

Education Scotland Scottish Attainment Challenge

National Summary Report
December 2022 - March 2023

For Scotland's learners, with Scotland's educators

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Section 1

1.1 Introduction

As part of the cycle for reporting on the implementation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), attainment advisors produce reports triannually. This process ensures there is a continuous narrative where next steps are identified and progress made towards them.

This summary report is an overview of the analysis of the progress of all 32 local authorities for the period December 2022 to March 2023. Illustrations throughout this summary are examples from local authority reports.

The key theme for this reporting period was data for improvement and is summarised in Section 2. It outlines the improvement and the progress local authorities are making in using data to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.

1.2 Progress towards next steps for this period

In the first round of triannual reports all local authorities identified their next steps for the implementation of the SAC refresh. When summarised in the <u>Scottish Attainment Challenge National Summary Report September to November 2022</u>, key themes for next steps emerged as:

- Pupil Equity Funding
- Data
- Care Experienced Children and Young People Funding
- Stretch aims

These key themes continued to highlight the importance being placed by local authorities on the <u>SAC Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress</u> (the Framework).

In addition, local authorities are taking action to ensure the successful implementation of the Strategic Equity Fund (SEF). This is a positive indication that in the first year of the fund, local authorities have been quick to ensure that effective planning and measures have been put in place.

There is strong evidence that all local authorities have made progress towards their next steps. Indications suggest that the pace of progress has improved further. This is particularly notable in relation to the implementation and use of the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) which was referenced by 75% of local authorities.

Pupil Equity Funding

Most local authorities outlined the substantial progress being made in using the Pupil Equity Fund. There is evidence that the following key areas have strongly contributed to the progress being made in closing the poverty-related attainment gap:

- Tracking and monitoring of interventions and spend
- Planning, reporting and review
- Visits/meetings/drop-ins
- Impact and evaluation
- Financial support

The use of data is interwoven throughout these areas and is a key component for all local authorities when implementing activities which contribute to progress. In most instances, progress is not attributed to only one of the areas identified above, rather a combination is evident. It is clear that where local authorities have developed a cycle for the implementation of the PEF, strong progress has been made.

Tracking and monitoring is cited in the next steps by more than a third of local authorities. In some, the focus of this has ensured quality assurance processes are embedded and intended outcomes have had an impact. Tracking and monitoring is also an ongoing process and not just a one-off activity. This is also supporting local authorities to identify any likely underspends at an early stage.

Tracking and monitoring

Consistently applied quality assurance process for primary schools and early years centres has resulted in more robust monitoring of the impact of PEF interventions.

Progress has been made in supporting schools in the monitoring of the PEF spend. The local authority (including headteachers) continues to self-evaluate by tracking and monitoring the progress being made in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

The local authority has revisited its review process. Additional training targeted at business support officers has developed an awareness of the need to ensure that all PEF spending is committed across the academic year.

The impact of PEF interventions was tracked effectively using the 'Closing the Gap Planning and Tracking Interventions Tool'. In 2021-22, 89% of learners fully or partly met the intended outcomes for tracked PEF interventions.

The education accountant and the SAC lead monitor the PEF spend monthly, and at the end of each financial period. The local authority continues to prioritise tracking and monitoring of PEF spending, allowing focused attention and clear prompt action by the quality improvement team.

There is strong evidence that local authorities have increased their expectations of how schools plan for, and report on, the impact of the PEF. This is further supported by local authorities engaging in the systematic review of plans and providing

feedback. Tracking and monitoring of spend is also evident in this process. This is providing robust support to headteachers and ensuring that interventions and approaches are being more appropriately managed.

For some, it has also involved developing new systems for planning, reporting and reviewing plans and reports.

Review of planning and reporting

The central team has made progress in systematically reviewing and developing PEF planning and reporting. The process has included looking beyond the local authority for good practice.

There is evidence that the updated version of the PEF planning and reporting format is resulting in a more consistent approach to the effective use of data, evidence-based rationales and well-planned outcomes and measures.

Collaborative lead officers are monitoring PEF plans and engaging in regular dialogue with headteachers about the impact of interventions and resources.

All schools have had thorough feedback on their PEF plans. Meetings have taken place between the SAC lead, the attainment advisor and headteachers to support making plans more measurable.

Good progress has been made in revising the quality improvement framework which features refreshed approaches to planning for PEF.

Consultation with all sectors is underway to refine the PEF planning tool. Evidence of significantly more focused PEF planning can be seen with clearer identification of individuals/groups.

All schools now have a PEF plan which is included within the Standards and Quality Report and school improvement plan. Clearer PEF outcomes and measures are providing a more robust support for measuring impact.

An effective quality assurance process was introduced to monitor and evaluate plans and facilitate PEF.

During COVID-19, understandably, the ability of local authority officers to visit schools was reduced. It was also difficult for headteachers to fully implement their existing plans. Local authorities' systems for quality assurance are now being strengthened, and there are strong signs of recovery. In just under half of local authorities, progress has been attributed to central officers visiting schools, engaging in regular meetings and drop-in sessions. This is providing challenge and, in some instances, targeted support for focus schools.

Visits, meetings, drop-ins

In response to a request made by headteachers, the attainment advisor and the SAC lead officer arranged PEF drop-in sessions for headteachers to discuss PEF spend with colleagues from finance. It is anticipated that the impact of these sessions will result in less underspend and tighter more accurate planning. All schools have been offered one-to-one PEF support and professional learning. Themes of support include effective planning based on robust evidence, implementation, tracking and monitoring and evaluation.

All schools have had thorough feedback on their PEF plans. Meetings have taken place between the SAC lead, the attainment advisor and headteachers to support making plans more measurable.

Thirteen schools have been targeted in this reporting period, with a further six schools identified as requiring a visit from the AA to explore PEF underspend and planning.

Rigorous quality assurance activity has directly informed a range of input including financial advice, professional learning and targeted school visits. As a result, the PEF underspend has been reduced and identified schools have been supported to implement appropriate interventions.

PEF mid-year visits to schools have been in place since 2018-19 session. These involve the AA and SAC lead officer meeting with all schools between January and March and discussing PEF. These visits include supporting schools to collect impact data throughout year, evaluate funding impact, financial monitoring and sharing practice. Positive progress has been made with school link officers attending these visits alongside the AA and SAC lead officer.

All primary, secondary and additional support needs establishments have now had a focused support/challenge visit by either the PEF officer, equity team and/or the attainment advisor.

There is growing acknowledgement of a requirement for robust quality assurance processes. These processes are helping local authorities and schools monitor the impact and evaluation of the PEF which is paramount when considering all aspects of the cycle.

This is perhaps a reflection of the clear expectation set out in the Framework in relation to the role of local authorities in: "supporting and challenging schools in their use of PEF to make progress in improving the health and wellbeing and educational outcomes of children and young people impacted by poverty."

For some local authorities, this is a new layer of quality assurance and indicative of the importance placed on their overall strategic responsibility in managing the PEF.

Impact and evaluation

The establishment of a consistently applied quality assurance process for primary schools and early years centres has resulted in more robust monitoring of the impact of both SEF and PEF interventions.

For example, members of the central team working alongside headteachers to review the impact of PEF spending.

This was followed by a series of PEF 'quads', where headteachers worked together to review effectiveness of the PEF process, impact to date and explore lessons learned.

The authority has revisited and updated the school improvement planning cycle and Standards and Quality Report following engagement with headteachers. As a result, there is clear focus on demonstrating impact of PEF through measurable outcomes.

Consultation is underway with all sectors to refine the 'PEF planning tool'. Evidence of significantly more focused PEF planning can be seen with clearer identification of individuals/groups, Gaps are being identified using data, with outcomes/measures leading to impact on progress being recognised.

All schools now have a PEF plan which is included within their Standards and Quality Report and school improvement plan. Clearer PEF outcomes and measures are providing a more robust support for measuring impact.

Tracking and monitoring of spend is also evident. This is providing robust support to headteachers and ensuring that interventions and approaches are being more appropriately managed. In some local authorities this includes support from finance officers.

Financial support

Monitoring of the PEF including interventions, evaluations and finance is now in place which will be shared with the quality improvement officers. Targeted support is beginning to be provided where PEF is not being implemented effectively to maximise impact on learners.

The education accountant and the SAC lead monitor the PEF spend monthly, and at the end of each financial period. The local authority has continued to prioritise tracking and monitoring of PEF spending, allowing focused attention and clear prompt action by the quality improvement team.

The local authority is committed to reducing the financial underspend across identified schools. Schools identified as having an underspend have received communication regarding this and have had discussions with the finance team regarding challenges and solutions.

The local authority has revisited its Pupil Equity Fund review process. Additional training targeted at business support officers has developed an awareness of the need to ensure that all PEF spending is committed across the academic year. Regular review of underspends leads to offers of support for headteachers. The local authority will continue to monitor committed spending with the intention of reducing it further.

Strong progress has been made in understanding PEF carry over and forecast. The quality improvement manager, alongside finance colleagues, has worked hard to collate this information and disseminate it. Thirteen schools have been targeted in this reporting period, with a further six schools identified as requiring a visit from the AA to explore PEF underspend and planning. This has resulted in a significant reduction within three months.

Bespoke guidance has been created and supports senior leaders in understanding of the key principles of PEF. It also provides clarity on local governance structures. This guidance is used by all schools in receipt of the funding and clearly outlines criteria on areas of finance and staffing.

Rigorous quality assurance activity has directly informed a range of input including financial advice, professional learning and targeted school visits. As a result, the PEF underspend has been reduced and identified schools have been supported to implement appropriate interventions.

Strategic Equity Funding

The majority of local authorities cited the Strategic Equity Fund within the progress towards their next steps. There are clear signs that local authorities have acted with pace to ensure that this funding stream is embedded in their strategic approaches.

Of those authorities, more than half have used the fund to recruit new posts with a varying range of roles and remits. Whilst there were indications of local authorities' intent to do this previously, the detail of those posts was not explicit. Evidence is now emerging that there has been more clarity, consideration and detail given to how specific posts can enhance outcomes for children and young people and, in particular, those living in poverty.

Establishing new posts

A Strategic Equity funded education officer with a SAC remit has been recruited to work with schools and strategically gather intelligence around the use of Pupil Equity Funding and its impact.

A successful recruitment process led to the appointment of a Strategic Equity Fund lead officer who will audit processes and approaches to electronic tracking across all sectors. As this work further develops it will provide efficient and effective methods to identify trends in attainment data to allow for targeted interventions across the authority.

Through the Strategic Equity Fund the local authority has created family support worker posts and enhanced principal teacher posts. They will be based in four targeted primary schools. To inform their remits, the head of service and quality improvement officer for equity held informal focus groups with learners, parents and carers. This highlighted the need for support with learning, access to a key person in school and an understanding of the challenges that families face.

Front-facing posts such as principal teachers for numeracy, equity in learning, teaching and assessment and digital equity have now been appointed. The authority's clear vision for how the Strategic Equity Fund team will be deployed using a three-tiered approach of 'supported, guided and independent' was shared with all headteachers.

The local authority has decided to appoint a development lead at principal teacher level to support learners who have experienced care. This will be funded through the Strategic Equity Fund and will mean the appointee will have access to the full amount of the Care Experience Children and Young People Fund.

The new 'Family Wellbeing Service' is well underway with the full team now recruited and trained. Referrals to the team have increased and there are now twenty-five families linked to the service. Attendance and wellbeing baselines are used to measure impact. The service is currently making decisions on how best to capture qualitative data to show the wider impact on families.

Some examples of how the SEF is being used to progress interventions and approaches have been outlined. In a minority, further progress of the implementation of plans, governance and management, stakeholder participation and consultation are mentioned.

Interventions and approaches

A test of change has been implemented across four primary schools to build skills and confidence of primary one teachers to meet children's speech, language and communication needs. Speech and Language Therapists have delivered a coachconsult model alongside the class teachers based on three programmes (Word Aware: Teaching Children to Listen: Nursery Narrative), Initial evidence shows gains in the children's listening and vocabulary skills. Teachers report an increase in their confidence and skills in understanding and planning for learners' listening and talking experiences and outcomes.

Strategic Equity Fund resources support the two challenge schools. Both schools are using this resource to support existing programmes for pupils affected by poverty and are demonstrating its impact with improved attendance rates, levels of exclusions and improved attainment.

The local authority has redirected some of its Strategic Equity Fund to implement targeted supported study sessions. Pupils impacted by poverty who may need additional support to achieve at least one national five or higher qualification have been identified. Coaching and modelling officers have also been working alongside additional support needs staff on literacy and numeracy pedagogy, resulting in learners being more effectively supported.

The local authority has made considerable progress on redesigning approaches to Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) planning. This mirrors the approach used in the SAC Logic Model to increase alignment of SEF and core education activity. This will significantly improve the ability to plan future SEF activity against a robust, consistent evidence base. It will also improve reporting on the impact of this activity in closing the poverty-related attainment gap with an increased level of confidence.

Priorities within the Strategic Equity Fund plan have progressed, in part, with the appointment of development officers to lead on aspects of literacy, play, nurture and data analysis. The local authority has worked to minimise challenges such as timeous recruitment and procurement. There has been further lead officer input on attendance with all four locality groups of schools. There is now a greater awareness of attendance approaches from across the authority and related resources are promoted and signposted on the local equity hub. Individual attendance coaching sessions have been set with the 16 participating schools to establish the impact from identified change activities. The local digital equity hub is well established and accessed by schools and central team staff.

The SEF intervention grants process has been introduced. It is funding resources, content, and activity to improve attainment and strengthen participation and engagement from learners deemed to have a poverty-related attainment gap.

Stretch Aims

The majority of local authorities referenced progress towards stretch aims within their next steps. Of these, more than a third specified tracking and monitoring of data. There is evidence to suggest that, as more robust quality assurance processes are being developed, local authorities are refining their approaches. Discussions between central teams, officers and their schools will ensure there is a continued focus on progress being made in reaching stretch aims.

Tracking and monitoring

The local authority continues to make steady progress in developing values and processes which underpin the use of dashboards in tracking and monitoring progress.

Attendance data is monitored and collated and shared with all establishments. This information has been used by establishments to develop action plans to improve attendance. Achievement of a level data is tracked regularly by the local authority for all learners at every stage from pre-school until the end of P7. Progress information outlining where learners are, in relation to achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels and progress within these levels, is collected in October, December, March and June.

The introduction of a robust system to track progress of the stretch aims allows the central team to monitor and provide feedback on a monthly basis. This has ensured that the achievement of stretch aims remains a clear focus for the local authority. Emerging data indicates positive trends towards improvement.

The dashboard is also being used at authority level to track and monitor attainment levels and progress towards the overall authority stretch aims.

The local authority has developed its own Broad General Education toolkit, now used by all primary schools. All schools submit predictions for Curriculum for Excellence levels for P1, P4 and P7 three times a year. This data, which includes progress towards stretch aims, is analysed and followed up where necessary. In the Senior Phase, the service manager has improved the systems for tracking and monitoring attainment. This includes reviewing progress being made towards achievement of the stretch aims. Follow-up interventions are identified and actioned.

Aspects of governance are working well, for example, the tracking of workstream actions towards stretch aims.

Outcomes are being monitored via the local authority's robust improvement framework. The local authority reports it is likely to achieve the stretch aims for both Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels and Senior Phase.

There is a clear action plan for stretch aims in place which supports the monitoring and tracking of progress.

Professional learning has been an important factor for some local authorities. This has increased leaders' understanding of how data at school level impacts on the overall authority levels. Where identified as a next step, a few local authorities have made progress when tracking and monitoring attendance.

Other themes

Professional learning on individual school use of data for improvement has empowered leadership and supported more effective use of data.

Workshops were undertaken with identified schools, based on attainment data for targeted support around tracking and monitoring. This includes supporting schools to plan and implement a more rigorous tracking and monitoring calendar around the achievement of stretch aims. Coaching in context was also offered to targeted schools based on attainment data; quality improvement education officers have visited schools on a bespoke basis to support more effective use of data in raising attainment and meeting the stretch aims.

Bespoke data for each school is now being generated and processes are in place for its analysis. Data is being provided to headteachers prior to attainment meetings and is being used to inform target setting. As a result, headteachers are now able to drill more deeply into the data, intersect it and identify areas for development. Universal attendance support for schools and cluster-based targeted support have led to a 2pp increase in attendance between August 2022 and January 2023. This improvement is broadly in line with the progress targeted through the stretch aims process but remains below 2019 attendance rates.

Attendance data is tracked and monitored by establishments as well as by the local authority. There has been a greater focus on tracking and monitoring of attendance in secondary schools through the Strategic Equity Fund project and the employment of family link worker/equivalent with a specific remit of attendance in almost all secondary schools. Across ten schools, 33% of all targeted students increased their attendance between August 2022 to February 2023 by an average of 13.2%.

Care Experienced Children and Young People Funding

There are some very strong examples from local authorities of how this funding stream is having a positive impact on children and young people who have experienced care. In some examples, there is evidence that collaborative approaches and teamwork were key to successful outcomes. For example, better attendance, attainment and positive destinations.

In others, designing digital platforms and dashboards, which can be accessed by children and young people, is a positive step. Learners can share their views, successes and find useful resources.

Spending the funding to appoint virtual headteachers (VHT) is mentioned by two local authorities. These posts, which are already evident in a small number of local authorities, provide an additional layer of challenge which has led to improved outcomes. Further consideration is being given by a few other authorities in establishing VHT posts and exploration of the advantages this could bring.

In a few examples, there is evidence of building successful relationships with parents, children and young people and other agencies. Ensuring that information sharing is co-designed has resulted in increased participation, motivation and engagement. Seeking the views of those children and young people who have experienced care has also been highlighted. This is ensuring that their voices are represented in the planning process.

Care Experienced Children and Young People's Funding

The virtual headteacher (VHT) and the team, work strategically to positively support children and young people who have experienced care. This team, together with key school staff, provides additional support for those leaving school and children in early years settings. In partnership with learners, the team has made progress in codesigning an online platform where learners can share their views, successes and find useful resources. The VHT team continues to build positive relationships with multi-agencies, resulting in raised awareness and improved outcomes and attainment for learners.

The CECYP team has worked with colleagues from the digital learning team to create a profiling tool. Young people are now accessing this to record their own progress in relation to achievements. Individual attainment information is included within the tool. Parents and carers can view the profile for their children and make comments. Additionally, progress report meetings for parents and carers have been introduced. Children and young people have responded positively to this method of recording their achievements and celebrating successes.

Education and social work have further strengthened collaborative working. A joint planning activity was undertaken to review the use of CECYP Fund. A reduction in the use of participatory funding resulted in the creation of a new education support assistant post. This will support the work of the (VHT) and the ambition for learners with care experience as outlined in the local authority stretch aims.

The three attainment officers employed to link with CECYP have moved to new posts during the session. This has allowed the authority to re-evaluate the effectiveness of previous use of the fund. Discussions are taking place to explore the possible advantages of appointing a VHT. Artlink continue to support fourteen CECYP. Tracking by the care experienced team shows some positive outcomes including better attendance, attainment, and positive destinations.

Considerable progress has been made in re-aligning use of CECYP funding. A teacher is now in place who works in partnership with a range of professionals. This supports a target group of young people on the cusp of care. There is evidence of improved participation, motivation and engagement for these individuals. The teacher continues to work on developing a more consistent approach to supporting identified learners within schools. Work is now starting on understanding the challenges and barriers for a wider group of learners who are care experienced. Views of children and young people will be gathered and used to inform planning.

Teachers are now working more closely with the inclusion officer and secondary schools resulting in termly meetings for all teachers with remits working with children who have experienced care. A successful Winning Scotland bid has resulted in training for teachers in four schools to enable the provision of effective support for families and schools; specifically training in trauma informed practice and growth mindset culture. This has complemented the work of the CECYPF in this area. The inclusion officer monitors progress towards the stretch aims of exclusion, attainment and attendance. Through consultation with schools, the officer has set targets for 2022-23 and is challenging the Designated Senior Managers in schools on developing best practice. As a result, schools do have a greater awareness of attainment targets for learners with care experience.

Motivation, Commitment and Resilience Pathways, aimed at promoting increased wellbeing and positive mental health, continues to positively impact on young learners. Ten academies now have funding from the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund to host the mentoring programme. Work is currently underway exploring the use of the new Power Bi data system. This will enable further identification of areas for support and measure the impact of targeted interventions specific to the needs of young people with care experience.

Section 2

Theme: Data for improvement

2.1 Systems and processes

Systems to collect, track and analyse data are integral to identifying areas for improvement, poverty-related attainment gaps and progress towards implementing the SAC.

Systems for data collection, tracking and analysis

Every local authority has a data collection system in place however these vary significantly in both design and approaches to tracking. There is strong evidence that many local authorities are committed to further refinement of their systems. The development of data packs or dashboards to provide school level data to establishments is a common approach. Key aspects of the data packs include the ability to filter by learner characteristics, thus supporting the identification of trends within attainment. However, it should be noted that in some local authorities, where these are not provided, schools are developing their own systems.

Clear links between systems and quality improvement processes are evident. As a result, systems are informing support and challenge from central officers to schools around the use of data for improvement. These processes continue to evolve but currently include quality assurance visits, attainment reviews and regular opportunities for professional dialogue. In the best examples, processes and systems make explicit links between the data and progress towards the stretch aims and are used to set further priorities for improvement. Attainment advisors work closely with local authorities to provide support and challenge in analysis and identifying areas for improvement.

Systems

Tracking ensures continuity during transition periods as it includes historical information to support progression and trend analysis. The ability to see the wholelearner profile across all departments in secondary is useful to support learner conversations about subject choices. This is effectively supporting the work on curriculum innovation, particularly within the Senior Phase. It is also highlighting impact throughout the learner journey and any gaps at school, cluster and local authority levels.

The authority-developed tracking and monitoring system is used by all primary schools. Data is uplifted by the central team at three key points during the session. This supports the evaluation of progress towards achieving the stretch aims. Where there are concerns about projected attainment, the central team is engaging in further professional dialogue with senior leaders in schools. Analysis of this data informs where additional resources and support from the various workstreams is required.

Attainment and attendance data is gathered five times a year for all stages in primary schools and twice in S3 via school, and authority internal systems and Insight. The central team analyse the data to identify common themes and patterns. This is triangulated with attainment over time and discussed during establishment and cluster attainment meetings.

Quality assurance processes

Performance data is discussed as part of ongoing quality assurance procedures along with a school self-evaluation and attendance. As a result, data is used to inform support and challenge for schools and is a rationale for improvement priorities.

An innovative approach to discussing data has been introduced via structured attainment meetings between senior leaders and headteachers. Headteachers receive a pre-populated template with attainment-related data for their setting. alongside national data. This provides the focus for discussion during the attainment meeting. Headteachers and local authority officers attend raising attainment summits and officers provide support and challenge between attainment meetings. Focused dialogue is raising expectations regarding attainment and supporting headteachers to set ambitious attainment targets.

The framework was enhanced to include individual attainment reviews with each secondary school in addition to the existing reviews with primary schools. Attainment reviews took place in terms one and three. During the term one, senior officers met with headteachers and school senior leadership teams to undertake a rigorous review of attainment data, identify areas requiring more focused attention, and support milestone setting in relation to these. The term three reviews scrutinised each school's progress. At secondary level, reviews included a deep dive into Insight data updated in February 2023. This approach is ensuring that the local authority's strong focus on raising attainment and achievement continues to be at the forefront of school improvement activity.

Effective use of data to target, select and evaluate the impact of initiatives

Evidence suggests that the use of data to target, select and evaluate the impact of initiatives is largely focused on PEF and often at a school level. However, there is growing evidence of data informing central planning for the Strategic Equity Fund. In most examples, data is filtered to analyse trends and to determine the povertyrelated attainment gap, thus supporting informed decision making.

Direct correlation is made between the school improvement planning cycle and/or PEF plans and the effectiveness of using the data. In many cases, these processes have recently been strengthened or are currently being reviewed.

Although there are signs of progress, it is acknowledged that this continues to be an area of development for many local authorities and schools. In particular, the ability to monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives on learners can be variable.

Targeting, selecting and evaluating the impact of initiatives

The 'Closing the Gap Planning and Tracking Interventions Tool' is utilised by schools to track interventions including the PEF. The tool provides information including the number of targeted learners, intervention types, range of needs and overall impact of the PEF. In 2021-22, the tool was successfully used to evaluate the impact of interventions delivered to over 4,200 learners.

Data is used effectively to identify where the SEF support and interventions are required. The process of data-informed self-evaluation led to specific interventions in targeted areas with deployed central support from literacy and numeracy. Data is being used increasingly to inform strategic planning. For example, in six schools, identified as having a poverty-related attainment gap in numeracy, the SEF is supporting them to address this gap. Whilst at initial stages, there are indications of ongoing use of data to both inform this work and to evaluate the

Stretch aims drop-in sessions were facilitated alongside discussions during headteacher meetings together with analysis of thematic review data for the Q1 schools. The data is discussed termly at performance and improvement team meetings and monthly during the equity strategy board. This has led to more targeted support in schools.

Analysis of school PEF plans with highest levels of poverty illustrates all are using data well to target and select interventions to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. The family link network has effectively developed a series of data templates to support consistent analysis of impact data.

Support from data analysts to identify and monitor poverty-related gaps

Most local authorities have a data analyst or a team to manage and analyse data centrally. However, where there is not access to this, the collection, processing, collation and interpretation of data is managed by central officers. In a minority of instances, this is identified as a risk due to challenges with capacity.

Overall, where there is a specific person or team in place, there are several similarities in how they support the use of data for improvement and the identification and monitoring of gaps. These include:

- Development and refinement of bespoke systems and trackers
- Collation of data which can be filtered by learner characteristics, including attainment, attendance and demographics
- Production of data packs or dashboards for use both centrally and at school
- Analysis and displaying data to show trends, comparisons and the identification of gaps

To a lesser extent, the specific data analyst roles are also supporting delivery of professional learning in both the use of systems and in understanding the data. In some cases, these roles have been funded by the SEF to support the use of data in implementing the SAC.

Data analysts

The authority has had a data analyst for several years. Recently an additional data analyst has joined the quality improvement officer with the remit for strategic data analysis. They have responsibility for collating, analysing, sharing and disseminating across the system. This is resulting in establishments having a consistent data set and allows schools and central officers to have a better understanding of attainment, attendance and exclusions.

The data analyst, employed from the Strategic Equity Funding, is supporting further development of dashboards. This will provide context specific information for all schools.

The authority has a data team to support the authority, senior leaders and practitioners with the use and interpretation of data. The data team produce and issue data packs for headteachers that are individualised for each school.

The SEF currently funds two data analysts who effectively develop tools to support data use as well as providing one-to-one support for schools on data literacy. A team of headteachers also regularly support others to develop data literacy skills. The data analyst has developed a data pack for all schools. The need for this was identified during improvement visits and a review of planning documents. It highlighted that some schools were not able to articulate poverty-related attainment gaps and attainment over time. The pack provides this information and allows comparisons with local and national statistics. This data is supporting headteachers to use a variety of data to target Pupil Equity Funding more effectively.

The data improvement officer is currently creating a tracking and monitoring tool to ensure there is an overview of progress against all collaborative projects associated with data. The development of a tool to support secondary schools in the setting of stretch aims is also underway.

Strengthening systems and processes

In almost all local authorities, there is either an ongoing focus on refining systems and processes or this has been identified as an area needing further development.

A continued emphasis on strengthening and adapting both systems and approaches is apparent. Mostly, this is with a view to streamline data and accurately identify poverty-related gaps. Clear links between professional learning and the effective use of data are referenced by many local authorities. Where this has been successful, greater confidence in using and understanding data has been reported by headteachers and to a lesser extent, practitioners. However, this remains an area of development for many.

In a minority of authorities, there is a need to improve moderation and teacher professional judgement. This will support tracking and monitoring and lead to more accurate data. As a result, there should be increased confidence in targeting approaches and the measurement of impact.

2.2 Broad General Education

Attainment within the Broad General Education (BGE) is based on the percentage of learners that local authorities report as having achieved expected Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) in literacy and in numeracy. In line with the stretch aims, data was gathered relating to combined levels of attainment for P1, 4 and 7 for literacy and numeracy.

Measuring the poverty-related attainment gap

Nationally, the poverty-related attainment gap is measured by comparing the attainment of learners living in quintile one (Q1) to that of those living in quintile five (Q5). The majority of local authorities also use this measure.

However, a quarter consider alternative measures when identifying and monitoring poverty-related attainment gaps. For those local authorities, there is the disproportionate number of learners in Q1 compared to Q5. For example, some have few or no learners in Q1 whilst others have a very large proportion of learners in Q5.

Alternative measures include the following:

- Comparing the attainment of Q1 learners to that of learners in Q2-5
- Comparing attainment of Q1&2 learners to that of learners in Q5
- Comparing the attainment of Q1&2 learners to that of learners in Q3-5
- Comparing the attainment of learners who are in receipt of free school meal to those who are not

There are clear reasons why local demographics necessitate alternative ways to analyse poverty-related gaps. However, it should be noted that where comparisons are made between the most advantaged learners living in Q5 and the most disadvantaged in Q1, gaps are likely to be wider than when comparing less diverse groups such as Q1&2 combined versus Q3-5 combined. It is challenging to draw statistically robust conclusions with such variation in approaches. However, from the data available some improvements have been indicated.

Literacy Attainment (P1, 4 & 7 combined)

Almost all local authorities reported that overall attainment in literacy improved from 2020-21 to 2021-22. Where comparisons have been made with pre-pandemic attainment, almost a third of local authorities demonstrated an improvement in 2021-22.

Where comment has been made about the poverty-related attainment gap, a majority of local authorities saw a narrowing of the gap in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. A few showed a smaller gap than indicated by pre-pandemic data.

Numeracy Attainment (P1, 4 & 7 combined)

Most local authorities report that overall attainment in numeracy improved from 2020-21 to 2021-22. Where comparisons have been made with pre-pandemic attainment, a quarter of local authorities demonstrated improvement in 2021-22.

Where comment has been made about the poverty-related attainment gap, the majority of local authorities saw a narrowing of the gap in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. A few showed a smaller gap than indicated by pre-pandemic data.

Approaches to addressing the poverty-related gap

Various approaches are being employed to address poverty-related attainment gaps. Specific literacy and numeracy interventions have been highlighted.

Literacy and numeracy interventions

The equity strategy group has focused on literacy this year and are developing an equitable literacy framework for early years and primary schools. School PEF plans indicate almost all schools with the highest levels of poverty are focusing on literacy and numeracy and providing smaller, more targeted group teaching for children. Six schools identified as having the biggest poverty-related attainment gap in numeracy, now have additional targeted interventions in place, funded by SEF. Data is gathered regularly at both school and central officer level to inform impact and next steps.

A sizeable portion of the Strategic Equity Funding will be used to implement an intensive approach to improving learning and teaching within literacy. Aims include all practitioners to be trained in the science of reading and all learners leaving school with key reading skills required for their chosen pathway. Ongoing professional learning delivered by a numeracy principal teacher will continue.

The local authority has employed a numeracy officer to work with schools on improving attainment. This has contributed to an improvement in overall levels of attainment.

The role of local authority central officers has also been highlighted. Evidence suggests that addressing poverty-related gaps is becoming an embedded part of local authority quality assurance processes.

Quality assurance

A consistently applied quality improvement process has been introduced and is being embedded across the primary and early years sectors. This provides regular opportunities for central officers and peer headteachers to engage with senior leadership teams offering support and challenge around the targeting and impact of both PEF and SEF interventions.

Where appropriate, central officers continue to provide targeted support to schools and remain focused on eliminating the poverty-related attainment gaps that exist. The authority conducts regular primary school equity network meetings which are well embedded. In addition, there are primary headteachers' meetings, equity visits from central staff and Education Scotland, and link quality lead officer support visits.

Other approaches which are impacting positively include improved tracking and moderation, collaboration through networks and improved leadership.

Other approaches

There has been a sustained effort to improve the use of data to target interventions effectively. By using effective tracking systems headteachers can quickly identify learners whose progress is no longer 'on track' and ensure they are part of SEF 'small group interventions' to address gaps in learning.

The authority has been working with the Education Scotland National Improvement Framework officer to support the training of QAMSOs, who support teacher confidence and professional judgement.

Headteacher learning partnership groups continue to engage in professional dialogue to share practice and support moderation of annual improvement planning and reporting. Both the literacy and mathematics champion networks continue effectively to deliver targeted support.

In both numeracy and literacy, the increase in attainment can, in part, be attributed to system-wide focus on improving leadership at all levels. This has included a more consistent use of pedagogical approaches, progression frameworks as well as an increasing quality in teacher judgement.

2.3 Senior Phase

The analysis and comparisons in all aspects of this section are based on the information available from each local authority.

Some of the comparisons and trends of the results may have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of teacher estimates in 2020 and the Alternative Certification Model in 2021 have led to different attainment patterns when compared to 2022 and pre-pandemic performance.

Measuring the poverty-related attainment gap

Most local authorities compare the results of learners in quintile one (Q1) and quintile five (Q5) when analysing the poverty-related attainment gap. In a few cases, due to their unique contexts, alternative comparisons are made. This includes comparing the attainment of those in receipt of free school meals with those who are not and comparing the attainment of learners living in Q1 with learners living in Q2-Q5.

In one local authority there are no learners living in Q1 and very small numbers living in Q2 and Q5. This authority, with the support of the attainment advisor, is currently considering how perceived gaps can be reviewed and reported on more accurately.

1 or more Level 5 qualifications (SQA National A-C pass)

Overall attainment

For the majority of local authorities overall attainment in this measure decreased in 2021-22 when compared to data from 2020-21. However, where comparisons have been made, most authorities demonstrated an improvement on pre-pandemic performance. Where evident, this reinforces the drive and commitment to accelerate recovery and progress in the next phase of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge.

Poverty-related attainment gap

Where comparisons were made between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 data, the poverty-related attainment gap widened in the majority of local authorities. However, where this gap has narrowed, improvements in performance are wide-ranging. It is important to take account of the impact of the pandemic when considering this.

1 or more Level 6 qualifications (SQA National A-C pass)

Overall attainment

In almost all local authorities overall attainment in this measure decreased in 2021-22 when compared to data from 2020-21. However, where comparisons were made, the majority have demonstrated an improvement on pre-pandemic performance.

Poverty-related attainment gap

Where comparisons were made between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 data, the poverty-related attainment gap widened in the majority of local authorities. In 2022, the poverty-related attainment gap increased by figures ranging from 0.2pp to 19pp. However, where comparisons were made to pre-pandemic performance, half of the local authorities have narrowed the poverty-related attainment gap.

Annual Participation Measure

Where comparisons were made between data from 2021 and 2022, the majority of local authorities have seen an increase in the percentage of school leavers in education, training or employment as recorded by Skills Development Scotland.

Where the poverty-related attainment gap was outlined, half of the local authorities have been able to close the poverty-related attainment gap compared to 2021 data.

Addressing the poverty-related attainment gap

A few examples of approaches which are being implemented to improve overall attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap in the Senior Phase are outlined.

Strategies include ensuring that the Senior Phase curriculum is more flexible and allows for a greater range of progression pathways within curricular areas. One local authority has seen significant benefits for learners by enhancing their Senior Phase curricular offer with a wide range of Foundation Apprenticeships. This has resulted in an increase in overall attainment and a narrowing of the poverty-related attainment gap. In another example, greater emphasis has been placed on engaging with learners to look at barriers that impact on their Senior Phase attainment and sustaining a positive destination. By consulting with the youth participation group, the authority intends to use the information gathered to support future planning.

There is some evidence that schools have been empowered to devise their own strategies to improve attainment for all and close poverty-related attainment gaps that are unique to their context.

Empowerment

In 2020-21 over 800 students undertook a Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) as part of their Senior Phase. The percentage of leavers achieving SCQF Level 5 or above was 5.2pp higher than the national average, with 100% of leavers who completed an FA in positive destinations. Data for 2020-21 suggests there is no significant attainment gap for learners who completed an FA.

Work to develop and enhance relevant learning pathways to education, training and employment is anticipated to increase the percentage of young people achieving grade A-C at SQA National.

A multi-agency 'Task and Finish Group' to improve positive destinations recently engaged in a mapping exercise to provide clarity around why and where young people are participating in the local authority. Views of young people are key to understanding the barriers and potential solutions to positive destinations. The youth participation group reviewed current activity around participation and collated a 'Stop/Start/Keep' task. The 'Task and Finish Group' will include the views of young people in its planning.

Discussions with the Senior Phase team indicates ongoing work to increase early intervention approaches and flexibility of curriculum to provide better progression pathways in curricular areas, particularly at SCQF levels 4-6.

The appointment of principal teachers in each of the secondary schools who have a remit to track and monitor progress in these measures will drive improvement in overall attainment and reducing the gap.

2.4 Progress towards stretch aims

A key element of the Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress is the requirement for local authorities to set stretch aims. The aggregation of this data has been published in The Scottish Attainment Challenge - local stretch aims 2022 to 2023.

Progress towards achieving local authority stretch aims

Almost all local authorities are making progress towards achieving some of their stretch aims. Evidence suggests that the majority of local authorities are on track to meet targets identified for combined ACEL levels in P1, 4 and 7, often in both literacy and numeracy. There are promising indications, in a few local authorities, that the poverty-related gap within the combined P1, 4 and 7 attainment is beginning to narrow.

In relation to Senior Phase, there are some early signs of improvement. However, until the leavers' data is published. local authorities cannot yet confidently predict progress towards the stretch aims.

The majority of local authorities identified attendance and/or exclusions as part of their health and wellbeing stretch aim. There is strong evidence that, for most, attendance continues to be a concern. Factors noted as contributing to this include continued outbreaks of COVID-19 and other illnesses, particularly over the winter period. Schools and local authorities are continuing to work extensively and in partnership with other professionals to address attendance rates. Further work to improve exclusion rates has been identified in a minority of local authorities.

It should be noted that in a few local authorities, it is emerging that their year-one stretch aims may have been overly ambitious in the first period of this approach

Progress towards stretch aims

Stretch aims were identified and agreed upon through a consultative process with headteachers. This ensured that headteachers are clear about the targets for this session. These targets are reflected in school improvement plans, maintaining a clear improvement focus.

Attendance and exclusion data is examined monthly to monitor progress made in relation to health and wellbeing stretch aims. These measures continue to be a concern for schools and the authority. Developments in partnership working with schools across the authority should support the improvement of attendance and exclusion moving forward.

As part of the quality assurance calendar, there is ongoing data and stretch aim conversations between headteachers and link quality improvement officers. This has been effective in analysing current and predicted pupil performance data and for setting attainment targets for cohorts and individual groups. Through this dialogue, headteachers are supported and challenged to consider accuracy of judgements, approaches to assessment and next steps. Recent 'Excellence in Equity' visits to all secondary schools enabled headteachers to present their analysis of performance, strengths and areas for development.

Work to address the poverty-related attainment gap and meet stretch aims is overseen by the attainment reform strategy group, as part of the reform and recovery agenda. The improvement work undertaken by this group is supported by the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative and embeds quality improvement methodology. This group brings together professionals from early years, schools and other services to ensure a coherent approach to improvements being undertaken with children and families social work and the wider children's services.

Tracking and monitoring stretch aims

Local authorities continue to utilise a range of processes to track and monitor progress towards stretch aims.

Most commonly, ACEL data is aggregated at key points throughout the year. Frequency of this varies between local authorities. There is strong evidence that analysis of this is supported by ongoing quality assurance processes including school visits and professional dialogue with individual schools. As a result, there is some confidence in the robustness of data informing progress towards numeracy and literacy in P1, 4 & 7. Work to ensure consistency in professional judgement and on moderation is ongoing. Consequently, there is evidence of increased practitioner understanding and confidence in some local authorities.

Monitoring of attendance data in the most part, takes place monthly.

There is little evidence of consistent approaches to tracking and monitoring of Senior Phase stretch aims at local authority level. Most will monitor this through the national qualifications data released in August. Where this is taking place, more bespoke solutions to this have been developed such as specific attainment reviews with secondary schools, analysis of prelim data or looking at the whole S4-S6 cohort.

Tracking and monitoring stretch aims

Progress and achievement data for Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence is analysed at each of the three data uplifts in November, February and May. Frequent dialogue considering data and progress takes place with individual headteachers and deputes during termly quality improvement visits and any additional support required is identified. Progress towards Senior Phase stretch aims is being monitored by headteachers and the quality improvement manager responsible for all secondaries. Detailed analysis is drawn from Insight data, released in February 2022 and breakdown of prelim data.

Currently quality improvement officers are engaging with secondary schools regarding projected data in relation to Senior Phase measures. This professional dialogue will support in monitoring progress towards achieving the stretch aims set in relation to this stage of the curriculum.

In the Senior Phase measures, the local authority is gathering monthly data on learners who are tracking to achieve 1 or more A-C passes at level 5 and the same at level 6. As they do not know who is likely to be a leaver, they are tracking the whole S4-6 cohort.

A tracking update has been sent to all secondary schools for the current levels of school leavers based on their tracking after prelim examinations. This will be submitted at the end of March 2023 and discussed at directorate and area improvement teams in a similar way to primary updates. This will allow for targeted engagement with schools on the predicted achievement of school leavers and progress towards stretch aims.

In relation to the health and wellbeing stretch aim, attendance data is scrutinised monthly. This measure continues to be a concern for schools and the authority. The appointment of a financial inclusion officer in each education group will support families with income maximisation. There is some evidence that this is a barrier in relation to learners' attendance.

Education Scotland attainment advisors continue to support local authorities in the monitoring and evaluating of progress towards the stretch aims.

Section 3

3.1 Next steps for continuous improvement

All local authorities have worked with their attainment advisor to identify next steps. These relate to the individual progress made and describe how local authorities can further strengthen implementation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, Several common themes continue to feature within these next steps. This indicates increased recognition of the key drivers required for continuous improvement.

Data systems and processes

Almost half of local authorities will focus on improving the use of data. Planned improvement activities included developing more robust moderation processes as well as refining systems which facilitate the collection and analysis of data. This should result in more accurately being able to identify poverty-related gaps and target support appropriately. A few local authorities also highlighted the need to evaluate the impact of support and interventions more effectively.

Data systems and processes

Improve the robustness of using data to inform approaches in measuring povertyrelated attainment gaps

It will be important that consideration is, again, given to developing a consistently applied moderation approach across the authority between now and August with a view to this being implemented next session

Continue to develop the capabilities of the pupil tracking tool as part of the ongoing implementation plan, including consideration of developmental milestones and a local authority dashboard

Continue to refine systems for tracking, monitoring, and analysis of data, which support increased ownership of data by schools and headteachers

Support schools to use the recently developed school data packs effectively for improvement

Pupil Equity Funding

Almost half of local authorities have identified the need to strengthen quality assurance processes in relation to Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). There is a continued focus on improving the use of data to inform planning, target support and evaluate the impact of interventions. There is evidence that local authorities are taking an active role in providing support and challenge. This includes through planning processes, as part of quality improvement visits and developing governance structures to support PEF. A few local authorities have highlighted the need to ensure that funding is fully utilised following close monitoring of spending in a bid to reduce underspends.

Pupil Equity Funding

The new education officer for SAC will begin to work closely with targeted schools to ensure robust and appropriate data is being used to inform PEF interventions and to evaluate their impact

Direct actions should be taken following identification of the pupil equity fund underspend to ensure money is targeted towards right group of children

Strengthen the processes and systems in place to ensure that Pupil Equity Fund allocations are fully utilised and benefit those learners most impacted by poverty

Use data from PEF evaluation to plan next steps for improvement

Develop and implement PEF governance, enhanced accountability and alignment with school improvement plans

Revisit support to schools around measuring the impact of PEF interventions

Professional learning

Building the capacity of staff is a continuous improvement priority for almost a third of local authorities. Some of these are focused on improving pedagogy particularly in literacy and numeracy. Others seek to further develop data literacy across the education workforce. Positively, there is emerging evidence of local authorities encouraging collaboration and sharing of effective practice.

Professional learning

Building staff capacity with 'Workshop for Literacy' and 'Conceptual Understanding in Numeracy' as core learning and teaching approaches within the Broad General Education. Ensure school staff are highly skilled and able to provide high-quality learning and teaching experiences in literacy and numeracy for all children

The attainment summit will facilitate sharing best practice and enable peer support and challenge in relation to quality improvement and raising attainment

Continue training on the data dashboard for primary headteachers

Ensure establishments most impacted by poverty-related barriers to attainment and those with trends of underperformance in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are prioritised in learning hub professional learning and support

Support the further roll-out of the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) writing programme beyond the two initial pilot schools

Quality Improvement

Evidence is emerging that local authority quality improvement processes are increasingly reflecting the aims of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. A quarter of local authorities identified improving an aspect of these processes that will contribute to the effective implementation of the SAC. For example, making better use of data to support and challenge schools in identifying and addressing poverty-related gaps.

Quality improvement

Following feedback gathered throughout the pilot programme, it will be important to fully implement a school review programme with all schools in 2023-24

The quality improvement team will engage in attainment visits to ensure support and challenge is provided to school leaders to improve the use of data to support analysis of the poverty-related attainment gap and plan interventions

Continue to use data to support quality improvement visits to schools

Stretch aims

A quarter of local authorities have highlighted work to improve the monitoring and tracking of data relating to stretch aims as a next step. There is also evidence of a focus on work to improve outcomes based on specific stretch aims particularly health and wellbeing stretch aims related to attendance.

Stretch aims

Work with partners including Skills Development Scotland to reduce the volume of leavers with unknown status in the participation measure

Further develop the process for tracking and monitoring the plus stretch aims

Having a calendar which considers the rhythm of data releases and explicitly reviewing what the data means for tracking the achievement of equity goals, including stretch aims will be beneficial

Increase focus and impetus on improving attendance for both primary and secondary schools

The development of an action plan with clear time frames to address emerging attendance and exclusion data

Develop consistent data-informed approaches to using family engagement support workers across clusters to continue progress on improving attendance rates in the local authority

Further analysis of attendance data, the impact of attendance projects and associated support, e.g., RIC input, will inform the next steps for continuous improvement for identified establishments

Children and young people who have experienced care

There is evidence of a continued focus on improving outcomes for children and young people who have experienced care. A few local authorities have identified this as a specific next step. Evaluating current practice and reviewing how progress is tracked are key actions. Two local authorities have also highlighted a new virtual headteacher role to be introduced.

Children and young people who have experienced care

Implementation of the new local authority Care Experienced Children and Young People self-evaluation toolkit to ensure appropriate progress is made towards achieving positive outcomes for children and young people with care experience

Develop an effective approach to tracking the use and impact of the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund

The 'Home to Highland Team' (CECYP Fund) will measure the impact of its work by comparing learner engagement levels as part of a termly review of individual packages

Successfully induct virtual headteacher to lead on the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund objectives

Increased monitoring and tracking by designated senior managers of targeted learners who have care experienced with a focus on the use of data to identify and measure the impact on attainment for different categories

Strategic Equity Funding

A few local authorities have identified specific next steps in relation to Strategic Equity Funding. These focus on reviewing the impact of the current SEF plans in order to identify improvement priorities going forward. There are also some practical steps planned to ensure that resources are managed effectively.

Strategic Equity Funding

Further develop the 'finance for equity model' to ensure more effective use of resources and to maximise the use of SEF

Strategic Equity Fund workstream leads will be evaluating progress against their outcomes and measures in May and June 2023. This data and evidence will support the development of local improvement priorities for 2023-24

A review of the SEF collaborative projects to date will be conducted, including the progress made towards the stretch aims. Support required for moving forward for continuing and new projects will be identified

Education Scotland

Denholm House Almondvale Business Park Almondvale Way Livingston EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)131 244 4330 E enquiries@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk

www.education.gov.scot

