

Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: A report on progress 2016-2021

March 2021



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Ministerial foreword



As was set out in our [National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan](#), we need Scottish education to deliver both excellence, in terms of ensuring children and young people acquire a broad range of skills and capacities at the highest levels, and also equity, so that every child and young person should thrive and have the best opportunity to succeed. This vision is shared across the education sector and, in support of that, this government set a defining mission of closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

There are many strengths in Scottish education, and I see evidence of those on a daily basis. The collective response to the pandemic has been outstanding, with all parts of the sector demonstrating commitment, professionalism and compassion to support the needs of our children and young people.

Despite these strengths, the attainment gap has remained a feature of our society for generations and does not do justice to the type of Scotland we wish to build. That is why we set ourselves the bold but necessary ambition of substantially eliminating the attainment gap within 10 years, while also making demonstrable progress during the lifetime of this parliament. There was a need to bring more light, urgency and focus to this issue. Nothing is more important than ensuring every child and young person has the same opportunity to succeed in education, regardless of their background.

Over the last five years, we have put in place a comprehensive range of measures to turn the corner with the attainment gap. These have been built around the flagship Scottish Attainment Challenge, but also feature throughout our wider education policies, relentlessly focusing efforts on driving up improvements in education and reducing the impacts of deprivation on educational outcomes.

As we have made this sustained investment, the social, economic and political context in which we are living has changed enormously. The UK Government's rigid approach to austerity has meant that we have had to work even harder to offset

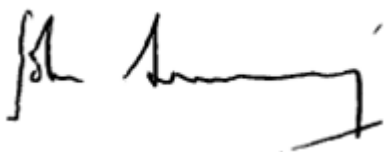
these challenges. The UK's exit from the EU, alongside the uncertainty caused in recent years, will mean those pressures continue. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a profound impact on every aspect of our lives. Despite this background, our key purpose has not changed and indeed remains more important than ever. Now, more than ever, there is a need to stay the course with our vision of equity and excellence.

I am greatly encouraged by the progress that has been made over the last five years. The strength of evidence demonstrates that positive progress has been made towards achieving our short and medium-term outcomes and, I believe, strong foundations are now in place to help us achieve our long-term ambition of closing the poverty-related attainment gap. There is still work to do but I am confident that we are on the right path.

We deliberately injected ambitious timelines into our stretch aims – it would have been a dereliction of duty to do otherwise. Our next task will be to reflect on what more is required to deliver a step change in the pace of existing improvement. The evidence set out in this report, bringing together a range of analyses for the first time, will help us to understand where that further support and focus is required.

Building on existing progress, we will continue to work in partnership with local authorities, schools and other partners to facilitate, broker and support action. Concepts of empowerment and collaboration, where decisions about children and young people's education are made as close to them as possible, will continue to be a driving force for positive change.

In conclusion, let nobody be in any doubt that I am wholeheartedly committed to continuing to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap beyond this parliamentary term. We have already committed to over £200m in Attainment Scotland Funding in 2021/22, building on the £750m invested over the course of this Parliament. That unwavering commitment will continue beyond 2021/22, and we will draw on our findings from this report, the recent [Equity Audit](#) and elsewhere to guide our thinking. As we do we will ensure all children and young people have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their backgrounds.



John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
March 2021

THE PROGRESS TOWARDS CLOSING the poverty-related attainment gap



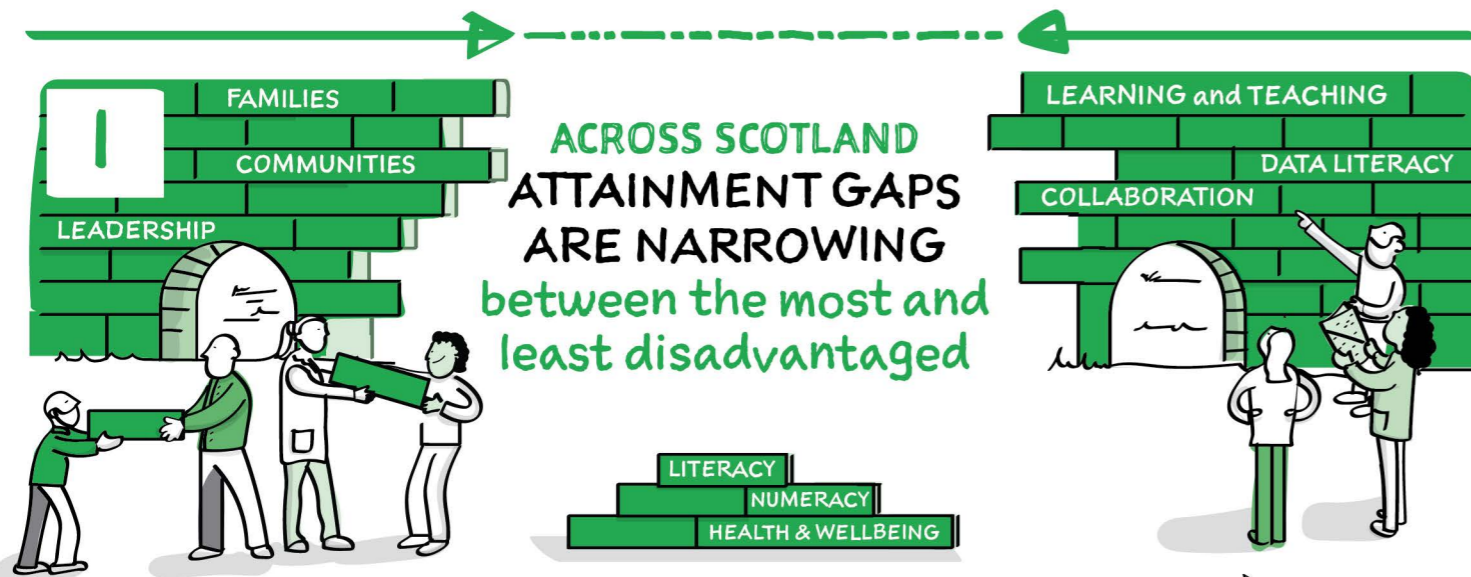
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THE SCOTTISH
ATTAINMENT
CHALLENGE
LITERACY NUMERACY
HEALTH & WELLBEING



POSITIVE INDICATIONS of PROGRESS across the country

PISA 2018 - background has less of an impact on attainment now than it did in 2009

STEADY BUT VARIABLE PROGRESS over 5 years across the 11 NIF measures

POSITIVE IMPACT EVIDENT IN SCOTLAND'S MOST DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES

2 EMPOWERMENT
through SAC and Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF)
is closing the poverty-related attainment gap

STRONG FOUNDATIONS created to help achieve the programme's long-term outcomes

9 in 10 SCHOOLS report an improvement in closing poverty related attainment gaps

3 Widespread FOCUS ON EQUITY

SYSTEMIC CHANGE in terms of CULTURE AND ETHOS increasingly evident

APPROACHES TO EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE becoming embedded and sustained

HEADTEACHERS confident when choosing suitable approaches

LOCAL AUTHORITIES accountable and driving forward a strategic vision for equity

4 IMPROVED WAYS OF WORKING

Targeted HEALTH AND WELLBEING approaches

BETTER USE OF DATA

Higher quality LEARNING, TEACHING and ASSESSMENT

WORK, COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

between local authority, schools and community strengthened

5

COVID-19 and school building closures has had an IMPACT

PROGRESS...

Focus now on accelerating and DEEPENING RECOVERY

CONCLUSION

Closing the poverty-related attainment gap IS NOW MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

IT IS A LONG-TERM OUTCOME THAT REQUIRES ONGOING COMMITMENT AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

Executive Summary

A vision for closing the poverty-related attainment gap

The shared vision for Scottish education is to deliver excellence and equity for all, with the defining mission of closing the poverty-related attainment gap, ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed.

This is a long-term commitment and has been supported by a system wide, collaborative endeavour between all partners within Scottish education to make Scotland the best place to grow and learn.

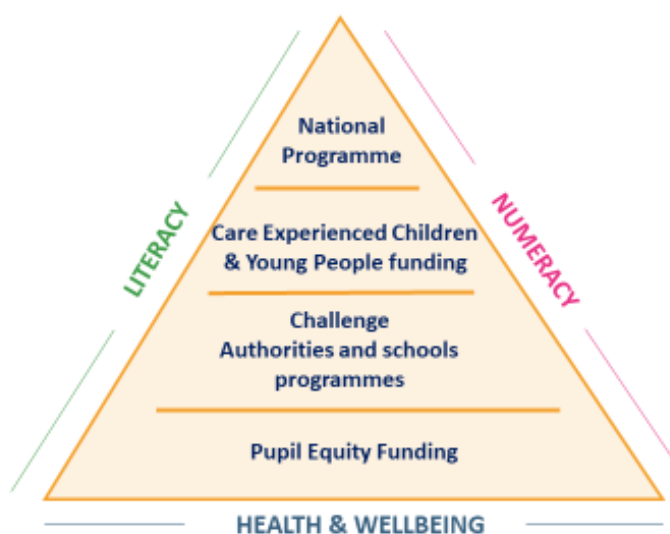
Report on progress

This report presents the evidence of progress towards achieving this defining mission over the period of the parliament 2016-2021. In doing so it also acknowledges the disruptive and detrimental impact of COVID-19.

While referencing the broader policy landscape, particular focus is made to the central role of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) which was launched in February 2015.

The strategic aim of the SAC has been to ‘close the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities’.

Scottish Attainment Challenge and £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund 2016-2021



***‘Close the
poverty related
attainment gap’***

The gap is closing, but it remains a long-term endeavour

The poverty-related attainment gap is closing, but this remains a complex and long-term endeavour. Equally, while there are positive indications of progress, there are also variations in the pace of that progress across the country. We know that the impact of COVID-19 is likely to have placed further pressure on the gap.

However, over the 5-year time period a number of key elements have been put in place that provide strong foundations for on-going progress. Important strengths of the Scottish approach include: a systemic change in terms of culture, ethos and leadership; a strengthened awareness of the barriers facing children and young people adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage; the significant role of local authorities in driving forward a strategic vision for equity at local level.

It is notable that the most recent evidence from the [International Council of Education Advisers \(ICEA\)](#) acknowledged the progress that is being made in Scottish education to close the attainment gap through the SAC and wider education policies:

“Scottish education exhibits many strengths. It values equity as well as excellence. It has an excellent standing internationally. It is investing effort and resources to narrow attainment gaps, working with and strengthening the teaching profession.”

There are a range of improved ways of working to deliver equity. These include:

- Enhanced learning and teaching and using data for improvement
- A sustained focus on health and wellbeing
- Collaborative working
- Working with families and communities

We also know that one of the key features of the SAC is the flexibility and opportunity it offers to schools and local authorities to select, develop and create interventions that best work for children and young people in the local context. Because of this, the SAC has seen a wide range of interventions and approaches develop in different settings.

As a result of this activity, there has been demonstrable progress on a number of long-term measures to close the poverty-related attainment gap. Headteachers are positive about the impact of SAC in their school, have a clear understanding of what is working, and are optimistic about improvements being embedded and continuing over the next five years. Where the level of progress has been more varied, this has often been a result of attainment of those from the most deprived areas increasing but not at the same rate as those in least deprived areas. The greater rate of progress that can be seen at primary school level aligns with the implementation of the SAC, which initially focused support towards improvement activity within primary schools.

A range of wider data sources provides additional insight into the longer term benefits for young people. An increasing proportion of young people from the most deprived areas are:

- in education, employment or training
- in a positive initial and follow up destination after school
- are attending Higher/Further Education

The gap between young people from the most and least deprived areas has narrowed across all these measures. At the same time the percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination has consistently increased over the last ten years. However, the coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on destinations in the last year.

Reflecting on this progress to date provides an opportunity to consider further how we can accelerate and extend progress across all outcomes. This might include a focus on:

- A system-wide improvement strategy that promotes educational equity
- Maintaining a holistic and integrated approach
- Targeting to accelerate recovery and progress
- A renewed focus and a continued long term commitment

Going forward, the Scottish Government recognises that closing the poverty-related attainment gap will take time and remains committed to this task beyond this parliamentary term.

The evidence in this report, the Equity Audit and the views of partners, including the ICEA, and stakeholders, not least children and young people themselves, will be key to refining our approach going forward to accelerate recovery and progress and ensure all children and young people, regardless of their backgrounds, have the opportunity to succeed.

1. Introduction

A vision for closing the poverty-related attainment gap

The shared vision for Scottish education is to deliver excellence and equity for all, with the defining mission of closing the poverty-related attainment gap, ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed.

This is a long-term commitment and has been supported by a system wide, collaborative endeavour between all partners within Scottish education to make Scotland the best place to grow and learn.

In 2016, we set out that:

“Ensuring educational excellence for all and closing the gap in attainment between young people from our most and least deprived communities will be the defining mission of the SNP in the next parliament.”

This report now presents the evidence of progress towards achieving this defining mission over the period 2016-2021. In doing so, it also acknowledges the undisputed disruptive and detrimental impact of COVID-19 on progress, and also highlights key areas that will need to feature in the next steps of education recovery.

Report structure

Section 2 sets out the policy context and background related to the attainment gap. It provides an outline of the range of policy initiatives that contribute to closing the gap and, in particular, the central role of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and the associated Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF). It demonstrates how the SAC has evolved over the duration of the programme to date.

Section 3 outlines the type of interventions that have been designed to reduce the gap within schools and local authorities. It includes an emphasis on the development of interventions that have been tailored to local needs and circumstances, as opposed to prescribing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. It highlights a range of activities, spanning key areas such as literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, and family support.

Section 4 highlights how evidence, analysis and data has increasingly been at the heart of activities funded by the ASF. It makes reference to schools and local authorities drawing on a wide range of evidence and intelligence as part of selecting interventions, targeting approaches and in evaluation. Combined, it highlights how this commitment to data and evidence has helped to ensure they understand the effectiveness and impact of interventions.

Section 5 covers the progress made to date against a wide range of short- and medium-term outcomes. It covers indicators such as: awareness of approaches to achieving equity; culture and ethos; professional learning; collaboration; and data and evidence.

Section 6 shows the extent to which this progress on short- and medium-term outcomes currently translates to equivalent long-term outcomes. It draws on headteacher perspectives, attainment data and a range of wider data. It recognises that progress in closing the attainment gap has been made on a number of measures, although the level of progress across the measures is varied.

Section 7 then reflects on the impact of COVID-19 on priorities and ambitions. Specifically, it draws on key findings from the recent Equity Audit, as well as those derived from the ASF Year 5 evaluation. It provides some international context, local evidence, and cites a range of mitigations that have been implemented to date.

Finally, section 8 provides some concluding remarks. It summarises the key findings from earlier sections, and highlights a small number of reflections that may prove valuable as the commitment to closing the gap continues.

Additional information

The appendices include summaries of the progress made in the nine Challenge Authorities.

The supplementary tables also include a range of attainment and other data referred to throughout the report.

2. Policy context and background

A holistic approach to delivering excellence and equity

The vision and priorities for Scottish education are shared annually in the [National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan 2021 \(NIF\)](#). The NIF is supported by the ongoing implementation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW).

The shared vision of excellence and equity is defined as:

- **Excellence** through raising attainment: ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to shape their future as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors;
- **Equity** through ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

The focus on equity in education is supported and complemented by a wide range of national policy initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people. These deal with issues both within and beyond the school and provide the holistic support that is necessary for children and families. These include:

- Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan
- Our transformative expansion of early learning and childcare
- Children's rights
- The Promise, and
- The Young Persons Guarantee

A Scottish education system rooted in empowerment and collaboration

In delivering this vision, schools leaders and practitioners are empowered, while working collaboratively with stakeholders, to make the decisions that most affect their children and young people's outcomes. It is our firm belief that an empowered and collaborative system, where everyone's contribution is heard and valued, is a necessary component in improving children and young people's outcomes.

To support this, in 2018 we established 6 regional improvement collaboratives to ensure the provision of educational improvement support to school leaders and practitioners through dedicated teams of professionals, drawing on support from Education Scotland, local authorities and others and delivering a relentless focus on improvement.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge

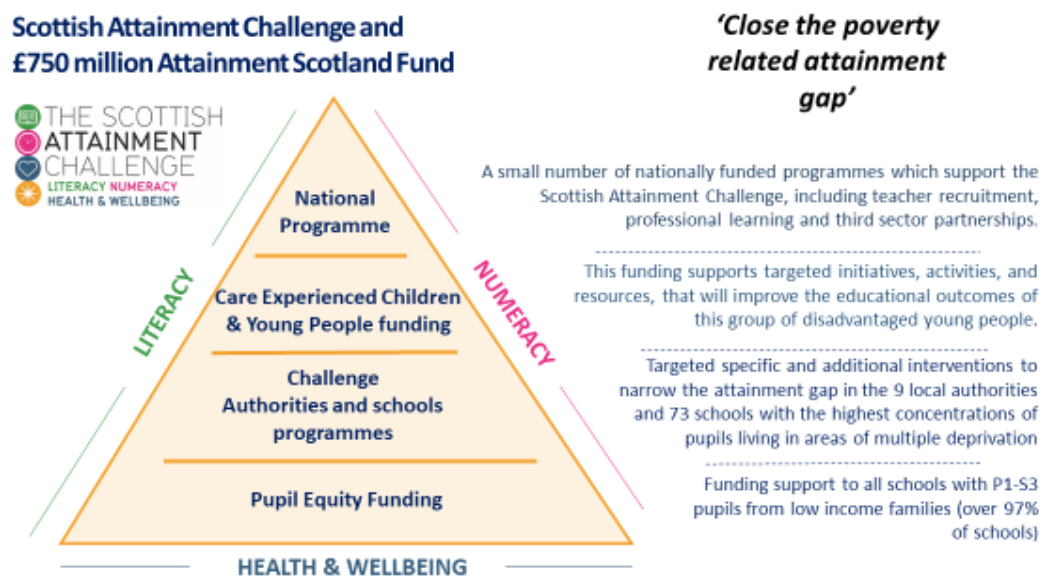
Central to the focus on delivering equity in education was the establishment of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, launched in February 2015.

The strategic aim of the SAC has been to ‘close the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities’.

In order to deliver on the strategic aim, a number of short, medium and long-term outcomes were established to provide clear indicators of progress. The intention was to build strong and sustainable foundations within the education system recognising that improvements were likely to be gradual and incremental over time.

Prioritising improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing of those children adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage, the SAC aims to empower schools to develop focused and innovative approaches to improving outcomes for children and young people. This is to be done at classroom, school and local authority level by undertaking approaches or interventions within three key organisers: teaching and learning; leadership; and families and communities.

The Attainment Scotland Fund provided an investment of £750 million over this parliamentary term, distributed across a number of programmes as outlined below.



Since 2015, the programme has been developed and extended to include more schools and local authorities. As investment increased the number of challenge authorities rose from seven to nine, the schools programme and universal offer evolved, and support for care experienced children and young people and PEF (Pupil Equity Funding) were introduced. In doing so, the programme expanded from

a narrow approach to close the attainment gap within a very specific locale, to a broader system-wide improvement strategy to promote educational equity.

Initially focusing on improvement activity in primary schools, the reach of the Challenge is now far wider, with targeted activity being delivered across both primary and secondary sectors and beyond. Today the SAC has five main strands with almost £190 million being invested in 2020/21:

- The **Challenge Authority Programme** provides additional resource to the nine local authorities in Scotland with the highest concentrations of deprivation (as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)). The 'Challenge Authorities' (seven in 2015, rising to nine 2016/17) are Clackmannanshire, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire. Profiles on these Challenge Authorities are provided in the appendix 2.
- The **Schools Programme** provides targeted support to an additional 73 individual primary and secondary schools in Scotland out with the nine Challenge Authorities who have the highest concentrations of pupils living in SIMD 1 and 2.
- **Pupil Equity Funding** (PEF) was introduced in 2017/18 and provides over £120 million directly to 97% of schools in Scotland based on the number of P1-S3 pupils registered for free school meals, used as a proxy measure for socio-economic disadvantage.
- The **Care Experienced Children and Young People Funding** was introduced in 2018/19 with funding allocated to all local authorities based on the number of looked after children they have in their care or schools aged between 5-15, but with the funding available to be invested to support all care experienced children and young people aged between 0-26.
- Additionally a number of **National Programmes**, including a number of third sector organisations, have been supported for targeted work to raise attainment and improve equity.

The SAC approach drew from the lessons of the City Challenges in England (London and Manchester) and Challenge Cymru in Wales and introduced a team of Attainment Advisors (AAs) - centrally managed but locally based advisors, who provide a new and disruptive challenge and support function within the system. Scotland has 32 such AAs within Education Scotland's regional improvement teams, and each Local Authority has direct access to a named AA.

The principal role of AAs is to ensure a relentless focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Their remit is to support local authorities and schools by providing advice and guidance, leading improvement and building capacity, and contributing to robust evaluation of impact. Their work is to drive a cultural shift in understanding poverty and the impact it can have on children's and young people's ability to learn and achieve. As systems leaders, AAs have an important role in ensuring social justice is at the heart of decision-making at national and local levels.

Support is also provided by The Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC). It encourages and supports the systematic application of

quality improvement (QI) thinking and methods to improve outcomes for children and young people across children's services.

Consistent with this approach, local authorities and schools have been key partners in the delivery of the SAC. The SAC has enabled schools and Challenge Authorities to develop targeted, creative and bespoke approaches to improving outcomes for children and young people adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage, tailored to meet their local needs and circumstances. The significant investment provided through the ASF is considered by schools and local authorities to be vital in achieving the outcomes of the SAC.

Funding has been used by schools and Challenge Authorities to implement a wide variety of approaches designed to drive up improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The variety of approaches implemented by schools and Challenge Authorities reflects their diverse contexts and circumstances on which they have based their decisions. Challenge Authorities, which have collectively had a total of £212 million made available to them through the ASF since 2015, have used funding to develop strategic approaches at local authority level. Schools have used the flexibility of PEF, and in some cases additional funding received through the Schools Programme, to develop a range of different approaches tailored to their specific needs. This proved particularly important during the pandemic, where greater flexibility in the use of PEF funding allowed schools to rapidly adjust approaches to continue to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people.

Impact of COVID-19

It is widely accepted that the impact of COVID-19, and the period of school building closures, is likely to have made education inequality worse and more complex to tackle. These are impacts that are being experienced simultaneously in countries across the world. As highlighted by [the International Council of Education Advisers \(ICEA\), \(2020\)](#), "The pandemic reinforces the issue of equity as the defining agenda of our time."

Cognisant of this, our [Equity Audit](#) (published in January 2021) helps to deepen our understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, to outline the actions already taken to meet this challenge, and to set clear areas of focus for accelerating recovery.

The findings of the audit highlight the scale and potential depth of the impacts of the pandemic, and recognise that the full extent of those may not become fully visible for some time. They are fully integrated into this report.

3. Flexibility within schools and local authorities to develop tailored interventions.

A key feature of the SAC (and ASF) is the flexibility and opportunity offered to schools and local authorities to select, develop and create interventions that best work for children and young people in the local context. This chapter provides an overview of some of the interventions and approaches, looking at literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, and family support, developed in different settings.

Summary

- More than 9 out of 10 schools reported literacy interventions as part of their school's approach to closing the attainment gap. After the first year of the ASF, 235 **literacy** interventions and approaches were reported. These included literacy leaders and champions; innovative reading initiatives; one to one and group support; accelerated reading programmes; initiatives to create a literacy rich environment, and working with specialists including dyslexia support and speech and language therapists.
- 9 out of 10 schools had implemented **numeracy** interventions by Year 3 of the ASF. Examples included numeracy leaders and champions; new tools and approaches such as SEAL, Big Maths and Sumdog; cooperative learning strategy approaches; linking numeracy to wider STEM; and one to one and group support.
- 90% of headteachers reported that **health and wellbeing** approaches were part of their approach to closing the attainment gap, with many examples of innovative and collaborative practice. Interventions reported included taking a nurture approach; targeting support at key transition periods; breakfast and afterschool clubs; targeted support for young people with intersecting disadvantages; counsellors and health and wellbeing workers integrated within schools; outdoor learning and community gardens; musical and sport activities; and use of modes such as Neurosequential Model in Education and Growth Mindset.
- Over the period, there has been evidence of a shift in emphasis from individual school interventions towards the **development of local authority-wide approaches**. Examples of these approaches include whole school nurture approaches related to health and wellbeing, and [Cost of the School Day](#) projects which have developed in several Challenge Authorities.

3.1 Literacy interventions

More than 9 out of 10 schools reported literacy interventions as part of their school's approach to closing the attainment gap.

In Year 1 (2016/17) of the ASF, 235 Literacy interventions and approaches were reported. These included:

- literacy leaders and champions;
- one to one and group support – particularly around early literacy;
- approaches such as reciprocal reading and paired reading;
- new programmes or approaches such as Read Write Inc, POLAAR (Primary One Literacy Assessment and Action Resource), VCOP (Vocabulary, Connectors, Openers and Punctuation), Ready Steady Read, Word Aware, Word Boost, The Literacy Shed and Rainbow Reading;
- accelerated reader (in secondary schools), active literacy, phonics based programmes, metacognitive work and creative vocabulary development;
- encouraging children to become enthusiastic about reading including creating a literacy rich environment, literacy hubs or (in one instance) having a resident author; and
- working with specialists including dyslexia support and speech and language therapists.

One local authority identified the need for an intensive reading intervention to improve young people's literacy skills. SAC funding enabled the appointment of an Education Support Officer (ESO) to lead, coordinate and evaluate literacy interventions in secondary schools. The ESO supported secondary staff with professional learning, coaching and modelling. A professional network was created and resources to support the reading intervention were also provided. The programme was a success and rolled out to primary pupils subsequently.

Local-authority wide approaches to literacy have developed alongside individual school interventions, with significant resource and innovation invested in supporting schools and practitioners to address the attainment gap in literacy with positive results.

One authority's innovative approach to improving children's and young people's attainment in literacy is supported by extensive professional learning for staff. It successfully empowers schools to prioritise the elements which suit their own context and has had a very positive impact across the authority. This has led to raised attainment in reading and writing, and a narrowing of the gap between the least and most deprived groups. Specialised training for classroom assistants in the literacy approach has improved their understanding, enhanced their roles and increased their job satisfaction. The approach has had a very positive effect on the ethos of schools and is now having a strong influence on other areas of the curriculum. [Challenge Authority Inspection].

3.2 Numeracy interventions

9 out of 10 schools reported numeracy interventions as part of their school's approach to closing the attainment gap.

Numeracy interventions weren't as common as those in literacy and health and wellbeing in the first two years of the ASF, with some local authorities and schools saying that numeracy interventions had generally started later. By Year 3, however, almost 9 out of 10 headteachers described numeracy interventions as part of their school's approach to closing the attainment gap.

Teachers participating in qualitative research felt that the ASF had helped to shift the way that they taught numeracy skills, using new approaches. Numeracy interventions included:

- numeracy leaders and champions;
- new tools or approaches including SEAL (Stages of Early Arithmetic Learning), Nurture Number, Big Maths, Play along Maths, Numberbug, Sumdog, Number Talks and Concrete Pictorial Abstract;
- learning approaches including cooperative learning strategies, problem solving and linking numeracy to wider STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) activities; and
- one to one numeracy support, small group support, extra maths periods (in secondary schools).

A Schools Programme local authority described a numeracy intervention menu created to support schools in selecting relevant interventions, as well as a numeracy 'equity and excellence' group which is supporting driving up numeracy attainment through focusing on pedagogical themes identified in research as raising numeracy attainment, linking this to professional learning and the development and roll out of a Closing the Numeracy Gap intervention.

As has been the case in literacy, councils have developed local authority wide approaches to addressing the attainment gap in numeracy. These approaches provide significant additional resource to schools, helping to develop skills and increase collaboration, and complementing school approaches.

In one local authority, two teachers in every primary and secondary school are trained in Maths Mastery. Feedback from teachers attending the training is that it has made them think differently about the methodology used to teach identified concepts and provided them with increased knowledge and understanding of how children learn. A Local Learning Community collaborative programme is developing maths/numeracy assessment and moderation approach, and teachers at key stages have engaged in visits to colleagues in other schools to review approaches and conduct assessments. [Challenge Authority Progress Report]

3.3 Health and wellbeing interventions

Teachers taking part in qualitative research felt that good health and wellbeing was critical in providing the foundation for learning and improved attainment.

In 2018, 90% of headteachers mentioned health and wellbeing approaches as being part of their school's approach to closing the attainment gap. Most responses referred to specific approaches or initiatives, and the staff training and engagement with external agencies to support these. This includes reference to nurture-based approaches, outdoor learning, play-based approaches, counselling and therapist services, and family support and engagement.

Many teachers taking part in qualitative research felt that good health and wellbeing was critical in that it provided the foundation for learning and improved attainment. This included addressing social and emotional needs, to ensure that children were able to attend school, enjoy school and be ready to learn.

Health and wellbeing interventions included:

- taking a nurture approach (with many mentioning learning from the model used in Glasgow);
- support at key transitions – between nursery, primary and secondary;
- breakfast and afterschool clubs, homework clubs and supported study;
- targeted support for young people including looked after children, children with English as an additional language and refugees;
- counsellors and health and wellbeing assistants integrated within the school, with early intervention for pupils with social or emotional behaviour issues;
- outdoor learning, Green Gyms and community gardens;
- approaches using music, dance, sport, physical activity, massage, relaxation, mindfulness and other techniques to provide positive experiences for pupils;
- use of models such as Neurosequential Model in Education, the ICE Pack training resource, growth mindset; and
- in secondary schools, support moving into positive destinations.

A local authority has developed extremely successful approaches and interventions to support health and wellbeing. Children's and young people's health and wellbeing have been significantly enhanced in schools where nurture principles have been embedded. In partnership with Barnardo's, the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) programme is being delivered in 28 primary schools to develop the emotional literacy and resilience of learners. In-class coaching and professional learning is significantly improving the confidence of teachers and support staff in teaching and supporting this area of health and wellbeing. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

A local authority described its approach to using play in pedagogical approaches. 52 schools are taking part in the programme, with training and school support visits taking place. Schools are expanding their approaches to the use of environments and sensory learning, and reducing the use of plastic resources in the classrooms. Staff report that children are achieving well in a wide range of areas. Many staff are delighted and surprised to see how confident, capable and imaginative children are and how they are seeing children in a way they never did in the past. They believe they know children better as individuals and as learners.

'Playful pedagogy has allowed our learners to develop confidence in taking ownership of their own learning. There are high levels of engagement in our classroom with children working both independently and collaboratively.' P1 teacher

Most teachers interviewed used a wide range of data and evidence to target their interventions, including:

- health and wellbeing data including Boxall profiles, wellbeing assessment plans, social, emotional and behavioural needs, care settings, child vulnerability, GIRFEC and SHANARRI indicators.

In one school, teachers evaluate health and wellbeing three times a year using [SHANARRI indicators](#). Pupils self-evaluate using traffic lights to indicate how they are feeling each day. Teachers pick up on any amber or red lights, and meet with parents to address any issues. Teachers have noticed a change from red to amber, which is going in the right direction. [Challenge Authority Progress Report]

A local authority has established a wellbeing service whereby 12 schools have access to a Wellbeing Worker. 120 young people have been accessing the service on a weekly basis. Data analysis at the start of 2020 highlighted that, of pupils from SIMD 1 and 2 in all establishments, almost all remain “on track” or “have made “some progress” in identified learning outcomes/targets across literacy and numeracy. A review of the wellbeing tool used in the intervention showed that all young people accessing the service show improvements in social and emotional wellbeing. During the period of school building closures, all wellbeing workers transitioned to online support and telephone consultations, while three provided additional regular home visits to targeted families. [Challenge Authority Progress Report]

4. Systematic use of evidence to target interventions and maximise impact

Challenge approaches have been developed in a number of different ways, with local authorities supporting schools to target interventions, select the most appropriate approaches, and to evaluate and develop approaches. This chapter provides an overview of the evidence of how these approaches have been developed.

Summary

- **Schools select interventions based on a wide range of information**, such as local authority support, AA advice and guidance, consideration of data, research on interventions, and input from staff, parents and pupils.
- Local authorities have indicated evidence of a shifting focus and streamlining of approaches towards those approaches where there was **evidence of effectiveness and impact**.
- Analysis of the different years of the ASF indicate **mixed approaches** to closing the attainment gap, with a focus on the most deprived alongside other 'universal approaches'. Most schools have taken a mixed approach, with 85% of all respondents indicating that they have used ASF to support 'universal' approaches.
- **Targeted support for individual pupils** is an emphasis in the approach of nearly all schools (98%) and a 'high emphasis' in 3 out of 4 schools. The next most common themes in approaches were **teachers skills or practice** (92% of schools), **resources or tools for teaching** (89%), **self-improvement/improvement planning** (88%), **dedicated staff time** (86%) and **data skills or use** (85%).
- Local authorities are supporting **effective self-evaluation** that is leading to improved tracking and evaluation of impact, and refinement of approaches.

4.1 Approaches to selecting interventions

Schools select interventions based on a wide range of factors, such as local authority support, AA advice and guidance, consideration of data, research on interventions, and input from staff, parents and pupils.

There are many factors that influence how schools select appropriate approaches, as these are often tailored to each school's needs. Schools and headteachers have support from local authorities to discuss which approaches work best, and the great majority of headteachers feel confident in choosing ones that would help close the attainment gap.

In the 2020 Headteacher survey, factors associated with the development of approaches included:

- Collaborative working;
- Evidence of approaches becoming more embedded;
- Improvements in use of guidance and planning;
- Increased focus on the use of data, including greater rigour in use of data, greater access to data and greater data literacy;
- Staffing increases;
- Increasing opportunities for professional learning;
- Easily accessible support and clear communication channels;
- Improved understanding of the poverty-related attainment gap and of the experience of poverty and its impact on children and families;
- Continued development of mechanisms to support strategic planning and governance;
- Aspirational target setting; and
- Increasingly adaptive and responsive approaches.

In the first two years of the ASF, there were wide-ranging and varied approaches to choosing interventions across authorities. Some schools were given autonomy and flexibility by their local authorities to select a given intervention, while other schools were provided with a suite of potential interventions to choose from. Factors that played a role were data and evidence, support from AAs and input from parents/carers and pupils.

Qualitative research asked teachers and local authorities to describe their approach to selecting interventions. It revealed that data and evidence played a key part in the process of selecting interventions and that local authorities largely took the lead in this process.

AAs have played a key role in supporting the development of approaches. Most AAs interviewed in the qualitative research indicated that they supported schools and teachers, particularly in primary schools, to identify and monitor interventions.

Our collaborative work with our AA has been a significant factor in improvements over the last 12 months. [Their] work with schools to help teams understand the importance of data; to support schools to see the links between raising attainment and an appropriate and relevant curriculum; [their] support to the project lead in developing a more coherent attainment challenge plan all contributed to a productive and successful year. [Challenge Authority Progress Report]

At a local authority level, interventions were chosen to reflect a number of broad priorities, based on, for example, attainment gap data, previously successful approaches and engagement with headteachers and other partners or services.

In the ASF qualitative research case studies undertaken in Year 3 of the ASF, local authority officers indicated that they set broad priorities for selecting approaches through:

- reviewing data to identify attainment gaps;
- engaging headteachers to explore views;
- building on previous successful approaches and experience of programmes;
- gathering evidence and research about successful approaches; and
- building on good relationships with other partners and services.

In some cases, local authority officers encouraged headteachers to select their own interventions, and research approaches themselves (with support). These local authority areas felt that it was important that teachers took ownership of the approaches, and drove the approach. In others, schools were offered access to interventions which were set at a local authority wide level. This was to ensure that the approach was joined up and clearly managed and governed. Some areas also indicated that teachers did not always have time to review research and evidence.

Case study findings from the 2018 Headteacher survey highlighted the value of a coordinated approach to ASF interventions, and the substantial planning time required. This was reflected in several schools using ASF to fund staff whose roles are dedicated to coordinate supported interventions. Some schools (typically primary schools and smaller secondary schools) had used the ASF to introduce a single role to coordinate activities, while others had introduced dedicated leads for specific areas. These schools identified benefits in dedicated staff members having the time required to support delivery, to ensure a more coherent approach across the school, and to support development of whole-school approaches.

Participation of Children and Young People in deciding approaches

Evidence from qualitative case studies show that input from teaching staff, parents/carers and children was identified as an important element in ensuring interventions were based on an accurate understanding of children's needs and the local community. Schools also noted that pupils and parents often identified a different set of priorities to those identified by staff, demonstrating the value of ensuring a broad range of perspectives. Examples of pupil and parent input included consultation exercises to develop priorities, use of participatory budgeting with pupils, and ongoing engagement through pupil representative groups.

Almost a third of AA professional reports collated in late 2020 noted particular initiatives targeted specifically at promoting participation of children and young people affected by poverty. This included developing programmes to raise the understanding of the impact of poverty with children and young people.

A few reports described how learners are being consulted about ways to respond to emerging needs in the context of the pandemic and some described participation in programmes relating to children's rights including the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools programme.

In one authority, funding from the Attainment Scotland Fund is supporting and increasing opportunities for young people to take leadership roles, for example, the Pupil Led Enquiry programme. The Senior Leadership Team has identified the need to ensure that pupil voice is further developed in order for it to make an impact on the delivery of learning and teaching. The authority should continue with its plans to build on innovative programmes which are increasing pupil voice and aspiration and integrate the learning and approaches more fully into the curriculum. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

One local authority implemented the Social Justice Ambassadors Programme which uses the voice of young people to tackle current social issues, many of which are related to poverty. It is an educational programme which supports young people to become social researchers exploring these issues and how they impact on their own community and the world around them. The approach was successfully piloted and culminated in an event where young people presented 19 motions regarding community issues to lead staff from across the LA including Elected Members, third sector and Community Partnerships. They worked together to explore the young people's findings through an interactive café conversation. The current research focus is centred on the impact of COVID-19, poverty and recovery. Collaborations with school staff and young people are being used to explore PEF spend and in one high school, they are discussing using the Young Scot card as a means to allow young people to purchase resources they require.

4.2 Targeting of approaches

Most schools have implemented both targeted and universal interventions, with 85% of all respondents indicating that they have used ASF to support 'universal' approaches.

Analysis of the different years of the ASF indicate mixed approaches to closing the attainment gap, with a focus on the most deprived alongside other 'universal approaches'. Survey responses from the 2020 Headteacher Survey indicated that a large majority of schools have included a focus on the pupils or parents experiencing deprivation or disadvantage as part of their approach to achieving equity; 83% include a focus on those experiencing socio-economic deprivation and 77% include a focus on other types of disadvantage. However, most schools have taken a mixed approach, with 85% of all respondents indicating that they have used ASF to support 'universal' approaches. These findings are consistent across most key respondent

groups, although schools in rural areas are less likely to include a specific focus on those affected by disadvantage.

Over half (58%) of respondents in the 2018 survey reported targeting at least some of their interventions in 'other' ways. A total of 153 respondents provided a description of these other ways. This included using attainment, attendance, exclusion or risk of exclusion data. Headteachers also looked to individual characteristics when targeting their interventions, including: additional support needs; care experienced; adverse childhood experiences and having English as an additional language.

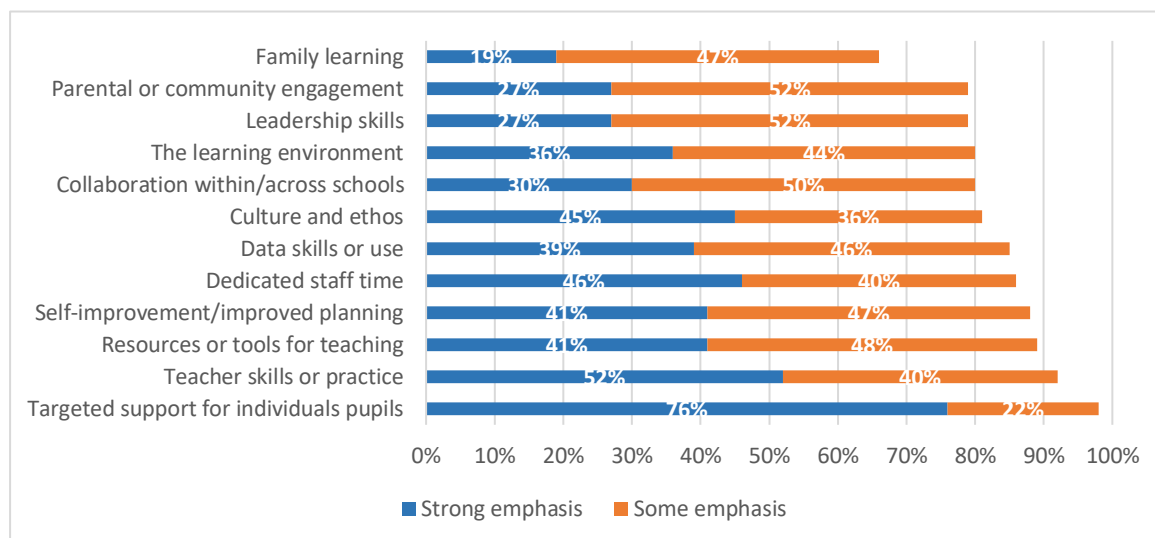
In addition, the profile of the school influenced the nature of targeted approaches. For example, schools with a large proportion of their school roll from the most deprived areas needed to take into consideration other criteria in order to prioritise resources. For schools with a small proportion of their school roll registered for free school meals, consideration of a wider range of needs helped ensure an inclusive approach.

4.3 Focus of approaches

Most school approaches had a broad focus – referring to multiple themes such as targeted support for individual pupils, improving teachers skills or practice, improving data skills.

As well as addressing key areas for children and young people – such as literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing – school approaches also sought to develop wider school improvement themes, such as teaching skills and use of data and evidence. Responses from the 2020 Headteacher Survey indicated that the approaches selected by schools generally had a relatively broad focus in this respect, with the great majority referring to multiple themes. The responses to the 2020 survey are shown in Figure 6.1. Targeted support for individual pupils is an emphasis in the approach of nearly all schools (98%) and a 'high emphasis' in 3 out of 4 schools. The next most common themes in approaches were teachers skills or practice (92% of schools), resources or tools for teaching (89%), self-improvement / improvement planning (88%), dedicated staff time (86%) and data skills or use (85%). The responses show that approaches included a broad range of themes.

Figure 4.1: Proportion of schools that reported they had a focus on the following themes



4.4 Changes in approach over time

Local authorities have indicated evidence of a shifting focus and streamlining of approaches towards those approaches where there was evidence of effectiveness and impact.

The ASF evaluation considered the extent to which plans changed over time. Headteachers responding to the online survey were asked to indicate to what extent their interventions (supported by any of the funding streams) were new, a scale up from previous year or continuing at the same level. Across both Year 2 and 3, respondents most commonly indicated that the interventions were newly introduced.

In Year 3 of the Headteacher Survey, there was an increase in those reporting that most interventions were newly introduced and a reduction in those reporting that most interventions were a scale up of an intervention implemented in previous year. This reflects the inclusion of PEF-only schools; 61% reported that most interventions were newly introduced compared to 30% of Schools Programme schools and 47% of Challenge Authority schools.

Further evidence on the development of local authority approaches is provided through the Local Authority Survey 2019. Local authorities provided their views on the extent to which the approach for addressing the poverty-related attainment gap had changed within their local authority over the period of funding. Of 27 local authority responses to this question, 20 viewed their approach as having changed either significantly or to some extent. A further seven viewed their approach as having changed to a limited extent. Specifically, with regard to the nine Challenge Authorities, two indicated their approach had changed significantly, three indicated the approach had changed to some extent, and four indicated limited change.

Local Authority Survey responses indicated evidence of a shifting focus and streamlining of approaches towards those approaches where there was evidence of effectiveness and impact. Challenge Authority progress reports similarly suggested evidence of change and continuity in approaches, highlighting the maturation of existing approaches in some instances and innovation in others. Innovation included pilot approaches/interventions in development as well as new approaches being rolled out on the basis of positive pilot evaluation. Challenge Authority progress reports clearly linked refinement of approaches to assessments of effectiveness. Where authorities indicated limited or no change in approach, this was primarily due to continuation of an existing approach.

Approaches to closing the poverty-related attainment gap are being refined based on improvement and use of evidence. Enhancements or adaptations in approaches to literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing introduced to close the poverty-related attainment gap were based on the increasing use of a broad range of data, a focus on measuring impact, and a focus on building sustainability.

Enhancements or adaptations in approaches were based on the increasing use of a broad range of data, a focus on measuring impact, and a focus on building sustainability. This is illustrated in the following comment:

'... a shift in focus from use of a wide range of interventions to narrowing the range of approaches ..[.].informed by our experience and evidence gathering over the past three years' (Schools Programme local authority)

4.5 Evaluation of approaches

Local authorities are supporting effective self-evaluation that is leading to improved tracking and evaluation of impact, and refinement of approaches.

The majority of the nine challenge authorities were assessed through inspections as having robust and highly-effective self-evaluation processes in place. Where practice is strongest, self-evaluation is securing significant improvement at all levels in the system. There are clear links between the strategic vision for improved outcomes and the day-to-day practice of staff. In a minority of challenge authorities, whilst self-evaluation has improved, it is not yet leading to improved outcomes for learners. More time and a greater depth of consistency is needed to embed their approaches. All challenge authorities use a range of approaches to ensure stakeholders are actively consulted through self-evaluation.

Case study feedback indicates that ASF support has helped to improve capacity for tracking and evaluation of impact, with schools gathering a substantial volume of evidence around intervention. Some schools noted that their local authority had made a positive contribution to their efforts to evaluate ASF activity.

Most schools reported adapting their interventions in response to emerging monitoring data. Schools also reported feeling more confident about trialling new

approaches on the basis that findings from their ongoing evaluation activities could be used to refine the approach over time.

A Challenge Authority's inspection found that self-evaluation permeates every aspect of education at authority, school and individual practitioner level. There is a clear, shared expectation that everyone involved will evaluate their practice and continuously improve it. This involves regularly gathering and analysing the views of learners, parents and other stakeholders who are involved in education. The authority's extremely effective approach to self-evaluation informs policy and practice and is focused on ensuring that learning activities are appropriate. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

5. Progress across short- and medium-term outcomes

In order to meet the strategic aim of closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities, a series of short- and medium-term outcomes have been identified that will lead to progress towards meeting the strategic aim.

This chapter analyses evidence towards the following short and medium term outcomes:

- Awareness of range of approaches to achieve equity within their particular context and setting (5.1)
- A culture and ethos that promotes high aspirations for all and improves equity is embedded across the whole school community (5.2)
- Increased engagement in professional learning with a focus on reducing poverty related attainment gap (5.3)
- Increased focus on Health and Wellbeing, Literacy and Numeracy to improve outcomes for children and young people living in poverty (5.4)
- A focus on increasing the engagement of parents, carers and families living in areas of deprivation with their child's and their own learning (5.5)
- Increased evidence of collaboration across the education system (5.6)
- Increased use of research evidence and data (5.7)

Summary

- The ASF Headteacher Survey indicated that a great majority of headteachers (96%) felt that they had a **good awareness of the range of approaches** that can help close the poverty-related attainment gap, while 93% felt confident about **selecting the approach most effective for their school**.
- 45% of headteachers indicated that there was a strong emphasis on **culture and ethos** in their approach to closing the attainment gap.
- A large majority of headteachers indicated that the approach to achieving equity in education is **embedded within their school community** in 2020; 84% agreed that this was the case to a 'great' or 'moderate' extent, while no headteachers said 'not at all'
- A strong focus across schools and local authorities has been placed on **professional learning** to bring about high quality teaching and learning.
- Nearly 2 in 3 headteachers have seen an increase in **collaborative working** in their school as a result of ASF support, including one quarter who have seen a large increase.
- 84% of headteachers felt that they are 'very good' or 'good' in using **data and evidence** to inform development of their approach

5.1 Awareness of range of approaches to achieve equity

96% of headteachers felt that they had a good awareness of the range of approaches that can help close the poverty-related attainment gap, while 93% felt confident about selecting the approach most effective for their school.

The ASF Headteacher Survey has been undertaken on five consecutive years to gather the views and experiences of headteachers and schools on the implementation and impact of the ASF. Findings illustrate a growing confidence in the successful implementation of approaches:

- A great majority of headteachers (98%) felt they **understood the challenges and barriers faced by pupils affected by poverty** in the 2020 survey; including 78% who felt they understood this 'to a great extent'. This finding was consistent across most respondent groups, although those in rural areas were less likely to feel that they understood these challenges.
- A great majority of headteachers (96%) felt they had a **good awareness of the range of approaches** that can help to close the poverty-related attainment gap in 2019; including 60% who felt they were 'very aware' of the range of approaches. Survey findings indicated variation in views across urban and rural areas, with headteachers of schools in rural areas less likely to feel that they were aware of the range of potential approaches.
- A great majority of headteachers (93%) felt confident in selecting approaches to close the poverty-related attainment gap that would be **most effective in their school** in 2019; with around half of these feeling confident 'to a great extent'.
- A large majority of headteachers indicated that the approach to achieving equity in education is **embedded within their school community** in 2020; 84% agreed that this was the case to a 'great' or 'moderate' extent, while no headteachers said 'not at all'.

There was some variation in views across key respondent groups. In particular, headteachers of schools who only receive the PEF element of ASF and those with lower PEF allocations were less likely to feel that the approach to achieving equity is embedded.

“As secondary headteachers, we are actively encouraged and involved in strategic decision making. Our opinions are listened to. We are constantly reminded our role is to improve outcomes for young people and families, raise attainment and be mindful that we are striving to close the poverty attainment gap. This is then emphasised to all staff at every opportunity along with the inclusion agenda.”
Secondary headteacher, Challenge Authority

5.2 A culture and ethos that promotes high aspirations for all and improves equity is embedded across the whole school community

45% of headteachers indicated that there was a strong emphasis on culture and ethos in their approach to closing the attainment gap

The 2019 ASF Headteacher Survey found that 45% of headteachers indicated that there was a strong emphasis on culture and ethos in their approach to closing the attainment gap, and a further 36% said they placed some emphasis on culture and ethos. Analysis of the survey indicates that the headteachers most likely to have reported seeing progress in closing the gap were those who had seen a change in culture or ethos (more collaborative working and/or embedding the approach to equity) or have improved their understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families.

84% of headteachers in the survey indicated that the approach to achieving equity in education is embedded within their school community, while 2% disagreed.

ASF Evaluation qualitative case study feedback suggested that some schools had seen a wider change of culture or ethos as a result of ASF support. This included schools where targeted interventions had required a change of approach and development of data skills for staff, a more nuanced understanding of what 'equity' means for teaching practice, and a more inclusive ethos (for example a stronger role for pupils and families in planning and delivery of approaches). Culture change was also evident in some schools' use of the ASF as an opportunity to develop whole-school approaches, for example embedding nurture across the curriculum and whole-school approaches to numeracy and literacy.

The Education Scotland Inspection of Challenge Authorities summary report published in 2019 found that Challenge Authorities with a shared and embedded vision and values, leading to a culture of relentless drive for improvement, were among those making the greatest progress in closing the attainment gap.

5.3 Increased engagement in professional learning with a focus on reducing the poverty-related attainment gap

A strong focus across schools and local authorities has been placed on professional learning to bring about high quality teaching and learning

Across the Challenge Authorities, well-considered, strategically planned professional learning, informed by high-quality data, has been a very significant factor in bringing about improved outcomes. In the majority of Challenge Authorities, key partnerships with attainment advisors, academia, and others, have delivered professional learning at classroom level in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. In addition, they have up-skilled staff on how to make best use of data, improvement methodologies and action research. Challenge Authority inspections found professional learning has enabled practitioners to make informed judgments about appropriate interventions and evaluate their impact.

There are examples of sector-leading professional learning which have universally driven change in classrooms across an authority leading to improved attainment. These approaches have been co-constructed between academia, authorities and establishments. The learning has been shared and built upon, reducing duplication and increasing the pace of improvement. As a result, there is greater collaboration within and between establishments by confident, well-informed staff.

One authority's officers have worked with a private education company to develop training to improve learning and teaching. This has been organised in such a way as to ensure that the training programme is sustainable. To date, the programme has involved over 3,000 participants. Almost all staff in focus groups held the view that the professional learning they were undertaking was the best and most impactful of their career. Staff demonstrated clarity of thought and depth of understanding about their own learning and education research. This was clearly impacting on, and improving, learning and teaching in classrooms across the local authority. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

To enhance a culture of collaborative professional learning, all Challenge Authorities have put in place professional learning for leadership at all levels. In the best examples, this is providing sustainability through universal opportunities and succession planning. This also applies to young people who are offered high-quality opportunities to lead and motivate others within their schools and across the Challenge Authority.

A local authority has appointed Development Officers in assessment and moderation, literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, and curricular transitions. This team works extremely effectively to offer high-quality career long professional learning to staff on an individual, establishment and authority-wide basis. This is an innovative use of Attainment Scotland funding which has improved pedagogy across the authority as well as the consistency of assessment and moderation. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

5.4 Increased focus on health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy to improve outcomes for children and young people living in poverty

During the first two years of the ASF, literacy and health and wellbeing interventions were prioritised, while progress around numeracy was less evident. There was considerable progress made in the primary programme, with strong foundations being built around leadership, resources and training of the workforce. Reflecting the later expansion of the ASF into secondary schools, evidence of progress in the secondary programme was more limited.

Year 3 of the ASF Evaluation found that interventions were implemented around literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The 2018 Headteacher Survey found that, unlike in years 1 and 2 of the ASF, numeracy interventions (mentioned by 88% of respondents) appear to be as prominent as literacy (95%) and health and wellbeing interventions (90%). Interventions on literacy and numeracy were prominent in the primary programme, while there was some evidence that secondary school interventions tended to focus more health and wellbeing. From the Challenge Authority progress reports, there was some evidence that progress was still balanced in favour of the primary schools.

In Year 4 of the ASF, evidence sources pointed to a wide variety of approaches implemented around literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. Strategic approaches had been developed by Challenge Authorities tailored to fit local needs and circumstances. There was evidence of an increased focus on the development of local authority-wide approaches, such as whole school nurture approaches related to health and wellbeing. Other authority-wide approaches were also evident, such as the Cost of the School Day project which has developed in several Challenge Authorities.

Local Authority Survey responses indicated evidence of a shifting focus and streamlining of approaches towards those approaches where there was evidence of effectiveness and impact. Challenge Authority progress reports similarly suggested evidence of change and continuity in approaches, highlighting the maturation of existing approaches in some instances and innovation in others.

Literacy

Interventions around literacy appear to be the earliest to have been implemented and to have shown impact, particularly amongst the youngest age groups.

Evidence sources show that literacy interventions were the first to be implemented and to have an impact, particularly in the initial stages when the programme was focused on primary schools. In qualitative research exploring the roll out of the ASF, most teachers were very positive about the focus on literacy, believing that the ASF had helped the school to embed consistent approaches to literacy, and spend more time on literacy within the curriculum.

Teachers commenting on outcomes in qualitative interviews reported that they had seen an improvement in literacy attainment through evidence from standardised

assessments and reading scores, as well as observations of increasing Literacy skills.

In one school, baseline testing for P3, P4 and P5 showed an improvement of 25% in literacy. The school had delivered interventions to target groups and had 'control groups' in order to better measure the impact of the intervention. It also benchmarked itself against other schools.

One school has used the 'Read to Self' approach with P5 pupils. They began to see tremendous increases in reading age over a very short space of time. It was rolled out to the whole school, and as the approach has become more established, some pupils have made 36 months progress over 12 months.

Most of the early evidence around impact related to younger age groups. Some teachers said that they had seen an increase in phonological and phonemic awareness for pupils in P1, and evidence of this improvement as P1 classes moved up the school. A few also highlighted progress in other year groups, in relation to reading and writing levels.

In one Challenge Authority inspection, it was assessed that there is a range of emerging evidence that improvements in learning and teaching in literacy are leading to increased progress for children at the early level. For example, the nursery narrative initiative is showing evidence of eight months gain following an average of ten weeks intensive experience for children. Similarly, there is evidence of positive impact on improving progress of children in SIMD 1 and 2.

Numeracy

9 out of 10 schools reported numeracy interventions as part of their school's approach to closing the attainment gap.

Numeracy interventions weren't as common as those in literacy and health and wellbeing in the first two years of the ASF, with some local authorities and schools saying that numeracy interventions had generally started later. By Year 3, however, almost 9 out of 10 headteachers described numeracy interventions as part of their school's approach to closing the attainment gap.

In one local authority, 64 teachers have completed a Mathematical Growth Mindset course. One study with a P2 class showed the shift in mindset was significant

- 83% of children believed that even if they worked hard they would never become very good at any subject. This dropped to 0% at the end of the project.
- 94% of children initially believed that making mistakes in maths meant they weren't good at it. Only 6% still believed this after the project.
- Before learning about growth mindset, 100% of the class thought speed was very important when answering maths questions. Just 12% agreed with this by the end.

- Teacher observations also noted positive changes in confidence, attitude and resilience towards maths.

A survey of participating teachers found a growth mindset culture was developing, with a positive shift in attitudes towards children who were not attaining. The vast majority noted an improvement or significant improvement in the children's understanding of; speed related learning, seeing mistakes as learning opportunities, importance of effort and persistence; and an understanding of learning anxiety. [Challenge Authority Progress Report]

Schools reported using a range of sources to both target their interventions and to measure their effectiveness:

One secondary school has seen an improvement in reading age and confidence, in a short space of time. It has also seen a big increase in young people reaching appropriate numeracy levels at S3 and S4, and teachers can see that young people are now more able to answer more challenging maths questions. Teachers are also more aware of the types of questions that pupils struggle with, and there is a numeracy team to provide lesson starter resources to review these questions. Attainment data shows that the approaches are making a difference.

Health and Wellbeing

Teachers taking part in qualitative research felt that good health and wellbeing was critical in providing the foundation for learning and improved attainment.

Many teachers taking part in qualitative research felt that good health and wellbeing was critical in that that it provided the foundation for learning and improved attainment. This included addressing social and emotional needs, to ensure that children were able to attend school, enjoy school and be ready to learn.

Teachers indicated that progress on health and wellbeing could be challenging to track, but some were seeing positive indications. Signs of progress included:

- fewer exclusions from school;
- better punctuality;
- improvements in behaviour at school – for example through decreased referrals from class teachers around behaviour issues;
- healthy family eating;
- increased pupil motivation and engagement;
- increased resilience among pupils;
- improvements in relation to SHANARRI indicators.

ASF Evaluation qualitative case study evidence suggests that schools typically observed improvements around emotional wellbeing and pupil engagement more quickly than, for example, attainment. In addition to quantitative measures of pupil

attendance, these included more qualitative changes such as improved pupil confidence and engagement, which schools noted can be more difficult to measure.

Perceived improvements in emotional wellbeing and engagement were also consistent with a focus on these as underlying issues affecting attainment. For example, several schools noted that work to embed nurture approaches across the curriculum had been informed by a perceived need to improve emotional wellbeing and develop a more positive school ethos. Case studies suggested that schools' experience of implementing these approaches has reinforced the importance of these factors for improved attainment.

In the majority of local authorities, ASF funding had been used to support targeted health and wellbeing interventions, training and resources to address the needs of learners and their families. Almost all local authorities were able to evidence improvements in children and young people's health and wellbeing resulting from PEF interventions. Positive impacts were also noted as a consequence of the investment in professional learning through the SAC. In most local authorities, there was evidence of various improvements including improvements to the culture within settings, increased practitioner knowledge and skills, increased staff confidence to identify and effectively address learners' needs and improvements in the capacity of teams to sustain interventions.

A local authority reports a partnership approach with Barnado's which has achieved positive emotional and mental health outcomes for parents, children and young people. 211 children and young people have or are presently participating in 1 to 1 interventions with Family Support Workers who address mental health and wellbeing. 93% of families engaging or who have engaged in a bespoke package of support this year are showing improved mental health and well-being. 95% of families across the year have benefited from brief financial interventions such as vouchers for family activities, cinema, food share, food bank, funding grants, clothing vouchers etc. [Challenge Authority Progress Report]

Factors reported to have been integral to the delivery and success of health and wellbeing approaches have included: strong strategic emphasis on nurture; effective programmes and training; accreditation opportunities; provision of specific staff successful collaboration with a range of partners including key stakeholders such as parents and learners.

5.5 A focus on increasing the engagement of parents, carers and families living in areas of deprivation with their child's and their own learning

90% of headteachers reported an increase in collaborative working with families and communities as a result of the work on closing the attainment gap.

A focus on parental and family engagement has formed a key part of the approach developed in many schools. This has included, for example, approaches aimed at supporting pupil attendance and engagement, and improving children and young people's aspirations. Headteacher Survey 2019 findings suggest the need for a clear commitment to parental engagement, and recognition of the time required to build relationships with families.

There were a number of specific approaches to achieving and maintaining parental engagement highlighted in headteacher comments, including use of extra-curricular and physical/sports activities, and ensuring free access to activities. The importance of enabling parents to engage with schools in ways parents felt comfortable with was also highlighted. However, there was also the perception raised by some headteachers of the need for greater clarity in terms of how parents can positively support learning without it being overly burdensome.

In the 2019 headteacher survey, 27% of respondents indicated that there was a strong emphasis on parental or community engagement in their approach, and a further 52% stated that there was some focus in their approach. A great majority (90%) of headteachers in the 2020 survey reported an increase in collaborative working with families and communities as a result of the work on closing the attainment gap.

Staff are using a very wide range of universal and targeted family learning opportunities to successfully support the most vulnerable learners. For example, Families First holiday clubs provided lunch and engaging activities to over 200 children and their extended families daily. Targeted Family Learning programmes in partnership with community learning and development, including Pizza Reading and Pizza Maths, have supported the families in greatest need to engage much more effectively with school. Over 300 parent/carers have engaged with Pizza Family Learning and report that they feel much more confident in school and are better able to support their children in reading and numeracy. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

Family workers, funded through ASF and/or PEF, have been key in developing increased engagement of parents and carers with children and young people's learning in over half of the local authorities, with a focus of supporting those in most need. They effectively support families with a range of issues and seek to mitigate the impact of poverty on family life and learning. Collaborative working, including that of the Family Link workers, has led to improved outcomes for children, young people and their families by addressing very practical poverty-related barriers. There is evidence across the majority of local authorities of holiday activity and food programmes, with local authorities seeing improved access to food, clothing and benefits as a result of collaborative policies and plans. As a result of family learning

programmes, some findings identified strengthened relationships between schools and families.

A local authority reports positive outcomes for a project that provides support in linking home and school, which has provided sustainable solutions for young people who are poor attenders or dealing with mental health issues affecting school participation. Feedback from schools:

“Link between home and school, regular updates and communications are fantastic, positive outcomes for young people, positive relationships built between all.”

“Dedicated workers who liaise with families and engage with pupils in a way no other service can, they supplement the role of Social Work in most cases and have a very good working relationship with the school. They offer support and advice and updates to the pupil, families and school.” [Challenge Authority Progress Report]

Working alongside parents and helping to build their confidence and capacity is an important element for family learning. Evidence collected by Attainment Advisors in 2020 suggests that in at least a quarter of local authorities, there was evidence showing an emphasis on increasing provision of opportunities for parents. These include opportunities to gain valuable skills and qualifications, which have led to employment, further study and/or volunteering opportunities. An increasing number of these are able to report increases in parental employment, sometimes for the first time and a focus on improving parents’ communication and literacy skills.

There is a wide range of very well-planned and targeted interventions to engage parents and then to develop how families learn and become active members of the community. Many of the interventions result in accreditation for parents and an increasing number are leading to employment, sometimes for the first time. This is building confidence in individuals and supporting families to have a better future...there is strong evidence that parents are becoming increasingly engaged in supporting their children’s learning, in learning themselves and in becoming more active in the community. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

Community learning and development-led learning sessions are delivered to families in primary schools and direct support is currently being provided for over 150 young people in secondary schools. A range of courses, including those focused on personal development have supported a number of parents to successfully move onto college, university and employment. Parents and carers who met with the inspection team spoke very passionately about the impact of the learning opportunities, on their lives and those of their children, with a few describing the powerful life changing impact of the experiences on themselves and their families. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

A question was included in the Local Authority Survey in 2020 in order to capture local authority perspectives of the development of approaches to engaging families and communities. Three respondents indicated their local authority approach to

engaging families and communities had developed significantly over the previous year, with nine indicating the development of approach to engaging families and communities to some extent. Two further respondents perceived only limited development of their local authority's approach to engaging families and communities over the previous year.

As detailed in the 2019 Education Scotland summary inspection report of Challenge Authorities, work with families and communities has been strong across the nine Challenge Authorities. There were positive examples of families reporting greater confidence in supporting their children in reading and numeracy at home. In a majority of Challenge Authorities, there were also examples of structured family learning programmes, which made use of effective partnerships and lead to accredited and meaningful outcomes for parents. There was still scope to bring about greater coherence between work with families and communities and wider attainment challenge activity to support deeper self-evaluation and a clearer understanding of the impact of work with families on the attainment and achievement of children and young people.

In a Challenge Authority, community learning and development was a highly-effective partner for schools, working to improve the life chances of children and young people and their families. Community learning and development-led learning sessions were delivered to families in primary schools and direct support was provided for over 150 young people in secondary schools at the time the Education Scotland inspection report was written in 2019. A range of courses, including those focused on personal development, had supported a number of parents to successfully move onto college, university and employment. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

5.6 Care Experienced Children and Young People

The Care Experienced Children and Young People Funding (CECYP) was introduced in 2018/19 with funding allocated to all local authorities based on the number of looked after children they have in their care or schools aged between 5-15, but with the funding available to be invested to support all care experienced children and young people aged between 0-26.

Data from the 2019 Local Authority survey shows that twenty of twenty-four local authority respondents were of the view that the CECYP Fund supported strategic decision-making to improve attainment or outcomes for care experienced children and young people either to a great extent (9) or to some extent (11). A further four viewed the CECYP Fund to have supported strategic decision-making to a limited extent.

There was recognition in 2019 that it will take time to consult, plan, develop understanding and buy-in, and therefore it is too early to give more than initial indications of progress towards planning and implementation of the CECYP Fund. However, respondents' viewpoints were broadly positive and reflected, for example, the increased focus on care experienced children and young people and links to existing local authority priorities (e.g. Children's Services Plans).

There was also evidence of progress in terms of developing structures, processes and approaches. Models (eg Virtual Headteacher) and initiatives (eg MCR Pathways) were highlighted, as well as appointment of specific posts, such as CECYP support workers. There was also emerging evidence of decision-making informed by analysis of research and data, and of collaboration and sharing of good practice (eg CELCIS). As one local authority response described, the CECYP Fund represented '...[a] creative new approach to supporting Care Experienced Young People' at the local authority level.

According to data from the 2020 Local Authority survey, the CECYP Fund was viewed positively as having supported strategic decision-making for outcomes for care experienced children and young people with all local authority respondents indicating this (six to a great extent, nine to some extent).

5.7 Increased evidence of collaboration across the education system

Nearly 2 in 3 headteachers reported seeing an increase in collaborative working in their school as a result of ASF support in 2020, including one quarter who have seen a large increase.

‘Collaboration within and across all sectors has increased extensively enabling a relentless focus on enhancing teaching and learning, while sharing and planning experiences across the [broad general education] BGE and beyond. This has been both as a direct result of planned programmes and often as an unforeseen gain.’
(Challenge Authority respondent – ASF Year 5 Report)

Collaboration and partnership working have been hallmarks of the ASF since its inception. In the 2020 Headteacher Survey, the majority of headteachers had seen an increase in collaborative working in their school up to March 2020 as a result of ASF support:

- Nearly 2 in 3 (65%) indicated that they had seen an increase in collaborative working, including more than a third (36%) who had seen a large increase in collaborative working as a result of the fund.
- A substantial proportion of headteachers indicated that they had seen a further increase in collaborative working during school building closures between March and June 2020; 46% indicated this. Although this is fewer than had seen an increase in collaboration up to March 2020, it should be noted that school building closures covered a shorter time period.

Evidence from the 2019 Education Scotland summary inspection report of Challenge Authorities suggest that the most successful authorities had put in place very effective partnership working, enhancing the capacity of education staff to meet the needs of learners by improving learning and teaching. In particular, strong partnerships with universities were helping to improve pedagogy as well as the use and analysis of data to measure the impact of initiatives and interventions. Working in partnership around family engagement initiatives was leading to improvements in parenting skills, parental ambition and employability.

One authority continues to build upon and further strengthen the impact of partnership working to enhance staff capacity in improving literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Vibrant Communities is an important partner for many schools, working to improve the life chances of children, young people and their families. Other partners, including Centrestage, are making a positive difference to a few targeted young people and their families. Where successful, these are building young people’s confidence, improving their sense of belonging and re-engaging them in their learning. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

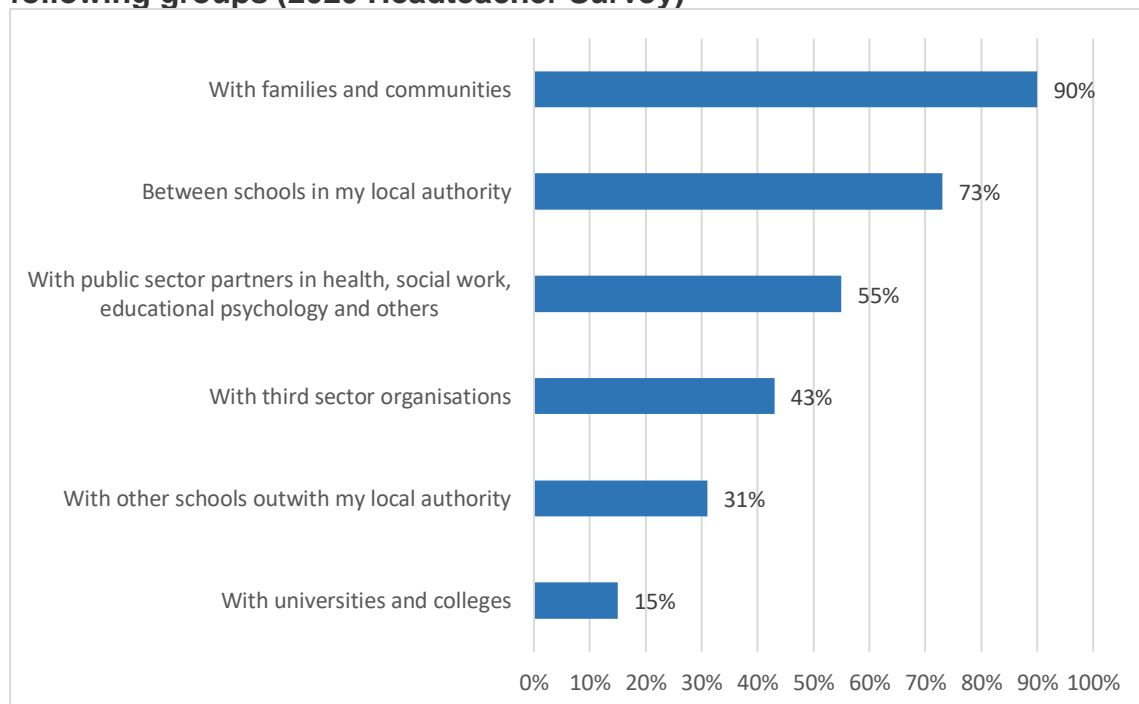
Types of collaboration

Increased collaborative working included collaboration around specific interventions or priorities (such as between teaching and support staff to develop a tailored curriculum for targeted pupils), and wider collaboration as part of a stronger focus on inquiry and improving practice. This collaboration was primarily within schools, but some had also used collaboration and pooling of resources with cluster schools to maximise the value of funding, and felt that in particular the autonomy provided by PEF had enabled this kind of collaboration around shared priorities.

In terms of organisations that schools are collaborating with as part of the ASF, schools were most likely to have seen an increase in collaboration with families and communities (90%), and other schools in their local authority (73%).

Headteachers also reported increased collaborative working with professionals in health, social work, and educational psychology (55%) and third sector organisations (43%). Headteachers also reported collaborations with schools outwith the local authority (31%) and with universities and colleges (15%).

Figure 5.1: Proportion of headteachers reporting collaboration with the following groups (2020 Headteacher Survey)



The extent of partnerships, particularly with other professionals (e.g. Speech and Language Therapists) and with third sector organisations was evident in Schools Programme progress reports. Partnerships with third sector organisations tended to be related to the contracting and delivery of specific interventions or projects, and were seen across a whole range of areas with many different partner organisations. Partnerships appeared particularly prevalent in relation to health and wellbeing-related activities and interventions.

Third sector organisations are working to engage parents through confidence building programmes, leading to them eventually taking up volunteering opportunities. The approach is designed to raise the expectations of parents who should then be more aspirational for their children. [Challenge Authority Inspection Report]

Collaboration featured strongly as a theme within Challenge Authority progress reports and provided some further detail on mechanisms to facilitate collaboration. For example, there was evidence of established networks within local authorities (such as networks linking headteachers to colleagues working at authority-wide SAC programme level), as well as specific collaborations (such as networks linking those with responsibilities for data and evidence).

Partnerships with universities were commonly reported within Challenge Authority progress reports. A number of Challenge Authorities have entered into collaborations with universities which have led to a number of benefits, such as schools implementing research-based initiatives and local authorities commissioning evaluations of approaches and progress.

An authority has initiated and developed university partnerships, including the University of Strathclyde and University of Stirling. This work is informed by identified areas of need across the council. As a result, university staff are working with several schools to implement research-based initiatives. Initial work on reading has involved helping school staff to understand reading as a social activity. This is beginning to lead to a culture shift in the schools involved. Children report that they are finding reading more enjoyable and have been learning techniques which help them in other curricular areas such as interdisciplinary learning. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

Collaborations beyond the local authority level were also highlighted in progress reports, such as schools collaborating at the Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) level (e.g. good practice sharing at RIC level regarding Family Link Worker interventions).

Impact of collaboration

Stakeholders involved in the ASF qualitative research in 2018 felt that the ASF had a positive impact on collaboration within schools and that increased collaborative working had resulted in:

- increased professional dialogue and thinking together about new approaches
- making teachers more willing to seek out new approaches
- enabled joint planning and a more formal approach to collaboration
- encouraged peer observation, team teaching and collegiate working
- encouraged teachers to undertake joint training and joint learning
- energised teachers and built a culture of sharing

- building the confidence of teachers in relation to peer observation and self-evaluation

Factors promoting and hindering collaboration

Respondents in the Headteacher survey (2017) were asked to comment on why they felt there had been an increase in collaboration as a result of the ASF. Their responses revealed that the following factors helped to foster collaboration:

- A shared motivation or commitment of teachers to achieve the aims of the ASF and work collaboratively to make an impact
- Additional resources made available as a result of the ASF, including additional staff and more time
- Increased enthusiasm, motivation and confidence of staff
- Professional learning opportunities

This was supported by qualitative research which found that training and professional development was a key catalyst for greater collaboration; it provided the opportunity for teachers to share their learning.

Teachers reported through qualitative research that within schools collaboration worked well because teachers were excited and eager to learn. Feeling empowered and confident and having the time to reflect on their practice also supported collaboration.

Strategic stakeholders taking part in the qualitative research felt that national events and the AAs role provided more opportunities for networking between local authorities. Local authorities and schools reported that positive aspects of the AAs role involved their ability to link in with national and local networks, fostering collaboration and information sharing.

In instances where headteachers did not identify improved collaboration as a result of the ASF, this was commonly due to perceptions of an existing well-established culture of collaboration. There was also some evidence of headteachers believing that the ASF had not had sufficient impact on staff time or opportunities within schools for collaborative working.

In some examples, RICs have helped to extend and facilitate collaboration by providing opportunities for staff to collaborate across local authorities. Partnerships with academic institutions have helped to support research and the upskilling of staff. In most local authorities effective collaborations between education staff and others including community learning and development staff, health professionals, businesses and third sector partners were noted. This has led to an improved understanding of barriers facing those living in poverty. Links with employers through Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) have had a positive impact upon children and young people affected by poverty, for example, by increasing work experience opportunities for vulnerable young people.

5.8 Increased use of data and evidence

Local authorities have put in place support for using data/evidence to target and evaluate approaches, while 84% of headteachers felt that they are ‘very good’ or ‘good’ in using data and evidence to inform development of their approach.

Evidence from the 2019 Education Scotland summary inspection report of Challenge Authorities indicate that the authorities making the greatest progress with improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap have high levels of expertise in data analysis and use this to drive outcome-focused self-evaluation.

Almost all schools have developed approaches and procedures for tracking and monitoring children’s progress in literacy and numeracy. This has been increasingly supported by local authority tracking systems. In most schools, regular meetings between staff with senior leaders to discuss children’s and young people’s progress are a key feature of effective practice. This works well when all staff are involved in collaborative discussions.

Staff in almost all schools continue to increase their confidence in the use and analysis of data to plan improvements. The use of the Insight senior phase benchmarking tool in secondary schools allows staff to identify the attainment of different groups of learners, including those residing in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 1 and 2, those in receipt of FSM, and young people requiring additional support. This is supporting the planning of interventions to close any gaps between groups and raise their attainment.

Schools’ use of data

Findings from a range of data sources show that schools are increasingly confident in using data, and are seeing the benefit from doing so. Using evidence has been key in choosing the correct approaches, and schools are now collecting more data than before.

The Headteacher Survey 2020 explored the extent to which headteachers felt confident using data. Findings included:

- A large majority of headteachers felt that they are ‘very good’ or ‘good’ in using data and evidence to inform development of their approach; 84% indicated this. This represents a nine-point decrease from 2019, and is similar to the 2017 survey. Although the data do not explain why this measure has decreased, qualitative evidence have suggested that the increasing number of sources of data that are available to schools may be a factor.
- Headteachers were positive about their skills in measuring the impact of their approaches; 82% were positive about their ability to identify appropriate measures, and 76% were positive about their use of evidence to measure impact. However, the latter result represents a 14-point decrease from the 2018 and 2019 surveys (where 90% felt they used evidence to effectively measure impact).

It is also notable that schools who only receive PEF and those with lower PEF allocations were less positive than others on this indicator.

- The majority of headteachers feel that ASF support has helped to develop staff skills and knowledge in using data and evaluation; 63% indicated that ASF had helped to develop these skills to a 'great' or 'moderate' extent. Survey findings indicate some significant variation in views across key respondent groups. In particular, schools who only receive PEF, those in rural areas and those with lower PEF allocations were less positive on this measure.
- Evaluation plans were in place to measure the impact of ASF supported approaches in the great majority of schools, with 95% of Headteacher Survey respondents indicating the presence of a plan. There were a number of reasons for the absence of an evaluation plan provided by the remaining 5%, including referenced changes to schools' approach or indicators requiring the production of a new plan, changes in leadership or staffing constraints delaying production, or difficulty identifying success measures for approaches being implemented.

Local authority approaches

Use of data and evidence relevant to the local context to support decision-making featured strongly for most local authority respondents of the 2020 ASF Local Authority Survey, with ten out of fourteen indicating data and evidence had featured to a great extent in decision-making over the previous year. Two respondents indicated it had featured to some extent, and a further two felt it had featured to some extent.

Progress reports provide evidence of local authority level use of data and evidence within Challenge Authorities. The continued and expanding use of data to support targeting, monitoring and evaluation of work-streams, initiatives and approaches was evident across Challenge Authority progress reports, pointing to the increased focus on data and evaluation to support decision-making and focus on improvement.

A local authority was assessed in an inspection as having an outstanding approach to the use of data to inform improvement in all aspects of its work related to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The central team of authority officers is strongly focused on improvement and rigorously discusses data regularly with schools, including a focus on the local evidence for impact of Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding. The data analysis team supports this work by providing highly effective professional learning for individual staff, groups, schools and officers. Trained data mentors in each primary school and principal teachers in each secondary school are helping to build staff expertise in data analysis. This is enabling them to identify and implement appropriate, impactful interventions for individual children and young people. [Challenge Authority Inspection]

Evidence from the 2019 Education Scotland summary inspection report of Challenge Authorities shows that, in the majority of Challenge Authorities, continuous progress in closing the gap was underpinned by highly-effective self-evaluation. All Challenge Authorities had improved or were developing further their use of data to raise

attainment. In all nine Challenge Authorities, professional learning in leadership, pedagogy and engaging with research and research methodology was evident.

Types of data used

Increasingly rich data environments were suggested by evidence sources, with a range of mechanisms for using data including combining of data from different sources and different levels within the system. An increasing focus on, and availability of local data was also apparent. Feedback gathered from headteachers as part of the Year 4 survey indicated use of a range of data tools including BGE toolkit and Insight, alongside evidence relating to participation rates, attendance, and progress through specific ASF programmes and interventions.

A wide variety of data sources were cited by Challenge Authorities in their progress reports. These included:

- Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL)
- Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA)
- BGE Benchmarking Toolkit
- Insight
- New Group Reading Test (NGRT)
- Positive destinations
- Attendance
- Exclusions

Most Challenge Authorities complemented this data with other evidence sources, including: local surveys (including pre- and post-implementation); qualitative focus groups; feedback forms; pupil assessments and attendance tracking.

A local authority described the programme they had built to ensure effective analysis and use of data. Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) data is interrogated with all schools who are individually supported and challenged through authority-led attainment visits. A range of data collated through authority learning visits, standards and quality reports, establishment improvement plans, literacy and numeracy baseline assessments (pre and post) and practitioner voice through Collaborative Action Research informs where direct interventions within the authority are made to maximise impact on learning and teaching.

In addition, in April 2018, a mapping study revealed that 6 out of the 9 Challenge Authorities had commissioned an external evaluation to help measure progress and impact of the funding received. These evaluations were undertaken by universities and typically focussed on one of their planned work-streams.

Furthermore, there was some evidence amongst Challenge Authorities of the creation of bespoke tools for direct use by schools. For example, one Challenge Authority had created a monitoring and tracking database for schools to use to track progress on interventions. In another, a specific tool to support schools to measure the impact of interventions was being piloted across the local authority. This raises the potential for authorities to learn from each other about these approaches as they

develop, and to share emerging practice so that these can support other authorities in their own developments.

Benefits of using evidence and data in decision making

According to ASF Evaluation qualitative case study data, local authorities and teachers felt that the use of data had improved considerably through the ASF. It had:

- enabled the development of systems which track each pupil, and allow easy comparison of outcomes within schools, and across some local authorities;
- embedded the use of improvement science methods within some schools;
- built teacher skills around data, evidence, monitoring and evaluation;
- encouraged teachers and schools to take ownership of monitoring and evaluation; and
- enabled teachers to interpret SIMD data, and other data, more carefully and more meaningfully, understanding changes over time.

Factors supporting increasing data literacy and use

Most local authorities have invested in professional learning activities to develop data literacy in education staff, particularly school leaders. This has included training in the use of specific tools such as SNSA, BGE Toolkit and Insight, as well as coaching sessions focused on data.

AAs have been influential in supporting the development of data literacy by working directly with headteachers and/or providing professional development sessions with a focus on helping them to identify poverty-related attainment gaps. Almost all AA reports highlighted this as an aspect of their work with headteachers. CYPIC advisers have also provided important support in this area.

Other local authority staff have been identified as having a specific role in improving the use of data. These included data analysts, data coaches and data champions. Most local authorities have created data tools and/or packs to support effective data use at school level including data packs which are provided by local authorities to support schools as well as online analytical tools which could be used at school level.

6. Progress towards achieving long-term outcomes

There are four long term outcomes that the Challenge aims to achieve in order to progress towards the strategic aim of closing the poverty-related attainment gap. These are:

- Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of poverty related attainment.
- All children and young people are achieving the expected or excellent educational outcome, regardless of their background.
- An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in ethos, practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people.
- Closing of the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

This chapter uses a range of evidence – headteacher views, attainment data and wider data – to assess progress towards these long-term outcomes.

Summary

Perceptions of progress

Headteachers are very positive about the impact of SAC in their school and optimistic about improvements being embedded and continuing over the next five years.

- 9 in 10 schools report seeing an improvement in closing the poverty-related gap in attainment and/or health and wellbeing, while a similar proportion of schools (88%) expect to see an improvement in the next five years.
- A great majority (84%) of headteachers indicated that the approach to achieving equity is embedded within the school community to either a great extent (35%) or a moderate extent (49%).
- Ability to implement approaches relevant to the school, teaching and staffing resources, and high quality learning and teaching, were perceived to be the most important factors in supporting closing the attainment gap.

Progress in improving attainment

Progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap has been made on a number of measures, although the level of such progress is varied depending on the measure under consideration. For the majority of measures, attainment of those from the most deprived areas has increased, although in some cases not at the same rate as for those from the least deprived areas.

- Change in the attainment gap across the Challenge Authorities is varied, and on some measures the gap has widened. However, this is largely not due to performance worsening, but instead that performance in the most deprived areas

has improved but not kept pace with performance of those from the least deprived areas.

- The gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy and numeracy has narrowed since 2016/17.
- At S3, the gap between the proportion of pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy reduced slightly between 2016/17 and 2017/18, but then increased slightly between 2017/18 and 2018/19. There has been a narrowing of the gap between the most and least deprived areas for pupils in S3 who achieved their expected level in numeracy since 2016/17.

Progress in wider education measures

A range of key wider data sources may provide insight into the longer term benefits of the SAC for young people. Across a range of data sources, an increasing proportion of young people from the most deprived areas are in education, employment or training; are in a positive initial and follow up destination after school, or are accessing Higher/Further Education. The gap between young people from the most and least deprived areas has narrowed across all these measures.

- The Annual Participation Measure – the proportion of young people in education, employment or training – shows there has been an overall reduction in the participation gap between those living in the most deprived areas compared to those living in the least deprived areas (9.9 percentage points in 2020, 10.5 percentage points in 2019, 10.8 percentage points in 2018, 11.6 percentage points in 2017).
- The percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination consistently increased between 2009/10 and 2018/19, for leavers from both the most deprived and least deprived areas. The gap in positive initial destinations also decreased in this period. However, the proportions in positive initial destinations fell in 2019/20 for leavers from both the most and least deprived areas and the gap widened. This is likely to at least in part reflect the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Overall, a greater proportion of school leavers from the most deprived areas were reported to be in Higher/Further Education as a positive initial destination in 2019/20 (65.7%) than in 2013/14 (58.8%).
- Between 2013/14 and 2019/20, the total Undergraduate Higher Education entrants from the most deprived areas increased from 14,730 to 16,500. In the same period, the proportion of all entrants from the most deprived areas increased from 17.2% to 19.4%.

6.1 Perceptions of progress

9 in 10 schools reported seeing an improvement in closing the poverty-related gap in attainment and/or health and wellbeing, while a similar proportion of schools (88%) expect to see an improvement in the next five years

- 9 in 10 schools reported seeing an improvement in closing the poverty related gap in attainment and/or health and wellbeing as a result of ASF supported approaches. This included 20% that had seen 'a lot' of improvement to date.
- There has been a 12-point increase since 2017 in the proportion of schools reporting an improvement in closing the gap; from 78% in 2017, to 88% in 2018, 91% in 2019, and 90% in 2020.
- Almost 9 out of 10 schools (88%) expected to see improvement in closing the gap over the next five years, although this represents a 10-point reduction since the 2019 survey. This included 21% who expected to see 'a lot' of improvement.
- Survey responses indicated some correlation between schools having already seen improvement, and expectations of further improvement; 67% of those who had seen 'a lot' of improvement to date expected to see 'a lot' more, compared with 11% of those who had only seen 'a little' improvement to date.

The survey showed some variation in views across funding streams, with Schools Programme respondents most likely to report an improvement in closing the gap. Schools who only receive PEF funding, particularly those with a lower PEF allocation, were least likely to report an improvement.

Analysis indicates that the headteachers most likely to have seen progress in closing the gap were those who had seen a change in culture or ethos (more collaborative working and/or embedding the approach to equity) or have improved their understanding of barriers faced by children, young people and families.

Challenge Authority progress reports highlight improvement in terms of the impact of approaches on 'soft indicators' of health and wellbeing, with evidence cited of, for example, improved readiness to learn, decreased disruption in the classroom, and improved social and emotional competence.

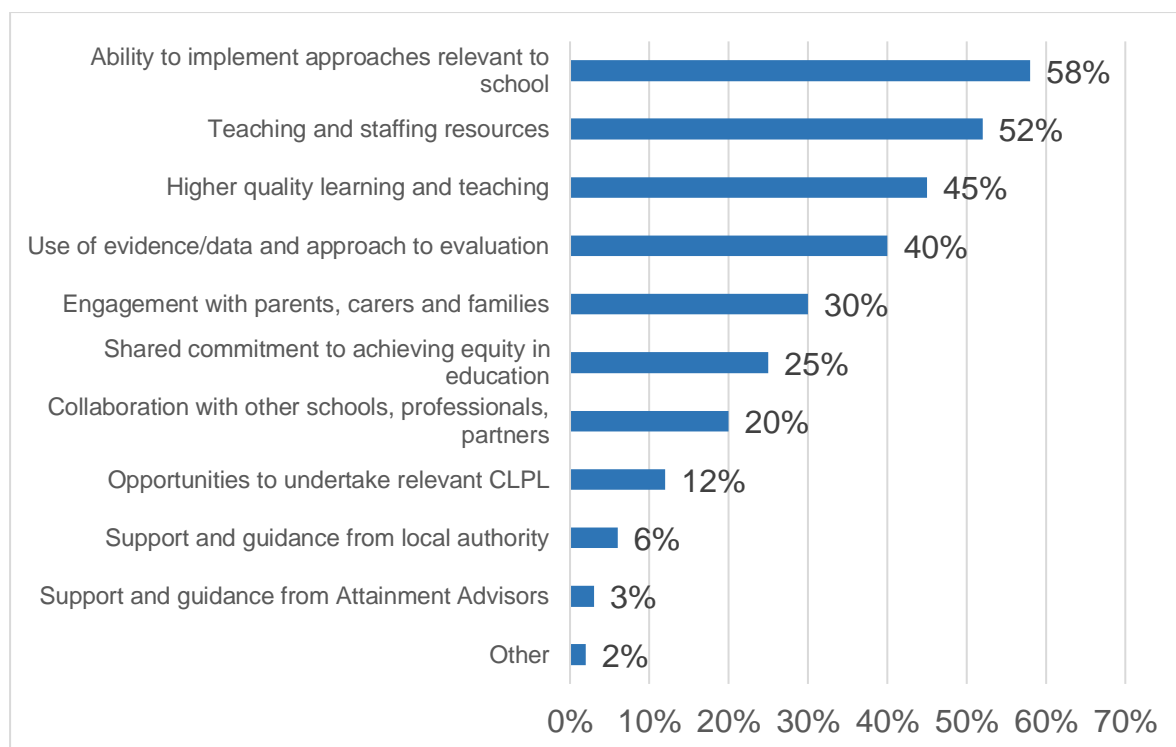
Improvements were also indicated in terms of increasing practitioner confidence, knowledge and practice in supporting health and wellbeing, as a result of professional learning and a strategic focus on health and wellbeing in policy and guidance. Pupil voice was also noted as a further form of impact evidence in terms of improvements in health and wellbeing. A number of Challenge Authorities described data gathered on such measures as social and emotional competence, reduced disruptive behaviours, improved empathy and problem solving skills.

6.2 Factors supporting progress in closing the attainment gap

Ability to implement approaches relevant to the school, teaching and staffing resources, and high quality learning and teaching, were perceived to be the most important factors in supporting closing the attainment gap.

Headteachers were asked to report factors that supported progress towards closing the poverty-related gap in attainment or health and being (Figure 8.1). The most common factors chose were the ability to implement approaches relevant to school (58% of headteachers), teaching and staff resources (52%), higher quality learning and teaching (45%), use of evidence/data (40%) and engagement with families (30%). The results show the importance of flexibility in approach, resources, supporting practitioners, and engaging with families.

Figure 6.1: Factors supporting progress towards closing the poverty-related gap in attainment or health and wellbeing



The factors listed above link back positively to the short/medium term outcomes that were considered in the previous section. For example, ability to implement approaches relevant to school was the most common factor listed as supporting progress, while 93% of headteachers agreed that they were able to select the approach that was most effective for their school. Use of evidence/data was also listed as an important factor to supporting progress, with 84% of headteachers agreeing that they were 'good' or 'very good' at using data to inform development of their approach.

Early analysis from the 2020 Headteacher Survey considered the relationship between perceived progress in closing the gap and other aspects of headteachers' experiences. This analysis indicates that a number of respondent groups are more

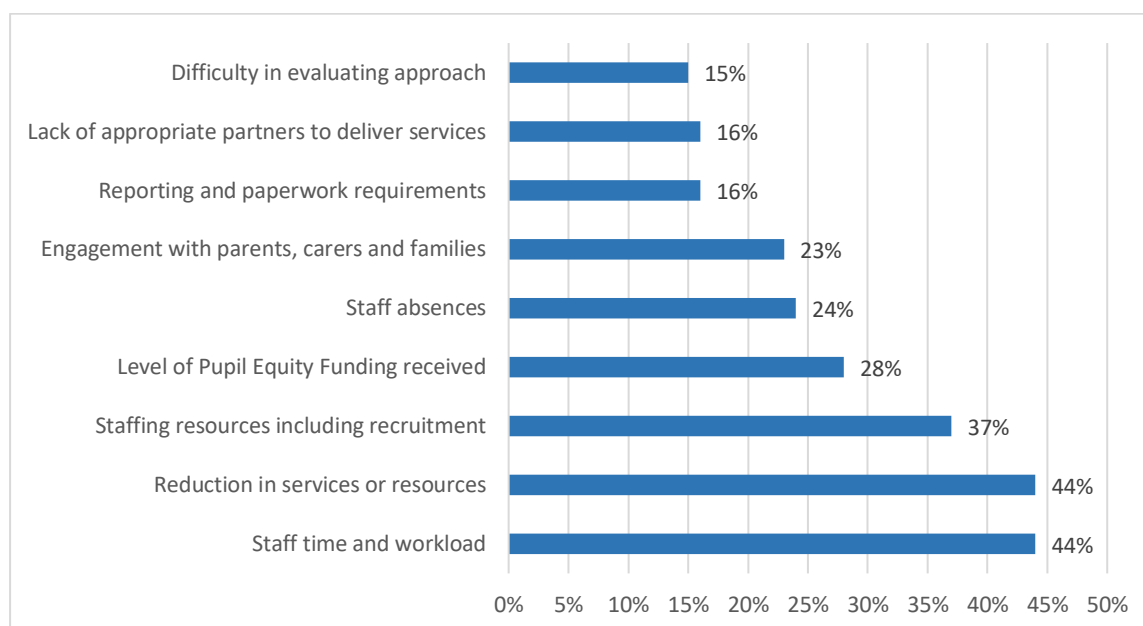
likely to have seen progress in closing the gap. In particular, survey results indicate that key factors in closing the gap include changes of culture or ethos (such as embedding the approach to equity or improved collaborative working), better understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families, skills and knowledge in use of data and evidence, and engagement with families and communities.

Table 6.1: Respondent groups most likely to have seen progress in closing the gap (2020)

Feel that approach to achieving equity has been embedded within school community
Feel they understand the challenges and barriers faced by pupils and parents affected by poverty
Feel ASF has helped to develop staff data and evidence skills
Have seen an increase in collaborative working
Feel their measuring of progress and impact of approaches is 'very good' or 'good'
Feel their use of data and evidence to measure impact is 'very good' or 'good'
Engagement with families and communities has been part of the school approach
Approach to equity has developed from the previous school year

Headteachers were also asked in the survey about the key factors that limited in progress in closing the attainment gap. Staff time and workload, and reduction in other services/resources were seen as the main factors limiting progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Each were mentioned by 44% of respondents. Other commonly mentioned factors included staffing resources and recruitment, level of PEF received and staff absences.

Figure 6.2: Factors limiting progress towards closing the poverty-related gap in attainment or health and wellbeing



6.3 Progress in improving attainment

This section provides detail on the various data and evidence that provide insight into the closing of the attainment gap. This includes attainment measures (ACEL and school leaver attainment) and wider measures related to educational attainment and deprivation.

The assessment of progress in terms of whether the gap is narrowing is nuanced and impacted by many contextual factors. Given the scope/timescales for some data collections, it can be difficult in the short to medium term to assess the extent of progress. Evidence of some of the impacts may not emerge in data until the longer term (for example, SCQF Level 5 and 6 qualifications data will not emerge for a considerable number of years for current primary pupils).

6.3.1 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL)

ACEL data reports on the percentage of pupils who have achieved the expected Curriculum for Excellence levels in Literacy and Numeracy. It covers publicly funded Primary 1, Primary 4, Primary 7 and Secondary 3 pupils.

As a result of COVID-19 and the closure of schools in March 2020, the ACEL 2019/20 data collection did not go ahead. Therefore the latest data available is 2018/19, and reliable comparisons can be made back to 2016/17.

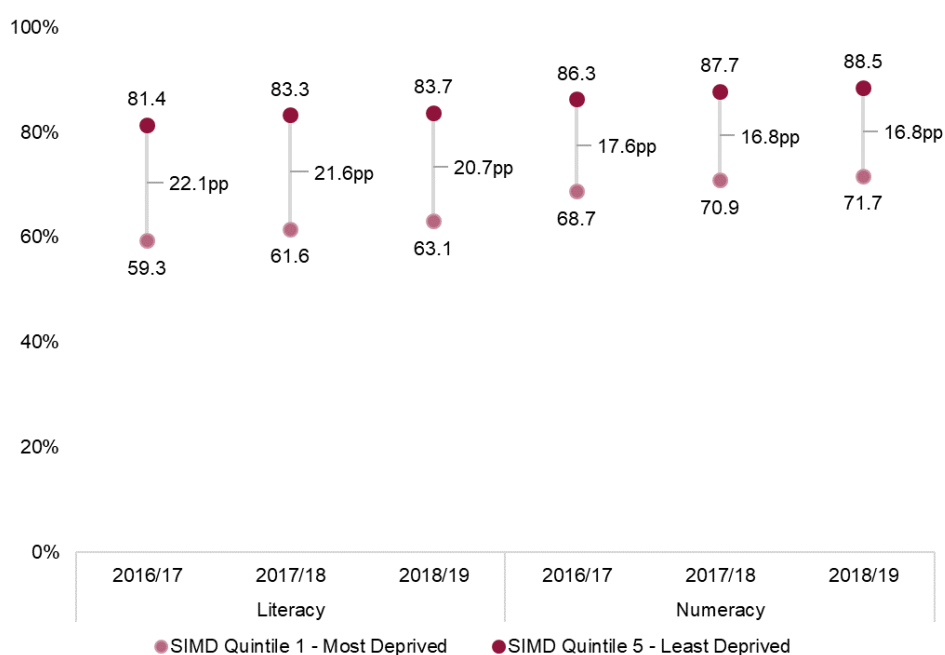
Primary school attainment

The proportion of primary children achieving the expected level in literacy and numeracy has steadily increased between 2016/17 and 2018/19 in Challenge Authorities, non-Challenge Authorities and in Scotland overall.

The gap between the proportion of primary children from the most and least deprived areas that have achieved the expected level in literacy narrowed for Challenge Authorities, non-Challenge Authorities and Scotland overall between 2017/18 and 2018/19. For numeracy, the gap widened slightly for Challenge Authorities and non-Challenge Authorities between 2017/18 and 2018/19, and remained the same at Scotland level.

The attainment of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined) in literacy and numeracy are outlined below, based on analysis of ACEL data for 2016/17 to 2018/19.

Figure 6.3: Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils (combined) achieving expected Level in Literacy and Numeracy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2018/19



Source: Achievement of CfE Levels data collection

In terms of primary school pupils' literacy and numeracy performance:

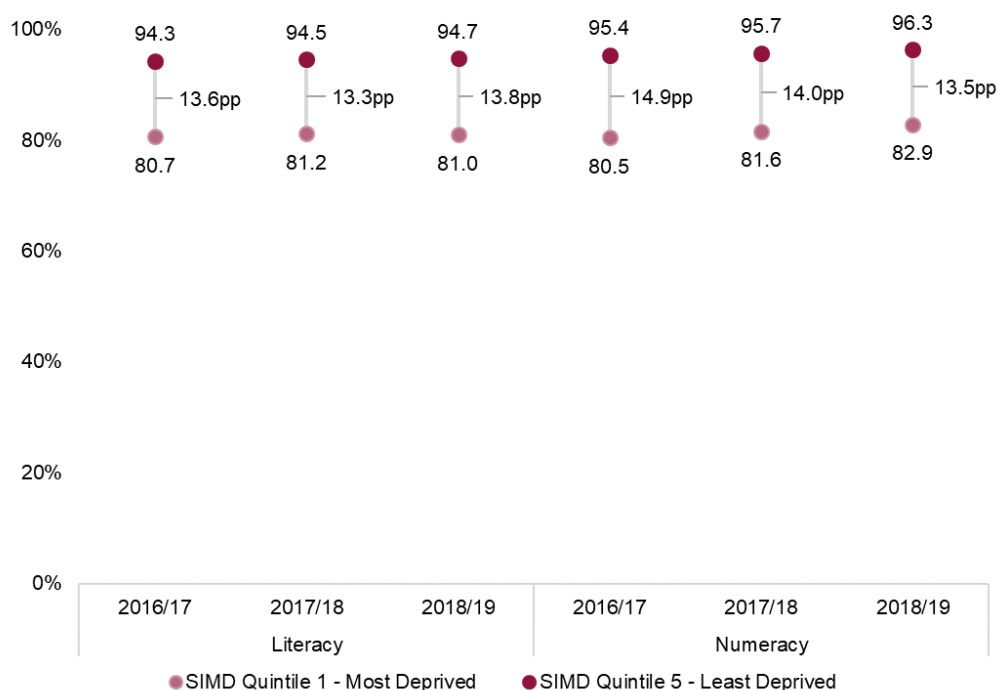
- The gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy has narrowed since 2016/17.
- The gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in numeracy narrowed between 2016/17 and 2017/18 and remained stable in 2018/19.
- The proportion of primary pupils achieving the expected level in literacy has steadily increased in Challenge Authorities, from 67.5% in 2016/17 to 69.1% in 2017/18, and 70.8% in 2018/19.

- This proportion has also increased in non-Challenge Authorities (70.1% in 2016/17 to 73.0% in 2018/19) and Scotland overall (69.2% in 2016/17 to 72.3% in 2018/19).
- For Challenge Authorities, the gap between the proportion of Primary pupils from the most and least deprived areas widened from 19.8 percentage points in 2016/17 to 20.9 percentage points in 2017/18, and narrowed to 20.2 in 2018/19.
- At Scotland level, the gap narrowed from 2016/17 to 2018/19. The literacy attainment gap for non-Challenge Authorities closed from 24.7 percentage points in 2016/17 to 22.6 percentage points in 2017/18, and further narrowed to 22.2 percentage points in 2018/19.

Secondary school (S3) attainment

At S3, the gap between the proportion of young people from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy reduced slightly between 2016/17 and 2017/18, but then increased slightly between 2017/18 and 2018/19. There has been a narrowing of the gap between the most and least deprived areas for young people in S3 who achieved their expected level in numeracy since 2016/17.

Figure 6.4: Percentage of S3 pupils achieving Third Level or better, by SIMD, for Literacy and Numeracy, 2016/17 to 2018/19



Source: Achievement of CfE Levels data collection

Comparing levels of attainment across Challenge Authorities (combined) and Scotland, from 2016/17 to 2018/19, shows that:

- The proportion of secondary school pupils achieving the expected level in literacy has remained broadly the same in Challenge Authorities, with 87.2% in 2016/17 and 87.1% in 2017/18, as well as 86.9% in 2018/19.
- Over the same period of time, this proportion has increased in non-Challenge Authorities (87.1% in 2016/17 to 88.4% in 2018/19) and at Scotland level (87.1% in 2016/17 to 87.9% in 2018/19).
- The proportion of S3 pupils achieving the expected level in numeracy has risen in Challenge Authorities (combined), from 86.6% in 2016/17, to 87.2% in 2017/18 and 87.3% in 2018/19.
- While there has been an increase in attainment for Challenge Authorities (combined), over the same time period, there has been a greater increase in non-Challenge Authorities (combined) (88.9% in 2016/17 to 91.5% in 2018/19).

Looking at the size of the gap between the proportion of S3 young people from the most and least deprived areas that have achieved the expected level in literacy and numeracy, from 2016/17 to 2018/19:

- For literacy, the gap within Challenge Authorities (combined) widened from 11.3 percentage points to 12.8 percentage points in 2017/18, and further increased to 13.5 percentage points in 2018/19.
- For non-Challenge Authorities, the literacy gap closed each year from 17.2 percentage points in 2016/17, 15.5 percentage points in 2017/18, to 15.2 percentage points 2018/19. Literacy remained broadly stable at a Scotland level, with a slight narrowing from 13.6 percentage points in 2016/17 to 13.3 percentage points in 2017/18, followed by an increase to 13.8 percentage points in 2018/19.
- The numeracy gap between attainment in the most and least deprived areas has narrowed for Challenge Authorities (combined), non-Challenge Authorities (combined) and Scotland overall.
- For non-Challenge Authorities, the gap in numeracy reduced from 16.4 percentage points in 2016/17 to 14.6 percentage points, and to 13.1 percentage points in 2018/19.
- The gap in numeracy for Challenge Authorities reduced from 13.9 percentage points in 2016/17 to 13.6 percentage points in 2017/18, and further narrowed to 13.3 percentage points in 2018/19.

6.3.2 School leaver attainment: percentage of school leavers achieving awards by SCQF level

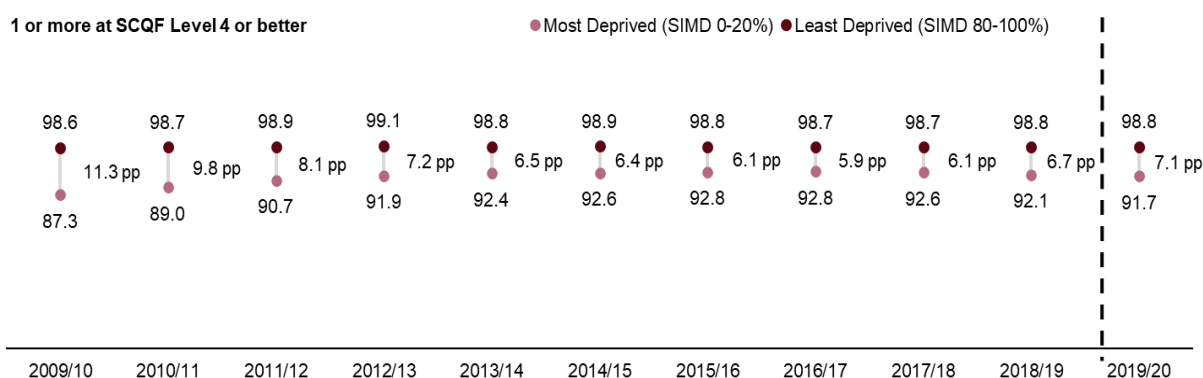
The attainment of school leavers in Scotland is based on the Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations publication. This data includes attainment in National Qualifications achieved throughout all stages of a pupil’s schooling, covering all school leavers from publicly funded mainstream schools.

This section will consider the proportion of school leavers attaining one pass or more at a given SCQF level or better (SCQF Level 4 to 6) in Challenge Authorities (combined), non-Challenge Authorities (combined) and Scotland overall, from 2009/10 to 2019/20.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of 2020 National 5 (SCQF Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) exams and external marking of coursework. Grades in these qualifications in 2019/20 were instead based on teacher estimates. For this reason a **dashed line break** in the series has been placed between 2018/19 and 2019/20 to indicate that care must be taken when comparing 2019/20 attainment to that of earlier years. Interpretation must take full account of the different certification methods and a change in the attainment levels in 2019/20 should not be seen as an indication that performance has improved or worsened without further evidence.

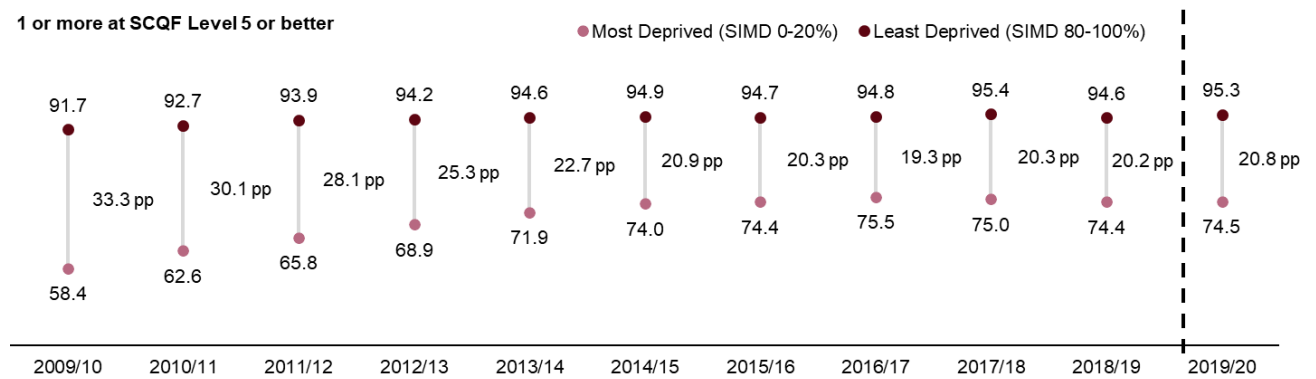
Chart 8.5 shows the proportions of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas who attained 1 pass or more at SCQF Levels 4 or better, 5 or better and 6 or better.

Figure 6.5 Percentage of school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 4, by SIMD¹ quintile, 2009/10 to 2019/20^a



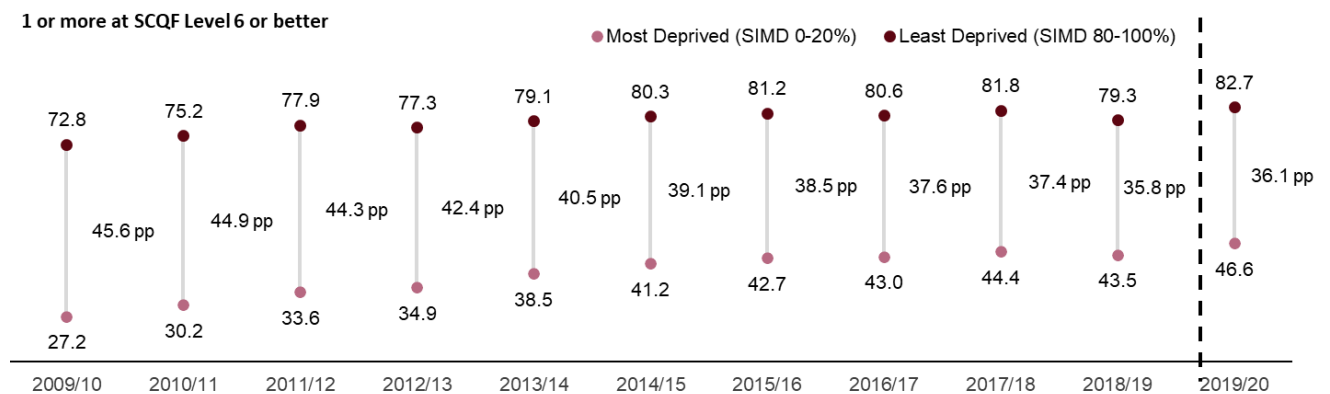
The gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas attaining 1 pass or more at **SCQF Level 4 or better**, was 7.1 percentage points in 2019/20. This is up from 6.7 percentage points in 2018/19 due to a small reduction in the proportion of leavers from the most deprived areas who attained a pass at this level. Following a steady reduction in the gap between 2009/10 (11.3 percentage points) and 2016/17 (5.9 percentage points), the gap has widened each year and in 2019/20 is the widest it has been since 2012/13.

Figure 6.6: Percentage of school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 5, by SIMD¹ quintile, 2009/10 to 2019/20



At **SCQF Level 5 or better**, the gap was 20.8 percentage points in 2019/20. This is up from 20.2 percentage points in 2018/19. The proportion attaining 1 pass or more has increased slightly for school leavers from the most deprived areas but increased by more for those from the least deprived areas which has led to the gap widening. Between 2009/10 and 2016/17 the attainment gap at SCQF Level 5 or better reduced steadily from 33.3 percentage points to 19.3 percentage points. Since then it has increased to 20.8 percentage points in 2019/20.

Figure 6.7: Percentage of school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 6, by SIMD¹ quintile, 2009/10 to 2019/20



At **SCQF Level 6 or better**, the gap was 36.1 percentage points in 2019/20. This is up slightly from 35.8 percentage points in 2018/19. The proportion attaining 1 pass or more has increased for both school leavers from the most and least deprived areas but has increased by more for those from the least deprived areas which has led to the gap widening slightly. Over the longer term, the gap has reduced from 45.6 percentage points in 2009/10.

Challenge Authorities

As outlined above, care should be taken when making comparisons between 2019/20 and earlier years and any increase or decrease should not be interpreted as indicating improving or worsening performance without further evidence.

The proportion of school leavers attaining one pass or more at **SCQF Level 5 or better** for Challenge Authorities (combined) slightly increased in 2019/20 to 84.2% from 83.7% in 2018/19. This represented a return to 2017/18 levels (84.2%) but was down on 84.8% in 2016/17.

A similar pattern was seen at Scotland level and for non-Challenge Authorities (combined) whereby the proportion of leavers with 1 or more pass at SCQF Level 5 increased between 2018/19 and 2019/20, after a decrease the previous year.

The proportion of school leavers attaining one or more pass at **SCQF Level 6 or better** has seen a similar trend across Challenge Authorities (combined), and Scotland overall, from 2016/17 to 2019/20. This trend has featured an increase from 2016/17 to 2017/18, followed by a decrease in 2018/19 and then an increase of more than 3 percentage points in 2019/20.

In Challenge Authorities, the proportion increased from 59.1% in 2016/17 to 61.9% in 2019/20. In non-Challenge Authorities there was an increase from 62.1% to 64.7% in 2019/20.

From 2016/17 to 2019/20, the proportion of school leavers attaining one or more pass at **SCQF Level 7 or better** for Challenge Authorities (combined), non-Challenge Authorities (combined) and Scotland increased slightly in 2017/18, decreased marginally in 2018/19 before increasing by around 4 percentage points in 2019/20.

In Challenge Authorities, the proportion slightly increased from 15.4% in 2016/17 to 15.9% in 2017/18, decreased to 14.8% in 2018/19 and rose to 18.7% in 2019/20. In non-Challenge Authorities there was an increase from 21.0% in 2016/17 to 22.0% in 2017/18, a decrease to 20.9% in 2018/19 then an increase to 25.1% in 2019/20. At Scotland level there was an increase from 19.3% in 2016/17 to 20.2% in 2017/18, a decrease to 19.1% in 2018/19 and an increase in 2019/20 to 23.2%.

Gap between school leavers from the most and least deprived areas

At SCQF Level 5:

- The percentage point gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas attaining one or more pass reduced slightly for Challenge Authorities and at Scotland level between 2016/17 to 2018/19.
- The gap widened for Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (18.3 to 18.8 percentage points) before decreasing again slightly in 2018/19 (18.5 percentage points) and widening to 19.4 percentage points in 2019/20.
- A similar pattern is seen at Scotland level with 19.3% in 2016/17 increasing to 20.3% in 2017/18, a slight decrease in 2018/19 to 20.2% and an increase to 20.8 percentage points in 2019/20.
- In non-Challenge authorities (combined), the gap has consistently increased between 2016/17 to 2019/20 from 21.7 percentage points in 2016/17, to 22.7

percentage points in 2017/18, 22.9 percentage points in 2018/19 and 23.2 percentage points in 2019/20.

At **SCQF Level 6** or better:

- The gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas that have attained one pass or more narrowed across Challenge Authorities (combined) between 2016/17 and 2019/20.
- The gap declined steadily from 2016/17 (37.9 percentage points), 2017/18 (36.3 percentage points), 2018/19 (35.2 percentage points) to 2019/20 (35.1 percentage points).
- The gap widened in non-Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (40.3 to 41.1 percentage points), and subsequently decreased in 2018/19 (39.6 percentage points) and again in 2019/20 (39.5 percentage points).

At **SCQF Level 7** or better:

- The gap at SCQF Level 7 or better for Challenge Authorities (combined) decreased between 2016/17 and 2017/18 and subsequently closed further between 2017/18 and 2018/19.
- The gap narrowed for Challenge Authorities (combined) from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (20.9 to 20.4 percentage points), and decreased again in 2018/19 (18.8 percentage points), rising to 23.4 percentage points in 2019/20.
- In non-Challenge authorities (combined), the gap increased slightly from 26.5 percentage points in 2016/17, to 26.6 percent in 2017/18 before reducing to 24.3 percentage points in 2018/19 before increasing to 28.6 percentage points in 2019/20.

6.3.3 Annual Participation Measure (APM)

The participation gap between those who live in the most deprived and least deprived areas narrowed year-on-year between 2017 and 2020.

The APM is another measure for considering progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap, set out in the NIF. It is produced by Skills Development Scotland and reports on the economic and employment activity of the 16-19 year old cohort.

The proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment was 92.1% in 2020 which represents an increase of 0.5 percentage points compared to 91.6% in 2019. This is the highest rate since the inception of the APM. The 2019 figure showed a decrease of 0.2 percentage points compared to the 2018 figure (91.8%). Previous figures were 91.1% (2017) and 90.4% (2016).

Between 2019 and 2020 the participation rate rose in 20 of the 32 local authorities. Although there remains variation in the participation rate by local authority, the gap between the highest and lowest participation rates reduced from 9.3 percentage points in 2017 to 7.5 percentage points in 2020. Similarly the participation gap between those who lived in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas continues to show narrowing with a gap of 9.9 percentage points in 2020 (compared to 12.9 percentage points in 2016, 11.5 percentage points in 2017, 10.8 percentage points in 2018 and 10.5 percentage points in 2019).

Looking specifically at the participation rate in the Challenge Authorities, seven of the nine recorded a slight increase between year 4 and year 5 of the ASF. This represents an increase from 2019 where six of the nine recorded a slight increase between Year 3 and Year 4 of the ASF. In 2018 seven out of the nine recorded an increase between Year 2 and Year 3 of the ASF.

in the rate of participation amongst those within the most deprived areas. With regards to Challenge Authorities:

- In Year 5 of the ASF, four Challenge Authorities had a smaller or similar participation gap compared to Scotland.
- Between Year 4 and 5 of the ASF, the participation gap narrowed in seven Challenge Authorities.
- In Year 5 of the ASF, the participation rate for those living in the 20% most deprived areas was higher or similar in four Challenge Authorities, compared to Scotland.
- Between Year 4 and 5 of the ASF, the participation rate for those living in the 20% most deprived areas increased or was maintained in six Challenge Authorities.

6.4 Progress in improving Health and Wellbeing measures

6.4.1 Attendance rates

The attendance rate of pupils from the most deprived areas decreased between 2016/17 and 2018/19.

93% was the total attendance rate recorded for 2018/19. This is very similar to previous years. The attendance rate was higher for primary schools (94.5%) than secondary schools (90.7%) and special schools (90.1%).

Pupils from the most deprived areas had lower attendance rates, with those living in the most deprived areas having an attendance rate that was 5.0 percentage points lower than the pupils living in the least deprived areas. The gap in attendance rates for primary school pupils increased between 2016/17 and 2018/19 and, whilst the gap is greater in secondary schools, it remained the same in years 2016/17 – 2018/19. Whilst the attendance of pupils from the least deprived areas remained fairly stable over time, the attendance rate of the most deprived pupils decreased.

Attainment Advisor 5 year local authority reports also included evidence on attendance. A few reports detailed improvement in the overall attendance of learners affected by poverty over time and in narrowing the attendance gap. A few also identify improvement in the attendance of looked after children and young people.

Data indicates that in the majority of local authorities, it was recognised that there is a steady or persistent gap in the attendance of children and young people affected by poverty and those who are not. Nevertheless, there is evidence across individual local authorities of focused approaches to attendance which have successfully improved the attendance of targeted learners, increasing attendance and positively impacting upon attainment. Approaches taken to effectively improve attendance for targeted learners and so impact upon attainment were varied and tailored to individual local authorities and schools. For example, participation among children and young people who are care-experienced has improved in a variety of ways through supported curricular and wider experiences such as school equipment, excursions and access to leisure facilities.

6.4.2 Exclusion rates

While the exclusion rate for pupils from the most deprived areas is higher than that for the least deprived, the exclusion rate has been falling year on year since 2006/07.

The exclusion rate for all pupils in 2018/19 was 21.6 per 1,000 pupils. This has been falling year on year since 2006/07. Rates of exclusions per 1,000 pupils for pupils living in the most deprived areas were 35.4 per 1,000 pupils compared with 8.2 per 1,000 pupils living in the least deprived areas. Secondary schools had a higher exclusion rate than primary schools and the gap in exclusion rates was also higher in secondary schools.

From 2014/15 to 2016/17, the primary exclusion rate for pupils from the most deprived areas decreased for four Challenge Authorities. The gap in secondary exclusion rates narrowed in six of the nine Challenge Authorities between 2014/15 and 2016/17.

Exclusion rates are around seven times as high among looked after children (152 per 1,000 pupils) compared to all pupils. However, this rate has fallen substantially, from 397 per 1,000 pupils in 2009/10 to 152 per 1,000 pupils in 2018/19.

Exclusion rates for children and young people affected by poverty is reducing as a result of an increased focus on inclusion. However it is also recognised that children and young people affected by poverty continue to be at higher risk of being excluded than their more affluent peers. There was no notable difference in trends or patterns across the Challenge Authority, Schools Programme and PEF strands of the SAC programme with regards to inclusion. Almost all local authorities were observed to have approaches and initiatives which are mitigating against risks of exclusion for all and particularly those affected by poverty.

6.4.3 Health and wellbeing measures

Information on health and wellbeing is available from the Scottish Health Survey and the Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS). The findings are based on two variables: scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which measures emotional and behaviour problems, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). Mental wellbeing is measured using the WEMWBS questionnaire and is used as a sub measure to report progress around health and wellbeing in the ASF Evaluation.

Total Difficulties Score

The social, emotional and behavioural development of children has been measured via the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire designed for use with the 3-16 age group.

The SDQ comprises 25 questions covering themes such as consideration, hyperactivity, malaise, mood, sociability, obedience, anxiety and unhappiness. It is used to measure five aspects of development: emotional symptoms; conduct problems; hyperactivity/ inattention; peer relationship problems; and pro-social behaviour.

A score was calculated for each of the five aspects, as well as an overall 'total difficulties' score which was generated by summing the scores from all the domains, except pro-social behaviour. The total difficulties score ranged from 0 to 40 with a higher score indicating greater evidence of difficulties. There are established thresholds indicating 'normal' (score of 13 or less), 'borderline' (14-16) or 'abnormal' scores (17 or above).

Regardless of age, children in the most deprived areas were more likely to have a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score. This is summarised in Table 8.2 and further detail is given in the paragraphs that follow.

Table 6.2: Total Difficulties Score – By Deprivation

	Year	Most disadvantaged	Least disadvantaged	Gap
		(bottom 20% SIMD)	(top 20% SIMD)	Percentage points
		%	%	
Total difficulties score (aged 4-12)	2012/15	22	6	16
	2014/17	22	10	12
	2015/18	25	10	15
	2016/19	25	9	16
Total difficulties score (aged 13 & 15)	2015	34	26	8
	2018	42	34	8

Children aged 4-12 years old

Children in the most deprived areas were more likely to have a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score (25%) than those in the least deprived (9%) in 2016/19. Whilst the gap of 16 percentage points initially decreased (12 percentage points in 2014/17 and 15 percentage points in 2015/18), it returned to 16 percentage points in 2016/19.

Children aged 13 and 15 years old

Children in the most deprived areas were more likely to have a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score (42%) than those in the least deprived (34%) in 2018. The gap was also 8 percentage points in 2015 (the proportion of children aged 13 and 15 with a borderline or abnormal total difficulties score in the most and least deprived areas both increased and by the same amount).

Health and wellbeing sub-measures

Mental wellbeing score

Overall, mental wellbeing among 13 to 15 year olds decreased with age for all children. Mental wellbeing recorded higher levels for 13 to 15 year old boys than for girls. The figure below presents data by year group and gender.

Mental wellbeing showed a correlation with areas of deprivation. Overall, pupils in the least deprived areas had a higher WEMWBS mean score indicating better mental wellbeing than those in the most deprived areas. Table 8.3 shows the mental wellbeing score by those most and least deprived and displays the gap between the two.

Table 6.3: Mental Wellbeing mean score – By Deprivation, 2018

	All children	Most disadvantaged (bottom 20% SIMD)	Least disadvantaged (top 20% SIMD)	Gap
Mental Wellbeing Score (13 year old boys)	50.0	48.4	51.2	2.8
Mental Wellbeing Score (13 year old girls)	46.3	45.0	47.0	2.0
Mental Wellbeing Score (15 year old boys)	48.3	48.0	48.7	0.7
Mental Wellbeing Score (15 year old girls)	43.3	41.9	43.9	2.0

6.5 Progress in wider education measures

6.5.1 International comparisons

Social background is less of a factor in performance in PISA for pupils in Scotland than the OECD international average.

Scotland's participation in [PISA](#) allows for international comparisons of the impact of social background on attainment. Analysis shows that there is a weaker link between background and attainment in Scotland than the OECD average, and that the link is weaker than it was in 2009.

PISA uses an Index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status (ESCS) to analyse results by social background. It is constructed from the responses given by students in their background questionnaire and collects information on parental education and occupation, learning resources in the home and cultural possessions. This index is not directly comparable to the SIMD. The ESCS index is used to derive a number of measures, each of which tell us something different about the impact of social background on performance.

Resilient students

A 'resilient' student is one who achieves a high score in PISA despite having a disadvantaged social background. PISA results show that the proportion of disadvantaged students who were academically resilient was higher in Scotland (13.9%) than on average across OECD countries and economies (11.3%). This marks the overall progress made on academic resilience since 2012.

Strength of relationship between ESCS and reading performance

The percentage share of the variation in performance explained by ESCS tells us how strong the relationship is between reading ability and social background. The strength of relationship between social disadvantage and a pupil's score was lower in Scotland than the OECD average. About 8% of the variation in Scotland could be explained by socio-economic factors. This was similar to the position for reading in 2015 (9%) and 2012 (11%), but less than 2009 (14%). The strength of relationship between social background and reading performance in PISA is weaker now than it was in 2009.

Variation in score by ESCS

The ESCS gradient, shows how much score varies on average with each step (one point) in social background. The extent of the relationship between deprivation and reading performance (or "gradient") in Scotland was lower than the OECD average at around 32 points. Therefore, for every one point change in ESCS, reading score changes by 32 points. This is similar to 2015 (32 points) and 2012 (35 points) but better than 2009 (44 points). Therefore the impact that social background has on reading performance in PISA is lower now that it was in 2009.

6.5.2 School leaver positive initial destinations

The percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination consistently increased between 2009/10 and 2018/19, for leavers from both the most deprived and least deprived areas. The gap in positive initial destinations also decreased in this period. However, the proportions in positive initial destinations fell in 2019/20 for leavers from both the most and least deprived areas and the gap widened. This is likely to at least in part reflect the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

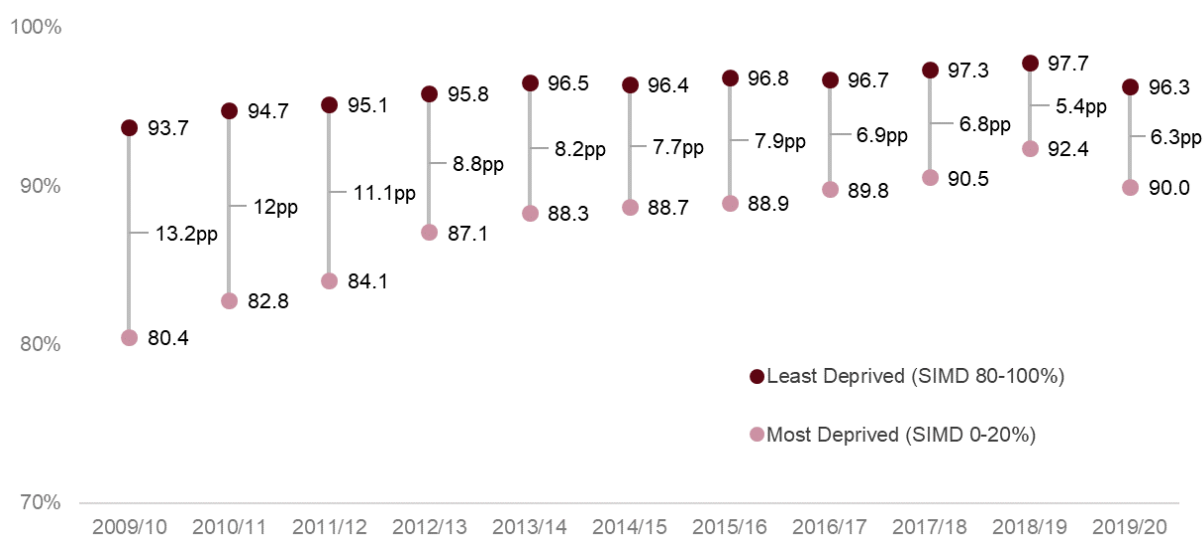
In 2018/19, the proportion of school leavers in positive initial destinations from the most deprived areas was 92.4% compared to 88.3% in 2013/14. Over the same period, the deprivation gap between the most deprived and least deprived areas reduced from 8.2 percentage points to 5.4 percentage points.

The 2019/20 figures on school leavers' initial destinations will reflect the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) on choices made by, and opportunities available to, pupils upon leaving school during the pandemic.

The proportion of school leavers in positive destinations fell from 95.0% to 93.3% in 2019/20. The proportion of school leavers in employment fell from 22.9% in 2018/19 to 16.2% in 2019/20. 44.2% of school leavers were in Higher Education, the highest proportion of all categories and the highest percentage since consistent records began in 2009/10.

Figure 6.7 shows that the percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination has decreased in 2019/20, both for leavers from the **most deprived and least deprived areas**. The proportion of school leavers in a positive initial destination has fallen by more amongst leavers from the most deprived areas than it has amongst those from the least deprived areas which has led to an increase in the deprivation gap, from 5.4 percentage points in 2018/19 to 6.3 percentage points in 2019/20.

Figure 6.8: Percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination, by SIMD, 2009/10 to 2019/20



Between 2015/16 and 2018/19, there was a shift in positive initial destinations for school leavers from the most deprived areas, with a greater proportion in Higher Education (25.9%, up from 24.0%) and employment (21.3% compared to 21.2%). The proportion that were unemployed (seeking or not seeking work) decreased from 10.7% in 2013/14 to 7.2% in 2018/19. However, this increased to 9.0% in 2019/20 after the impact of coronavirus. Further education remains the most common initial destination for school leavers from the most deprived areas (37.0%). These 2019/20 figures will reflect the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) on choices made by, and opportunities available to, pupils upon leaving school during the pandemic.

Overall, a greater proportion of school leavers from the most deprived areas were reported to be in Higher/Further Education as a positive initial destination in 2018/19 (62.9%) than in 2013/14 (58.9%). Despite a reduction in overall positive destination for this group in 2019/20, the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived areas reported to be in Higher/Further Education increased again to 65.7%.

Improvements in initial positive destinations for all featured strongly in Education Scotland 5 year evidence, with a recognition that the gap between leavers living in the areas most and least affected by poverty is narrowing. This includes looked after children; the proportion of young people who were looked after and achieving positive destinations has been improving. This was described as fluctuating around or above the national average for almost all of the local authorities reporting on this.

6.5.3 Access to higher education

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2014-15 set out the ambition that a child born at that time in one of Scotland's most deprived communities should, by the time of leaving school, have the same chance of going to university as one born in one of the country's least deprived areas.

The Commission on Widening Access set out a series of targets to realise the ambition of equality of access to higher education in Scotland. This includes that, by 2021, students from the most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 16% of full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole. This target was effectively met early, with 15.9% of entrants being from the most deprived areas, an increase from 13.9% in 2014/15.

Between 2013/14 and 2019/20, the total Undergraduate Higher Education entrants from the most deprived areas increased from 14,730 to 16,500. In the same period, the proportion of all entrants from the most deprived areas increased from 17.2% to 19.4%.

The majority of Higher Education Institutions (12 out of 18) increased their proportion of those in the most deprived areas between 2017-18 and 2018-19. Some have made substantial advances in this single year. For example, University of St Andrews has increased its portion of first-degree entrants from the most deprived areas from 7.5% to 10.6% and University of Edinburgh from 8.1% to 10.8%. Among the pre-1992 universities, University of Strathclyde (17.4%) and University of Dundee (16.2%) show the largest improvement.

There has also been an increase in the proportion of students from the most deprived areas entering Further Education. In the period between 2014/15 and 2018/19, the proportion of students from the most deprived areas in Further Education Institutions increased from 22.9% to 24.8%.

6.6 Sustainability of improvements

A great majority (84%) of headteachers indicated that the approach to achieving equity is embedded within the school community to either a great extent (35%) or a moderate extent (49%).

A key focus of the ASF approaches is sustainability – how these approaches will be maintained if they prove to be successful. The more sustainable the approach is, the more successful it is perceived to be. Many schools attribute the sustainability of approaches to career long professional learning as a means of embedding approaches in schools.

Around a third (34%) of headteachers in the 2020 survey expected that the ASF supported improvement they had seen to date will be sustainable beyond the years of funding. Views were more positive on the extent to which the focus on equity will be sustainable beyond the years of funding; 58% felt that this will be the case, a 17-point increase on the 2019 survey. Survey findings show some variation across key respondent groups, with primary headteachers less likely to feel that the focus on equity will be sustainable beyond funding.

Survey findings suggested a correlation between the views on sustainability and perceived improvement to date. Those who had seen improvement to date in the poverty-related attainment gap were more likely to expect improvements to be sustainable beyond the funding period.

A great majority (84%) of headteachers indicated that the approach to achieving equity is embedded within the school community to either a great extent (35%) or a moderate extent (49%). No headteachers indicated that the approach wasn't embedded at all.

Local authority perspectives

At the broader local authority level, evidence from the Local Authority Survey 2019 indicated that local authorities were broadly positive regarding the extent to which the focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap would be sustainable beyond the years of the fund. All 24 local authorities that responded to this survey question agreed that the focus on closing the gap would be sustainable to some degree (8 to a great extent, 11 to some extent and 5 to a limited extent). Of the seven Challenge Authorities who responded to this question on sustainability of focus, three viewed the focus would be sustainable to a great extent, and four to some extent.

The 2019 Local Authority Survey explored factors impacting on the sustainability of focus. Sustainability concerns related to staffing and budget were seen as key, following withdrawal of funding. Local authority respondents also indicated that activities such as collaboration, 'pooling' of resources, good practice sharing, building capacity and focusing on staff professional development would help deliver sustainability.

Factors promoting or hindering sustainability

Analysis of the 2019 Headteacher Survey data indicated that **staff training and development** was, by some margin, the most common factor for schools who expect their improvement and/or focus on equity to be sustainable. More than half of those who expected their approach to be sustainable referred to staff training, development and capacity building. This included development of existing staff (including embedding practice) to ensure the sustainability of their approach, and training and development of new staff.

The importance of staff is also reflected in '**loss of staffing and skills**' being by far the most common reason given for schools who felt their approach would not be sustainable. Some respondents felt that schools would lose staff capacity in the absence of ASF support, and that this would have an inevitable negative impact on their ability to maintain their approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Actions to support, encourage and/or plan for sustainability were also explored in Local Authority Survey 2019 responses. In addition to affirmations of commitment to sustainability, there were also statements of specific actions both at local authority and at school level. There was evidence of both strategic approaches and actions towards sustainability, as well as actions at a local level and within specific initiatives.

Within Challenge Authority progress reports, several made explicit mention of the extent to which authorities were considering and/or addressing sustainability in their local authority. This included, for example, specific actions such as taking steps to rationalise interventions or develop an exit strategy; as well as broader focus on culture change and ethos, partnership working, capacity building (such as provision of career long professional learning (CLPL) to staff groups); and focus on leadership.

7. Impact of COVID-19 on the closing of the poverty-related attainment gap

The [Equity Audit](#), published in January 2021, sought to investigate the impact that COVID-19 and resulting school building closures had on the educational experiences and attainment of children and young people, in particular those affected by poverty.

The Equity Audit comprised two complementary pieces of work – an evidence review of the emerging literature on the impact of school building closures on educational experiences in the context of pupils' social and economic background, and 54 Scottish school case studies exploring the key themes from the evidence review namely health and wellbeing, learner experience, attainment and mitigations.

In addition to the Equity Audit, the ASF Year 5 evaluation was enhanced to include the consideration of the impact of COVID-19 on the development of approaches. The Local Authority Survey 2020 and Headteacher Survey 2020 were used in the ASF Year 5 evaluation, with respondents invited to report on each of the two key time periods (prior to COVID-19 and the period of school building closures between March and June 2020).

Educational attainment will have undoubtedly been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland, as is the case globally; this will have had an impact on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap in Scotland in recent months.

7.1 Impact on educational experiences

The evidence review showed that there were considerable differences in remote teaching provision experienced by children and young people, with variation in experience for children and young people from more and less advantaged backgrounds. The review also highlighted differences regarding teaching time/time spent learning experienced and amount of time spent on home learning between pupils from more and less advantaged backgrounds. There were also considerable differences in access to resources to support home learning in relation to children and young people from more and less advantaged backgrounds (digital resources, space to learn, parental support). Evidence pointed to the importance of access to technology for children and young people. Where there were gaps in such access – with socio-economically disadvantaged pupils most negatively affected – this had a direct impact on their learning experience and engagement.

The case study interviews highlighted that significant numbers of parents found it difficult to support their children's learning at home and believed that this negatively impacted on children's learning and progress.

According to the findings from the ASF Year 5 evaluation, whilst family and community engagement aspects had frequently been driven forward at pace in order to respond to the challenges created as a result of COVID-19, some planned aspects of family and community engagement had been paused or adapted as a result of the school building closures. Adaptations included the development of virtual approaches. For some, work at the local authority level progressed on a more limited level during the school building closures, whilst at the school level engagement with families and communities increased.

7.2 Impact on educational attainment and the poverty-related attainment gap

In terms of the impact of school building closures on pupils' learning overall, there is a considerable body of evidence which has emerged to date; international evidence generally shows that school building closures are likely to have had a negative effect on pupil progress and attainment.

The Equity Audit found a number of studies that had been undertaken which specifically considered the impact of COVID-19 school building closures on socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. The literature highlighted evidence of exacerbated impacts for pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds, pointing to increased inequality of educational attainment as a result of COVID-19 school building closures. Studies have indicated that pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to experience a larger decline in learning compared to their more advantaged counterparts, with the suggestion that such increased inequality may persist over time.

The majority of participants in the Equity Audit case study interviews reported that the first period of remote learning had had a negative impact on the progress of most children and young people and that this varied by factor such as socio-economic status, English language proficiency, age and stage; the impact was most apparent in P1 and P2 children.

In addition, the majority of teachers reported that higher numbers of children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds showed regression in core literacy and numeracy skills when schools re-opened after the March-August 2020 closure of school buildings.

In terms of perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, the majority (13 of 15) of local authorities who responded to the Local Authority Survey 2020 were of the view that COVID-19 had impacted on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap (five indicated this to a great extent, and eight to some extent). A further two local authority respondents viewed COVID-19 as having impacted on progress to a limited extent.

Local authorities perceived a range of factors associated with COVID-19 to have impacted on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and it was recognised that there remained a great deal of uncertainty regarding the extent of the impact. Several local authorities referenced internal data gathering exercises undertaken, which had sought to understand and quantify the impacts at the local authority level. A number pointed to emerging evidence of the impact of COVID-19 widening the gap between most and least affluent pupils at the local authority level.

In the 2020 Headteacher Survey, the great majority of schools (95%) felt that COVID-19 and school building closures had at least some impact on their progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This included 61% who felt that COVID-19 and school building closures had a 'significant impact' on their progress. Secondary schools and those with middle to higher PEF allocations were most likely

to feel that their progress had been significantly affected by COVID-19 and school building closures.

7.3 Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on closing the poverty-related attainment gap

A number of financial and practical measures have been put in place to support education recovery. This includes additional investment to support the recruitment of additional teachers/support staff and the provision of devices and connectivity to people suffering from digital exclusion. Education Scotland has worked with stakeholders to develop the National e-Learning Offer alongside a wide range of professional learning and resources to support practitioners. The Scottish Government has implemented increased flexibility to redirect ASF to help mitigate the impacts of school building closures on the most disadvantaged families.

At a local level the most common mitigations were the provision of access to digital hardware and connectivity, and physical or paper-based resources to support remote learning.

Reference was made in the findings from the 2020 Local Authority Survey to increasing numbers of families experiencing poverty as a result of the pandemic, and of the need to put in place appropriate responses. Longer-term plans were frequently paused in order to focus on short-term priorities, but all respondents described a continuing focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap throughout the period of school building closures. Rather, the focus was on limiting and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on children and families affected by socio-demographic disadvantage, whilst recognising increases in socio-economic disadvantage because of COVID-19. Local authorities variously described a range of actions in order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, including:

- adjustments, adaptations or pausing of existing activity
- altering governance and funding to respond to emerging challenges
- creating recovery plans and longer-term planning
- planning for future potential periods of school building closures, or for pupils self-isolating
- considering the provision of specialised support to address the needs of those pupils not making expected progress
- addressing digital connectivity challenges, particularly in rural areas; and
- developing practice for remote learning.

Local authority approaches during the initial stages of the pandemic developed in a range of ways. A number of local authorities had undertaken reviews to consider planned activities with decisions subsequently made to pause or progress work related to current and emerging priorities and needs. One local authority noted it had undertaken an equity audit to support future planning. Flexibility, agility and creativity were key aspects highlighted during this period of review and adaptation.

Large-scale changes were introduced in order to adapt to meet the challenges of providing remote learning, frequently 'pivoting' in very quick time-periods to meet the unprecedented challenges presented by responding to COVID-19. This included the

introduction of a wealth of responses, from providing physical resources (e.g. food parcels, home-learning packs), equity-related advice and information, signposting to other sources of support, as well as the continuation of face-to-face support where possible. Prioritisation of health and wellbeing support was a common theme in responses, ranging from increased pastoral support and support for mental health through to physical support such as linking up with food banks. The creation of new partnerships with other agencies in order to take this activity forward, in particular with third sector organisations, were commonly highlighted. Cross-departmental responses were also highlighted, such as joint working through social work and education.

According to the ASF Local Authority Survey findings from 2020, schools were using data to provide support during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, a Challenge Authority described its schools' use of data and knowledge of families to provide food to vulnerable families, signpost to sources of third sector support, welfare rights advice, identification of mental health and wellbeing issues. This provision was supported by key SFDW roles based within education hubs.

A family learning project continued to engage with 57 registered families and identified a further 516 families who required support during 'lockdown'. Each family was assigned a Key Worker to provide advice and support with access to online classrooms, outdoor activities and active learning programmes. Activities included a forum for parents/carers to share experiences, links with wider community support, and virtual learning support with literacy, numeracy and health & wellbeing.

In the March to June 2020 period, respondents highlighted aspects of collaboration associated with the closure of school buildings and transition to remote learning. A range of new collaborations with a wider range of partners, as well as strengthened collaborations with existing partners, were identified as local authorities sought quickly to respond to the demands and needs of responding to COVID-19, with several respondents pointing to the pace of this.

In one local authority, all programme leads were redirected to support the delivery of a blended model of in-school and at-home learning, involving digital, independent and active learning. Consideration was given to the specific requirements of children and young people with additional support needs, areas of transition and families most in need of support. Key areas of focus included engagement with partners to support a wider group of identified vulnerable children and families, an online platform of resources and activities to support parents/carers, and targeted advice for practitioners through virtual networks and webinars. An immediate increase in health and well-being concerns was identified, which led to the creation of a partnership - Vulnerable Children's Panel - a multi-agency whole systems approach, which provided bespoke packages of support ensuring that the identified needs and well-being of children and families were addressed.

One local authority sought to revisit the focus of workstream priorities and interventions to adapt to COVID-19. As a result, refocused projects were delivered during school closure which led to unexpected, new and different positive outcomes such as identifying opportunities for sustainability, leadership and improvements in professional learning. The local authority has also placed an increased emphasis on utilising performance data, developing collaboration opportunities, developing their digital strategy, and identifying the most successful interventions.

It was broadly recognised in the analytical work informing the ASF Year 5 evaluation that COVID-19 has had, and will continue to, impact on sustainability of focus to some extent. Local authority perspectives reflected on the reprioritisation which took place during the March to June 2020 period of school building closures, including a greater focus on addressing the immediate challenges of responding to COVID-19 and an increased focus on health and wellbeing. There was also a broad affirmation of sustained focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The gap is closing

It is clear from the above that significant progress is being made. This can be seen across short-, medium- and long-term outcomes, and is supported by strong evidence of a system-wide endeavour to establish the platform for the next phase of improvement. **However, while the gap is closing, this remains a complex and long-term endeavour.**

Further, while there are positive indications of progress, there are also variations in the pace of progress across the country. In addition, we know that the impact of COVID-19 is likely to have placed further pressure on the gap.

The report draws attention to a number of powerful findings:

1. **Over the 5 year time period a number of key elements have been put in place that provide strong foundations for on-going progress. These strengths of the Scottish approach are:**
 - There is a systemic change in terms of culture, ethos and leadership with a focus on equity becoming more embedded and sustained in schools, communities and local authorities. A greater awareness and understanding of the barriers facing children and young people adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage has emerged. This has led to a wide range of approaches and interventions being implemented to meet the needs of children and young people.
 - The role of local authorities has been instrumental in driving forward a strategic vision for equity at local level, ensuring this is a central component in school and local authority improvement plans. There has also been a shift towards many local authorities using core resources, including core education funding, to improve outcomes for learners experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
 - Clear leadership, direction and accountability by senior leaders in national government, local government and in schools, supported by effective strategic planning on equity, is helping to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, young people and families.
 - The most recent evidence from the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA) acknowledged the progress that is being made in Scottish education to close the attainment gap through the SAC and wider education policies:

“Scottish education exhibits many strengths. It values equity as well as excellence. It has an excellent standing internationally. It is investing effort and resources to narrow attainment gaps, working with and strengthening the teaching profession.”

2. There are improved ways of working to deliver equity

Enhanced learning and teaching and using data for improvement

- Investment in high quality professional learning and development opportunities has resulted in higher quality learning, teaching and assessment focusing on achieving equity.
- Literacy and Numeracy interventions are imbedded in most schools and integral to improved learning and teaching approaches with a focus on equity.
- Schools are increasingly confident in using data, and are seeing the benefit from doing so.
- Local authority strategies have been developed to reflect a number of broad priorities, based on attainment gap data, previously successful approaches and engagement with headteachers and other partners or services.

Focus on health and wellbeing

- Improving health and wellbeing is a priority for schools in closing the attainment gap, with many examples of innovative and collaborative practice. The most successful interventions have resulted in fewer exclusions from school better punctuality; improvements in behaviour at school, healthy family eating, increased pupil motivation and engagement and increased resilience among pupils.
- The majority of local authorities have seen improvements in children and young people’s health and wellbeing supported by ASF funded approaches.

Collaborative working

- There has been an increase in collaboration at local authority and school level to support equity. This has included collaboration across schools and local authorities as well as between education and other partners, including parents and the third sector.
- Strong partnerships with universities are helping to improve pedagogy as well as the use and analysis of data to measure the impact of initiatives and interventions.

Working with families and communities

- Schools are more consistently and effectively working with families on a range of issues that seek to mitigate the impact of poverty on family life and learning.
- Family workers, funded through the ASF, are a specific example of an initiative that has been **key** in developing increased engagement of parents and carers with children and young people's learning in over half of the local authorities.
- Working in partnership around family engagement initiatives is leading to improvements in parenting skills, parental ambition and employability.

3. There is demonstrable progress on a number of long-term measures to close the poverty-related attainment gap

Headteacher perspectives

- Headteachers are positive about the impact of the SAC in their school, have a clear understanding of what is working and are optimistic about improvements being embedded and continuing over the next five years.

Attainment measures

- Progress in closing the attainment gap has been made on a number of measures, although the level of such progress is varied depending on the measure under consideration. For the majority of measures, attainment of those from the most deprived areas has increased, although in some cases not at the same rate as those in least deprived areas.
- The greater rate of progress that can be seen at primary school level aligns with the pace at which the SAC was implemented, which initially focused support towards improvement activity within primary schools. The same rate of progress would, therefore, not be expected in secondary schools as a result of the SAC at this stage in the programme.

Wider Data

- A range of wider data sources may provide insight into the longer term benefits of the Challenge for young people. Across a range of data sources, an increasing proportion of young people from the most deprived areas are in education, employment or training; are in a positive initial and follow up destination after school and are attending Higher/Further Education. The gap between young people from the most and least deprived areas has narrowed across all these measures.

4. The SAC and ASF are playing an important role in empowering schools and local authorities to deliver on closing the poverty-related attainment gap

- One of the key features of the SAC is the flexibility and opportunity it offers to schools and local authorities to select, develop and create interventions that best work for children and young people in the local context. As a result, the SAC has seen a huge number of different interventions and approaches develop in different settings
- The autonomy and flexibility provided by PEF has enabled schools to tailor approaches to their specific needs.
- Evidence demonstrates that the Challenge Authorities have made significant progress towards achieving the medium-term outcomes of the programme as a result of the longer-term investment.
(More detail on each Challenge Authority can be found in Appendix 2)

8.2 This remains a long-term endeavour

Reflecting on this progress to date provides an opportunity to consider further cross-cutting themes. These will be useful as we look to accelerate and deepen progress across all outcomes. Such themes include:

Building on the strengths of the SAC

The evolution of the Challenge and its associated investment saw the number of challenge authorities rise from seven to nine, whilst the schools programme and universal offer evolved, and support for care experienced children and young people and PEF were introduced. This gradual development saw the programme grow from a very targeted approach to closing the attainment gap to a system-wide improvement strategy to promote educational equity.

In looking ahead to continued efforts to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap, it is clear that there is progress to build on by focusing on the key areas of strength identified in the report.

Maintaining a holistic and integrated approach

The holistic approach of SAC has been a factor in embedding the culture and ethos of equity in the system, engendering a collective ownership of change. Supported by PEF, efforts to empower the system to make decisions closer to the classroom have created the conditions for decision-making more tailored to the needs of specific groups, families, children or young people. This has been generally welcomed by headteachers, highlighting the benefits of this system-wide approach to achieving equity in education.

There is evidence, however, that this autonomy has been particularly valued alongside co-ordinated local authority-wide approaches, highlighting the benefits of a blend of

both school-led and strategic local authority-led approaches to achieving equity in education.

A strength of the programme from the outset has been the commitment not to reduce the SAC to a narrow focus on attainment, whereby success is only measured against a narrow set of measures such as test scores. Rather the SAC has taken a broader, more holistic and integrated approach that has included a range of approaches to promote health and wellbeing and recognise the importance of wider achievement. This has seen LAs and schools implement a wide range of approaches that include activities such as the daily mile and a range of nurture programmes. In line with the aims of the CfE, that recognition of wider achievement alongside attainment is a strength to take forward in supporting children and young people to achieve their full potential.

The experiences of the pandemic have brought the importance of continuing and improving this holistic and integrated approach to tackling the poverty related attainment gap into sharper focus than ever. The nature of this holistic and integrated approach needs to be strategic, adaptive to emerging need, and accurately targeted to support those who need it most, whilst maintaining its long term vision of equity and excellence.

Consider targeting to accelerate recovery and progress

We have also learned that the intensity of approaches and levels of investment required to sustain improvements in settings with the highest concentrations of deprivation can be quite different to those required in other settings with lower levels of deprivation or with different challenges and barriers to learning.

Therefore, alongside considering the most impactful blend of authority-led strategic approaches and school-led local approaches, we can consider also more finely grained approaches focusing on school clusters or neighbourhoods within local authorities. An approach that relies on local knowledge of deprivation and its associated issues within specific local communities could allow for precise, targeted and co-ordinated interventions within Scotland's holistic and integrated approach, looking to support the collective impact of service provision across phases and sectors.

A renewed focus and a continued long term commitment

COVID-19 and the impact of school building closures has had a detrimental impact on the progress being made. This disruption to the system and to the lives of Scotland's children and young people reinforces the continued need to focus on equity and excellence, with the Equity Audit highlighting the need for a continued focus on health and wellbeing. A range of action is already underway in response to COVID-19 to support education recovery and help close the poverty-related attainment gap via the recruitment of additional teachers, provision of digital devices and connectivity, targeted youth work programmes, wider provision of free school meals and increased support for families to engage with learning at home. In addition to these, in 2021/22 the Scottish Government has increased its investment in the SAC to over £200 million by introducing a one-year £20 million PEF COVID-19 Premium. This increases the investment in PEF from almost £128 million to almost £148 million and builds on the £750 million invested over the course of this Parliament and over £375 million in education recovery to date. This action

will ensure headteachers across 97% of schools will have further additional funding to support the children and young people who need it most.

The work to close the poverty-related attainment gap remains a long term goal. To deliver this, a renewed focus is required. This report demonstrates that whilst the attainment data indicates variation in the pace of progress across the country, good progress has been made in a number of foundational strengths that the system can build on. The opportunity ahead is to build on these foundations and accelerate.

This must remain a collective, system-wide endeavour that builds on the progress to date and one where the voices of children and young people are key to its continued development.

As children's rights become embedded in all aspects of society, there is increasing urgency and scope for the voices of our children and young people to influence the interventions that will improve their life chances.

The voices of children and young people are evident in a range of local approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap, for example where one local authority implemented the Social Justice Ambassadors Programme, which used the voice of young people to tackle poverty related challenges in schools. The children and young people involved gave their views on a range of motions regarding community issues in their areas to lead staff from across the LA including Elected Members, third sector and Community Partnerships feeding into collaboration between young people and school staff to identify approaches to investing PEF.

We want to build on this. A children's rights approach has been embedded into the Scottish Government's response to COVID-19 and its approach to recovery and renewal and will be embedded in its continued efforts to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

In addition, the Government is convening an Advisory Group which includes some of the best minds in the system and will include education leaders and practitioners, third sector organisations and education and social justice experts to support the development of approaches to continue and build on progress beyond 2021/22.

Input from both the Advisory Group and children and young people, alongside the evidence in this report, the Equity Audit and consultation with a range of partners and stakeholders, including the ICEA, will be key to refining our approach going forward.

This refined approach developed in consultation with system experts, leaders, partners and children and young people will build on the strong foundations identified in this report and take forward a whole-system approach whilst further targeting approaches to accelerate recovery and progress and ensure all children and young people, regardless of their backgrounds, have the opportunity to succeed.

Appendix 1: Data sources

ASF Evaluation reports

The ASF evaluation began in 2015 and follows the duration of the SAC. An evaluation of the first two years of the ASF was published in [March 2018](#), with the Year 3 (2017/18) evaluation published in [June 2019](#). The Year 4 evaluation report was published in [October 2020](#), while the Year 5 publication report will be published in March 2021. The evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and the extent to which the aims of the ASF have been met.

The evaluation has the following objectives:

- Assess the impact of the overall fund in improving attainment and health and wellbeing and reducing the difference between pupils from the most and least deprived areas
- Assess the extent to which the further aims of the ASF have been met: promote capacity for data-based self-evaluation and improvement, and encourage collaboration between schools and local authorities;
- Provide learning and increase the Scottish evidence base of what does and does not work to improve attainment and health and wellbeing, especially of pupils from the most deprived areas;
- Provide learning on what did and did not work well in the process of implementing the ASF across participating Challenge Authorities and schools and which factors helped and hindered the ASF achieving its outcomes.

Evidence in relation to the ASF aims has been gathered from a range of sources and evaluated against a set of research questions. These include:

- **Administrative data:** information gathered as part of the routine organisation of the ASF provides data primarily on the funding that local authorities and schools received from the different funding streams.
- **Challenge Authority and Schools Programme progress reports:** Challenge Authorities and Schools Programme Progress Reports in March and September each year.
- **Local Authority Survey:** all 32 local authorities are invited to take part in an online survey. The first wave took place in 2016 with Challenge Authorities only and subsequent waves have been undertaken with all local authorities. To note that the Local Authority Survey 2020 was impacted by COVID-19, with a final response rate of 15 authorities.
- **Headteacher Survey:** headteachers from a representative sample of schools are asked for their experiences of ASF, including the approaches that their school uses, the impact achieved, and the sustainability of the impacts and approaches. To note that the Headteacher Survey 2020 was impacted by COVID-19, with a final response rate of 27%.

Education Scotland 5 year professional review

Between October and December 2020, Attainment Advisors (AAs) worked alongside SAC local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence from their respective local authorities looking at the impacts of the SAC. The purpose was to provide qualitative and quantitative answers to three high level questions regarding the impact of SAC within each of the 32 local authorities:

1. How has the implementation of the SAC impacted upon the culture and systems of local authorities to ensure those cultures and systems are equitable for children, young people and families affected by poverty?
2. How has the SAC positively impacted upon, or contributed to, educational outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty?
3. Which lessons have been learned and what are the future priorities for the SAC?

Each Attainment Advisor completed a professional report which provided further detail and evidence around each of these three high level questions. They utilised data from a variety of different sources to triangulate the analysis. Some of these sources were more granular and specific to the individual local authorities (such as surveys and other data collections produced by those authorities), while others were more national in scope, such as Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) statistics or National Improvement Framework (NIF) data. Harmonised data collection reports focusing on some or all local authorities and compiled by Education Scotland were also used, these included inspection reports and Challenge Authority inspection reports. The reports compiled by AAs were then further analysed by Education Scotland and its partners to provide a national professional report detailing the impact of SAC over the past 5 years across Scotland.

Education Scotland Inspection of Challenge Authorities report

In September 2017, Education Scotland announced that HM Inspectors would establish a new programme of inspections. These were designed to evaluate and report on the progress being made in improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap by the nine local authorities designated as Challenge Authorities within the SAC.

HM Inspectors carried out the nine inspection visits between December 2017 and December 2018, with the report summarising this information published by Education Scotland in June 2019. During each inspection they met with local authority staff, including groups of headteachers, teachers and practitioners from early learning and childcare settings, primary, secondary and special schools. They also met with learners, parents, and other stakeholders. In addition, inspection teams observed practice in establishments and reviewed relevant documentation, with a particular focus on attainment outcomes for children and young people.

The inspection methodology included the issuing of questionnaires to allow HM Inspectors to gather the views of various stakeholder groups across a range of domains. The [report](#) itself contains a brief overview of the findings along with examples of best practice and high level descriptive statistics for the survey questions asked.

Appendix 2: Profiles of the 9 Challenge Authorities

Profiles of the 9 Challenge Authorities provided by Education Scotland Attainment Advisors

Summary of Progress – Clackmannanshire Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering equity and excellence in education. Clackmannanshire was identified as one of five original Challenge authorities.

The education service in Clackmannanshire Council is led by the Strategic Director (People). The service is responsible for the education of over 6717 school-aged children and 766 within its nursery provision. There are 18 primary schools, 3 secondary schools, 1 special school and 2 support services: 1 primary and 1 secondary. There are also 3 stand-alone local authority nurseries. Over 29% of school pupils in Clackmannanshire live in areas of highest deprivation as categorised by The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2.

The authority has received Attainment Scotland funding through the Challenge Authority Programme (£7,985,703), the Pupil Equity Fund (£6,292,187), the Innovation Fund (£29,850) and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund £397,494), a total of (£14,705,234) over the period 2015 to 2020.

In the early years of SAC Clackmannanshire Council went through a period of significant political and strategic change. During the first year of the Attainment Challenge Clackmannanshire was part of a shared education service with Stirling Council. A new Clackmannanshire education service was established after this partnership ended in 2017. This early instability had a negative impact on the initial governance, focus, pace and direction of the education authority's work in relation to implementation of SAC. The newly established senior education team in Clackmannanshire revised the initial plans to better reflect the needs of Clackmannanshire Council and to support their vision for education. In 2020 a new Strategic Director (People) and a new Interim Chief Education Officer were appointed.

In December 2019 Education Scotland published the inspection of Local Authorities How well is Clackmannanshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? The authority was evaluated as making 'satisfactory' progress and the report identified the following key strengths:

- The strong leadership of the Chief Education Officer, supported by her senior leadership team, who share a clear vision of the action which needs to be taken.
- Education staff have been reinvigorated to make a positive difference for children and young people as part of the Clackmannanshire 'family'.
- Positive steps, including strong partnerships with universities, have been put in place to improve the use and analysis of data to measure the impact of SAC initiatives.

Aspects for development:

- Continue to develop and strengthen joint working with partner agencies which is leading to improvement.
- Ensure, as planned, implementation for the initiatives which are making the greatest difference to improving outcomes for learners.
- Continue to develop and improve the sustainability element and exit strategies for Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding initiatives and improve governance arrangements.

In December 2020, the Education Scotland link attainment advisor worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact which identified the following key strengths:

- A strong commitment to trauma informed practice evidenced by the investment, at all levels, in the Readiness for Learning (R4L) Programme. 1200 staff have received training and 2900 pupils have benefited from a range of R4L interventions. The programme has been influential in developing key principles and 'non-negotiables' which are now accepted as an entitlement for all learners across Clackmannanshire.
- A sustained focus on improving health and well-being has resulted in improved social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people accessing the wellbeing workers who have been employed in targeted schools.
- The intelligent use of a range of data is leading to increasingly more appropriate targeting of resources at local authority level.
- An effective tracking system developed by the data analyst and the one to one support provided by the data coach is helping headteachers to identify and address poverty related gaps.
- A strong emphasis on building the capacity of staff has resulted in improved practice. The Equitable Literacy Programme, for example, has improved approaches to reading across the authority. The Improving Outcomes Team have played a key role in supporting professional learning.
- The continuing commitment to supporting parents and families through initiatives such as Talk Clacks, FLIC 1400 and school family learning programmes are positively influencing families and their capacity to support children and young people in their learning.

Next steps include:

- It will be important that the recent more forensic targeting of SAC resources continues and is reflected at school level, particularly in relation to Pupil Equity Funding. This will ensure that all Attainment Scotland Funding is very clearly focused on improving outcomes for the children and young people impacted by poverty.
- There has been an increased coherence between the various workstreams involved in the local authority SAC plan which has worked well. It will be important to develop a similar coherence between the various strands of Attainment Scotland Funding (SAC, PEF and Care Experienced Funding) within Clackmannanshire. A common governance structure for all three

strands would help ensure all funded activities are very clearly focused, and result in, a closing of poverty related gaps across all sectors.

March 2021

Summary of Progress 2015-2020 – Dundee City Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering equity and excellence in education. Dundee City Council joined the Challenge programme in year 1 (2015-16).

There are 24,000 school age children and young people in Dundee and 43.8% live in areas of highest deprivation as categorised by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2. Data from 2020 indicates that 37% of people in Dundee live in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland, only 65% of adults are in work, and life expectancy is the second lowest of any city in Scotland. There are 33 primary schools, 8 secondary schools, 1 special school and 1 off-site service for children with additional support needs. The Executive Director of Children and Families Services has overall responsibility for education, social work and community justice. There are two heads of service; the Chief Education Officer and the Chief Social Worker.

Dundee City Council has received Attainment Scotland funding through the Challenge Authority Programme (£25,851,375), the Pupil Equity Fund (£20,060,277), and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (£871,506), a total of £46,783,158 between 2015 and 2020.

In 2015, Dundee City Council adopted an early intervention approach to achieve its vision for improving outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty. Eleven schools were initially targeted but this was quickly expanded to include all schools and sectors to ensure that equity is a priority for all. As a result of this expansion, there is a shared moral purpose and a collaborative ethos which underpins improvement.

The Education Scotland inspection report of February 2018, How well is Dundee City Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? stated that the authority was making good progress. The report stated that Education Scotland was confident that the evidence and evaluation at that time indicated the following strengths:

- Strong leadership of the children and families service which has recently improved the pace of change through increased awareness of the need for improvement and appropriate support and challenge within the system to deliver change.
- Effective partnership working is providing a wide range of support for children and families and is leading to improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- A range of career-long professional learning opportunities is supporting practitioners to collaborate, to test out changes in their practice, to make better use of research and to develop further their knowledge and skills.
- Improved self-evaluation which is being supported by the recently developed framework, trios of schools working together and more intelligent use of data and improvement methodology.
- Very helpful advice to headteachers with regard to supporting them in their responsibilities with respect to PEF.

Aspects for development were noted as:

- Continue to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap across all sectors, building on valuable lessons learned in the early learning and childcare and primary sectors and in health and wellbeing. In so doing, continue to raise the attainment of all children and young people in literacy and numeracy.
- Review, based on evidence available, the number of initiatives that are being tested out and supported with a view to simplifying the landscape and gaining improved outcomes.
- Continue to develop exit or continuation strategies for SAC funded initiatives in order to embed practice and to build on children's progress.
- Further strengthen the information provided to the Children and Families Services Committee to enhance scrutiny and transparency through, for example, providing more information on the funding provided and used, and an increased focus on progress against planned activity.
- Building on the good start made, to develop further the role of school improvement partnerships, and using these as a mechanism to share good practice and collaboration of stakeholders across wider areas.

In December 2020, the Education Scotland link attainment advisor worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact, which identified the following key strengths:

- The strategic direction provided by senior leaders consistently promotes the vision of the attainment challenge and there is a strong commitment from staff at all levels to improve outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty.
- High-quality professional learning for leadership is strengthening capacity and supporting sustainability. Professional learning and support for teachers and early years practitioners is developing skills in the use of data, action research and improvement approaches. This is increasing agency, confidence and skills to address equity in the classroom.
- More effective use of data is supporting authority officers, school leaders and practitioners to identify attainment gaps and evaluate progress at classroom, school and authority level.
- Intervention programmes in the early years are delivering intensive, targeted support which is improving acquisition of early literacy and numeracy skills.
- Literacy and numeracy attainment in P1, P4, P7 and S3 has increased over time. In primary, the poverty-related attainment gap has narrowed as a result of greater increases in the attainment of learners living in areas of highest deprivation.
- A range of early intervention approaches to support wellbeing is having a positive impact on vulnerable young people by reducing anxiety, improving attendance and increasing engagement in learning.
- Services created to assist in mitigating the impact of poverty on family life and on learning are providing effective support. For example, school and family development workers who are based in every primary school are playing a central role in strengthening relationships, improving parental engagement and facilitating family learning.
- The significant drop in exclusions since 2014, when rates were double the national average, to primary exclusions falling below national figures in 2018-19.

Next steps identified include:

- Embed systems leadership to enhance capacity at all levels, maximise progress and deliver the local authority's vision for a transformational pace of change.
- Build upon improvements in primary attainment and maximise attainment in the senior phase to ensure that young people affected by poverty achieve a breadth of skills, qualifications and achievements.
- Continue to strengthen quality improvement approaches and effective use of data by building on existing capacity and embedding consistent systems and practices across the authority.
- Utilise opportunities presented by entering the next phase of the attainment challenge to continue to review and streamline evidence gathering and evaluation across all SAC activity.

March 2021

Summary of Progress – East Ayrshire Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering equity and excellence in education. East Ayrshire was initially identified in 2015 to be involved in the Schools Programme and became a Challenge Authority in June 2016.

Over one third of all children and young people in East Ayrshire live in areas of highest deprivation as categorised by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2. This is above the national average. There are 7 secondary schools, 40 primary schools and 3 special schools. The education service in East Ayrshire Council is led by the Head of Education. The service is responsible for the education of over 16,000 school-aged children and over 3,000 children between the ages of 0 and 5.

The authority was allocated Attainment Scotland funding through the Challenge Authority Programme (£14,434,854), the Pupil Equity Fund (£13,830,939), the Innovation Fund (£115,877) and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (£723,629), a total of £29,105,299 over the period 2015 to 2020.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) leadership team was formed between May and September 2017. The East Ayrshire SAC programme is focused on three main workstreams: Literacy and Numeracy, Families and Communities and Leadership.

The Education Scotland inspection of local authorities (March 2019) How well is East Ayrshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? reported that the authority was making satisfactory progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. The report stated that Education Scotland were confident that the evidence and evaluation at that time indicated the following strengths:

- The commitment of senior leaders to understand the needs of local communities.
- The recently refreshed leadership, which is providing greater clarity in the education service.
- Partnership working, which is helping to develop successful family and community work.

Aspects for development were noted as:

- Increase the pace of progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap and improve approaches to using data to support this.
- Approaches to sustainability should be more formally documented and shared with elected members to provide them with assurance that the most effective interventions provided through the Scottish Attainment Challenge are embedded within schools.
- Improve rates of attendance and continue to reduce exclusions, while also addressing the variations in these between schools.

In December 2020, the Education Scotland link attainment advisor worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact which identified the following key strengths:

- Through the clear commitment of senior leaders to understand the needs of local communities and supported by the work of the SAC leadership team there is an improved and shared understanding across the authority of the challenges faced by children, young people and families living in poverty. SAC funding has been a key driver for improvement across the local authority. Overall, the attainment of children and young people in East Ayrshire affected by poverty is beginning to improve.
- The approach to targeting SAC resources was improved by widening the data set used to identify pupils and schools. In doing so, the pace and reach of the programme was accelerated.
- Progression frameworks for literacy and English and numeracy and Mathematics were developed. In addition, the local authority has engaged well with the national quality assurance and moderation support officers (QAMSO) programme; good use of local expertise has linked this work to SAC priorities. As a result, there is now a strategic approach to planning for learning, teaching and assessment across the authority.
- The increased availability of high quality professional learning for all practitioners with an explicit focus on pedagogy, raising attainment and improving outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty. The growing culture of professional enquiry has contributed to the development of a 'leaders of learning' approach to share practice and build capacity across the workforce. This approach has the potential to be a sustainable model to further develop quality pedagogy and andragogy across the local authority.
- The professional learning networks established in the last two years to provide opportunities for learning and collaboration across all practitioners. These include those focused on self-evaluation, data training, Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) planning, School Improvement Planning (SIP) and Standards and Quality (S&Q) training. These professional learning networks have demonstrated early positive impact on school improvement. They are designed and delivered in consultation with a range of partners and all school leadership teams and are open to practitioners at all levels across the system.

Next steps identified include:

- Through analysis and scrutiny of attainment data and SIMD profiles there is scope for further targeted support and professional learning to interrupt the cycle of deprivation in schools where there are persistent gaps and low attainment.
- Action research/professional enquiry approaches within professional learning should be embedded authority wide. The data gathered from these approaches should continue to be used to inform professional learning requirements and to improve the design of targeted and universal support across the local authority.
- Continue to embed the Professional Learning Framework to further increase teacher agency, collaborative working and supporting the development of leadership skills across the local authority Further articulation of SAC, PEF and Care Experienced Children and Young People funding, including planning and evaluation, is required across the local authority to maximise impact.

March 2021

Summary of Progress – Glasgow City Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in February 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering excellence and equity in education. Glasgow City Council has been part of the SAC since 2015.

Education services in Glasgow City Council is led by the Executive Director. The service is responsible for the education of 80,000 children and young people across the education authority. There are 110 childcare settings, 123 partner providers and early learning and childcare settings, 140 primary schools, 30 secondary schools, and 25 special schools and services. Over half of children and young people live in areas of highest deprivation categorised as Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2.

Glasgow City Council has received Attainment Scotland funding through the Challenge Authority Programme (£40,497,213), the Pupil Equity Fund (£87,894,530), the Innovation Fund (£109,445) and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (£5,371,032) over the period 2015 to 2020, a total of £133,872,220.

The Education Scotland inspection of local authorities (March 2019) How well is Glasgow Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? reported that the authority was making excellent progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. The report stated that Education Scotland were confident that the evidence and evaluation at that time indicated the following strengths:

- The very strong council-wide vision focused on reducing the impact of poverty on children, families and communities.
- The relentless drive of the Executive Director in improving the educational outcomes of children and young people living in poverty in Glasgow.
- The exceptional progress made in reducing the impact of poverty on the educational attainment and achievement of children and young people.
- Outstanding approaches to career-long professional learning and leadership which have strengthened the skills and knowledge of staff and, as a result, improved children's and young people's attainment.
- In-built sustainability through capacity building is at the heart of the professional learning approaches undertaken across the city. Education Services have strongly promoted the importance of long-term sustainability across all aspects of their universal and targeted approaches to permanently reduce the impact of poverty on outcomes for children and young people.

Aspects for development were noted as:

- As planned, further refine the multi-layer self-evaluation approaches to continue to drive up standards.

In December 2020, the Education Scotland link attainment advisor worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact which identified the following key strengths:

- The very strong council-wide vision focused on reducing the impact of poverty on children, families and communities. The work of Glasgow's Improvement Challenge has remained a core priority across Education Services over the last five years and is promoted as 'core business' by the Executive Director. Staff at all levels work together to promote excellence, equity and empowerment across the city.
- The exceptional progress made in reducing the impact of poverty on the educational attainment and achievement of children and young people. In primary schools there remains an attainment gap between those living in SIMD 1 and 2 and those living in SIMD 9 and 10, however, it is closing. In primary schools, children from the most deprived areas continue to perform above the national average for all Broad General Education National Improvement Framework measures. At senior phase, outcomes for young people have shown a very positive upward trend over the last five years. Overall, young people are leaving school with better qualifications particularly at SCQF Level 6. Glasgow City Council is mitigating the impact of poverty very successfully for its young people at the senior phase across a number of measures.
- Outstanding approaches to career-long professional learning (CLPL) and leadership which have strengthened the skills and knowledge of staff and, as a result, improved children and young people's attainment. The CLPL programme developed for Challenge Leaders of Learning has received accreditation from the General Teaching Council of Scotland and has had measurable impact on staff knowledge, confidence and learner experience across the city.
- Education Services have strongly promoted the importance of long-term sustainability across all aspects of their universal and targeted approaches to permanently reduce the impact of poverty on outcomes for children and young people. The capacity building approach built within the Challenge Leader of Learning model ensures knowledge and skills are developed across staff teams and that leadership of learning is a responsibility of all teachers.

Next steps identified include:

- Continue to increase curriculum for excellence achievement levels at all stages through increased levels of rigour, effective use of data and improved professional dialogue.
- Continue to focus on assessment and moderation to increase and refine understanding of achieving a level in the broad general education to impact further on narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap.

March 2021

Summary of Progress - Inverclyde Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering equity and excellence in education. Inverclyde Council joined the Challenge programme in year 1 (2015-16).

The education service in Inverclyde Council is led by the Director of Education, Communities and Corporate Development, supported by two heads of service. The service is responsible for the education of over 11,000 school-aged children and just over 1,100 children between the ages of zero to five. There are 20 early learning and childcare settings, 2 schools and centres for children and young people with additional support needs, 20 primary schools and 6 secondary schools. Over 48.8% of children and young people live in SIMD 1 and 2.

The authority has received Attainment Scotland funding through the Challenge Authority Programme (£14,632,650), the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) (£9,668,837) and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (£387,643), a total of £24,689,130 over the period 2015 to 2020.

Inverclyde has taken a strategic approach to raising attainment for all, while closing the poverty related attainment gap. Interventions in the local authority's Attainment Challenge Programme (ACP) were introduced with a 'start small and grow' approach. Initially 6 primary schools with the highest levels of children and young people living in areas of deprivation were identified to receive additional supports. This has grown to 12 over the life of the project with all 6 secondary schools joining the project in 2016/17. The authority's SAC improvement plan was developed in partnership with headteachers and other relevant stakeholders and is closely aligned with the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

The Education Scotland inspection of local authorities (October 2018) How well is Inverclyde Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? reported that the authority was making very good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. The report stated that Education Scotland were confident that the evidence and evaluation at that time indicated the following strengths:

- The very strong vision and shared values which are 'lived by all' across the authority.
- The influential leadership at all levels, from the Chief Executive, head of education through the central teams, and heads of establishments empowering staff to play their part in improving the life chances of children, young people and their families.
- Sector-leading evidence-based professional learning resulting in a culture of strong reflective and confident practitioners.
- Staff and partners working very effectively together to provide sensitive and well-judged support for children and young people, which is improving literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Robust self-evaluation, supported by strong strategic governance, at the heart of Inverclyde Council's practice

Aspects for development.

- Continue to secure high-level outcomes for all children and young people.
- Strengthen exit and continuation strategies for SAC initiatives.

In November 2020, the Education Scotland link attainment advisor worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact which identified the following key strengths:

- The leadership approach taken by Inverclyde in supporting the aims of the SAC and its implementation.
- Collaborative working across schools and between partners and schools is highly valued. This collaboration leads to improved outcomes for children. Highly effective professional learning has led to more skilled teaching. Through training and support in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved.
- The use of data is now an integral part of school improvement and the local authority continue to prioritise the development of data literacy. Processes for data analysis supports the review of the poverty related attainment gap and inform decisions in addressing this gap.
- Overall, there are improving trends in the attainment for children and young people in Inverclyde affected by poverty. Data shows improvement over time and the poverty related attainment gap is decreasing. Initial positive destinations for young people from areas of disadvantage in Inverclyde are improving and are above national levels. There are many factors which contribute to this including the work by staff funded by SAC across primary and secondary schools.

Next steps identified include:

- Strengthen reporting of outcomes of PEF spend to ensure the impact of the fund is maximised.
- Review care experience children and young people's fund plans to ensure improved educational outcomes for this group of children and young people.

March 2021

Summary of Progress – North Ayrshire Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in February 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering excellence and equity in education. North Ayrshire Council has been part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge since 2015 and receives funding as a Challenge Authority, through the Pupil Equity Fund and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund. North Ayrshire Council has received £43,177,412 over the last 5 years across these funding streams.

The majority of children and young people in North Ayrshire live in the 30% most deprived areas of Scotland with over a third living in the 20% most deprived. North Ayrshire has the second highest proportion of children and young people affected by socio-economic disadvantage in Scotland.

The Education Scotland inspection of local authorities (July 2018) How well is North Ayrshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? reported that the authority was making very good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. The report stated that HM Inspectors were confident that the evidence and evaluation at that time indicated the following strengths:

- The central officer team's drive, vision and capacity for continuous improvement, supported by strong governance structures, provide opportunities for innovation within an appropriate framework of accountability at all levels
- There are shared values and common purpose where school staff feel valued and very well supported
- The very strong leadership of the Executive Director and leadership team is driving improved outcomes for children and young people
- Partnership working within Scottish Attainment Challenge thematic workstreams is leading to improved outcomes for children, young people and their families living in the highest areas of deprivation
- Very effective self-evaluation is leading to improved learning, raised attainment and a narrowing of the poverty-related attainment gap
- Very strong approaches to staff development are evident across the whole authority led by the work undertaken by the PLA. The development of leadership at all levels is building leadership capacity across the authority

Aspects for development were noted as:

- The authority should continue to build on identified areas of strong and sector leading practice
- The authority should continue to engage a wider range of stakeholders, including parents and pupils, in self-evaluation, planning and governance of the Scottish Attainment Challenge across North Ayrshire Council
- The authority should further strengthen the information provided to the cabinet to further enhance scrutiny and transparency

- The authority should confirm formal exit strategies for Scottish Attainment Challenge workstreams as a matter of priority and share them with elected members to ensure sustainability

In December 2020, Education Scotland link Attainment Advisors worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact which identified the following key strengths:

- The strategic leadership and governance approach taken by North Ayrshire Council has supported the Scottish Attainment Challenge vision and embedded practice across schools. A consistent approach has been adopted throughout the challenge with operational overview being provided by the head of service with senior managers leading specific workstreams. This approach has supported improvement, agility and sustainability
- Continued development of the sector-leading professional learning academy is providing a range of high quality professional learning activities to practitioners in every school in the authority. This professional learning is helping to raise attainment, particularly for those most affected by socio-economic disadvantage
- Innovation within the leadership workstream has resulted in improved leadership capacity across North Ayrshire and the development of a sustainable delivery model.
- Nurture provision is well established within North Ayrshire and is providing robustly assessed and effective support for many of the authority's most vulnerable learners
- The work of the family learning team continues to develop a range of valued support to an increasing number of families most affected by socio-economic disadvantage
- There are improving trends in the attainment of children and young people most affected by socio-economic disadvantage. In particular, young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage are achieving well in literacy and numeracy. The poverty related attainment gap has closed significantly for S3 learners

In line with national trends the attainment of children and young people in North Ayrshire who live in the 20% least deprived areas continues to be higher than those living in the 20% most deprived areas resulting in an enduring attainment gap. There are improvements in reducing the poverty related attainment gap and the authority is committed to making these improvements more consistent across all measures. Consequently, areas of development for the future include the following key points:

- Continuation of North Ayrshire's governance and implementation approach to support sustainability and prioritisation of initiatives. This may include building on existing approaches to renew the focus on identifying key gaps and objective evaluation of the impact of Scottish Attainment Challenge funded initiatives - including Care Experienced Children and Young People and Pupil Equity Funds - to ensure their impact on equity
- Continue to deliver progress against key National Improvement Framework and local measures of the poverty related attainment gap

- Continue to develop access to high quality learning and teaching including digital and remote learning approaches for every learner and particularly those affected by socio-economic disadvantage

March 2021

Summary of Progress – North Lanarkshire Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering equity and excellence in education. North Lanarkshire Council joined the Challenge programme in 2015.

North Lanarkshire has the 4th largest population of local authority areas in Scotland with 26% of children living in poverty compared to a national average of 24% (End Child Poverty local data 2019). Over 25% of all children and young people in North Lanarkshire live in areas of highest deprivation, categorised as Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), deciles 1 and 2. This is above the national average. There are 119 primary schools, 23 secondary schools, 23 council managed family learning centres and 13 special schools. There are approximately 54,000 children and young people.

The authority has received Attainment Scotland funding through the Challenge Authority Programme (£34,360,724), the Pupil Equity Fund (£35,581,137), the Innovation Fund (£32,800) and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (£1,187,071), a total of £71,161,732 over the period 2015 to 2020.

The Education Scotland inspection of local authorities (July 2018) How well is North Lanarkshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? reported that the authority was making good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. The report stated that Education Scotland were confident that the evidence and evaluation at that time indicated the following strengths:

- The clear vision and drive of the Assistant Chief Executive and her team, within North Lanarkshire's one council approach to delivery of services, leading to improvement in outcomes for children across the SAC and Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) programmes.
- The increasing use of data and developing approaches to self-evaluation were providing more rigorous evidence to plan and review SAC and PEF interventions.
- Effective CLPL and strong support for families was resulting in improvement in aspects of attainment and closing of the poverty-related attainment gap.
- The work of the educational psychology service, within the SAC programme, was having a significant impact on improved outcomes for targeted groups of children and young people.

Aspects for development were noted as:

- Further develop the Continuous Improvement Service to maximise consistency of support and challenge for SAC and PEF.
- Build on the positive start made to closing the poverty-related attainment gap for children and young people as they progress through their learning.
- Strengthen the positive engagement of elected members in working for better outcomes for children and young people across North Lanarkshire Council by continuing to provide relevant information to the Education Committee on the

funding provided, and progress of Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund.

In December 2020, the Education Scotland link attainment advisor worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact which identified the following key strengths:

- An increased understanding and use of attainment data to support decisions around identifying targeted groups and the measurement of targeted interventions.
- A new leadership framework, endorsed by Education Scotland, has been developed and includes leadership programmes for new or aspiring principal teachers, deputy headteachers and headteachers. This approach aims to ensure long term sustainability and with less dependency on outsourcing.
- Approaches to empowerment, including 'family groups' and the recently developed 'Empowering Clusters' operating model, which are focussed on attainment and equity.
- Approaches to learning and teaching which have resulted in an overall improving trend in the attainment for children and young people in North Lanarkshire affected by poverty. The data shows improvement over time and the poverty related attainment gap shows a steady decrease.
- The positive impact of the community learning and development team on young people and adults from the most deprived communities.
- The Winter Leavers Pathways Programme was introduced in 2019-20 and supported 90 young people most at risk of disengaging from learning into a positive post-school destination.
- The work of the North Lanarkshire Psychological Service around health and wellbeing.
- The development of North Lanarkshire's Virtual School which provides additional educational support for care experienced children.

Next steps identified include:

- Building on the recent strategic realignment and refocussing of the SAC workstreams, continue to further develop integrative practice between services with a focus on increasing impact and sustainability including through PEF.
- A number of headteachers require support in developing a rationale for use of PEF, based on a clear contextual analysis which addresses attainment, attendance, exclusion, participation and engagement.
- At a strategic level, it is important that the various teams across the local authority work together to provide a coherent support for clusters and schools.
- Ensure long term sustainability via the leadership framework whereby experienced and effective practitioners from within North Lanarkshire continue to develop and deliver professional learning sessions, with less dependency on outsourcing.
- In order to optimise outcomes for care experienced children and young people, continue to develop the virtual school with particular focus on the partnerships between the virtual school and the young people's base schools.

- At a strategic level, continue to develop further guidance for school leaders to ensure consistently strong approaches to engaging with stakeholders.

March 2021

Summary of Progress – Renfrewshire Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering equity and excellence in education. Renfrewshire Council joined the Challenge programme in year 2 (2016-17).

The education service in Renfrewshire Council is led by the Director of Children's Services. The service is responsible for the education of over 27,000 children and young people between 3-18. There are 35 early learning and childcare establishments, 49 primary schools, 11 secondary schools and 2 special schools. 25% of children and young people live in areas of the highest deprivation, as categorised by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2.

The authority has received Attainment Scotland funding through the Challenge Authority Programme (£17,797,657), the Pupil Equity Fund (£17,228,108), the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (£1,426,000) and the Innovation Fund (£275,000) a total of £36,726,765 over the period 2015 to 2020.

Since 2015, the authority has been committed to delivering the recommendations from its Tackling Poverty Commission. Renfrewshire Council joined the programme in 2015 as a School's Programme Authority with five Challenge Schools. When the authority became a SAC Challenge Authority in June 2016, it was able to build on this foundation to develop its vision, values, and aims for SAC. The authority's SAC improvement plan was developed in partnership with headteachers and other relevant stakeholders and is closely aligned with the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

The Education Scotland inspection of local authorities (February 2019) How well is Renfrewshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? reported that the authority was making excellent progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. The report stated that Education Scotland were confident that the evidence and evaluation at that time indicated the following strengths:

- Very strong self-evaluation, informed by high-quality data resulting in very successful, evidenced-based universal and targeted interventions, which are securing improvement.
- Highly effective leadership, shared vision and an ethos of empowerment of staff at all levels to improve outcomes for children and young people, their families and communities.
- The outstanding impact of very high quality professional learning approaches, developed and delivered in collaboration with partners.
- Renfrewshire Council's excellent approach to Scottish Attainment Challenge governance, which is set within a well-defined accountability framework.
- Significant year-on-year improvements in closing the poverty-related attainment gap across all key indicators in the broad general education across curricular areas.

Aspects for development were noted as:

- As planned, continue to build on successes achieved to date in addressing the poverty-related attainment gap and continue with plans to develop the sustainability of initiatives beyond the life of the SAC programme.

In December 2020, the Education Scotland attainment advisor worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact which identified the following key strengths:

- Well-structured programme management ensuring clearly defined approaches.
- Partnership working to enhance impact including co-ordinated approaches in the sharing of data.
- A sector leading approach to professional learning including a highly effective leadership programme and a programme for classroom assistants.
- Evidence-based approaches to the teaching of literacy have led to delivery of a high-quality literacy curriculum.
- Very good moderation activities provided across the authority.
- Staff are skilled at recognising and addressing the impact of poverty on families.
- Attainment in literacy and numeracy in the broad general education has improved over time and the authority continues to perform above national averages with decreasing poverty-related attainment gaps across stages.
- Schools have been supported to deliver a Senior Phase which ensures appropriate pathways for young people and provides them with the opportunity to achieve a range of qualifications.
- There has been an increase in positive destinations for leavers from areas of highest deprivation.
- The views and voices of children and young people are shaping improvements across the authority.
- The roles of inclusion support assistants and transition teachers have supported improved attendance, reduction in exclusions and transitions among targeted groups.
- Almost all establishments in all sectors are fully engaged in Renfrewshire's Nurturing Relationships Approach and there is a wide range of high-quality services and resources available to support the health and wellbeing of all children, young people and families.
- The work of the Support to Promote Attendance/Attainment for the Care Experienced (SPACE) team is effectively improving attendance and health and wellbeing for care experienced children and young people.
- The development of a parental engagement strategy has been a key focus to support establishments with their planning around parental engagement.
- The authority's approach to the use of data to inform all aspects of its work has led to the development of a positive data culture.
- Increased opportunities to work in partnership within, across and outwith the workstreams including with a range of academic partners have been impactful.

Next steps include:

- Establishing a 'Virtual School' approach towards supporting care experienced children and young people.
- Continuing to develop collective impact approaches.

- Continuing work to align systems and processes to ensure data accuracy through the ongoing data matching work.

March 2021

Summary of Progress - West Dunbartonshire Council

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) was launched in 2015 to help the Scottish Government achieve its vision of delivering equity and excellence in education. West Dunbartonshire Council joined the Challenge programme in year 1 (2015-16).

The education service in West Dunbartonshire Council is responsible for the education of around 12,000 school-aged children and young people in mainstream education establishments and 187 who are engaged in alternatives to mainstream education. There are 21 council managed early learning and childcare centres, 10 partner providers of early learning and childcare, 2 special schools, 33 primary schools, 1 programme for young people whose needs are not being met by mainstream secondary schools and 5 secondary schools. Just under half of all children and young people live in the areas of the highest deprivation categorised as Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2, which is well above the national average.

West Dunbartonshire Council has received Attainment Scotland funding through the Challenge Authority Programme (£10,597,759), the Pupil Equity Fund (£13,326,356), the Innovation Fund (£34,000) and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund (£869,360), a total of £24,827,475 over the period 2015 to 2020.

The Education Scotland inspection How well is West Dunbartonshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? dated 1 May 2018 evaluated the authority as making very good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. Particular strengths noted were:

- Highly-effective leadership of the education service resulting in a clear shared understanding of the local authority context and vision for improving the life chances for all children and young people.
- Staff and partners working effectively together to provide a wide range of support for children, young people and families which is leading to improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- Many children, young people and families demonstrate a strong desire to positively engage in new projects and different ways of learning leading to increased achievements and skills for learning, life and work.
- Well thought-out strategic approaches to career long professional learning supporting practitioners to improve their practice through collaboration, engagement in research, critical reflection and skills development.
- Self-evaluation, underpinned by a robust governance framework, as an integral approach to continuous improvement.

Aspects for development were noted as:

- Continue to ensure self-evaluation provides clarity about which interventions add the most value to children's and young people's attainment and achievements and take steps to formalise exit or continuation strategies as appropriate.
- Further strengthen the information provided to the Educational Services Committee to enhance scrutiny by elected members through, for example, an increased focus on actual progress against planned activity.

- Building on the current good practice, improve planning with parents, carers and children and young people to ensure they are fully involved in discussions and decisions which affect their learning.
- Monitor the workload and impact on headteachers and central staff, including in human resources, procurement and finance, of their work related to the SAC and Pupil Equity Fund to ensure there is capacity to continue providing the required levels of administrative and other support.

In December 2020, the Education Scotland link attainment advisor worked alongside local authority project leads to analyse data and evidence of impact which identified the following key strengths:

- The authority strategy to deliver a system wide model of change and improvement, focussing on building capacity at all levels and in all sectors. This has improved the range of approaches being used to raise attainment and narrow poverty-related attainment gaps.
- An empowered system of school improvement at all levels has generated a self-sustaining model of school improvement with education leaders supporting and challenging peers and colleagues to raise attainment and improve learning.
- The conditions for effective collaboration and embedded use of data to improve outcomes have been created as a result of the foundations laid by the SAC work streams and projects.
- Since the 2018 Education Scotland inspection initiatives continue to maximise progress and embed sustainable change.
- A wider curriculum offering across establishments is in place with a focus on skills for learning and life enabling more young people to gain personal success and achievement.
- The scale and reach of nurture has been increased across all establishments and sectors, which has impacted on positive reductions in exclusion rates.
- Attainment of children and young people is showing trends of improvement with evidence of the narrowing of attainment gaps.
- Provision of SAC projects has increased the range and scope of accessible activities and services to support improvement in outcomes for families.
- The positive contribution played by the third sector family support and outreach workers is supporting children, young people and families with engagement, attendance, wellbeing and readiness to learn.

Next steps include:

- Continuing to prioritise quality of teaching and learning to raise attainment and continue to narrow the poverty-related attainment gaps.
- Advancing initiatives and projects to maximise attendance.
- Continuous development of personalisation and choice in the curriculum matched to future workforce demands.
- Continue to work with a range of multi-agency partners to identify interventions which focus on addressing identified needs of care experienced children and young people.
- Build on local community approach to providing integrated services for children, young people and families.

March 2021

MAKING SCOTLAND

the *best place* to

GROW and LEARN



Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)

SHARED VISION and PRIORITIES in the National Improvement Framework

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC)

COLLABORATIVE ENDEAVOUR system-wide

EXCELLENCE THROUGH RAISING ATTAINMENT:
Ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to shape their future as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.

Scottish ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE

FOCUS ON CLOSING THE POVERTY-RELATED ATTAINMENT GAP

£ 750m ATTAINMENT Scotland Fund (ASF)



Leadership

EQUITY DRIVERS



Families and communities



Learning and teaching

Support for all 32 LOCAL authorities

Attainment ADVISORS

ADDITIONAL targeted support and approaches TO EDUCATION

focus on

Local delivery of

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

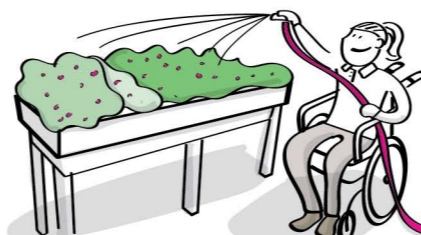
INTERVENTIONS include:

LITERACY



- * literacy leaders and champions
- * metacognitive work
- * 1:1 and group support
- * commercial resources

HEALTH & WELLBEING



- * nurture
- * transition
- * outdoor learning
- * breakfast and afterschool clubs
- * music, dance, mindfulness

NUMERACY



- * numeracy leaders and champions
- * problem solving
- * cooperative learning
- * new tools and approaches
- * linking numeracy to wider STEM

A vision of EQUITY

CLOSING THE POVERTY-RELATED ATTAINMENT GAP

where the FUNDING goes

ATTAINMENT

Scotland **FUND**

NATIONAL PROGRAMMES



PUPIL EQUITY FUNDING (PEF)
Over 97% of schools, across Scotland

CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FUNDING



CHALLENGE AUTHORITIES AND SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES

FOR AUTHORITIES AND SCHOOLS
(9 authorities & 73 individual primary and secondary schools) most affected by poverty



ACHIEVING EQUITY:

Ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap.



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Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba





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