

Summarised inspection findings

Àrd-sgoil Inbhir Theòrsa – Thurso High School

The Highland Council

23 June 2026

Key contextual information

School Name: Àrd-sgoil Inbhir Theòrsa - Thurso High School
Council: The Highland Council
SEED number: 5102030
Roll (September 2024): 723

Àrd-sgoil Inbhir Theòrsa - Thurso High School is a non-denominational, comprehensive secondary school. The school serves the town of Thurso and the surrounding area within Highland. The school offers a Gàidhlig Medium Education provision.

Eleven young people with a range of additional support needs (ASN) attend the school's ASN provision. This includes young people with severe and complex needs.

The headteacher has been in post for eight years. She is supported by three substantive deputy headteachers.

In September 2024, no pupils lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland. In September 2024, 8.9% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2024, the school recorded 34.7% of young people as having an additional support need.

Attendance has shown improvement in recent sessions and was in line with the national average in 2024/25. Exclusions are generally in line with the national average.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

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

- Young people benefit from highly respectful relationships within a very positive, supportive and inclusive culture. Staff value all learners and encourage young people to do their best. Almost all young people feel motivated to learn and to be successful in their learning. These highly positive relationships support a calm, supportive and purposeful learning environment.
- Almost all teachers use the school's "lesson evaluation toolkit" to design well-structured lessons. This clear structure is supporting improvements in the consistency of classroom practice across the school. Most staff talk confidently about the well-planned whole school collaborative professional learning activities and how this is supporting them to plan more effective lessons.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers use engaging starter activities to help young people recall previous learning and to revisit aspects that are not well understood. In the majority of lessons, teachers' instructions are clear and purposeful. In most classes, teachers explain the purpose of learning and how learners will know if they have been successful. This approach is supporting most young people to better understand what they are learning. However, in a minority of lessons young people are not clear about what they need to do to improve. Teachers should now look at developing further the quality of success criteria and support all young people to understand when they are successful in their learning.
- Teachers use questioning well in the majority of lessons for recall or checking understanding. A minority of teachers are highly effective in using very structured challenging questions to extend thinking. As planned, the staff should continue to share this effective practice through the well-planned professional learning programme. This should develop approaches to check young people's understanding and encourage all young people to engage in more complex and reflective thinking.
- Teacher's use of the "lesson evaluation toolkit" is leading to an improved consistency of learners' experiences and is increasingly leading to improvements in the quality of learning and teaching. Teachers should continue to work together to develop a shared understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment. An important next step is to involve young people in the ongoing development of the toolkit.
- In the majority of classes, learning is appropriately paced and challenging. However, a minority of lessons are overly teacher led where tasks are set for the whole class. In these lessons there is not an appropriate level of challenge for all learners. Staff should continue to

develop their approaches to planning tasks, activities and resources for all young people to better support and challenge their learning.

- Almost all staff are aware of the individual needs of young people through the shared additional support needs information. Most staff use this information well to adapt and enhance lesson resources to help young people overcome barriers to their learning. For example, teachers make effective use of assistive technology for young people to make learning more accessible for all young people. Specialist staff work effectively with individuals and small groups of young people who require additional support, especially literacy and numeracy.
- All young people have access to a digital device. In almost all subject areas they access content and resources effectively to support them with their learning. In the majority of lessons, teachers use digital technologies creatively to enhance young people's learning experiences and to help consolidate learning where appropriate. Digital technology is used well to support young people's learning and to meet learners needs. Most young people use their devices confidently and are accessing a wide range of activities to support them with their learning.
- Almost all teachers use summative assessment well to measure the progress young people are making in their learning across the broad general education (BGE) and senior phase. Most staff use formative assessment approaches well in lessons to assess young people's understanding. A minority of teachers use information from assessments to adapt their teaching during lessons skilfully. They identify when young people need to revisit learning or require additional input to develop further their confidence in learning.
- Most teachers provide young people with timely and regular feedback on their learning and understanding. For example, through discussions during lessons, self-evaluation, and learning conversations following formal assessments. Young people value the individual feedback they receive. As a result of this, most young people talk confidently about their strengths and what they need to do to improve, particularly in the senior phase. Young people also take part in a range of helpful peer- and self-assessment activities. These activities allow most young people to evaluate their work against agreed, shared criteria, deepening their understanding of measures of success.
- Almost all departments are using the language of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) within learning in the BGE. Almost all departments are planning and tracking progress against National Benchmarks. As a result, most young people in the BGE are aware of the level they are working at in their different subjects. In a few subjects, the working level description is too broad, and a few young people are unsure of how to progress within the level. Senior leaders should continue to embed a consistent shared language about progression and achievement within a level in the BGE.
- Almost all subjects have teachers with experience of working with Qualifications Scotland. These staff effectively share their experience with colleagues in their departments, which supports a strong, shared understanding and application of national standards in the senior phase. In the BGE, staff plan relevant assessment activities based on national benchmarks.
- Senior leaders in the school have created a clear and helpful moderation and internal verification policy. Teachers within all departments undertake activities linked to this policy,

particularly around verification of assessments. There is scope to develop further moderation activities across all curricular areas in the BGE, particularly at fourth level. This should build further staff confidence in judgement of attainment at all levels. Senior staff should continue to develop moderation activities in partnership with teachers from associated primary schools. This will enhance primary to secondary transition planning and also allow earlier identification of young people for targeted interventions.

- Staff in almost all departments use bespoke tracking systems effectively to record data on the progress of young people. Teachers and middle leaders use this data well to identify young people who are not on track with their learning. Importantly, subject teachers have access to a range of interventions to support these young people. These interventions include mentoring, supported study, timetabled one-to-one sessions to develop key literacy and numeracy skills, and S6 subject ambassadors supporting young people in the BGE. Senior leaders evaluate and monitor closely the impact of these interventions. Senior leaders also collate departmental data in a whole-school tracking and monitoring system. Helpful “Pupil Attainment Summaries”, derived from whole school, departmental and primary school data, allow senior leaders to monitor the progress of young people across all curricular areas over time. Pupil Support staff effectively use these summaries at points of transition to identify young people’s strengths and to support discussions around appropriate, aspirational course choices and career pathways planning.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- 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.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

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

- Staff have developed an effective and proactive approach to raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. Staff who lead literacy and numeracy use well a range of tracking data about young people's progress through the BGE and senior phase. They use this information, such as standardised and diagnostic assessments, very effectively to identify young people requiring further support in their learning and to plan appropriate interventions. Staff track the success of these interventions, and these are impacting considerably in progressing young people's literacy and numeracy skills.

Broad General Education

- The development and introduction of a carefully planned literacy programme for young people in S1 and S2, along with targeted support for individual young people has had a positive impact on young people's achievement in literacy. Almost all young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence CfE third level or better in literacy and the majority achieved CfE fourth level by the end of S3, in 2024/25. This is generally in line with local and national levels of achievement and has been sustained from 2022/23 to 2024/25.
- Staff identified previously a need to improve young people's numeracy skills. They have developed a bespoke numeracy programme for learners in S1 and S2. This programme targets key numeracy skills and has supported almost all young people to achieve CfE third level or better in numeracy by the end of S3, from 2022/23 to 2024/25. This has also resulted in the majority of young people achieving fourth level numeracy from 2022/23 to 2024/25. Performance at third and fourth level is generally in line with local and national levels.

Senior Phase

Leavers

- Working with senior leaders, staff leading literacy have developed a number of very effective targeted interventions to ensure all young people leave school with appropriate literacy qualifications. Senior leaders and guidance teachers use the regular attainment and attendance reviews to identify young people requiring this more individualised support and carefully monitor the impact of this work. As a result, almost all young people left school with Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 4 literacy or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25. From 2020/21 to 2024/25, most young people left school with SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is significantly higher than the virtual comparator (VC) in 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2023/24. Around half of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better in literacy in 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25, in line with the VC.

- Staff have developed effective approaches to increase the percentages of young people who leave school with an appropriate numeracy qualification. This includes, working with a range of staff and partners to provide individual interventions, including a well-considered off-site provision. This work helped ensure most young people left school with SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in 2024/25. Over time this measure is generally in line with the VC, although it was significantly higher than the VC in 2022/23. Staff have increased the number of pathways for young people to achieve this level and are now presenting more young people for SCQF level 5 or better. A minority of leavers achieved SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This is significantly higher than the VC in 2021/22 and 2024/25 and is following a three-year pattern of improvement from 2022/23 to 2024/25.
- Staff monitor closely the progress of young people who require additional support with their learning. They ensure that their needs are known and met through a range of approaches. From 2020/21 to 2024/25, a majority of young people who require additional support with their learning left school with SCQF level 5 or better in literacy and a minority achieved SCQF level 6 or better. In numeracy, the majority of young people who require additional support with their learning left school with SCQF level 5 numeracy in 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2024/25. This is in line with the performance of virtual comparators.

Cohorts

- In literacy, at S4, most young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in 2020/21, 2021/22, 2023/24 and 2024/25. This is generally in line with the VC and significantly higher in 2021/22. By S5, based on S5 roll, the majority of young people attained SCQF level 6 or better, from 2020/21 to 2024/25, in line with the VC. By S6, based on the S6 roll, most young people attained SCQF level 6 or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This is in line with the VC.
- A majority of young people at S4 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2020/21 to 2023/24, in line with the VC. In 2024/25, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better, significantly higher than the VC. At S5, based on S5 roll, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25, in line with the VC. This shows an improving pattern from 2022/23 to 2024/25. At S6, based on the S6 roll, a minority of young people attained SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy from 2020/21 to 2024/25, in line with the VC.
- Staff have developed successful senior phase interventions, using the termly attainment reviews and robust tracking data in the senior phase, to identify young people who require more support to achieve their best across the senior phase. This includes individual and group work, targeted work, online support and supported study. These approaches have led to sustained performance in literacy and important improvements in young people's numeracy attainment in S4 and S5.

National Qualifications (NQ)

- The proportion of young people presented for National 5 (N5) English from 2020/21 to 2024/25 is generally similar to the national average. Most young people presented were successful in achieving the course at grades A–C from 2021/22 to 2024/25. Most young people in S5, presented for Higher English, achieved a grade A–C from 2020/21 to 2023/24 with a majority achieving grade A–C in 2024/25.
- A minority of young people in S4 were presented for N5 Mathematics from 2020/21 to 2024/25 and most were presented for N5 Applications of Mathematics in 2024/25. N5

Mathematics course presentation rates are in line with the national average and N5 Applications of Mathematics presentation rates are considerably above the national rate. Of those presented for N5 Mathematics in 2024/25, almost all achieved the course at grades A-C. This was well above the national average. Of those young people presented for N5 Applications of Mathematics in 2024/25, most achieved a grade A-C. In S5/6 of those presented for Higher Mathematics, most achieved the course award at grades A-C. A few young people were presented for Higher Applications of Mathematics in S5/6 in 2024/25. Of those presented, all young people achieved the course award at grades A-C.

Attainment over time

BGE

- Across most curricular areas, most young people achieved CfE third level by the end of S3 over the two-year period from 2023/24. The majority of young people are working within CfE fourth level by the end of S3. Senior leaders and teachers should continue, as planned, to develop moderation activities to improve the reliability of their judgments about achievement of CfE levels, especially CfE fourth level. This will allow middle and senior leaders to have increased confidence in tracking patterns of improvement across all curricular areas.

Leavers

- Senior leaders, working with staff and partners, closely track and monitor all young people preparing to leave school. The number of young people leaving school at the end of S4 and S5 is much greater than the national average. Staff should continue to sustain and develop the strong focus on ensuring the highest levels of attainment for all school leavers, at all stages. This approach has impacted positively on the outcomes for most S4 and S5 leavers. Attainment of the middle 60% and highest 20% of S4 leavers was in line with the VC in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Attainment of the lowest 20%, middle 60% and highest 20% of S5 leavers was in line with or above the VC, from 2020/21 to 2024/25.
- Attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of young people, when using average complementary tariff scores, was in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2023/24. In 2024/25, it was significantly lower than the VC. Performance of the middle attaining 60% of young people was in line with the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25, although the average complementary tariff score has generally been following a pattern of decline from 2020/21 levels. Performance of the highest attaining 20% was in line with the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and was significantly lower than the VC in 2024/25.
- The attainment of leavers who require additional support with their learning is generally stable from 2021/22 to 2023/24, with 2024/25 showing a considerable fall in average complementary tariff score.

Cohorts

- At S4, using average complementary tariff points, the performance of the lowest attaining 20% of young people in S4 was in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This has shown an improving pattern from 2022/23 to 2024/25. The middle attaining 60% of learners was in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25, with an increasing average complimentary tariff score from 2022/23 to 2024/25. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people in S4, is in line with the VC for the five-year period. The average complementary tariff score for the middle 60% and top 20% of young people has remained stable over the past five years.

- At S5, based on the S5 roll, the attainment of the lowest 20% is in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25. The performance of this group shows a slight decrease from 2021/22 to 2023/24 with improvement noted in 2024/25. Based on the S5 roll, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% of young people has generally been in line with the VC. There is a slight pattern of decline from 2021/22 but there was an improvement from 2023/24 to 2024/25. Based on the S5 roll, the highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25, with average complementary tariff scores broadly consistent over this time.
- At S6, based on the S6 roll, the average complementary tariff across the lowest attaining 20% is in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2023/24. The average complementary tariff in 2024/25 is significantly much lower than the VC and shows an overall decreasing pattern since 2021/22. The middle attaining 60%, in S6, is in line with VC from 2020/21 to 2023/24, however the attainment in 2024/25 is significantly much lower than the VC. This is decreasing from 2022/23. Based on S6 roll, the highest 20% is in line from 2020/21 to 2023/24 but significantly lower in 2024/25. Average complementary tariff score has been generally stable from 2020/21 but is lower in 2024/25 than previous years.
- Senior staff are aware of the need to improve the performance of young people in S6. They track the progress of young people in the senior phase very carefully and can demonstrate the impact of the high number of S5 leavers on S6 attainment over time.

Breadth and depth

- The majority of young people in S4 attained three or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better, from 2020/21 to 2024/25, in line with the VC. From 2020/21 to 2024/25, around half of young people in S4 achieved five or more level 5C or better award, generally in line with the VC but significantly higher in 2021/22. A minority of young people attained five or more level 5A or better in 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2024/25. This was in line with VC for the five-year period. A generally stable pattern of attainment over time.
- By S5, based on S5 roll, a minority of young people achieved five or more awards, at SCQF level 6C or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25, in line with the VC. A minority of young people achieved three or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better over the five-year period, in line with the VC. A few young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25, in line with VC. In general attainment in most measures for S5 at level 6 is stable over the past three years.
- By S6, based on S6 roll, most young people in S6 achieved one or more level 6C or better qualifications from 2020/21 to 2023/24. This was in line with the VC. This dropped to the majority, significantly much lower than VC in 2024/25. Around half of young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better from 2020/21 to 2023/24, with this decreasing to a minority in 2024/25. This was in line with the VC over the five-year period. A minority of young people achieved three or more awards at level 6A or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This was in line with VC but significantly higher than the VC in 2022/23. A minority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25. In line with the VC until 2024/25, which was significantly much lower than the VC.

Attendance

- Senior leaders and staff maintain a relentless focus on improving young people's attendance at school. They know young people and families well and use these relationships effectively

to offer bespoke and well-considered support. Staff have developed a clear strategy, based around building a sense of belonging, to support improved attendance. They are monitoring and tracking attendance robustly and working closely with parents to address barriers to regular attendance. Positively, as a result of this work, attendance rates have shown improvement over the past three years. Importantly, the school community have developed a shared understanding and appreciation of the impact attendance has on attainment. A few young people attend school on a part-time basis. Staff ensure that these arrangements are applied appropriately and maintain a focus on returning young people to full time learning as soon as possible. A few young people with significant barriers to attendance are reengaging with learning and achieving qualifications as a result.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Almost all young people develop important skills for life, learning and work through engagement in a considerable offer of well-promoted wider achievement activities. This extensive offer is responsive to young people's interests and local context, with staff, partners and young people themselves contributing effectively to its design and delivery.
- Staff across all curriculum areas provide a coherent and well-considered offer of excursions, clubs and activities that effectively extend young people's learning beyond the classroom. These experiences deepen subject knowledge, promote the application of learning in real-life contexts, and enable young people to achieve success at local and national levels. Most young people develop confidence, creativity, and performance skills through participation in a rich and broad range of craft, games, science, drama productions, reading initiatives, and debating activities. Young people apply their musical abilities through well-considered performances such as the Caithness Music Festival. Young people develop teamwork, resilience and enhanced fitness from a substantial and inclusive offer of sports activities. Through involvement in sports such as rugby and netball, young people build strong collaborative skills, learn from peers at varying levels and broaden their social networks through competition. Young people's participation in local and national competitions, such as Future Chef, enables them to achieve at high levels and make clear links to pathways into training and employment.
- Young people demonstrate a very well-developed sense of responsibility and citizenship through volunteering, charity initiatives and additional roles in the school and local community. This includes well established programmes such as the Youth Philanthropy Initiative, where all S3 pupils develop a range of organisation and communication skills and a strong social awareness. A majority of young people develop leadership skills through a broad and increasing range of roles. These include pupil council positions, committees, mentoring, subject ambassadors, prefects and peer support. These activities foster a deep sense of belonging for almost all young people, as well as strengthening their communication and interpersonal skills.
- Staff and partners capture and celebrate young people's achievements in and beyond school very well. Young people value the recognition they receive through the house system, assemblies, certificates, wall displays, social media and the annual awards ceremony. This helps motivate young people and develops a real sense of pride across the school. Staff continue to extend accreditation of achievements, including through use of Personal Development awards, leadership qualifications and the Saltire Award.

- Staff track participation in achievement activities very well. They use this information sensitively to identify and support effectively all young people's participation in achievement activities. Young people articulate very well the skills and outcomes gained through achievements. Senior leaders should now progress plans to implement a planned approach to capture and track the quality of all young people's achievements. They should use this to support more consistently all young people to recognise and apply systematically their skills from achievements across the curriculum.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff use well-established departmental and whole school tracking systems to monitor carefully the attainment of young people who face barriers to success. This includes young people who have additional support needs or are care experienced. Staff support young people through a range of impactful approaches including well-received mentoring, individual and group support and additional help from staff in all subject departments. Young people supported through these interventions are attaining well.
- There are no young people living in the most or least deprived data zones. When compared using average complementary tariff scores, the attainment of young people who left school, and lived in SIMD deciles four, six and eight is significantly lower than the national average in 2024/25. The attainment of young people leaving school at the end of S4 and S5 has been in line with or above the national average, across all deciles, from 2022/23 to 2024/25. Senior leaders should explore further the support required for a few young people, particularly in S6, to reduce all poverty-related attainment gaps in line with national expectations.
- Staff use their allocation from the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) to support effectively individuals to sustain positive attendance, wellbeing and engagement with school. Staff have also used this fund over the past five years to support individuals and groups who require additional support to develop appropriate literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, young people who are supported through these interventions demonstrate accelerated progress in these areas.
- Almost all staff use their very strong awareness of the socio-economic context of the school to reduce the cost of the school day. This includes, for example, thoughtful support to participate in school events and trips, as well as help for families to receive entitlements. Young people appreciate the sensitivity and discretion of staff's approaches. This work has led to young people developing an impressive understanding of equity. Young people, as a result, demonstrate high levels of understanding and empathy for peers.
- Senior leaders and staff use their extensive knowledge of the local context thoughtfully to prepare young people very well to transition successfully from school. Staff have developed a very well-considered range of effective partnerships across all curricular areas. Staff and partners collaborate effectively on a well-planned careers' education strategy. Through liaison with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) staff and well-established links with the local college and universities, a majority of young people progress successfully to employment and the local college on leaving school. Staff and partners identify early and support swiftly a few young people who are at risk of not progressing to a positive destination when leaving school. Young people value greatly the well-planned university excursions which help to develop the skills and resilience they need for moving away from the

area. These highly impactful approaches result in almost all young people between 2020/21 and 2024/25 progressing to a positive destination on leaving school, in line with the VC.

Context

The enhanced provision is a specialist unit in the school which supports eleven young people aged from S1 to S6. All young people are placed in the school by the local authority and have a range of additional support needs. Most young people are in the senior phase of their education. The unit comprises a large classroom, kitchen, multi-purpose and sensory rooms. Almost all young people are taught practical subjects in classrooms in the mainstream school. The unit is led by a principal teacher who has overall responsibility for additional support needs across the school. Most lessons are taught by additional support needs teachers who work across the enhanced provision and mainstream classes.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- All staff develop positive caring relationships with young people. Young people come to school keen and eager to learn. Almost all young people interact well in classes. They work well together in pairs, for example when playing games together. Young people are kind and respectful to each other and enjoy their learning. As a result of the positive relationships and supportive learning environment they engage well in their learning. Young people engage particularly well in lessons which involve practical skills such as cooking.
- All staff model the school's values which underpin teaching very well. Teachers show kindness and praise young people's achievements and use a range of approaches to maintain young people's interest in their learning. They use practical activities and games effectively to promote young people's interest and enjoyment. In addition, they use the wider school campus and community well to support young people to learn in a range of real-life contexts. A few lessons are overly teacher led. Teachers should consider how they plan learning to ensure young people spend more time actively engaged in their learning.
- Teachers' explanations of young people's learning are clear. They use visual cues appropriately to support young people to know what they will be doing each day. Teachers use questioning techniques well to check for young people's understanding. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to develop young people's thinking skills. As planned, teachers should now consider how they deliver lessons which provide each young person with appropriate levels of challenge. Teachers should continue to develop the use of digital technologies to enrich young people's learning further.
- Pupil support assistants (PSAs) support young people well to access and make progress in their learning. PSAs are skilled in knowing when to let young people attempt a task unsupported. This helps young people to develop their confidence and independence.
- Young people attend the unit following multi-agency assessment by local authority representatives. The principal teacher is involved fully in planning effective transition processes. This approach supports almost all young people to settle quickly into the school. Teachers undertake a range of assessments throughout the school year. These assessments are not yet integral to planned learning. Teachers now need to develop their approaches to assessment further to ensure all young people experience learning which build progressively on what they can already do.

- Almost all lessons are targeted at ensuring young people in the senior phase can achieve accreditation for their work. Young people in the BGE undertake the same tasks but with a focus on developing their skills. Teachers plan lessons which do not yet take sufficient account of young people's entitlement to a broad general education and senior phase. Senior leaders now need to develop the curriculum in the unit further to ensure young people's learning accurately reflects their entitlements.
- Teachers in the enhanced provision have recently introduced a new tool for recording and tracking and monitoring young people's progress. Teachers are developing their skills well in using this new tool. Senior leaders should continue as planned to support teachers to maintain checks on young people's progress. This should include ensuring that valid and reliable data is gathered consistently across all curricular areas.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

- The small number of young people and range of their additional support needs renders comparisons of cohorts or groups invalid.
- Most young people develop their literacy and communication skills well. They listen to adults and respond well when responding to questions. Most young people use speech effectively to communicate with adults and others. A few young people communicate their wants appropriately using vocalisations, gestures or words. They respond well to stimuli such as visual cues. A few young people read simple words or sentences. A few young people overwrite individual letters. A few young people write texts for a range of purposes such as poetry. Young people need to continue to develop their functional communication skills more formally when working with others.
- The majority of young people develop their numeracy skills appropriately. They sort and order objects such as coins according to type or colour. A few perform simple additions including with coins. A few young people find the missing number in a 2-digit number line. A few young people compare the capacity of a range of containers. They can order them from smallest to greatest. A few young people describe whether a bottle is full or empty. A few use litres to measure the volume of liquid in a jug. Young people need to develop their skills further in identifying and naming two-dimensional (2D) shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects.
- The majority of young people in the BGE attain well against their individual targets. This includes increasing their attendance or developing new skills. Teachers now need to review how they deliver the BGE to ensure all young people continue to progress in their learning.
- All young people in the senior phase attain a wide range of units at National 1 level. A few attain units up to National 3 level. In recent years, staff have recognised that young people are capable of attaining more qualifications at a higher level than they are currently achieving. Teachers should now, as planned, ensure all young people in the senior phase attain as highly as possible across all curricular areas.
- All young people access a range of clubs and activities which support their personal achievements. A few young people develop their coordination and sports skills well when playing sports such as badminton and football. A few young people develop their social and strategy skills effectively playing board and role-playing games. The majority of young people develop their confidence when going swimming or horse riding. Most young people develop an appropriate understanding of the natural environment when in the school garden or

undertaking outdoor activities in a local forest. Almost all young people develop their understanding of important life skills such as shopping when on visits to the local community. Staff celebrate young people's wider achievements effectively through school awards linked to the school's values. Young people are proud of their achievements and enjoying sharing these with their parents. Senior leaders should continue to promote young people's opportunities to achieve as widely as possible. Senior leaders should consider how young people can be accredited for their achievements.

- Senior leaders use PEF to fund 'soft start' activities for young people who require this support at the start of each day. They should continue to consider how this intervention helps to raise attainment for those young people most affected by poverty.
- Senior leaders ensure the cost of school day does not adversely affect young people's access to all the activities on offer. This includes supporting young people acquiring school uniform or tickets to a sensory theatre.

Context

- Gàidhlig Medium Education commenced at Àrd-sgoil Inbhir Theòrsa – Thurso High School in 2020–21. Young people transition to the àrd-sgoil from Bun-sgoil Mount Pleasant – Mount Pleasant Primary School. The àrd-sgoil has a Gàidhlig specific catchment area, which is the same as that for English Medium. Gàidhlig Medium Education and Gaelic (Learners) are part of the languages department. This is led by a non-specialist principal teacher. The àrd-sgoil provides a proportion of learning through Gàidhlig across S1–6. Since August 2025, staffing arrangements have become more stable. The àrd-sgoil has experienced ongoing staffing challenges, including a period during 2024–25 when the senior phase teaching was delivered through the digital platform, The Highland Virtual Academy.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Young people and the staff team enjoy consistently positive, respectful and caring relationships. This supports young people's wellbeing effectively and provides a strong foundation for high-quality immersion in Gàidhlig. Young people are enthusiastic and motivated learners within Gàidhlig Medium Education. They contribute constructive ideas about how to improve the profile of Gàidhlig across the àrd sgoil. For example, they are actively increasing bilingual signage to make the language more visible. Young people develop their fluency by attending national and local events where they meet other learners of Gàidhlig. These include sports events where young people develop their skills in language while engaging in sports. They joined other schools to celebrate Seachdain na Gàidhlig – World Gaelic Week. Young people develop confidence as they extend their language skills in meaningful situations.
- Young people benefit from a range of well-considered strategies to support immersion. Teachers model Gàidhlig fluently, with a well-balanced focus on all literacy skills. Senior leaders are providing clear guidelines and professional learning on what constitutes effective practice. This should also include the distinctive features of Gàidhlig Medium Education and how all teachers can contribute to Gàidhlig Medium Education.
- Young people's learning and assessment is beginning to be planned more thoroughly in line with whole-school policy. Teachers use a few appropriate assessment approaches in Gàidhlig. As young people move through stages, they have an increasing understanding of how they will be successful in their learning of Gàidhlig. Teachers should continue to moderate standards with colleagues to continue strengthening their teacher professional judgements. Young people's progress and attainment is tracked at whole-school and departmental level.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

- At the time of the inspection, the roll in Gàidhlig Medium Education comprised small cohorts of learners. As a result, attainment and progress is expressed in overall statements, rather than for specific year groups.
- Young people in S1–6 learn across the four contexts of the curriculum through Gàidhlig. Literacy and Gàidhlig are available in S1–3, leading to national qualifications in S4–6. As yet, only a few young people study Gàidhlig at SCQF level 5, with no presentations at SCQF levels

above this. Senior leaders should establish a clear entitlement to progressive literacy and Gàidhlig in S1-3, with young people's attainment recognised with a national qualification in the senior phase. The staff team are at the very early stages of planning to introduce subject teaching through the medium of Gàidhlig. Senior leaders are similarly at the early stages of planning how Gaelic (Learners) can be a successful, sustainable pathway for young people in English Medium Education.

- Young people's attainment has been impacted by previous staffing challenges. Overall, attainment in literacy and Gàidhlig and Gaelic (Learners) should be improved. Senior leaders should continue to ensure that a sufficient proportion of young people's learning is through the medium of Gàidhlig. The improved staffing of late has enhanced equity of experience for young people.
- Young people experience belonging to a community of speakers of Gàidhlig. All young people in Gàidhlig Medium Education meet in registration so that they have a daily opportunity to speak Gàidhlig. This is also beginning to encourage young people who have paused their learning through Gàidhlig to resume again. Young people have raised the profile of Gàidhlig in the bun-sgoil and àrd-sgoil by establishing a Cafaidh Gàidhlig. This raises the profile of Gàidhlig with young people sharing their successes with their peers and offering some opportunities to learn some Gàidhlig.
- Young people develop fluency in Gàidhlig by taking part in national events, such as debating and Film G. They enjoy successes in such events, as well as skills in creating, editing and presenting short films. Young people should continue to develop an understanding of the associated culture of the Gàidhlig language, including the contributions of partners such as Fèisean nan Gàidheal.

Other relevant information - Gàidhlig Medium Education

- The faculty improvement plan leads to some early improvements in Gàidhlig at departmental level. Senior leaders and staff have recently undertaken helpful audits using the self-evaluation framework, How good is our school? 4th Edition. These have identified relevant next steps for improving the provision for Gàidhlig Education. Senior leaders should ensure that this is part of their strategic planning for continuous improvement and shows evidence towards The Highland Council's Gàidhlig Language Plan and the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017.

Other relevant evidence

- In S1 to S3, young people in English and Gàidhlig Medium do not receive their full entitlement to learning languages in line with the 1+2 Policy. In English Medium Education, young people learn French in S1-2 for three periods in total. Staff should continue developing progression from language learning at the primary stages. At the end of S2, most young people choose to not study a language. Attainment in modern languages at the senior phase is strong, while the total number of young people who study languages is low. In 2025, at S4, there has been a slight increase in the numbers studying National 5 French, but this has not resulted in high quality passes. Young people enjoy some learning of language and culture connected to the Caithness local language. Senior leaders should continue developing these pathways to recognise Scot's official status as a language of Scotland.
- All young people receive their national entitlements to religious and moral education and physical education.
- In Gàidhlig Medium Education, young people learn literacy and Gàidhlig in S1 and S2. They can discontinue their learning from the beginning of S3. There is not yet a pattern of continuing with Gàidhlig across the senior phase. Senior leaders should continue using personalised timetabling arrangements to maximise opportunities for meeting objectives in Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education and a 1+2 Approach to Languages. Young people should be aware of how their learning of languages enables them to gain the benefits of bilingualism.
- The school library is highly valued and well-used by staff and young people. The librarian is highly effective in supporting a wide range of appropriate activities to support reading and literacy. English classes are timetabled to visit the library and young people enjoy borrowing books to read in class and at home. Young people read, study and socialise in the library at break and lunchtimes. The librarian is supporting the school in pursuing reading school accreditation. The library also provides a wide range of resources to support local heritage, wellbeing and careers that is well used by young people. The library is well used by staff across the school to support and enhance learning.

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.