayed on at school from S4 to S5 but only around a third of those young people remain till the end of S6, in 2022/23 and 2023/24. A majority of young people left school to higher or further education and a minority to employment from 2021/22 to 2023/24. From 2020/21 to 2023/24, almost all young people moved on to an initial positive destination on leaving school. This is in line with the VC. Young people are supported effectively by SDS staff, Aspire North, and other higher education establishments to achieve aspirational post-school destinations.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard HMIE 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.