



The Ambition: Excellence and Equity for Shetland's Learners

2022 to 2026

Year 3 Progress Report and Areas of Focus for 2025/26

Foreword

The Ambition - Excellence and Equity for Shetland's Learners was published in September 2022 and set out our four-year aspirations for improvement against the five national priorities for education in Scotland. This report outlines the progress we have made in year 3 and identifies the areas of focus being undertaken in the final year of the plan in 2025/26.

Overall, the data presents a mixed picture of improvement. In a few areas we are continuing to meet the year-on-year targets towards the 2026 stretch aims and there are several measures which indicate we are not keeping pace with the ambitious year on year improvements. With further improvement work planned, we remain optimistic of achieving all 2026 stretch aims by the end of this academic year.

Our primary literacy and numeracy attainment shows small incremental gains and sits alongside a high, but falling, level of attainment in literacy and numeracy at S3. We continue to celebrate the high levels of literacy and numeracy amongst our school leavers.

Our performance in national qualifications from secondary four onwards has improved significantly from this time last year with gains at National 5 and Advanced Higher A-C passes. Our Higher results remain relatively stable, and this is set against a positive backdrop of ever-increasing level 5 and level 6 vocational course attainment demonstrating the increasing breadth of learner opportunities in the senior phase. Indeed, our work in this area has been shortlisted for a national award.

The year on year (different cohorts of children) attainment gap data shows a marginal widening of the gap however the attainment gap for pupils in S3 has narrowed from when the same group of children were in primary school. This data demonstrates the importance of looking at attainment over time and not simply one year group of students against another. The extended free school meal scheme has increased the number of children receiving free school meals and we have captured this entire cohort of learners in our data analysis, not just those who meet the Scottish Government criteria.

Our commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) continues to shape our approach to education, fostering an environment that respects and promotes the rights of every child. With Scotland becoming the first part of the UK to incorporate a UN Charter on children's rights into law in July 2024, we look forward to building on the sector leading work we are already doing here in Shetland.

We continue to prepare our learners for the future, equipping them with the skills they need to thrive in the workforce. The breadth of support for young people in school and moving through their final years at school and onwards to positive destinations means that we have the highest participation measure statistics in Scotland, a statistic which gives us great pride.

We continue to monitor key aspects of young people’s health and wellbeing who report stable levels of emotional wellbeing but highlight areas where things could be better. And whilst our attendance overall continues to be strong, there are an increasing number of learners with lower attendance. With our colleagues in schools and partners across Shetland we are listening and ready to respond to the wellbeing challenges our young people are telling us about. Our newly published Nurturing Positive Relationships guidance will strengthen the connections between our staff, children and young people.

As we enter the fourth and final year of our plan, we remain focussed on continuous improvement at school and local authority level to meet our stretch aims by the end of 2026. At the same time, work is underway to develop our strategic work beyond 2026, with greater alignment with the 7 national outcomes for Scottish Education which were published part way through the lifespan of our local plan.



Samantha Flaws, Director of Children’s Services

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Introduction

The National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan for Scottish Education have been designed to help deliver excellence and equity in education. This is to ensure that children and young people develop a broad range of skills and capacities regardless of their social circumstances or needs.

At the start of year 3 of our own improvement plan aligned to national expectations, the five key priorities of the National Improvement Framework were:

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

These have now been replaced by 7 strategic outcomes which set out the aspirations for Scottish Education:

1. a globally respected, empowered and responsive education and skills system with clear accountability at every level that supports children, young people and adult learners to thrive. The system enables the development of their knowledge, skills, values and attributes that give them the best opportunity to succeed and contribute to Scotland's society and economy.
2. young people experiencing the benefit of schools and early years settings working in excellent partnerships with wider children's services and other partners, families, and communities, in line with the GIRFEC approach.
3. inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment which gives young people the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to society, shape a sustainable future, while celebrating and supporting progression for all.
4. high levels of achievement across the curriculum for all learners, with action to close the poverty-related attainment gap.
5. highly skilled teachers and school-leaders driving excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all, especially those with additional support needs.
6. improving relationships and behaviour, and attendance, with increased engagement in learning and a culture of dignity and respect for all.
7. an education system engaging in digital technology to enhance all aspects of learning and teaching, supported by a digitally skilled workforce, and tackling digital inequality.

Children's Services Directorate Priorities in 2024/25

- Early Action Programme
- Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing
- Excellence and Equity for Shetland's Learners
- Learning Estate Strategy
- Curriculum for Employability
- Keeping The Promise for Shetland's children

Our Ambition 2021-26. Shetland Islands Council's Corporate Plan

The Ambition – Excellence and Equity for Shetland's Learners contributes to key areas of the corporate plan:

- Covid-19 Recovery and Renewal through our focus on wellbeing.
- Climate Change through our work on learning for sustainability.
- Sustaining current jobs and creating new ones in education and through education.
- Skills and learning through our focus on attainment and achievement.
- Digital connectivity through our work within the digital learning and teaching strategy.
- Caring for the community through our commitment to rights, needs and wellbeing.

Abbreviations and explanation of quantity

PEF	Pupil Equity Funding
SEF	Strategic Equity Funding
CECYP	Care Experienced Children and Young People Funding
CoSD	Cost of the School Day
CYPIC	Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative
Core stretch aims	A set of performance measures set by the Scottish Government, with accompanying targets
Core+ stretch aims	A set of performance measures agreed by the local authority, with accompanying targets
ELC	Early Learning and Childcare
QIO	Quality Improvement Officer
NIF	National Improvement Framework
HGIOS	How Good is Our School 4th edition
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the official tool for identifying areas of poverty and inequality across Scotland
ASN	Additional Support Needs
CLPL	Career Long Professional Learning
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
ACEL	Achievement of a Curriculum for Excellence Level
BGE	Broad General Education
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
ELC	Early Learning and Childcare
SAC	Scottish Attainment Challenge
PSE	Personal and Social Education
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
VC	Virtual Comparator - a virtual cohort that is comprised of similar pupils (based on key demographic characteristics) to pupils in your school. This allows the local authority (and to schools) to compare their performance to a meaningful benchmark.

Explanation of Quantity

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

The six-point scale

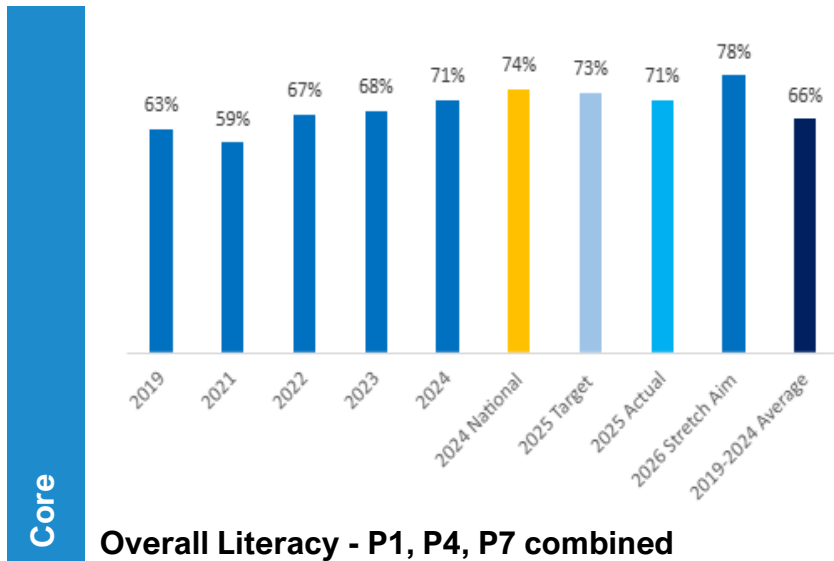
The six-point scale is a tool used by Education Scotland, local authorities and other governing bodies for the purpose of national and/or local benchmarking across a number of establishments. In education, an evaluation can be arrived at in a range of contexts and it is important to bear in mind that awarding levels using a quality scale will always be more of a professional skill than a technical process. Education Scotland have used the following definitions, and these are applied to the evaluation of progress within Shetland Islands Council's National Improvement Framework Plan.

Excellent	An evaluation of excellent applies to services which are a model of their kind. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice. It is characterised by professional understanding which is being shared to support system-wide improvement. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.
Very good	An evaluation of very good means that there are major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish the service user's experience. An evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision and is a standard that should be achievable by all. There is an expectation that the organisation will make continued use of self-evaluation to plan further improvements and will work towards improving provision and performance to excellent.
Good	An evaluation of good means that there are important strengths, yet there remain some aspects which require improvement. The strengths have a significantly positive impact on almost all service users. However, the quality of service users' experiences is diminished in some way by the aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the organisation should seek to improve further the areas of important strength and also take action to address the areas for improvement.
Satisfactory	An evaluation of satisfactory means that the strengths within this aspect of the service's work just outweigh the weaknesses. It indicates that service users have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on service users' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of service users' experiences. It implies the organisation needs to take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.
Weak	An evaluation of weak means that there are important weaknesses within this aspect of the organisation's work. While there may be some strengths, the important weaknesses, either individually or collectively, are sufficient to diminish service users' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the organisation.
Unsatisfactory	An evaluation of unsatisfactory means there are major weaknesses within this aspect of the organisation's work which require immediate remedial action. Service users' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, this will require support from senior managers, or, in some cases, at corporate level, in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the organisation.

Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy

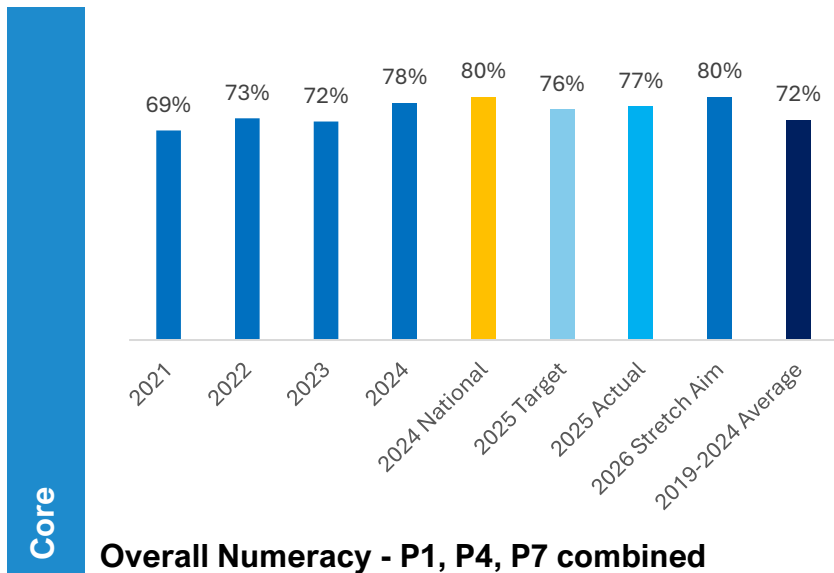
Self-evaluation: We have made good progress against this priority.

Primary Broad General Education*



We have not met our 2025 target.

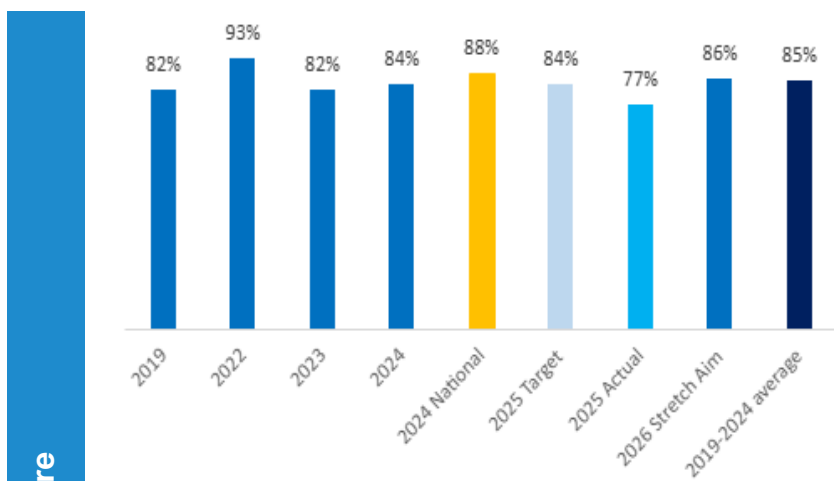
We remain confident of meeting our 2026 stretch aim.



We have met our 2025 target.

We remain confident of meeting our 2026 stretch aim.

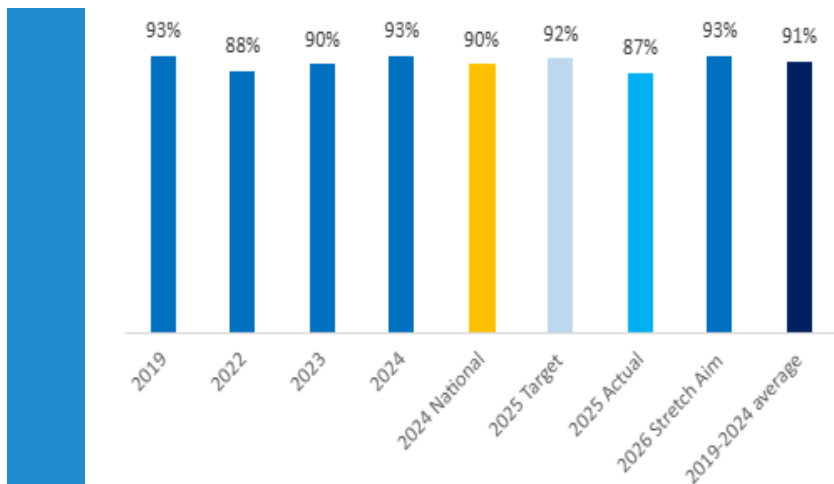
Secondary Broad General Education*



We have not met our 2025 target.

We remain confident of meeting our 2026 stretch aim.

S3 Literacy – Third level or better



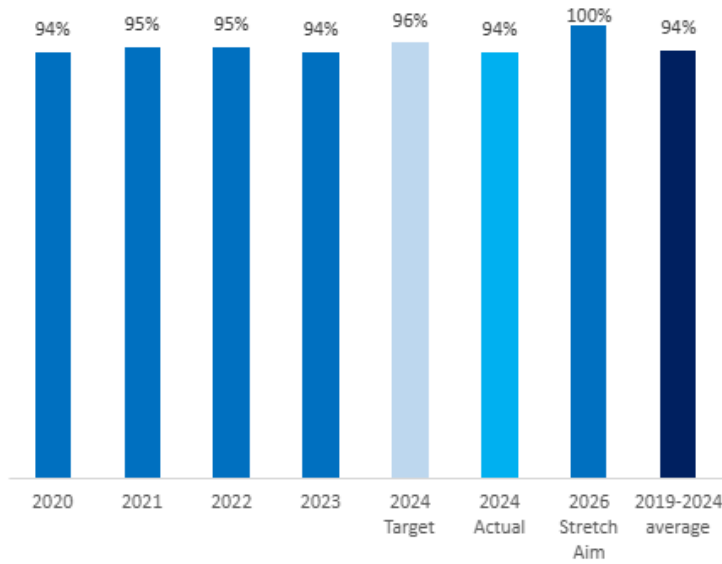
We have not met our 2025 target.

We remain confident of meeting our 2026 stretch aim.

S3 Numeracy – Third level or better

**Please note that Achievement of a Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) data contained in this report is the information held by Shetland Islands Council Children’s Services. The validated national data is published in December 2025 and may contain minor variations in the data.*

Senior Phase

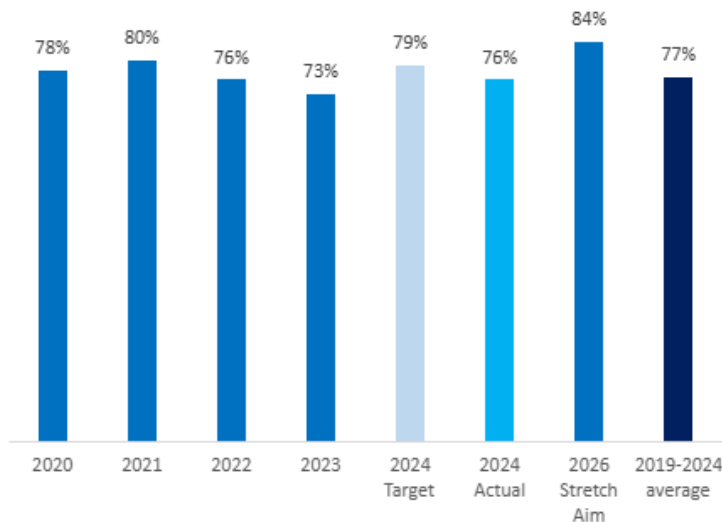


We have not met our Level 4 target. The 2026 stretch aim is at risk.

We have not met our Level 5 target. The 2026 stretch aim is at risk.

This data should be viewed in the context of comparison with other local authorities and the national average.

Level 4 School Leaver Literacy and Numeracy



Our overall school leaver Level 4 and level 5 literacy and numeracy levels remain high and broadly in line with our 5-year average. Our school leaver literacy levels remain much greater than our virtual comparator, the Northern Alliance authorities and national levels. This is true for the last five years.

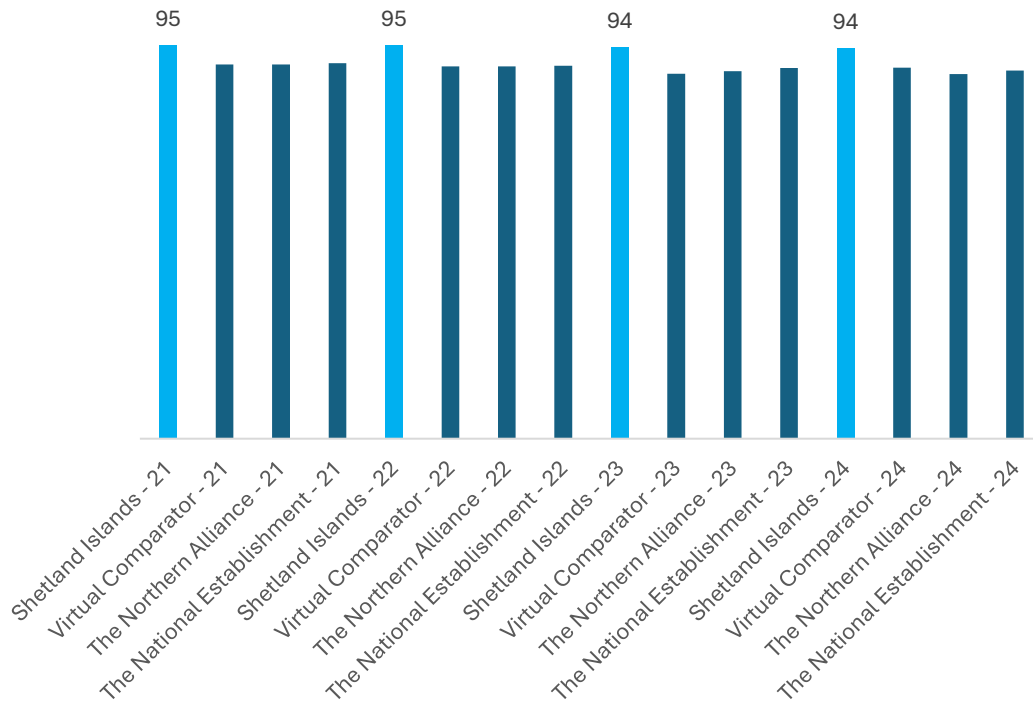
Our ambition is that all young people, where appropriate, should leave school with a minimum level 4 literacy and numeracy.

Level 5 School Leaver Literacy and Numeracy

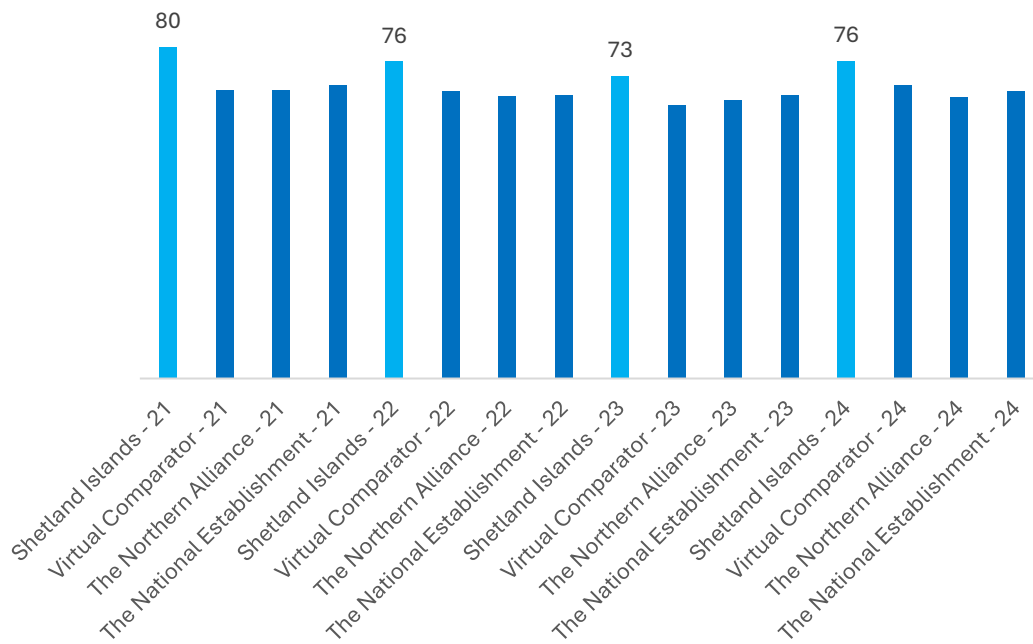
Core

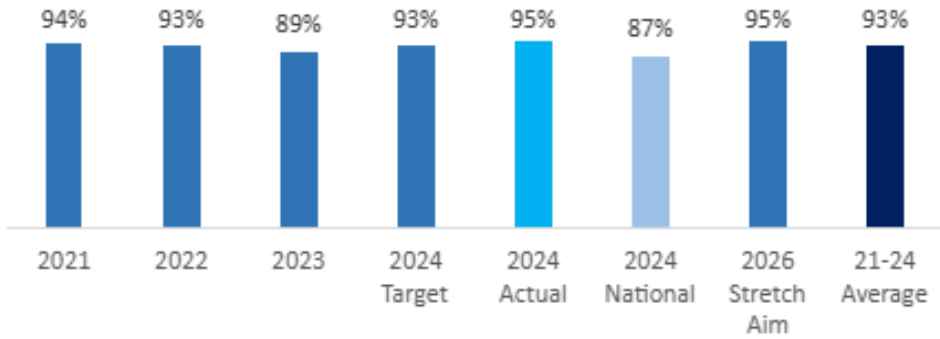
Additional Data

% Level 4 Literacy and Numeracy



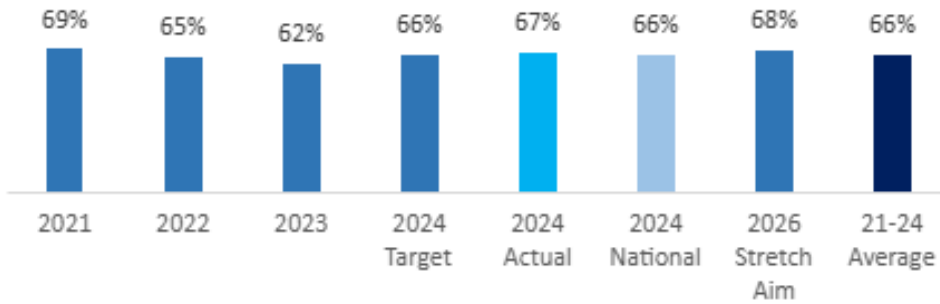
% Level 5 Literacy and Numeracy





1 or more at Level 5

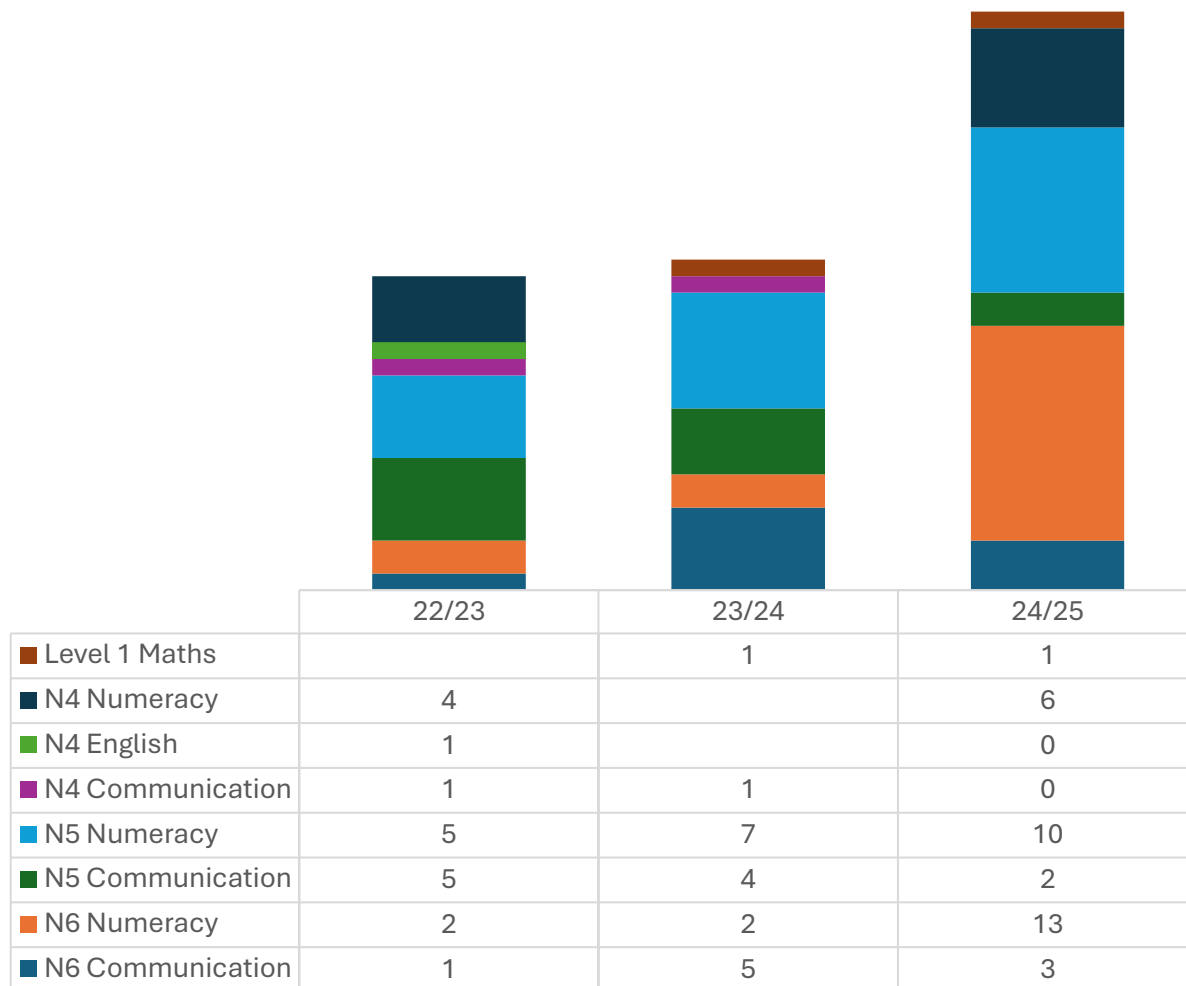
We have exceeded our target for this indicator and have met the 2026 stretch aim.



1 or more at Level 6

We have exceeded our target for this indicator and are on track to meet the 2026 stretch aim.

Additional Data from the Bridges Project



Activity to raise attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy

Shetland continues to invest in the National Improving Writing Project with thirteen further schools engaging this year. 43 teachers have undergone the training, and a fifth cohort of school engagement is planned for 2025/26.

The Bookbug Leader network was established in collaboration with Shetland Library with online professional learning and networking sessions held. The Shetland Library is an important partner in supporting the development of reading and wider literacy skills.

The Literacy, Language and Communication working group continues to meet. This group brings together expertise from across Children's Services and partners to discuss, develop and implement shared priorities which support literacy skills with a particular focus on those children and young people who may have literacy difficulties.

Revised 3- and 4-year-old developmental overviews were designed and tested before being rolled out to all early learning and childcare settings. Developmental overviews are a valuable tool for observing and supporting children's developmental milestones. Developmental overviews are snapshots that help practitioners understand a child's current stage of development and to plan appropriate next steps.

Building on the success of this collaborative work across service areas, developmental overviews for 2-year-olds will be developed in 2025/26.

We were unsuccessful in our bid for external funding to participate in the 'Learning to Read in the Early Years Professional Learning Programme' however Strategic Equity Funding will support this work in three schools in 2025/26.

Professional learning remains a key driver in raising attainment across literacy and numeracy. Emerging literacy training has been delivered to staff across early level. This enables staff to gain a broad understanding of the components of early literacy skills.

Our numeracy development work has been highlighted by Education Scotland as highly effective practice and will be showcased at a national event in November, which will be attended by LA SAC Lead Officers, the Scottish Government SAC Policy Unit and Education Scotland's Attainment Advisors. This work demonstrates how two large primary schools have transferred their use of quality improvement methodology from the National Improving Writing Project to planning for improvement in numeracy. We supported this work with Strategic Equity Funding.

One of the schools involved were recently inspected and the following was highlighted- "Senior leaders and teachers have regular robust tracking, planning and assessment meetings. Alongside rigorous moderation activities, this has strengthened teacher's understanding of achievement of a level. Senior leaders and teachers use the local authority data tool effectively to record progress and achievement in attainment in literacy and numeracy."

Another example of effective practice at Sound Primary School was highlighted in the most recent national Pupil Equity Funding Report ([pupil equity funding report 2025 .pdf](#)) The school used Pupil Equity Funding for a support for learning teacher and learning support worker to lead targeted group work for pupils not on track to stimulate an interest and improve confidence in literacy and numeracy and to reduce pupils' anxiety when they transition to secondary school. Strategic Equity Funding projects also indicate impact on attainment and confidence with numeracy in other schools.

Work is planned to look at the role of the National Standardised Assessments when using teacher professional judgement to assess progress towards achievement of a level. In particular how numeracy data can be used diagnostically by class teachers. This is a focus for discussion at attainment meetings between central officers and schools, where the data dashboard is used to focus on attainment.

In the secondary sector work has progressed in relation to secondary staffing and curriculum. Proposals for a revised staffing formula in secondary schools have been developed and are being discussed with Secondary Headteachers. The completion of this work is expected in 2025/26.

In an authority wide effort to raise attainment, there has been a focus on relationships, learning, teaching and assessment. Shetland's Standard for Learning, Teaching and Assessment was published in August 2024. Over the course of the year, the standard is becoming a key reference point for schools in supporting learning and engagement and high-quality teaching. The Northern Alliance Learning, Teaching and Assessment Toolkit supports effective implementation of the Shetland Standard. By the end of September 2025, 60% of Shetland schools have engaged with the LTA toolkit. 100% of schools have identified a learning, teaching and assessment priority in their school improvement plan. Common shared themes are around learner participation and ownership of learning, pace and challenge and environment, experiences and interactions.

Focus on Outdoor Learning

An evaluation of the outdoor learning qualification, 'Learning Beyond the Classroom' SCQF Level 7 has been undertaken and 100% of staff reported that the qualification had been beneficial for their professional development and had a direct impact on the quality of children and young people's learning experiences. 100% of staff reported that they felt more confident taking children and young people outdoors. Two members of staff presented their learning at a local probationer event, sharing practice and plying new knowledge and skills.

Three members of staff who have completed the qualification at one school have contributed to a whole school approach to outdoor learning. The development as a school is an example of good practice.

"My class are very enthusiastic and motivated. The children became familiar with local outdoor areas and were leading their learning." Class Teacher

"I shared information and knowledge with the wider staff team, supported other staff to lead outdoor learning with their classes." Class Teacher

A further eight members of staff are undertaking the qualification. This includes staff from the ELC, primary and secondary sector.

An outdoor learning position statement has been finalised, and this will be shared in due course. Professional learning to support staff to capture learning outdoors to support assessment and professional judgement has been delivered however this is still in the early stages. This continues to be an area for development.

One school has been identified to undertake a pilot project focusing on outdoor learning, health and wellbeing and the impact on attainment. Outdoor clothing has been purchased for children in primary 1-3 to support experiences and high-quality learning. Progress and impact will be monitored and evaluated.

Areas of Focus in 2025/26

Literacy

- Continue the expansion of the National Improving Writing Project – cohort 5 to commence in August 2026
- Continue the termly meetings of the Literacy, Language and Communication strategic group
- Pilot 'Literacy for All' tracker in one primary school
- Continue ongoing Emerging Literacy training to schools and early years settings
- Participate in Education Scotland's 'Learning to Read in the Early Years Professional Learning Programme'
- Enhance opportunities for the moderation of writing

Numeracy

- Implement the Stem Space and Maths Burst numeracy developments
- Further develop quality improvement tools to enhance learning, teaching and assessment in numeracy

Senior Phase

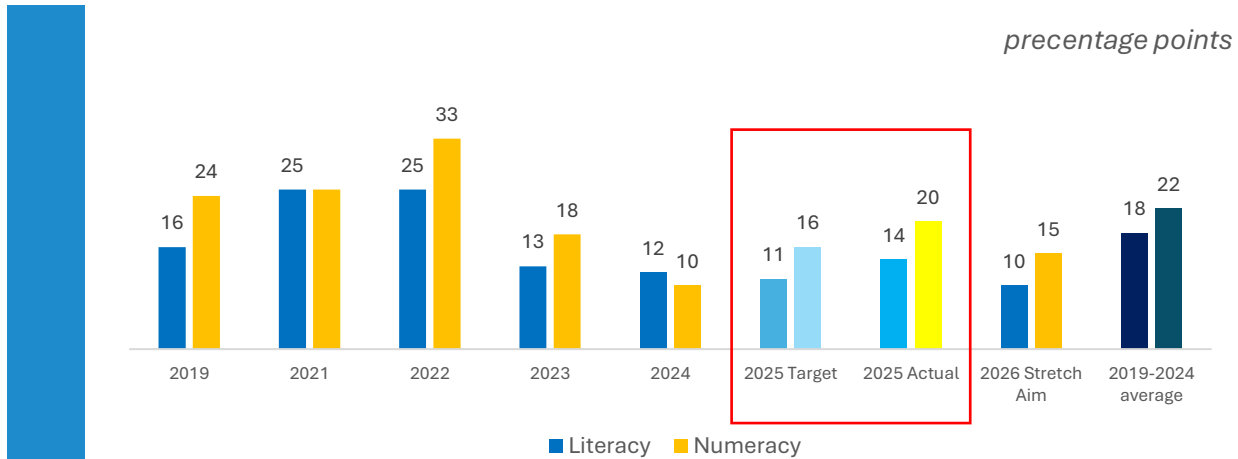
- Continue the secondary curriculum and staffing review within the context of national education reform
- Develop more sophisticated systems and processes to increase the effective use of data at school and local authority level.

Outdoor Learning

- Develop an outdoor learning pathway from ELC to Secondary
- Plan and deliver professional learning opportunities to support staff to assess learning outdoors and feel confident in professional judgements

Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people

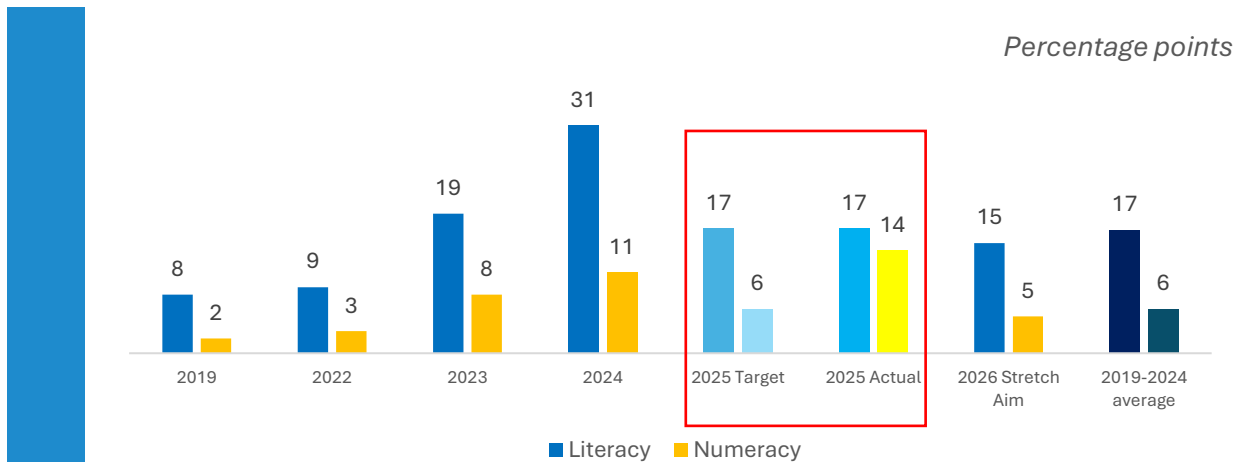
Self-evaluation: We have made good progress against this priority.



Primary - Overall literacy and overall numeracy attainment gaps – percentage points - pp

We have not met our targets for closing the gap in primary literacy and numeracy; however, we remain below the 5-year average. We remain confident of meeting the 2026 stretch aim.

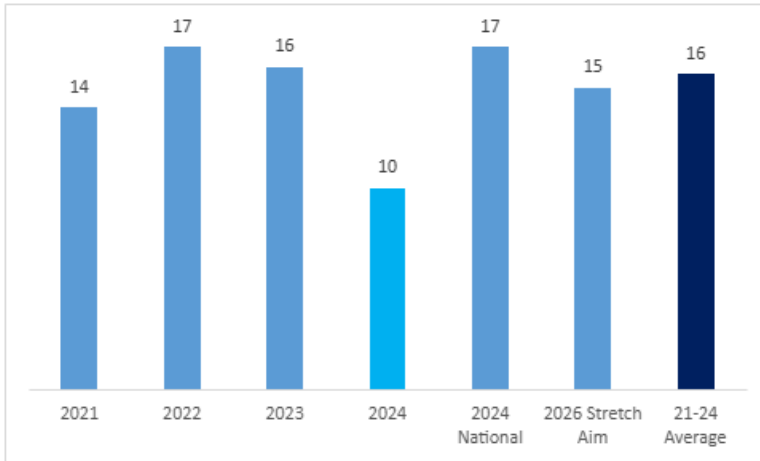
Core+



Secondary 3 - Overall literacy and overall numeracy attainment gaps – percentage points - pp

We have not met our targets for closing the gap in secondary literacy, but the gap has widened in numeracy. We remain confident of meeting the 2026 stretch aim.

Core+

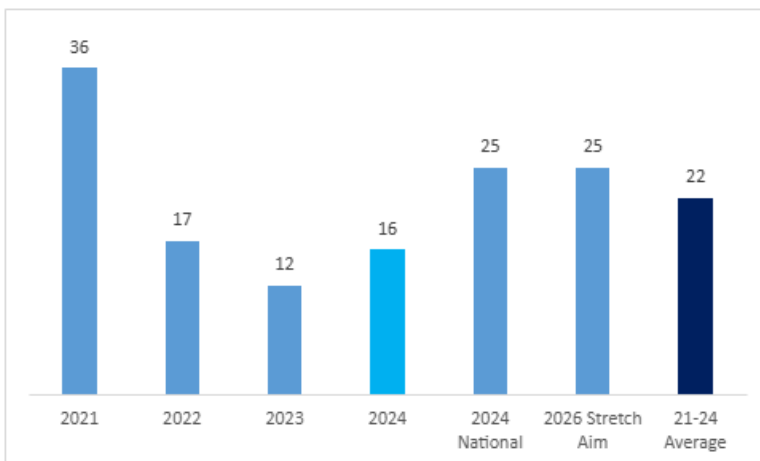


The attainment gap for young people leaving school with one or more qualification at level 5 is narrowing. We are on track towards reaching our 2026 stretch aim.

The attainment gap for this indicator is below the national figure. This has been the case for the past three years.

2025 school leaver attainment data will be available in Spring 2026.

1 or more, Level 5, All SCQF – FSM Gap – percentage points - pp

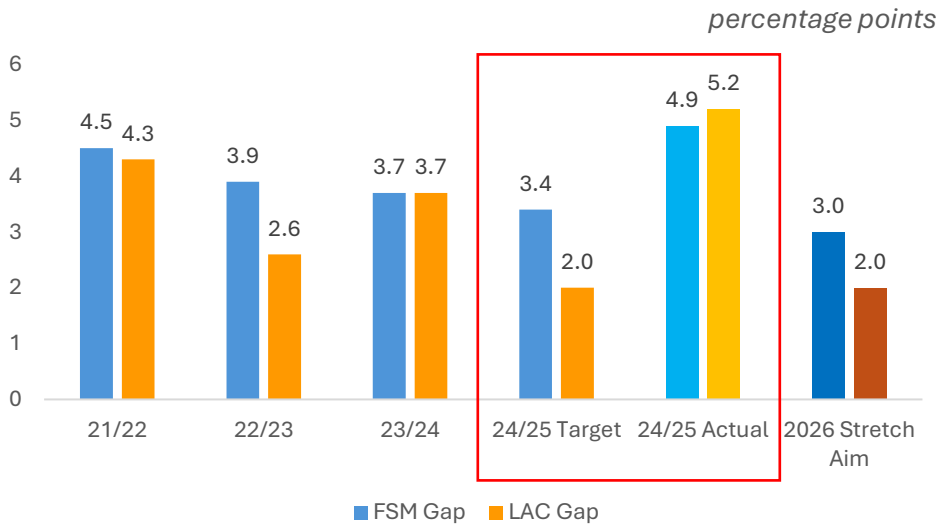


The attainment gap for young people leaving school with one or more qualification at level 6 is relatively stable. We are on track towards reaching our 2026 stretch aim.

The attainment gap for this indicator is below the national figure. This has been the case for the past three years.

2025 school leaver attainment data will be available in Spring 2026.

1 or more, Level 6, All SCQF – FSM Gap – percentage points - pp



Attendance Gaps – percentage points - pp

The attendance gap has marginally widened for pupils in receipt of free school meals and for care experienced children and young people. The data change is small but requires us to consider how we ensure that poverty related and other barriers to attending school are addressed for these cohorts.

Activity to close the poverty related attainment gap between the least and most disadvantaged

The Attainment Advisor (AA) led on the completion of the thematic review for all three funding streams of the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF). Progress was discussed during our Improvement Meetings, Closing the Gap Workstream meetings as well as Excellence and Equity Board meetings. In addition to discussions, impact was reported on through use of data (plans and reports) across the three funding streams. The thematic review was shared, via a PowerPoint presentation, to the Senior Leaders Network which is a termly business meeting with school managers and deputs.

Over the last two years, the Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) Fund has been re-aligned and a dedicated teacher is now in place. The teacher works collaboratively with a range of professionals to improve outcomes for children and young people who have experienced care and those on the cusp of care. There is evidence of positive impact including:

- Young people being supported to re-engage with school and return to learning
- Involvement of young people to co-create bespoke timetables, making good use of self-motivators and rebuilding relationships
- Supported transitions for those coming into care to a new school

The teacher is now a member of the 'Meids Board' (Corporate Parenting Board). Within this, a group of young people with experience of care and professionals from across the partnership, work collaboratively. This group currently has two priorities, chosen by the young people, one of which is Education.

The teacher has delivered a training session for headteachers. Feedback was positive and has resulted in increased awareness among staff about their duties and The Promise. There is strong evidence of the voice of children and young people featuring throughout. Headteacher feedback has also been used to identify next steps. These will inform the education priorities for the new 'Shetland Promise' plan for the next academic year.

Headteachers stated that the following training and support would be helpful to further understand and implement 'The Promise Scotland' in settings-

- Information to share with parents
- Staff training on The Promise
- Links for LAC co-ordinators
- Guidance on legislative responsibilities
- Send copies of slides
- School visit
- Training for LAC coordinator
- UNCRC resources

- Training offered at In-Service
- Meet with Headteacher
- Share Improvement Plan when ready

Collaboration with Island authority partners and the Scottish Government is well underway to further develop approaches to identifying and addressing poverty in a remote and rural context. A data sharing agreement is now in place and will support enhanced collaborative working across Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles to identify shared strategies to close the poverty related attainment gap.

The Attainment Advisor (AA), in collaboration with Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) delivered a session on Cost of the School Day (CoSD) to Shetland's Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in February 2025. This was well received and ensures NQTs have a deeper understanding of poverty and associated barriers to engagement and progress with learning and attainment. They are also aware of the CoSD Toolkit and other resources including the Voice Network and the eLearning module.

The AA provided an information sheet for Headteachers. This included an overview of CoSD resources provided by CPAG;

- CoSD Toolkit
- CoSD Ideas Bank
- CoSD eLearning
- CoSD Voice Network

This information sheet included a link to a Google Form to collect information about CoSD related work currently taking place across the Local Authority (LA). 100% of respondents are currently taking action to reduce costs associated with the school or ELC day.

Headteacher feedback is set out below:

“Parent Council provide a school jumper. We provide a bag and all stationery. School trips are free to pupils including residential trips. We fundraise and source funding to cover costs. We provide all weather clothing - wet suits, snow suits, boots, hats and gloves. We host events e.g. Burns Supper with no cost to families attending. We send home extra fruit and veg we have grown to our families.”

“Consistent use of Pupil Equity Funding to pay transport costs for all school trips - no contributions/donations sought to decrease stigma. Commitment to reduction of 'fund raising' events across the school year - both schools focused and nationally, e.g. 'Children in Need'.”

“Costs for P7 residential trip kept to a minimum. Harvest assembly no longer asks for items to be brought in, instead families are signposted towards independent donations to foodbanks. This signposting may also serve to subtly inform families about the availability of local foodbanks. “

“No school uniforms. School swap shops for Halloween, Christmas, Outdoor & Sports clothes. Facilitate large community swap shop in summer holidays. No charge for school items (pens, pencils etc). No charge for school trips - everything fundraised, or money sourced elsewhere. Free fruit for Primary and Secondary (at tuck shop). Free breakfast club for P6 - S5 every morning.”

“Free Breakfast club, Free fruit/vegetable for snack at breaktime, no charge for practical classes, school sweatshirt given to every pupil, no charge for school trips, stationary available free in school.”

“Fundraising - low profile, donations only. Winter coat swap, Christmas jumper swap. Anchor referrals for groceries following Covid. No charges for trips and activities. Free breakfast club five days a week. Free after school club Tuesday and Thursday. We are working with Sandness community and the Aith Leisure Centre to provide transport to children's swimming lessons so that parents can stay longer in work and come home in time for pick up from Aith. This also reduces transport costs.”

Next Steps for the Attainment Advisor in 2025/26

1. Provide termly newsletters highlighting different aspects and sharing of effective practice re CoSD
2. Provide a session for the ELCC Networks to explore costs associated with in the sector
3. Provide a session for NQTs on CoSD and equity/poverty
4. Create a PowerPoint presentation for all schools to use with staff/stakeholders when considering costs associated with the school/ELC day
5. Offer a CoSD Network for schools and partners to discuss challenges and share effective practice as well as signposting to available resources. This Network could also collaboratively develop an authority wide policy on CoSD for Shetland Islands Council as well as provide advice and guidance and support on how to create a school/setting CoSD Policy too.

Pupil Equity Funding

Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is additional funding allocated directly to schools and targeted at closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The funding is allocated to schools on the basis of the estimated number of children and young people in P1-S3 registered for free school meals (FSM) under the national eligibility criteria. Pupil Equity Funding is part of the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF).

Headteachers submit a PEF Plan as part of school improvement planning and report on the impact in the annual Standards and Quality Reports. Work is ongoing to review the planning and reporting processes. Quality Improvement Officers are also considering how to include a specific PEF focus during attainment progress meetings. This will be supported by the [SAC Logic Model](#) and the [SAC Self-Evaluation Resource](#).

During 2024, the Scottish Government carried out a national sampling exercise to share effective practice regarding the use of PEF and to consult with local authorities and Headteachers on the challenges and opportunities PEF processes face. Six schools were identified by the LA and were visited by the Attainment Advisor. Due to travel restrictions on SG staff, colleagues from the SAC Policy Unit joined the first three meetings online, via Teams but were able to make three visits in person.

Analysis of PEF Plans

Plans are submitted to QIOs along with the School Improvement Plan. Progress is shared via the annual Standards and Quality Report. Schools are encouraged to consider the [Interventions for Equity](#) through their PEF plans. Local guidance is provided to support the planning process, and this includes advice on engaging with parents/carers and also with learners. The planning and reporting templates have supported schools to make planning more explicit and focussed and encourages schools to ensure outcomes are specific and informed by data.

The Children's Services financial team monitor PEF spend at key points across the year. Schools value the support and advice given on PEF spend, recruitment and purchasing. Information on spend is shared regularly with LA officers. This allows the authority to monitor and report on spend thus ensuring the frequency of significant underspends has been reduced

Plans include a range of themes, depending on the school context, allocation and analysis of data.

Literacy	Numeracy	Health & Wellbeing
Raising attainment (targeted support) Speech, Language and Communication skills Individualised Support Small groups Resources	Raising attainment (targeted support) Individualised Support Small groups Resources SEAL	Breakfast Club Pupil mentoring and support Residential trips Outdoor learning Emotional wellbeing Social experiences Nurture

Other supports include play, family learning and wider achievements. Participatory budgeting is used effectively in two schools.

The quality of PEF plans is variable and areas for development include:

- Effective use of data to identify individuals and target groups. The introduction of a primary data dashboard should have a positive impact on both the availability and ease of analysing data. Further work is underway to replicate this for the secondary Broad General Education and Senior Phase.
- Baseline data included to inform tackling gaps
- Outcomes are informed by data and are clearly measurable
- Consultation with stakeholders
- Evidence-based interventions identified to close poverty-related attainment gaps, for example, [Education Endowment Fund, Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#)
- Outcomes could be more focussed on individuals and expected progress
- Data should be used to identify the target group and to measure progress

Strategic Equity Funding

Strategic Equity Funding is the part of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge with a revised mission statement “to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty related attainment gap.” The funding is distributed annually to every local authority based on Children in Low Income Families Data.

Shetland Islands Council receives £100,000k annually.

Strategic Equity Funding has been used to support the achievement of the local authority stretch aims and to complement and accelerate the work undertaken in schools to close the poverty related attainment gap and improve wider outcomes for children and young people.

We delivered a revised suite of support through Strategic Equity Funding to accelerate school level approaches to closing the gap. Up to £30,000 was made available for school bids. A list of these projects below and some feedback provided by the project lead in each setting is set out in the table below.

School	Broad Area of Spend	School Feedback
Aith Junior High School	<i>We employed a teacher for 4 days, who had a focus on pupils within P4 and P7 who require support to achieve a level.</i>	Pupils increased their confidence in both literacy and numeracy. Engagement and motivation improvements were observed by the class teacher and the support staff. Longer-term investment would have resulted in more significant and measurable changes in attainment.
Anderson High School	<i>We used the money for the hire of Aspire Fitness Room for our S4 & S5 Core P.E. classes.</i>	This funding has made a huge difference. We have been experiencing high numbers attending each class – on average 15 per class. More importantly, a large number of these pupils find it difficult to engage with larger groups doing team activities in the games hall or 60/40. These pupils are showing an interest in developing their own health and wellbeing whilst using the gym and their engagement has been excellent. This is a really good opportunity for pupils who have provided very positive feedback.

Quotes from pupils

“More opportunity to develop my fitness”

“I am busy after school and can’t go to the gym so this gives me the chance to go during the school day”

“I really enjoy coming to the gym and don’t go outside school, I feel more comfortable coming during school time”

“It feels different to normal P.E. and I can do my own thing”

“I like to be able to exercise on my own”

Baltasound Junior High School

We bought a range of resources linked to play based learning which could be used throughout the primary department in our school. This included KAPLA blocks, a rugged robot and a sand tray for classrooms.

Huge improvement in spaces offered for Play in Middle and Upper Primary, this, in addition to staff becoming more skilled in developing and planning spaces has resulted in higher engagement in play, and in some cases could be linked to higher attendance and attainment.
Slowly raising awareness of play with pupils, parents and staff – BYPTSD, Social Media, Up Helly Aa etc.
Staff willingness to try new things and embrace play and observation

Overall feeling in staff that Play Based Pedagogy has improved engagement in almost all learners across primary
Play creates a more inclusive learning environment. Together time and GSPD allowed variety of ages groups to play together

Despite various challenges, 93% of our FSM pupils have maintained an average attendance of over 90%. This is a clear reflection of their resilience, the strength of our engagement strategies, and the supportive relationships nurtured across our school community. A number of pupils are "On Track" or meeting milestones in their developmental pathways, demonstrating positive progress in both academic and social-emotional areas. Notably, pupils in P1, P3, and P4 have shown consistency across terms in both attendance and SHANARRI wellbeing indicators.

Brae High School *Staffing*

We now have a more consistent approach to universal support, and agreed standard across the school, which is supported by Ed Psych and Outreach Team.

Almost all teaching staff have engaged with the CIRCLE and have adapted their environment to be more inclusive
ASN Department report reduced demand on them, particularly in terms of reactive support. Has helped to realign staff understanding that Stage 1/2 support is responsibility of the class teacher.

Observations - more consistent approach to environment, reduced cognitive load.

Hamnavoe Primary School	<i>Staffing</i>	<p>Our initial SEF bid was a project to support pupils and young people within our community who were exhibiting anti-social behaviour, were verbally and physically abusive to staff and absconding from school. The plan was for a partnership with our youth club and community work. Unfortunately, these services weren't able to commit to the project and the spend went into supporting behaviour within the school instead. Our data demonstrates improvement across the 6-month period it was measured. (See attached survey data). We continued to work with the Police on anti-social behaviour, and they have visited the school running a survey and have had a presence in our school. Pupils have also visited the police station on a school trip. Anti-social behaviour of pupils in our school has almost stopped with very few reported incidents in 2025.</p> <p>The SEF funding was used to provide an additional LSW resource. This was targeting pupils in P567 with SEBD, providing additional 1:1 support, a weekly sports club to support wellbeing, additional outdoor time and supported time in the BASE for regulation.</p>
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North Roe Primary School	<i>Staffing - ASN and class cover teacher an extra day each week for 6 weeks (plus 1 preparation day) to deliver our 'Literacy Acceleration Project' following a team-teaching approach in our multi-composite class.</i>	<p>It allowed us to have far more focused teacher time. The visiting teacher took on the writing element and I took on the reading element. In addition to the extra time during the 6 weeks, we were looking to establish a longer term, sustainable way to approach the progression of literacy in our multi-composite setting with high ASN needs. We observed enthusiasm for the project, alongside some resistance, and the majority of learners engaged with the phonics programme (phonics international) and writing interventions. We are still collating data from our reading assessments in which we can see what that progress translates to in terms of outcomes.</p>
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Scalloway Primary School

*Staffing
8 days teacher supply to enable us to release class teachers to target individuals and small groups of learners.*

P3-6 focused on Spelling and the Highland Literacy most commonly used words. Teachers adapted resources and used approaches similar to the CYPIC NWP to map and track progress. All learners have made progress. Some staggering. P7 targeted a mixture of maths, sentence structure and reading comprehension. Two pupils requested some help in addition as they could see the benefit of individualised time with their teacher.

P1/2 mostly focused on phonics, targeting pupils who were not secure on identified blends, sounds etc.

Overall, confidence boost for pupils in all classes.

We could comfortably have carried these projects over into 10-12 weeks.

Sound Primary School

Staffing - teacher to cover teachers to support assessment and other aspects of Improving Numeracy Project. Also post project - targeted interventions to close gap within Numeracy for those with attendance related gaps

This project has been included in a national publication highlighting effective practice in Scotland.

[Purpose of this report | Impact of Attainment Scotland Funding \(ASF\) on Numeracy and Mathematics 2022-25 | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

Whiteness Primary School

Staffing

It allows us to put targeted interventions in place to support specific needs of our learners who need bespoke support. It gives learners a safe space to talk to a trusted adult, who is able to give advice / reassurance. This enables learners to be ready to learn when in class and helps them to deal with life's challenges they are facing. (ASN Teacher)

I have noticed learners in receipt of interventions funded from SEF are in a better place to learn and look forward to their time out of class to reset and learn strategies to cope with the challenges they are facing (class teacher).

Anxiety in maths resulted in a pupil asking to work on simpler maths and after the intervention- they are now able to work back at the appropriate level. (class teacher)

Pupil A is now on track to achieve second level in H&W by the end of P7. Pupil A is now on track to achieve second level in Numeracy by the end of P7. Pupil A is now on track to achieve second level by the end of P7. (P&A)

Pupil B is on track to achieve second level in all literacy, numeracy and HWB outcomes by the end of P7

Pupil C (P4) has achieved first level in numeracy and HWB, L&T and Reading. Pupil C requires support in writing and is not expected to achieve first level by the end of P4.

Areas of Focus in 2025/26

- Deliver tightly targeted support through Strategic Equity Funding to accelerate school level approaches to closing the gap
- Deliver a pilot project to enhance learning and teaching through the use of digital devices in the West Mainland
- Ensure PEF and SEF are a strong feature of Attainment Reviews, School Improvement Visits and Team Improvement Visits

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

Self-evaluation: We have made very good progress against this priority.

There are no Core or Core+ indicators associated with this national priority.

Activity to place the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education.

Children's Rights

In 2024 UNCRC was officially enshrined into Scots Law. Childrens Services areas of focus for Childrens Rights last year were to promote Childrens Rights and increase understanding of what it means to young people, staff and partner organisations as well as wider public by

- Increasing strategic engagement between young people and the Local Authority (and other organisations)
- Increase staff understanding of Childrens Rights and what it means in practice
- Promote Childrens Rights to the wider Shetland community

Strategic Equity Funding supported Childrens Rights development through Shetland Youth Voice activity and development in 2024/25. Shetland Youth Voice is a local advocacy group dedicated to empowering young people across the Islands. It aims to engage young people in meaningful participation within their communities, fostering leadership, advocacy, and positive change. By creating a platform where young individuals can express their ideas, opinions, and concerns, the project ensures that their voices are heard and valued in all aspects of community life and underpin Article 12 of the Childrens Rights Convention (children to express their views and have those views considered in matters affecting them).

Wider Strategic engagement with SIC and relevant community partnerships

Shetland Youth & Employability Service supported a series of youth participation engagement via Shetland Youth Voice, Scottish Youth Parliament and wider-scale activity. They engaged with various organisations, services and young people (see table below) throughout the year in order to promote UNCRC Article 12 (Young people's views to be heard and taken seriously) and to encourage organisations to consider their decision-making, policies and activities through a Childrens rights lens.

Activities below are a combination of young people's asks (for example Shetland Youth Voice priorities which include Wellbeing, Transport and Future employment in Shetland as well as approaches from other Council departments and partner organisations such as ZetTrans (Public Transport partnership), Planning and NHS. As well as some of the engagements described below,

young people also played key roles in recruitment processes of the new Director of the Directorate and Executive Manager for Schools.

As well as young people's engagement in the process, the service also held workshops/presentations on UNCRC Incorporation and what it means to organisations. These were shared with the local Chief Officers group (comprising of leaders from SIC, Police Scotland, Adult & Childrens Social Work, NHS and Public Protection Committee) and follow up workshops were done for NHS Shetland's Executive and Public Protection Committee.

While engagement to wider partners and with young people has increased, there has not been the same progress corporately within SIC – something which needs to be done in order for some of the procedures and decision-making processes to be child-friendly and future impact of decisions affecting young people adequately assessed. Next year there will be a focus on how this can be done with targeted engagement across the council and Shetland Partnership.

Engagement Activity	How It Was Carried Out	Who Was Engaged	Purpose & Outcomes	Dates
MSYP School Surgeries	Regular engagement sessions were held by the Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP) in partnership with other elected members. These visits took place in every secondary school across Shetland, offering drop-in opportunities for pupils to raise concerns or share views.	Young people from every secondary school in Shetland.	The sessions aimed to ensure young people had direct access to their youth and local representatives, helping elected members understand local priorities and represent these more effectively at both local and national levels.	September – December 2024
MSYPs engagement with decision makers	MSYPs have had regular, structured engagement with key local and national decision-makers throughout the year. They have been invited to attend and contribute to Shetland Islands Council's Education and Families Committee, where they are asked to consult with young people in advance on specific agenda items. They also meet with the Chair and Vice Chair of the committee and the Director of Children's Services for direct discussions on young people related issues. In addition, MSYPs have met with the Convenor and Leader of the Council, as well as a wide range of elected members, to discuss youth priorities. These meetings often happen in person, either in schools, the Town Hall, or at events such as the Youth Voice Summits. They have also met with Shetland's MP and MSPs during constituency visits and national events.	Education & Families Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Director of Children's Services, Council Leader, Council Convenor, elected SIC members, Shetland MP, regional MSPs.	These meetings provide a direct line between young people and decision-makers, allowing MSYPs to raise specific issues affecting Shetland's young people and influence policy discussions.	Ongoing Monthly meetings with director
Youth Voice Representative Review	Young people were invited to put themselves forward to represent their school or organisation on Shetland Youth Voice. Once selected, these representatives participated in dedicated sessions to reflect on what was working well, what they would like to change, and how Youth Voice could better meet their needs.	Youth Voice representatives from across Shetland's secondary schools and community organisations.	The feedback gathered was used to inform updates to Youth Voice's governance structures and support the development of a refreshed constitution that better reflects the views and needs of its members.	July 2024
Young Islanders	Themed consultations focusing on housing and transport were facilitated through the Young Islanders Network. These were carried out in a	Young Islanders	The activity helped gather meaningful insights on the challenges of young islanders, which were then used to	Sep 2024

Network Consultation	survey, allowing young people to share lived experiences of growing up and living on an island.		influence local and national thinking around island-specific policy and provision such as the National Islands Plan	
Big Ideas Event (Stirling)	Young people from Shetland attended the Big Ideas event in Stirling as part of the Young Islanders Network. During this event, participants were consulted on a variety of topics relevant to island life through workshops, presentations and discussion panels.	Young Islanders from Shetland attending the national event.	Their contributions fed into wider consultations taking place across Scotland's island communities, ensuring Shetland's youth voice was heard in shaping national discussions and initiatives.	Aug 2024
Public Bus Network Engagement	We visited every secondary school in Shetland to consult young people about their experiences using the public bus service. giving students the opportunity to comment on current provision and suggest improvements.	Pupils from all Shetland secondary schools.	The feedback provided helped inform local authority considerations around how the bus network could be improved to better meet the needs of young people across the islands.	October 2024 - Jan 2025
Inter-Island Transport Consultation	This activity involved direct engagement with students in Shetland's island schools, exploring how young people travel between islands and what barriers exist. Discussions were held in group settings, focusing on personal experiences and suggestions for change.	Pupils in island schools across Shetland.	The consultation formed part of the evidence base for a business case on improving inter-island transport, ensuring that young people's views were clearly represented.	March 2025
Place Standard Tool Consultation	Using the Scottish Government's Place Standard tool, young people from every school and year group were asked to reflect on their local areas what they valued, what they would improve, and how they experienced their communities.	Young people in all year groups from all schools across Shetland.	The responses have been collated to contribute to Shetland Islands Council Corporate Plan, ensuring that the views of young people play a role in shaping future priorities for the islands.	March 2025
SYP Manifesto Consultation	Y&E Staff/ SYP visited all Shetland secondary schools to facilitate sessions aimed at gathering young people's views for the Scottish Youth Parliament's national manifesto. Multiple year groups were engaged in each school to ensure broad representation.	Pupils from various year groups in every secondary school.	The feedback gathered was submitted to SYP, contributing directly to their national policy.	April 2025
Mobile Phone Use Focus Groups	Structured focus groups were held in every secondary school to discuss mobile phone use, including what works well, what concerns exist, and how young people think schools should manage phone use.	Young people from all secondary schools, through targeted focus group discussions.	Insights from these conversations will directly inform the development of a mobile phone policy for schools across Shetland, ensuring young people's voices are central to decision-making.	April 2025
Shetland Youth Voice General Meeting	All Youth Voice members came together for a general meeting to decide on the group's strategic priorities for the year ahead. The process involved facilitated discussions and a collective decision-making exercise.	Youth Voice members representing schools and organisations from across Shetland.	The group identified four main priorities for 2024–25: Transport, Mental Health, Jobs & Fair Work, and Public Spaces for Young People.	Aug 2024
Youth Voice Summit - Transport	The first themed summit focused on transport and was held onboard the NorthLink Ferry to symbolise island connectivity. The event brought together young people from across Shetland with	Youth Voice members, national and local transport	Young people discussed transport challenges and shared solutions directly with those who plan and provide	Jan 2025

	local and national partners, including public and private transport providers.	representatives , private companies.	services. The summit helped build shared understanding and momentum around improving youth access to transport.	
Youth Voice Summit -- Jobs & Fair Work	The second summit was a residential event held in Unst. It focused on employment, skills, and fair work. Young people participated in workshops and discussions with a range of partners.	Youth Voice members, local employers, national organisations and local organisations.	The summit provided a platform for young people to share their views and shape future actions on employment and fair work, while also building stronger links between youth and employers in Shetland.	March 2025
Youth Clubs and Hubs	Children and young people help to design the club programme for each term: arts & crafts, high energy and social opportunities.	Children and young people attending local youth clubs and hubs.	Promoted ownership, creativity and relevance in programming for local provision.	Ongoing Monthly
Shetland Pride Youth Event	Our staff helped to facilitate this event. The Pride Committee ensured young people were at the heart of decisions of this event.	Young people attending the event	Ensured youth voice were central to event planning and delivery, making the event inclusive and empowering.	May 2024
Youth Voice	Corporate plan sessions with Maggie and Peter Peterson	Youth Voice representatives	Ensured youth priorities were reflected in strategic planning for the Council.	Oct 2024
Winter Ball	Young people helped to design, plan and run this event	Young people across Shetland involved in Youth Voice and wider networks.	Offered a youth-led celebration that showcased leadership, creativity and organisational skills.	Dec 2024
MSYPs Attending SIC Education & Families Committee	MSYPs asked on specific agenda items, to consult with young people. They also have the opportunity to comment on any agenda item they feel relevant.	MSYPs representing Shetland. MSYPs Constituents	Enabled direct representation of young people's views at senior decision-making level in local education and family policy.	Ongoing (Since 2017)

Childrens Rights in Practice (Professional Development in Childrens Services Staff)

Childrens Parliament and Education Scotland input at in-service Sessions (August 2024)

Childrens Rights was one of the strands for Childrens Services in-service training last year with 32 staff from Shetland schools taking part in “*UNCRC – what does it mean for me?*”. This was led by Childrens Parliament’s Cathy McCulloch and Education Scotland’s Maxine Jolly.

It was aimed at staff who had less confidence in discussing UNCRC and were relatively new to the concept. It introduced UNCRC (linking with other broader priorities including The Promise/ASN Review, Creativity & Health and Wellbeing, what it means for families/carers/parents and how to engage learners in a meaningful way.

As well as these sessions, Childrens Parliament also had input at the Early Learning and Childcare Team’s mandatory session meaning every practitioner from Shetland ELC settings received an introduction to why rights are relevant to the young people they support and work with.

Each year as part of the Probationer Teacher development programme, UNCRC is one of the themed workshops early in the academic year. This is led by Lewie Peterson (Partnership Officer for SIC and former Strategic Lead for the Rights respecting Schools Programme). It is a compulsory session and up to 12 new staff to SIC explore what UNCRC can mean for Shetland Schools, young people and situations where this can be challenging.

Earlier in 2025, a small group of teaching staff also took part in *ScotDec's "Rights across the curriculum"*, which supports a pedagogical approach where human rights, particularly those outlined UNCRC, are integrated into various subjects and aspects of learning. This means not only teaching about rights but also creating a learning environment where rights are respected, promoted, and experienced by students.

Next year there are plans for young people to be involved in the planning and creation of CPD activity for Council staff with Shetland Youth Voice members engaging in a series of Relationships themed in-service sessions planned for August 2025.

Awareness raising of UNCRC to Parents/Wider Community

While social media can reach many demographics, Shetland Youth Voice sought to reach those who don't access it to the same extent through partnering with weekly print publication, Shetland Times to produce a monthly *Youth Voice* section of the paper. All articles are written by young people and showcase island life of Shetland's young people and those who find themselves living, working and studying here - provides an opportunity for young people to use their communication skills to engage with a wider audience.



Youth Voice

A round-up of news from young Shetlanders

Meeting the chief and feeding back views

By BERTIE SUMMERS

Joe Smith and I went to the Lerwick Town Hall to take part in a meeting with Maggie Sandison this month.

This was one of our regular duties as members of the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Mrs Sandison is the chief executive of Shetland Islands Council, a role which she has held since 2018. Our meeting was a follow-up to the one that we both went to at the end of October, as executive members of the Shetland Youth Voice organisation.

Mrs Sandison also attended the transport forum that took place onboard one of the NorthLink vessels, after it had become increasingly clear that young people in Shetland viewed access to good transportation links as one of their biggest priorities.

Beanie-Ann Wood currently chairs Shetland Youth Voice. She and a few other members of this youth-led organisation spent an hour at the town hall on 20th January.

We used this time to fill out a survey the council had created and released for young people to respond to. It contained questions on the different issues that are facing young people in Shetland. Issues included transport, roads, housing and jobs.



Development chairman Dennis Leask sits with members of Shetland Youth Voice.

Transport focus of youth voice summit

By KALI THOMSON

Transport was the focus of our first Shetland Youth Voice Summit this month, which was held on 14th January.

This followed a vote on priorities for the year ahead, which was carried out by young people in October. It highlighted transport as their number one focus. This month's summit was a lively and productive

event hosted aboard the NorthLink Ferry. It brought together young people, local political leaders and industry experts to talk about key challenges and opportunities in transport across Shetland.

The day included workshops on topics like inter-island connectivity, school transport, conversations with elected members and creative solutions from organisations like Loganair. This set up

was useful, because it promoted open and honest conversations - with many brilliant ideas suggested.

This really showed the value of giving young people a platform to influence our future community. Some of the main concerns concerned travel on and off the island, and the fact it is not affordable for young people. There are issues with reliability, due to these services often being

cancelled or delayed. And there are also problems with the frequency of buses, with it being acknowledged that there is a lack of buses on Sundays and large gaps during critical hours. Additionally, young people often feel unsafe on buses, specifically when travelling late at night. Youth Voice is looking forward to future summits discussing different topics, and hopes to continue this success.

Shetland Youth Voice won the YouthLink Scotland National Award for participation and youth voice earlier this year. Re-established in 2024, Shetland Youth Voice is making sure young people across the islands have a genuine role in local decision-making. With over 50 members, the group has already made an impact—bringing national partners to a Transport Summit, influencing the council's Corporate Plan, and creating new social events for young people. It's about having a seat at the table and being taken seriously. From transport to mental health, members are speaking up and shaping the future of their communities. Along the way, they're building skills, gaining experience, and showing just how much young people can contribute when they're listened to.

When UNCRC was incorporated in July 2024, Childrens Services launched a school competition to come up with images of Shetland life through the eyes of young people. Young people were asked to contribute images to go along with UNCRC articles of their choice. The winning entries are currently being digitised for learning resources to be used by Shetland Schools and young people.

While some activity has had a wide reach, there has been a struggle to reach parents/carers on UNCRC (and other issues affecting young people) with events not being well attended or engaged. There are plans to create a digital signposting resource with Child Protection Committee that anyone can access and that schools can point people to.

Children's Needs

The Child Inclusion Research Into Curriculum Learning Education (CIRCLE) primary and secondary resources are becoming embedded in settings across the authority. CIRCLE begins from the standpoint that teachers are experts in teaching and that what is required to support inclusion is a framework that allows this expertise to be applied in the most effective way, using a set of general principles and considering four factors:

- The Environment
- Structures and Routines
- Motivation
- Skills

During this year we have continued to offer professional learning for staff in schools and observed how many settings are using the framework effectively including the use of the inclusive classroom scale and participation scales.

In one setting the CIRCLE resources have been used to guide decision making for composite classes. In another setting all staff have undertaken the training to ensure consistent and data driven decision making about how adults meet the needs of all learners in the school.

Significant progress has been made in the development of the Nurturing Relationships and Promoting Positive Behaviour in Schools and Settings Guidance. The documentation has been developed and drafted with extensive consultation with key stakeholders taking place across the school year. It is expected that the guidance will become a central aspect of Children's Services professional learning offer for all staff in 2025/26.

Although not a direct commitment within our Excellence and Equity Plan it is worth noting the initiation of a Support for Learning Review. The review aims to identify effective practices benefitting children, young people and their families, highlight existing challenges and gaps in provision which negatively impact on children, young people and their families and implement recommendations for improvement.

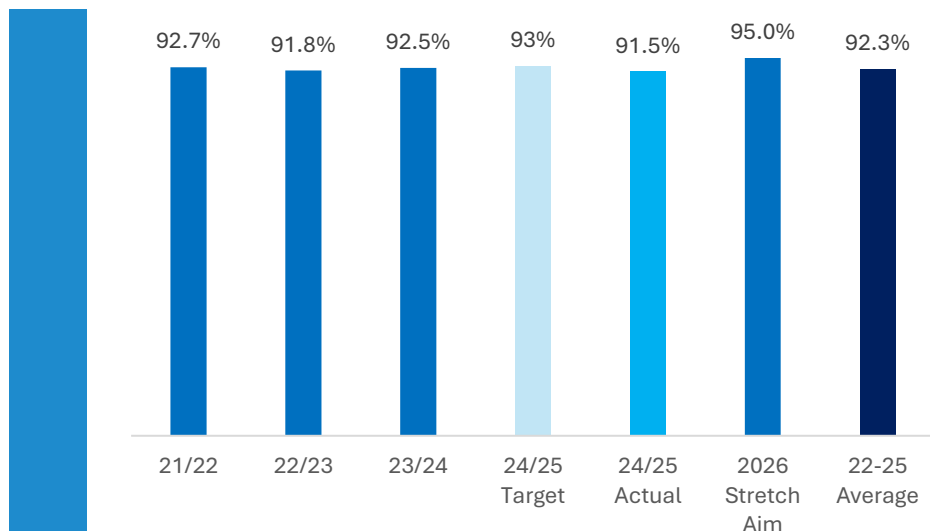
Areas of Focus in 2025/26

- Implement Nurturing Relationships and Promoting Positive Behaviour: Inclusive Practice
- Developing our approaches to child friendly complaints handling
- The Promise: Attainment and achievement of children and young people in care or on the cusp of care

Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing

Self-evaluation: We have made good progress against this priority.

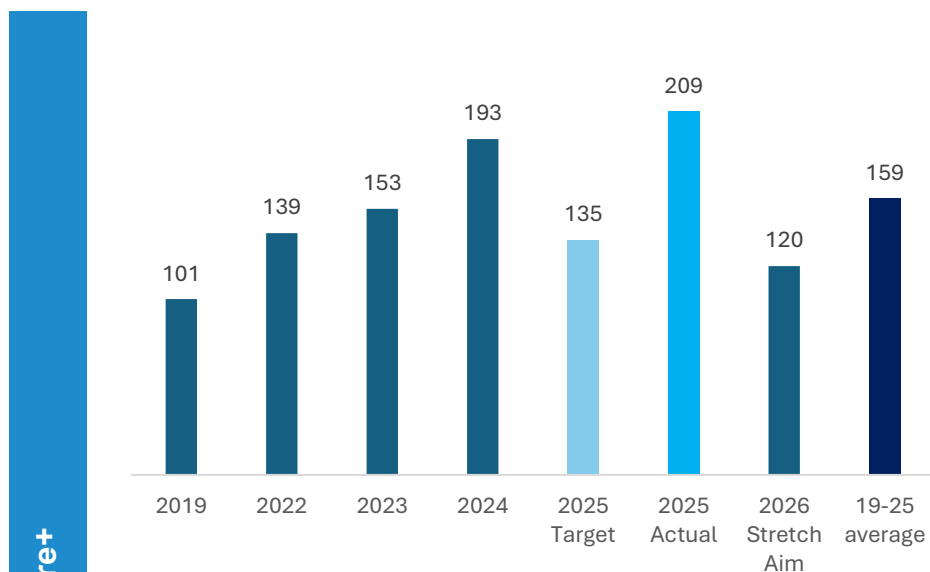
Attendance



We have not met our 24-25 target. Whilst primary attendance rates remained static, there was a decline in secondary pupil attendance.

Core

Overall Attendance (primary and secondary combined)



We have not met our annual target for this indicator, and the stretch aim is unlikely to be met for 2026.

The number of children with less than 80% attendance has increased. This continues to be a key challenge and reflects national trends.

Core+

Attendance – Number of pupils with less than 80% attendance

Low, persistent or chronic school non-attendance is a multi-faceted issue and usually symptomatic of complex family situations, requiring effective assessment and supportive individualised approaches with trusted key professionals.

With the new datasets, we have strengthened the existing multi-agency planning and partnership work supporting pupils with persistent or chronic low attendance. Partners include Education Outreach Services, Educational Psychology Service, School Counselling Services, Youth and Employability Services, Family Support Services, CAMHS, Allied Health Professionals, and other 3rd sector organisations.

A revised attendance policy was published in December 2024 followed by operational guidance in August 2025.

Embedding this guidance, which includes information on coding different types of absence consistently will improve the quality of data across the authority. The guidance also includes a staged intervention framework with assessment tools, strategies and links to partner agencies. Working with children, young people and their families to understand the root cause of low attendance is key to making a positive change in this area. In addition, we are signposting school leaders to Education Scotland's Improving Attendance resources and have discussed attendance regularly at Headteacher Development Days.

Robust monitoring and tracking of attendance data and consistent operational practice should guide schools for improvement. Further targeted work in schools to support children attend is expected to have a positive impact on this indicator in 2025/6. Four schools are undertaking national improvement projects using quality improvement tools and methodology.

Detailed, individual school attendance termly overviews are being sent to schools which will enable more efficient identification of key challenges and local trends.

Fortnightly attendance information (based on raw data) for each local authority is published by the Scottish Government analytical services online and we are using this data to inform our next steps over improving attendance.

Nurturing positive relationships is a key focus for staff across Children's Services and the full implementation of the nurturing positive relationships guidance in 2025/26 is intended to ensure schools are a welcoming and nurturing environment for all children, responding positively to the changing needs of children and families.

Improving Attendance Activity Summary

Strategic

Publication of revised Promoting and Managing School Attendance Policy. Approved by SIC December 2024.

Consultation meeting on amended draft guidance with pupil support teachers' subject development group and Anderson High school attendance improvement working group.

Local focus group meetings to develop attendance coding guidance illustrations for local context scenarios. Members of the focus group included school senior management, pupil support, outreach teachers and SEEMiS officer.

Attainment Adviser and Education Support Officer undertook focus group discussions with learners and parents at the Anderson high School to help understand the issues and inform the staged intervention framework for supporting attendance.

Launch of Promoting and Managing School Attendance Operational Guidance. The guidance highlights a staged approach to supporting attendance, a rigorous approach to tracking and monitoring attendance, and has clear guidance on attendance and absence management.

Professional Learning

Launch of Promoting and Managing School Attendance Policy to School managers in online twilight session led by Attainment Adviser and Education support officer in January. The session introduced the policy and highlighted the draft Operational Guidance.

Participation in national online attendance improvement seminars and consultation with several authorities on attendance coding guidance. Education Scotland National Attendance Network meetings promoted and attended by some schools.

Education Scotland delivered training to five schools' management and pastoral support teachers on improving Attendance using Quality Improvement approaches. Three schools will be planning improvement projects with an attendance focus over session 2025/26 and will be supported by the attainment Adviser and ESO Inclusion.

August In-service focus on the launch of Nurturing Relationships and Promoting Positive Behaviour in Shetland Schools Guidance. The parallel launch and focus on whole school culture and ethos aligns with Promoting and Managing School Attendance Policy and Guidance.

Training on use of Attendance operational guidance for clerical and senior management teams. Further professional learning in 2025/26 to embed clerical practice.

Business intelligence SEEMiS data attendance profiles sent to individual schools termly to support robust monitoring and tracking of attendance.

Areas of Focus in 2025/26

- Fully implement Nurturing Relationships and Promoting Positive Behaviour: Inclusive Practice
- To continue a Directorate wide approach to improving attendance with a focus on improving overall attendance and reducing the number of learners <80%
- Review the Anti – Bullying Policy, Procedures and Guidance
- Carry out a review of the data collection approaches to health and wellbeing indicators
- Continue to improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment, particularly in relation to learner engagement

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

Self-evaluation: We have made very good progress against this priority.

Participation Measure

The Annual Participation Measure (APM) reports on the education and employment activity of 16–19-year-olds in Scotland and is the source of the Scottish Government’s National Performance indicator “Percentage of young adults (16–19-year-olds) participating in education, training, or employment”. In 2025, this national indicator stood at 93.3% compared to 92.7% in 2024.

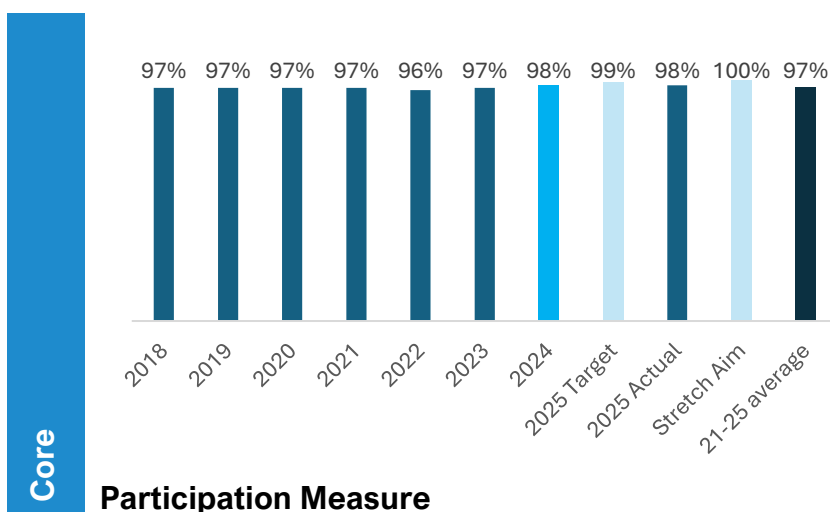
In 2025, we had the highest participation in Scotland at 97.5%. Dundee City had the lowest participation rate at 91.3%.

We also had the lowest unconfirmed rate among all local authorities at 0.7%—nearly half that of the next lowest, East Renfrewshire (1.4%). For island comparisons, Western Isles participation rate is 96.2% (4th out of 32 LA) and Orkney at 94.4% (11 out of 32 LA).

Shetland Data 2025 vs 2024

	2025	2024
Participating	97.5%	97.8%
Not Participating	1.9%	1.7%
Unconfirmed	0.7%	0.5%

Progress is very much down to successful partnerships between SDS, Youth & Employability Services and school partners. Full report: [2025-annual-participation-measure-statistics.pdf](https://www.shetland.gov.uk/media/2025/05/2025-annual-participation-measure-statistics.pdf)



The participation measure in Shetland the highest in Scotland. Given the small % of young people aged 16-19 not in a positive destination and the even smaller % of FSM and ASN pupils within that figure, it is not appropriate or valuable to set a gap stretch aim for this indicator.

We have had a Work Placement Officer in post from 14th April 2025. Work placements remain open to all Senior Phase pupils, across Shetland.

The number of young people accessing a work placement through WorkIt was 99 in the academic year 2024/2025.

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) has funded the Moving On Employability Project (MOEP) to provide supported work placements. In the academic year 2024/2025 they provided 44 supported placements, including 2 care experienced pupils and 36 with a disability.

DYW also put in place targeted provision to support 10 individual pupils, furthest from a positive destination.

Children's Service carried out a partnership course review to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing the important relationship between Shetland Islands Council and UHI Shetland in maintaining and/or enhancing the partnership offer across S3-S6. The review highlighted the significant value amongst all stakeholders placed on the partnership programme and identified aspects of the programme that could be managed more efficiently in order to maintain the overall breadth of the programme.

The partnership programme has been shortlisted in the Pearson National Teaching Awards. The mission of the Pearson National Teaching Awards is to celebrate and recognise excellence in education.

For a list of Skills for Work and Foundation Apprenticeships and Academy Courses go to <https://www.shetland.uhi.ac.uk/schools/>

Areas of Focus in 2025/26

- Continue the roll out of the My World of Work digital profiling tool
- Fully implement the revised partnership course offer
- Target support for young people with barriers to positive destinations