

# Summarised inspection findings

**Inverness High School**

**The Highland Council**

10 February 2026

## Key contextual information

School Name: Inverness High School

Council: The Highland Council

SEED number: 5142636

Roll (Sept 2025): 481 young people

Inverness High School is situated in the town of Inverness, Highland. There are five cluster primary schools of varying sizes and the school's roll has reduced slightly of the last five years. The headteacher has been in post for around a year and a half and there have been recent changes to senior leadership positions in the last two years. By S6, only around 32% of the S4 cohort currently choose to stay on at school.

Attendance is generally below the national average.

Exclusions are generally above the national average. This has begun to show signs of improvement and the headteacher recognises it continues to be an improvement priority.

In September 2025, 30.3% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2025, 87% of pupils lived in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2025, the school reported that 75.4% of pupils had additional support needs.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

weak

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 been in post for 18 months. She has rightly identified several key areas for improvement and has begun working with staff to drive forward change. For example, she has begun to work with senior leaders, stakeholders and staff to improve attendance, capitalising on the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Aspects of the PEF allocation are, for example, beginning to impact positively on young people's attendance rates. The headteacher and senior leaders are aware of the urgent need to develop a more collegiate culture in which all members of the school community are fully involved in planning and leading improvements. This continued planning will help support a more shared understanding of the expectations, improvement priorities and direction of Inverness High School.
- In 2023, senior leaders led a helpful review of the school's values. They consulted with staff and the majority of young people and agreed the current values of responsibility, resilience and respect. The majority of young people demonstrate these values through their interactions in the daily life of the school. The school does not yet have a shared vision or aims. The headteacher recognises that there is a need to create a strong vision and set of school aims based on the school's unique context. This should support the development of a unifying sense of direction of change and improvement for the school, underpinned by stronger leadership.
- There is a significant need to improve strategic leadership at all levels across the school. Senior leaders recognise that the pace of change has not been sufficient to achieve desired improvements outcomes for young people. They should now work with staff, young people, parents and partners to significantly increase the pace of change to drive forward identified improvement priorities.
- Senior leaders, in consultation with the local authority, agreed three appropriate school improvement priorities. The school is in the second year of a three-year school improvement cycle. The school improvement plan (SIP) is shaped by local and national priorities and responds to identified areas for school improvement. Senior leaders should now develop more rigorous approaches to reviewing fully the progress of these priorities and importantly, the impact on young people. There is significant scope to extend the role of parents, young people and partners.
- A minority of staff gather robust evidence regularly to identify improvement priorities and to measure their progress towards improvement. In a few departments, middle leaders regularly seek young people's views on their learning experiences. They use this robust evidence to shape improved curriculum planning. The range of data senior leaders and teachers use to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning needs to be broader and more reliable. Most faculty

improvement plans (FIPs) do not currently align well with the SIP and are of variable quality. Senior leaders should work with staff to ensure that improvement priorities are measurable, with clear, achievable timelines. They should ensure that all faculties engage in robust self-evaluation processes that support the identification of faculty improvement priorities. They should also capitalise on helpful feedback from local authority quality assurance visits.

- Senior leaders have identified the urgent need to develop strengthened quality assurance at whole school and faculty levels. These should also include timelines of reviewing attainment and progress data, sampling learners' work, conducting learning observations, and gathering the views of young people more consistently across the school. This will help to ensure that appropriate improvement priorities are identified at all levels.
- Almost all of the identified priority improvement areas for the school remain at an early stage of development and progress. The headteacher and senior leaders need to review their responsibilities and apply a robust and coordinated approach to strategic leadership across all areas of the school. Senior leaders and staff should continue to look outwards more regularly to strengthen their awareness of national standards and expectations. This will also help to identify highly effective practice to progress and formalise the school's improvement work.
- The headteacher has re-established successfully the staff professional review and development process. Staff are encouraged to self-evaluate their progress against General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) standards and identify professional development needs. Senior leaders encourage staff to develop their leadership capacity, and a minority of staff adopt eagerly leadership roles. Almost all staff contribute well across four whole-school working groups addressing attendance, learning and teaching, ethos and values and children's rights. These are beginning to support the implementation of change aligned with the SIP priorities. A few staff are leading well improvement projects such as timetabling, safety in school and work on the rights of the child. As planned, senior leaders should progress with professional development for middle leaders and in-house staff training to empower them to lead key aspects of change.
- Almost all young people are eager to offer ideas to support the school to improve, such as through providing feedback to departments or whole school surveys. They appreciate opportunities to make positive changes to the school environment through the pupil council. A minority of young people say that the school takes their views into account when making changes. Senior leaders and teachers should now consider how they gather regular pupil voice and demonstrate that young people's views influence change positively.
- Currently, only a minority of young people contribute regularly to the life of the school through various meaningful leadership roles. These include the pupil council, the 'Rights Respecting Schools' steering group, house captains, prefects and the new school website design group. These young people are developing a range of skills such as teamwork and communication. As a result, these young people feel that their voice is heard and they are empowered to make a difference and affect meaningful change in the school community.
- School leaders have well established relationships with a wide range of key partners such as Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), Youth Support Officers, and peer-mentoring charity groups across Scotland, who provide targeted support for young people. This is helping improve pupil engagement, attendance, and is supporting almost all school leavers into positive destinations. As a next step, school leaders should

establish a more strategic approach to partnership working, based on shared priorities and joint evaluation to help identify areas for improvement.

- Senior leaders and partners understand well how the priorities for DYW support young people develop the necessary skills for learning, life and the world of work. There is no clear strategic vision or action plan to embed these priorities throughout the school. As a next step, senior leaders should work with staff and key partners to plan, review and measure progress against implementing these priorities.

## 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

- In most lessons, staff foster positive relationships with most young people. Most young people are respectful and compliant in their learning. This supports a calm environment in most lessons where the majority of young people remain on task in learning activities. Staff should now consider how to use these positive relationships better to raise expectations and aspiration of all learners. Staff need to ensure that all young people display positive, respectful behaviours across all areas of the school campus. Improved levels of staff supervision and support will help to improve this.
- Senior leaders and staff identify rightly the need to improve learning and teaching. A group of staff developed well 'The Inverness High School Lesson'. This is providing a shared expectation of the core features of an effective lesson and is beginning to improve the consistency of lessons across the school. Staff should continue to use the framework to improve the quality of learning for young people. Learners should play a key role in refining and developing the framework further.
- In most lessons, young people know the purpose of their learning and how they will be successful in class. In almost all lessons teachers decide what young people will learn and how young people will know if they have succeeded. In order to increase the depth of learning, teachers should engage young people more frequently in discussion around what they are learning and how they will be successful. Young people would benefit from more explicit reference to the skills they are developing for learning, life and work across all curricular areas.
- Senior leaders have identified questioning as a focus to increase challenge and engagement. This is beginning to be effective in engaging young people more in their learning in a few subject areas. Local authority staff have recently led professional learning for all teachers on high quality questioning. This was welcomed by teachers and has begun to stimulate thinking on how to improve questioning strategies. This will help all young people to participate more actively in their learning. All teachers should build on this good practice to develop young people's critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- The majority of teachers provide clear instructions, explanations, and demonstrations, which help most young people understand the tasks and activities set. In most lessons, tasks and activities are directed at the whole class. Learners are expected frequently to work on the same tasks and activities. Too often, young people complete tasks which are at too low a level and which do not challenge them. The majority of young people require greater pace and challenge in their learning. All teachers need to meet the needs of all young people more

consistently across all curriculum areas. Most lessons are overly teacher-led. As a result, a minority of learners are not fully engaged and are passive in their learning. Teachers should ensure that they support all learners and challenge them to do their best in every aspect of their learning through a consistent culture of higher aspiration across the school.

- A few teachers successfully manage and support a wide range of needs in their planning for learning, through skilled application of the nurture principles and restorative conversations. This is practice that should be shared across the school. All teachers have up-to-date access to information that identifies individuals with additional support needs and provides agreed strategies to support their learning. All teachers should apply strategies to support young people with additional support needs in all lessons routinely. This will help to plan better to meet the needs of learners more consistently across the school. Senior and middle leaders should consider how to ensure consistency in application and quality assurance of this aspect of the school's work. An important next step would be to include young people in the consultation about the strategies that best support their learning.
- Almost all young people have opportunities to access digital technology. In a minority of subjects, young people use an online platform to produce work and access resources. To improve learning experiences, teachers should further develop learners' digital skills. Senior and middle leaders should give consideration as to how devices can be better managed and maintained to minimise disruption to lessons.
- In most faculties, assessment in the broad general education (BGE) is based on Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) national benchmarks. Most teachers routinely assess young people's work at the end of topics or when a unit of work is completed. A few teachers use self and peer-assessments well to help pupils reflect on their learning. Learners would benefit from more regular and more varied, ongoing assessment opportunities. The quality and range of assessment tools and use of assessment data to inform planning for learning in the classroom, is inconsistent across the school. Senior leaders should share more effective practice that is emerging in a few curriculum areas, to be embedded more widely across the school. A minority of learners in the BGE are clear about their progress and next steps. Teachers should look outwards more regularly at highly effective practice in other schools. This will help to bring about effective change and improvements in raising expectations and challenge through robust assessment. This would then allow young people in the BGE to understand what level they are working at and next steps for their learning.
- The majority of staff provide feedback to learners about their progress in learning. Staff should continue to develop their approaches in offering consistently high-quality feedback to young people. They should ensure that feedback leads to all learners being clear about their next steps in learning. Senior and middle leaders should consider how digital tools could be used to provide robust and consistent mechanisms for feedback between staff and learners.
- Most teachers engage in moderation activities with colleagues within their own departments. This is beginning to develop confidence in teacher's professional judgement. In a minority of subject areas, moderation involves other schools. This is having a limited positive impact on staff confidence to provide robust professional judgements of achievement of a level in the BGE. Teachers must begin to engage in the review of BGE courses to ensure that more robust assessment informs higher quality planning that allows teachers to make reliable judgements of a level and progress within that level.

- A majority of teachers are appointees of the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA). Most teachers understand well national standards in the senior phase. This helps teachers to make sound judgements about young people's progress and attainment in the senior phase.
- Senior leaders should support teachers to develop a shared understanding of the moderation cycle in the BGE. This will help teachers to capitalise on a wider range of assessment evidence that informs planning for learning, teaching and assessment. The use of high quality assessments across curriculum areas is currently inconsistent. Senior and middle leaders should ensure they look outwards to benefit from best practice to help consistently high quality experiences for young people. The development of a partnership approach to moderation with primary colleagues in literacy and numeracy would benefit the transition of young people to secondary school through increasing the reliability of data to meet the needs of young people.
- All faculties have individual approaches to gathering information about young people's progress. In a minority of faculties, teachers use robust tracking information effectively to identify young people who are not making sufficient progress towards their expected levels of attainment and plan appropriate learning activities for them. Teachers need to develop the reliability and validity of tracking data by improving their understanding of national standards and expectations and use of effective assessment strategies.
- Middle leaders should prioritise time to share best practice to develop a consistent approach to tracking and monitoring in the BGE and senior phase. Senior and middle leaders also need to develop a clearer overview of the progress made by young people over time. They should use this information to support staff more effectively to meet individual and groups of learners' needs across the school.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Young people receive their entitlement to learn in all curriculum areas in S1 and S2. Due to the nature of the subject choice from S2 into S3, young people are not experiencing their full entitlement across all curriculum areas by the end of S3. This also means that young people are not experiencing full continuity of modern language learning in line with the Scottish Government's 1+2 languages policy.
- Senior leaders have rightly identified the need to review the BGE as a priority, to ensure there is appropriate challenge and to improve progression pathways into the senior phase. Senior leaders and staff should create a clear rationale that highlights what and how young people will learn, as well as how they will make connections across their learning and develop essential skills. This rationale should be developed in partnership with stakeholders across the school community.
- Staff are currently reviewing BGE programmes of work for literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders have adapted class structures in S1 to offer enhanced support for young people working below nationally expected CfE levels. It is important that the impact of this approach continues to be monitored to ensure it is meeting learners' needs.
- English and mathematics teachers use data from cluster primary schools to support young people during their transition to secondary school. An important next step is to improve collaboration with cluster primary schools to ensure that the data received is robust and that there are common approaches to curriculum and pedagogy in literacy and numeracy. This may also involve the support of the local authority. This should help to ensure greater continuity of learning for young people.
- Senior leaders have also introduced an additional period of literacy within the BGE which is enabling more young people to access the curriculum and make progress in their learning. For example, the 'murder mystery project' helps young people in S1 and S2 to develop their literacy skills. Senior leaders now need to develop a strategy to ensure that literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing skills are understood as a shared responsibility of all staff.
- Young people study six qualifications in S4, moving to five in S5. Senior leaders should continue to ensure they course young people appropriately. They should ensure that choices are realistic and based on prior attainment but they should also be more aspirational.
- Young people in S4 and thereafter do not currently receive their full entitlement to high quality (PE) and religious and moral education (RME).
- One of the priorities of the school's improvement plan is the introduction of National Progression Awards (NPAs), to the senior phase curriculum to raise attainment for young people. A minority of subject areas have now broadened their curriculum offer to include awards such as a wide range of NPAs. In addition, the school works well with the regional college to provide an appropriate range of qualifications in the senior phase from SCQF Level 4-6, across a broad range of subject areas. These include skills for work (SfW) in Early Education and Childcare, Health & Social Care and Motor Vehicle, Hairdressing, for example.

Young people talk positively about this about these opportunities. It is helping to meet learners' needs and improve attainment.

- Young people have limited formal opportunities to identify and reflect on their skills. As a next step, senior leaders should work with learners, staff and partners to develop a whole school approach to developing young people's skills. They should then put in place a plan to support teachers to use and refer to these skills in lessons. Young people should be encouraged to identify and reflect on these skills. This should support young people to confidently identify and talk about the skills that they have and the skills they need to develop.
- Identified groups of young people within the BGE and the senior phase are experiencing motivational outdoor learning through working in the on-site school farm. This is leading to a targeted group of young people gaining the rural skills qualification within the senior phase. Senior leaders should now consider extending opportunities in outdoor learning to all young people.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The school currently has no active Parent Council or Parent Council Chair. Interested parents work at times with senior leaders and staff on aspects of the work and life of the school. Moving forward, senior leaders should liaise with stakeholders to design improved ways to improve communication regularly with parents, with a view of rebuilding an active Parent Council. This Council should then be involved in leading aspects of the life and work of the school. Parents talk positively about the support their young people have received as a result of the school's comprehensive primary to secondary transition programme. Importantly, this programme supports well those young people who require a more intensive and supported transition to secondary school.
- Senior leaders are currently working with partners to re-establish a school website. In anticipation of this, senior leaders should work with parents to use the website as an improved vehicle for communicating school news and celebrating achievement and updates with parents and the wider community. Further to this, senior leaders should also work with staff to establish ways to communicate regularly young people's achievements and feedback, to parents.
- A few parents took part in recent surveys about the work of the school. Most of these parents feel the school is well-led and managed and are satisfied with the quality of learning and teaching across the school. Senior leaders should engage more parents in sharing their opinions about the quality of young people's experiences in their learning. This will help to gather a more representative view across the parent body of the quality of educational provision across the school. This will also give more parents an opportunity to suggest ways to improve communications between the school and parents.

## 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.

### 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

- Most staff foster positive and caring relationships well with young people. This helps a majority of young people recognise they have a trusted adult to speak to when they feel worried or upset. A majority of young people feel that staff treat them fairly and with respect.
- Senior leaders and staff need to develop a whole-school strategy for supporting young people's wellbeing. Most staff require high quality professional learning to develop inclusive practice further. This includes a focus on developing and embedding whole school nurturing principles and restorative practice. Staff would benefit from professional learning on the impact of adverse childhood experiences and strategies to meet learners' needs. Senior leaders and staff should work together to promote an inclusive and respectful environment across the wider school campus. Staff need to be more responsive to the wellbeing and learning needs of all young people.
- A majority of young people feel safe in school. However, a minority of young people demonstrate behaviours that impact on other young people's sense of safety and wellbeing. This includes avoiding lessons and disruptive behaviours during breaks in the school day. All staff need to be more visible and play a role in monitoring and addressing negative behaviours that do not mirror the school's value of 'respect'. Staff should develop the promoting positive relationships policy further to ensure it provides clear guidance and protocols for all staff to follow. This should help staff to address concerns more confidently and support all young people to feel safe.
- Principal Teachers of Guidance (PTsG) and Additional Support for Learning (ASfL) staff know young people well. They are responsive 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. This includes work with Ross County Football Club and youth support officers. A majority of young people accessing interventions achieve positive outcomes, including increased confidence, resilience, improved behaviour and engagement as a result. As an important next step, senior leaders, PTsG and ASfL staff and partners need to improve how they evaluate interventions robustly. They need to set specific and measurable outcomes for young people and ensure these are used to measure success.
- A majority of young people need further support to develop their understanding of the wellbeing indicators and the relevance to their daily lives these have. There is not yet a shared or consistent language of wellbeing being used by all staff. PTsG conduct wellbeing check-ins

and review young people's attendance regularly during personal and social education (PSE). Staff do not yet use whole-school approaches to gather wellbeing data about young people routinely. This would help staff to plan improvements to universal and targeted supports.

- Young people learn about health and wellbeing and develop career management skills well in PSE. Senior leaders and PTsG identify correctly the need to improve the quality of the PSE curriculum and young people's learning experiences. They should continue to work with partners to review the personal and social education (PSE) curriculum, to ensure it is progressive and relevant. Moving forward, PTsG should consider how young people play a more active role in planning and evaluating PSE.
- Senior leaders should continue to develop the processes used across the school to ensure staff comply fully with statutory duties. In particular, those statutory duties pertaining to wellbeing, equality and inclusion. Importantly, all staff need to continue to develop their inclusive practice in order to meet the needs of young people who require additional support with their learning or wellbeing.
- Most senior leaders, PTsG and ASfL staff demonstrate a clear understanding of the principles of 'Getting it Right for Every Child'. They employ a helpful staged intervention approach, and a majority use child's plans well to detail young people's needs and planned interventions. They should work together to develop consistently strong practice in the use of child's plans. This includes ensuring all plans demonstrate staff's assessment of a young person's strengths and development needs and ensure plans contain specific and measurable individual targets. They should also demonstrate how the views of young people and parents consistently inform quality planning and evaluation. Staff and partners should continue to develop their approaches to engaging a minority of parents who are not yet contributing to planning processes.
- Staff prioritise care-experienced young people (CEYP) appropriately and ensure their support needs and progress are reviewed regularly as part of early intervention meetings. They consider CEYP for a coordinated support plan. Teachers should ensure this process is recorded routinely in review meetings or pastoral notes. Staff recognise the need to continue to support CEYP to improve their attainment and achievement further.
- The ASfL staff team uses nurturing principles successfully and well-considered strategies to meet the needs of identified learners when providing support beyond mainstream classes. A few young people with additional support needs access rich learning experiences through, for example, the working farm on the school grounds. This helps them to develop important life and interpersonal skills. Pupil support assistants provide positive support to help young people accessing learning in mainstream classes or the Learning Zone. However, there remain important weaknesses in the school's systems for supporting young people with additional support needs. ASfL staff provide information to all staff on young people's learning and wellbeing needs but a majority of teachers do not use information routinely to inform planning for learning. ASfL staff need to improve their systems to help staff access and use information better. They need to work with senior and middle leaders to quality assure approaches used to meet needs across the school. ASfL staff facilitate the welcoming Learning Zone, an area for young people with learning needs or those with a range of wellbeing and engagement needs. Senior leaders and staff need to develop a clear and shared rationale for the Learning Zone. This should outline how the provision is designed to support improved outcomes for young people.

- Overall, attendance data remains below national averages. The headteacher identifies appropriately improving young people's attendance as a key priority. Staff are developing more robust approaches to monitor and track young people's attendance. PTsG work closely with administrative staff to monitor young people's attendance. Child service workers (CSWs), are beginning to liaise with families to identify and address barriers to young people's regular attendance. There are early indications that this work is beginning to support improvements for targeted young people and families. Staff should continue to promote the link between regular attendance and positive attainment outcomes to help all parents to understand the impact of poor attendance. Improving all young people's regular attendance remains an urgent area for improvement.
- A few young people attend school on a part-time timetable. This amounts currently to around 10% of the school roll. Senior leaders, staff and the local authority need to reduce the use of part-time timetables. This includes reviewing their procedures and rationale for young people on part-time timetables. Staff should review arrangements regularly with the aspiration of returning young people to full time education as soon as possible. Staff must ensure the attendance of young people on part-time and flexible timetables are recorded accurately. Positively, the number of young people excluded from school has reduced over time. However, senior leaders should ensure exclusions are only used as a last resort in order to be more mindful of national guidance.
- A significant minority of young people and parents report that the school does not deal well with bullying. Staff should continue to develop the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures to ensure it reflects fully national guidance. Staff need to ensure they use systems to record bullying incidents systematically. This will help them to track and monitor issues and use data to make improvements. Staff should seek to address examples of misogynistic behaviours to ensure all young people feel respected.
- Young people are supported well during their transition from primary to secondary school. ASfL staff gather information from primary colleagues to plan interventions and support. A few young people access enhanced support to ensure any individual barriers to a positive transition are addressed appropriately. Senior leaders and ASfL use enhanced transition data to identify young people not working at appropriate CfE levels. These young people access learning in a smaller class setting with increased targeted support. Most young people achieve an overall positive transition experience due to the support teachers provide. They help the majority of young people to prepare well for post-school destinations. They receive appropriate guidance and support from teachers. This helped almost all young people achieve a positive post-school destination in 2023/24.
- A few young people and staff seek to promote children's rights. This has included teachers exploring rights of the week and young people sharing what particular rights mean to them. This approach is not yet resulting in most young people developing a clear understanding of the relevance of their rights. Staff should make meaningful connections to children's rights and young people's learning across the curriculum. There is considerable scope to develop leadership opportunities for young people relating to wellbeing, equality and inclusion.
- Young people are not yet able to identify how they learn about diversity and equality across the school. Most young people do not have an understanding of protected characteristics. A few teachers offer topics relating to discrimination and link to events like dyslexia awareness week.

However, this remains an important area for improvement. Staff should support young people to make links with the concepts of dignity and respect across their learning. Staff and young people should develop further opportunities for young people to learn about children's rights, equality and diversity, including in relation to the protected characteristics. This will support an improving sense of belonging and compassion across the school community.

- 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 that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

### 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

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

- Attendance rates across the school are significantly below national levels and too many young people currently access learning through a part-time timetable. Senior leaders have begun to allocate additional resources to improve this as this is affecting young people's attainment and achievement significantly, especially throughout the senior phase. Most young people currently have additional support needs. This includes a large proportion of young people who have English as an additional language (EAL). Overall, young people with additional support needs (ASN) are not attaining as well as their peers from across Scotland.

#### Attainment in literacy and numeracy

##### Broad General Education (BGE)

- Currently by the end of S3, the majority of young people achieve CfE third level in literacy and most achieve third level in numeracy. Senior leaders acknowledge that there is an urgent need for teachers to strengthen their professional judgment of young people's progress across all curriculum areas, including in literacy and numeracy, in line with national standards and expectations. In order to do this, they also need to look outwards at effective practice locally and nationally.

#### Senior Phase

##### Literacy and numeracy (leavers)

- In 2023/24, the majority of leavers achieved literacy at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better. This was significantly much lower than the virtual comparator (VC). This changed from being in line with the VC in the previous year. Leavers' attainment in literacy has been broadly inconsistent over the last five years. Overall, there is no pattern of improvement in literacy and the school's performance against itself is overall in decline.
- The majority of leavers achieved numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better in 2023/24. This was significantly lower than the VC. This changed from being in line with the VC in the previous four years. Overall, there is no pattern of improvement in numeracy and the school's performance against itself is decreasing.
- Across almost all measures in literacy and numeracy for leavers who have additional support needs, their attainment has continued to decline year on year. Senior leaders acknowledge the need to monitor this cohort of young people's progress and interventions to support them much more robustly to improve their levels of attainment across all curriculum areas.

## Literacy and numeracy (cohorts)

- In three of the last five years, young people's attainment in literacy at S4 at SCQF level 5 or better has been broadly in line with the VC. However, in 2022/23 and 2023/24, performance was significantly lower and much lower than the VC. When comparing the school's performance against itself at S4, there has been an overall pattern of improvement year on year since 2021/22. By S5, based on the percentage of the S5 roll, young people's attainment in literacy has been significantly much lower than the VC in the last two years, up to SCQF level 5 or better. At SCQF level 6 or better, performance has been broadly in line with the VC, except in 2022/23, where this was significantly lower than the VC. By S6, as a percentage of the S6 roll, attainment in literacy at SCQF level 5 or better, has been significantly lower than the VC in the past two years. At SCQF level 6 or better, performance has been broadly in line with the VC, but is steadily declining when comparing the school's performance against itself.
- Over the past five years, young people's performance in numeracy at S4 has been broadly significantly lower than the VC at SCQF level 4 or better. At SCQF level 5 or better, this has been broadly in line with the VC, except in 2022/23, where it was significantly lower than the VC. There was a steady decline in performance from 2020/21, to 2023/24. However in 2024/25, there was a notable improvement. This improvement is due to leaders and teachers in numeracy and mathematics working to improve courses and support for young people to achieve more. At S5, as a percentage of the S5 roll, in numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better, performance has been significantly lower or much lower than the VC in the last two years. There is a clear overall pattern of decline in the past five years. At SCQF level 6 or better at S5, attainment has been broadly in line with the VC in the last four years, but is inconsistent. By S6, as a percentage of the S6 roll, attainment in numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better has declined steadily over the past five years. At SCQF level 6 or better in S6, attainment over the past five years has been in line with the VC. There is no pattern of improvement and attainment is inconsistent.
- A few young people leave school year on year, having gained no qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Very low rates of attendance are contributing to hampering leavers' attainment and achievement. Senior leaders should work with teachers to ensure that almost all young people leave school having achieved national achievement in literacy and numeracy.

## National Qualifications (NQ)

- In 2024/25, a lower proportion of young people were presented for National 5 English, when compared nationally. Most young people presented however were successful in achieving the course at grades A-C. The majority of young people presented for N5 English in S5/6 in 2024/25, achieved an A-C award. A minority of young people were presented for Higher English in 2024/25. Of those presented, a significant minority did not achieve a grade A – C.
- Only a few young people were presented for National 5 Mathematics in 2024/25. A significant minority were presented for N5 Applications of Mathematics. Of those presented for N5 Mathematics, a majority achieved the course at grades A-C. However, a significant minority achieved a grade D or no award. Of those young people presented for applications of mathematics in 2024/25, a majority achieved a grade A-C. A majority of young people presented for applications of mathematics in S5/6 in 2024/25, did not achieve the course award. In S5/6, only a few young people were presented for Higher Mathematics. Of those presented, half 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, a majority did not achieve the course award at grades A-C.

## **Attainment over time**

### **BGE and senior phase**

- Whilst teachers in a few subject areas capitalise on up-to-date information for interventions to support young people in their learning, this is very inconsistent across the school. There needs to be more robust approaches to identifying and supporting those young people who are not on track with their learning. Young people would benefit from PTsG and all middle leaders taking the lead to support and model to subject staff, how best to support the needs of all young people with ASN in classes. Staff should continue to develop their approaches to evaluating the impact of interventions more fully to help young people's attainment to improve in line with nationally expected levels.
- Senior leaders should, as a priority, work with teachers to devise a clear, agreed raising attainment action plan. This plan should define clearly the roles and responsibilities of all staff for raising young people's attainment. An action plan should also support better the significant proportion of young people with ASN, to achieve more by the time they leave school. Importantly, this should include support to young people at risk of not achieving any nationally recognised qualifications in literacy and numeracy, by the time they leave school.

### **BGE**

- There is no overall pattern of improvement to young people's progress over time from S1 to S3 and into S4 and available BGE attainment data is not yet fully reliable. Currently, BGE attainment data is only reliable in a few subject areas. As a result, this is affecting too many young people's ability to progress and achieve at an appropriate level into and through the senior phase.

### **Senior phase**

- When compared using average complimentary tariff scores, the attainment of leavers has been consistently below the VC over the past five years. For the lowest attaining 20% of young people, the attainment of leavers was significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22 and 2023/24. For the middle attaining 60% of young people, attainment was significantly lower than the VC between 2019/20 and 2021/22. In 2023/24, this fell to being significantly much lower than the VC. For the highest attaining 20% of leavers, attainment has been consistently significantly much lower than the VC since 2020/21, and has continued to decline.
- At S4, by S5 and by S6 based on S5 and S6 respectively, when measured using average complimentary tariff scores, attainment is generally significantly lower or much lower than the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. In the latest year, there is limited evidence of improvement for young people by S6. By S6, attainment is currently in line with the VC for the lowest 20%, middle 60% and highest 20% attaining young people for the latest year.
- By S5, just over 30% of the S4 cohort remain at school until the end of S6, currently. When comparing leavers' performance using average total tariff scores, the weak attainment picture is very similar to attainment using complimentary tariff scores, over the past five years.

## Breadth and depth

- At S4, over the past five years, attainment from one or more subjects to seven or more, has been broadly significantly lower than the VC at SCQF level 4 or better. Overall, there is no pattern of improvement when comparing the school's performance against itself. At SCQF level 5C or better for one or more to seven or more subjects, attainment was in line with the VC in 2024/25. In 2022/23 and 2023/24, attainment in at least one measure at one or more and four or more to six or more subjects, was significantly lower than the VC. At level 5A in S4, attainment across all measures was in line with the VC in 2024/25. In 2022/23 from one or more to five or more subjects, this was significantly lower than the VC. At level 5A for one or more to six or more subjects, there are gradual signs of improvement since 2022/23.
- In S5, based on the S5 roll, at SCQF level 6C or better, attainment overall has declined between 2020/21 and 2023/24. This improved in 2024/25 for one or more and three or more to five or more subjects. These are in line with the VC having been previously significantly lower or much lower. At level 6A in S5, attainment has broadly remained in line with the VC, with the exception of one or more subjects, where this was significantly lower than the VC for two years.
- At S6, based on the S6 roll, attainment at level 6C or better improved to being in line with the VC in 2024/25 from three or more subjects. This had been significantly much lower than the VC in 2023/24. Until 2023/24, there had been a steady pattern of decline at 6C or better. In 2024/25, there have been improvements in attainment across all measures from one or more awards at this level. At level 6A in S6, attainment has been broadly in line with the VC, but has continued to decline gradually, over the past five years when comparing the school's performance against itself. Attainment for two or more to five or more subjects fell to being significantly much lower than the VC in 2023/24. At SCQF level 7C or better in S6, attainment has been inconsistent, but has remained broadly in line with the VC, with the exception of 2023/24, where it was significantly much lower for one or more subjects. This attainment picture is similar for SCQF level 7A.

## Overall Quality of Learners' Achievement

- Senior leaders and staff celebrate the success of young people's achievements well, including through the popular annual awards ceremonies. Staff also uses social media, house points and reward trips well to recognise and celebrate young people's achievements. Young people would feel more valued if the school celebrated their achievements in and out of class more routinely and consistently.
- A minority of young people participate in a range of clubs and achievement opportunities, which develop their confidence and social skills. These activities are designed to meet the needs and interests of all young people, including various sports, technology, games and performing arts activities. Senior leaders have only recently established a system to collate young people's participation in these activities. As a result, it is not clear how many young people are participating in these wider opportunities for achievement. The next step for senior leaders and staff is to use the data collected to identify young people not participating in wider achievement and address gaps in engagement. Senior leaders and key staff should continue with plans to develop a framework linked to skills for learning, life and work. This will help develop young people's ability to recognise and articulate the skills they are developing as a result of their participation in these opportunities for achievement.

- Most young people are gaining skills and building their social networks through targeted interventions with Youth Support Officers and mental health charities. They value the support they receive and are developing trusting relationships. For a few, this is increasing engagement with school and is also improving attendance. A few are gaining national awards at SCQF level 3 or better. However, senior leaders and key partners are not yet consistently tracking these collective achievements. There is now a need for staff and partners to work with young people to build a system that tracks their skills and achievements effectively, and extend the accreditation opportunities available. This will support staff to build on the skills gained by those participating and to ensure all young people have appropriate opportunities to achieve.
- Staff have built effective relationships with local businesses, with the support from Inverness Business Improvement District and the local Rotary Club. This has helped young people build confidence and develop creativity and life skills through participation excursions and initiatives such as 'Highland Master Chef' competition, 'Don't feed the gulls' campaign engagement with Ross County Women's Football Team. These business partners contribute to job interview experiences within the school. As a result, a few young people have gained meaningful employment.

### **Equity for all learners**

- Most staff have a sound understanding of the socio-economic context of young people and their families. They know young people and their families well and the potential barriers that they face in terms of attainment and achievement. The school has worked well to reduce the cost of the school day for example, the popular breakfast club, providing uniform, sportswear through their 'Kit for All' programme and covering the cost of excursions. This is helping to improve, for example, young people's rates of attendance and engagement in their learning, as well as participation in wider learning activities. Senior leaders should ensure they continue to monitor the impact of this aspect of the school's work to promote equity for all.
- The headteacher has developed a basic PEF action plan that has appropriate actions to address needs of identified young people. Senior leaders have agreed that a more evaluative approach to planning interventions is needed going forward. The present PEF plan includes a focus on attendance, engagement in learning, work experience and senior pupil mentoring. This is carried out by three CSWs. The plan has a list of focused interventions along with an indication of impact. For example, a significant minority of young people in the FSM targeted attendance group have improved attendance as a result.
- Senior leaders now need to track the impact of PEF spending on improved attainment outcomes for young people as well as looking outwards for good practice to inform future planning.
- Overall, attainment versus deprivation data shows there is a declining pattern of attainment in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1, and 3 for leavers over the last four years, when compared using average complimentary tariff scores. This is significantly lower or much lower than the VC between 2019/20 and 2023/24. The work of school staff is not presently narrowing the poverty related attainment gap. Senior leaders need to plan to continue further work to improve outcomes for targeted groups of young people, by the time they leave school.

- Almost all young people moved into a positive initial destination in 2023/24. This is in line with the VC. School leavers' destinations entering employment have increased significantly. They are above Highland Council, the VC and National figures for 2021/22 to 2023/24. The percentage of young people entering further education has decreased by around 12% over the same period. The percentage of young people entering higher education has remained stable between 2021/22 and 2023/24. This is below the VC and National benchmarks.

## 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.