

# Summarised inspection findings

**Stromness Academy**

Orkney Islands Council

3 June 2025

## Key contextual information

School Name: Stromness Academy  
Council: Orkney Islands Council  
SEED number: 6003532  
Roll (March 2025): 333 young people

Stromness Academy is a secondary school serving the West Mainland of Orkney. The headteacher has been in post since April 2023 and is supported by two deputy headteachers. The senior leadership team have all taken up their leadership posts in the last two years. The school has also experienced significant change to the wider staff body, resulting in just under half of teachers taking up their current posts in the same period. There have been periods of time when roles have remained unfilled but staffing is now improving.

Attendance is in line with the national average for session 2022/23. Exclusions is in line with the national average for session 2022/23. There have been recent improvements, with no exclusions in the current session. In February 2024, 8% of pupils were registered for free school meals. In September 2023, most young people lived in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles seven and eight. In September 2023, the school reported that 54% of pupils had additional support needs. Senior leaders recognise the need for further work to ensure this figure is accurate.

In 2024, around a quarter of young people left school at the end of S4. This is above national data.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

weak

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher has been in post for two years. Staff value his approachable and open manner. He demonstrates compassion and care for all members of the school community. The headteacher has faced significant challenges since taking up post which have impacted negatively on the pace of change. This includes staffing issues, including the recruitment of many teaching and leadership roles. He has focused appropriately on addressing these issues to provide increased stability. A new senior leadership team is in post and wider staffing issues have improved. There is now a need to accelerate the pace of change to secure much needed improvements across the school. Importantly, this includes an urgent need to work with senior and middle leaders to embed clear self-evaluation processes across the school.
- Senior leaders are highly visible and support young people and staff well. They recognise the need to focus less on operational activities and more on developing the strategic vision and direction to help move the school forward. The headteacher should review senior leaders' remits to help them to identify key areas for improvement and to develop strategies to take forward change positively. These remits should ensure a relentless focus on improving outcomes for young people through quality strategic planning. There is a need to improve strategic leadership at all levels to allow senior leaders to do this. Senior and middle leaders do not yet have a strategic overview of significant areas of the school's work.
- The school vision statement "Navigate to Success" and values of being positive, purposeful, proud, responsible, respectful, resilient were established in 2019. Senior leaders are aware of the need to review the school's vision and values to reflect better the school's current context. The headteacher plans to engage with all members of the school community to agree a new and ambitious vision statement to drive improvements and success for all young people.
- Most staff understand well the unique social, cultural and economic context of the school. They respect their place in an island community and celebrate their cultural heritage regularly. Staff and partners provide young people with positive experiences relating to art, music and sport within, across and beyond Orkney. Young people enjoy projects that involve learning about and celebrating local history. Senior leaders demonstrate commitment to reducing the cost of the school day. They recognise socio-economic challenges often hidden within a rural context.
- Senior and middle leaders do not have clear systems and approaches to quality assurance. This is an important weakness of the school. Staff's lack of understanding of high-quality self-evaluation is limiting their ability to measure progress accurately. As a matter of urgency, senior and middle leaders need to work with the local authority and undertake a programme of

professional learning designed to develop their knowledge and skills in this area. All staff require to set aside dedicated time to work together and develop robust quality assurance activities that demonstrate clearly the school's strengths and areas for development.

- Senior leaders share and discuss the school improvement plan (SIP) with the Parent Council. The Parent Council, the wider parent body and young people do not currently contribute to planning for Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Senior leaders need to consider how all staff, young people, parents and partners contribute to self-evaluation. The headteacher recognises appropriately the need to develop a quality improvement framework. This should detail the roles and responsibilities of staff and the wider school community in self-evaluation. There is a significant need for greater accountability across the school. Staff need to develop the ability to provide constructive challenge to each other in order to ensure change results in the desired outcomes for learners.
- Teachers in a few departments and individual staff use self-evaluation well to measure the success of aspects of their work. They can identify areas for improvement. School leaders, with support from the local authority, need to identify effective examples of self-evaluation and use them to inform a strategic approach. They also need to look for examples outwith the local area to inform their planning of a systematic approach.
- The SIP contains very broad priorities which are not informed by self-evaluation activities. The evidence used to identify improvement priorities is not robust, as a result. The SIP generally reflects local and national priorities. The current priorities mirror the areas of focus from the previous session and demonstrate that limited progress has been made. Senior leaders should review how they structure the SIP. They need to ensure it outlines how progress towards priorities will be measured and who is responsible for taking forward improvements. There should be clear timescales with points throughout the year for review and planning. Most middle leaders do not currently use department plans to support improvement at subject level. They do not yet recognise the key role they play in supporting change.
- Staff working groups were established for each improvement priorities within the SIF. Senior leaders encourage staff to contribute to school improvements. However, these groups need more support, challenge and direction to ensure they progress improvement meaningfully.
- The staff learning, teaching and assessment working group is at the early stages of improving the consistency of learner experiences. They created a helpful toolkit identifying features of high-quality practice last year, underpinned by a programme of professional learning activities. A majority of the staff in this group observed each other teaching to share ideas and consider pedagogy. This work has not progressed sufficiently well enough through the current session. Staff across the school do not yet have a shared understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment, nor do they have a strategy to embed strong practice widely. All staff need to continue to look outwards to learn from effective practice adopted by schools in and beyond their local authority, and through educational research. Senior and middle leaders must maintain a strategic overview of this area of work.
- Teachers value opportunities for professional learning and collegiate working time. There are a few positive examples of staff reading and exploring educational research together. Staff seek partnerships, such as with local businesses, to support learning. They also engage in professional learning alongside other schools, on areas such as focused work on senior phase

verification. Senior leaders should build on this by developing a strategic overview of professional learning, linked clearly to improvement priorities. They should develop a collegiate approach to professional learning so staff work together to take forward change successfully.

- A few young people, mostly in the senior phase, demonstrate leadership capacities through allocated roles. Senior leaders are at the early stage of re-establishing pupil councils. They need to consider how they allow young people to contribute to decision-making. A minority of young people feel the school takes their views into account when making changes. Staff need to consider how they demonstrate that young people influence change positively. A few young people supported community decision-making positively on areas relating to sustainability.

## 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

weak

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Senior leaders, working well with staff, prioritise the embedding of positive relationships across the school. Most staff foster respectful relationships with young people. This helps to create a positive learning environment, where most young people feel cared for and valued by staff and their peers. Almost all young people behave very well. Most teachers know young people well as individuals. Young people are a considerable strength of the school. They are articulate, welcoming and enthusiastic to learn. They are proud of their school and local community.
- In most classes, tasks are overly teacher-led, with all young people completing the same work at the same pace. Young people need more opportunities for independent and collaborative learning. This will stimulate young people's interest and engagement in their learning further. Teachers need to be more responsive to young people's needs, recognising that a majority of young people require increased pace and challenge in their learning.
- All staff need to embed stronger classroom routines. Across the school, only a minority of young people understand clearly the purpose of their learning and what they need to do to demonstrate success in their learning. A few teachers use well-considered starter tasks to help young people make connections between their learning. In the majority of lessons, teachers offer clear explanations and instructions which supports a majority of young people to understand how to complete tasks. Most teachers do not use plenaries at the end of learning well to review the progress made.
- Support for learning (SfL) teachers provide helpful and detailed information on, and strategies to support, young people's needs via a digital handbook. In a minority of lessons, teachers use information well to plan young people's learning. All staff now need to use information regularly to plan learning that meets the needs of all young people. A few young people benefit from positive experiences through targeted interventions. Senior leaders should consider how effective practice can be shared and implemented across the school. This will support young people experiencing barriers to their learning to attain and achieve further in all classes.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers use questioning well to check young people's understanding and knowledge. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning techniques effectively to prompt young people to think deeply about their learning. Teachers need to share strong practice widely to ensure it is embedded across the school.
- There are important weaknesses in teachers' approaches to assessment, particularly in the broad general education (BGE). Teachers need to use a greater range of high-quality assessments to inform their planning of learning.

- Most teachers use summative assessments regularly, such as end of unit tests, to measure young people's attainment. A few teachers use formative assessment well to check young people's progress in learning. They use strategies, such as self- and peer- assessment tasks, successfully to help young people reflect on their learning. Almost all teachers now need to develop their understanding and use of formative assessment strategies further. They need to use formative assessments routinely to identify young people not on track in their learning and offer timely interventions.
- Most teachers show clear understanding of standards associated with National Qualifications (NQs). Teachers in a majority of curricular areas have Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) roles. They are beginning to work with colleagues to support the consistent application of assessment standards. A majority of staff engage in helpful NQ verification activities to validate assessment decisions.
- In the BGE, teacher assessment approaches are inconsistent. A majority of teachers do not have a shared understanding of national standards and therefore teacher professional judgements are not valid or robust. All staff should continue to develop their understanding of the learning, teaching and assessment cycle to support better planning of learning. Teachers' use of moderation in the BGE is at a very early stage. They need to increase the range and robustness of activities undertaken. Senior and middle leaders, working with teachers, need to ensure moderation happens regularly in, across and outwith the school.
- Most young people feel that they receive helpful feedback on their learning from teachers. A majority of teachers use useful strategies to offer feedback to learners following summative assessment. In a minority of departments, young people benefit from detailed feedback connected to SQA marking criteria. This allows young people to recognise better their mistakes or misconceptions and address them. In the BGE, a majority of teachers rely too heavily on whole-class, oral feedback over written, individual comments. In a few strong examples, teachers provide detailed written feedback with clear guidance on how young people can improve. Middle leaders need to develop greater consistency in practice across the school.
- A majority of teachers use learner conversations with young people in the senior phase. Young people speak confidently about their working grade and aspirational target grade. They need more support to recognise clearly their next steps in learning. Teachers should now ensure these conversations are more structured, specific and measurable. They should also ensure young people in the BGE benefit from similar learner conversations.
- Teachers in a majority of departments use Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes appropriately to plan courses of work for the BGE. Senior leaders should support teachers to develop how they use experiences and outcomes to plan appropriate progression in learning for young people.
- In a majority of departments, middle leaders have clear tracking and monitoring systems for young people in the senior phase. They meet regularly to discuss young people's progress and plan next steps. Teachers' approaches to monitoring and tracking in the BGE are unreliable. This is due to most teacher's inconsistent use of assessment criteria which impacts on the quality of their professional judgements. Staff across departments use different tracking systems and approaches which are inconsistent, including in how they communicate progress to young people and parents. Senior and middle leaders should develop a shared and improved approach to tracking and monitoring young people's progress in the BGE. This should support staff to use data better to inform well-planned interventions and improvements. It should also allow staff to review the progress of individual young people and cohorts and compare their progress across curricular areas.



## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The aspiration of the school's curriculum rationale is to ensure all young people benefit from a range of opportunities to develop them as an individual. Senior leaders should consider how this rationale reflects fully the unique context of the school and its place within the local community. Senior and middle leaders should work with staff to develop progressive learning pathways for all curricular areas. They should ensure all young people are able to benefit from the full range of qualifications, accreditations, awards and local partners available across the curriculum. Staff should ensure the curriculum achieves its aim of preparing all young people for modern life and work, in Orkney and beyond.
- Staff do not have effective curricular transition arrangements for young people as they transition from primary to secondary school. Staff should work with primary colleagues to ensure young people build effectively on their prior learning as they move into S1.
- Young people exercise a degree of personalisation and choices as they move from S2 into S3. All young people select eight subjects in addition to their core subject areas. All young people experience learning in all curricular areas from S1 to S3. In almost all subjects, the curriculum in S3 is planned around the requirements of NQs. Teachers should ensure young people are able to progress their learning appropriately and achieve success at all CfE levels as they move through the BGE. At the end of S3, all young people choose four subjects in addition to English and mathematics, with almost all selecting to continue in subjects previously selected. Almost all young people are presented for six NQs at the end of S4. Most young people study five subjects in S5 and S6. Senior leaders have increased the range of subjects available to young people in the senior phase in recent years. For example, in response to local employment needs, staff introduced a skills for work course in laboratory science. Senior leaders recognise the need to explore further how well the curriculum from S1 to S4 prepares the minority of young people who leave school at the end of S4 for their next steps in life.
- Young people are supported by guidance and subject teachers when making course choices. Staff should apply a more detailed understanding of learner data, course information and pathways to improve the quality of this support. Staff have developed a few learner pathways which reflect well the school's context within the local community. A few young people in the BGE who selected maritime and rural skills as part of "Friday Activities" continue these studies and achieve qualifications in the senior phase. Staff have established meaningful partnerships within the community. These provide further opportunities to enhance the curriculum. Young people are benefitting from positive events with local employers, such as 'lunch with an employer', work experience and visits to businesses. Senior leaders should develop a clearer strategic overview of the wide range of experiences available to evaluate and improve their quality and impact further.
- Staff have not yet established an approach to develop successfully young people's literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across the curriculum as a responsibility of all. Senior leaders need to establish greater clarity over which staff lead these responsibilities across the school. Young people receive their curriculum entitlements to two periods of high-quality physical education and modern languages learning in line with the national languages 1+2 policy. Senior leaders should ensure young people in the senior phase continue to experience learning in religious and moral education (RME) that is meaningful and progressive.
- Staff work well with local authority Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) coordinators. They track the progress of a few young people who attend DYW courses, like vocational taster and college transition programmes. These young people benefit from meaningful learner pathways.



## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents value highly the community feel of the school. Most parents feel comfortable approaching staff with questions, suggestions or problems when required. Most feel that their child is making good progress at school. A few parents would like more information to help them understand better their child's progress in learning.
- The Parent Council leads fundraising for the school to support activities and experiences for young people. Senior leaders share improvement priorities with the Parent Council but recognise the need for greater engagement with a wider selection of parents.
- Parents value a few well-considered opportunities to visit and learn about the school. Staff have undertaken engagement with parents on specific issues such as the use of mobile phones. It will be important to involve parents more meaningfully in decisions about, and evaluations of, strategic plans moving forward.
- Parents appreciate the wide range of experiences and opportunities that staff facilitate for young people. They recognise the range of achievement opportunities available to young people is enhancing their self-confidence, teamwork and communication skills.

## 2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

**satisfactory**

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Most young people recognise that staff help them to understand and respect others. Almost all young people have a strong sense of belonging to their school community. Staff create safe and nurturing spaces which young people access to self-regulate. This includes the helpful support base and the well-regarded library which provides an inclusive area for young people to relax and interact. Most staff demonstrate care for and interest in young people through their daily interactions. Most young people feel safe in school as a result.
- Most young people recognise that staff help them to live healthy and active lives. This is enhanced by a range of opportunities for achievement, sports activities and interhouse competitions. A range of well-considered partners offer young people lots of physical activities within the school and local community. These result in improvements to young people's social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. A few partner agencies offer targeted interventions to address issues relating to young people's mental health. These helped a few young people to address and reduce their feelings of anxiety and improved their attendance at school.
- Principal teachers of guidance (PTGs) offer young people helpful learning as part of the personal and social education (PSE) curriculum. PTGs reviewed the course content to ensure its responsiveness to local issues. For example, including content which helps most young people to understand better how to live safely as part of an island community. Young people benefit from inserts on relevant aspects of health, including sleep, diet and teen illness. PTGs should extend opportunities for young people to be involved in shaping and planning PSE to ensure it is always progressive, meaningful and relevant to their needs. For example, young people would like more focus on option choices and planning for post-school destinations.
- Most young people do not demonstrate a strong understanding of the wellbeing indicators, or their relevance to their daily lives. PTGs are beginning to support young people to use wellbeing wheels to evaluate their wellbeing needs. Staff then identify young people for targeted supports. PTGs need to raise the profile of the wellbeing indicators to develop a shared understanding of the language of wellbeing across the school. Most teachers do not yet have a clear understanding of health and wellbeing as a responsibility for all.
- Staff are developing their understanding of statutory duties relating to wellbeing, equality and inclusion. Senior leaders should improve their record keeping, particularly chronologies, to ensure they reflect national guidance. PTGs monitor the progress of children who are care experienced and target them for interventions. They now need to develop their approach to considering care experienced children for a coordinated support plan and recording the outcome of this. Young people with caring responsibilities would also benefit from individualised support, outlined in a young carer's statement.

- Young people's attendance at school has decreased over time, although there have been improvements in the current session. Senior leaders and PTGs monitor attendance data regularly and use information to identify young people targeted for support with their attendance. A few young people attend school on a part-time basis. These young people access bespoke packages of support, tailored to their individual needs. There are indications of improvements in the attendance and engagement of a few young people as a result of this support. Senior leaders should now develop a rigorous attendance policy which outlines the roles and responsibilities of all staff in supporting improvements in attendance.
- Principal teachers of guidance and SfL staff work effectively with young people and their families to identify and address barriers to learning and young people's sense of wellbeing. These staff use a clear staged intervention process positively. This approach helps staff to meet the needs of young people who need additional support. Young people who require them have appropriate individualised plans detailing the support in place. The views of young people and parents are outlined in plans, allowing greater shared ownership over their progress. PTGs and SfL staff use well-planned individual or small group interventions to help young people develop their literacy or numeracy skills, as well as aspects of their wellbeing. These young people achieve success and progress in their learning. Staff should now ensure all plans include regularly reviewed, specific and measurable targets for young people. This will support staff to monitor more closely the impact of interventions and evaluate the effectiveness of support.
- A few young people report that they experience bullying in the school and a minority of young people and parents do not believe the school deals well with bullying. Staff do not respond to issues in a consistent way. Senior leaders and PTGs record incidents when they happen but they do not regularly analyse this information to identify trends and patterns. Senior leaders should, as planned, review and improve their approaches to anti-bullying. They should involve all members of the school community in improving anti-bullying policies and procedures. In particular, young people should play a considerable role in this work. This should help to ensure more young people to feel respected.
- Staff have improved their understanding of aspects of inclusive practice through helpful professional learning. This has helped a few teachers to review and improve their learning environments to be more inclusive of all learners. Most staff use restorative approaches well to address issues of conflict. There has been a steady reduction in the number of young people excluded from school over time. No young people have been excluded in the current session.
- Most young people recognise the importance of equality and diversity in society. Young people who recently joined the school feel very welcomed and included. Young people have opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of equality, diversity and multi-faith issues in a few curricular areas, including RME and PSE. Young people access fiction that challenges discrimination and represents diverse communities through the school library. A few staff engaged recently in positive racial literacy work and are beginning to decolonise aspects of the curriculum in a few departments.
- Most young people require more detailed learning about the full range of protected characteristics. Staff need to develop an overview of how and where young people learn about equalities, diversity and discrimination across the curriculum. This will ensure all young people recognise the importance of all feeling included and respected across society. It will ensure all young people feel able to challenge discrimination and intolerance.

### 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

**satisfactory**

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

#### **Attainment in literacy and numeracy**

##### **Broad General Education (BGE)**

- Until recently, teachers across departments had responsibility for collecting evidence of, and assessing young people's literacy skills. This approach, and a lack of effective and regular moderation, resulted in literacy data that was not consistently valid or robust. Teachers of English now recognise better their role in supporting, developing and assessing young people's literacy skills. They engaged in helpful professional learning on moderation. This is beginning to support improvements in the reliability of professional judgements.
- Teachers of mathematics assess young people's numeracy skills. They have undertaken professional learning and joint moderation activities in numeracy with other mathematics teachers in the local authority. This has led to a greater reliability of teacher professional judgements. Teachers of mathematics are at the early stages of work with a few teachers to develop numeracy as a responsibility for all. They should continue with and expand this work so young people benefit from consistent approaches to numeracy across their curriculum.
- In 2023/24, by the end of S3, school data indicates that most young people attained CfE third level in literacy and almost all attained at this level in numeracy. Attainment at CfE third level in numeracy has remained high over time from 2021/22 to 2023/24. There is a decrease in the percentage of young people achieving CfE fourth level in literacy and numeracy. A minority of young people attained at this level in both areas in 2023/24.
- Staff offer a few well-planned interventions to help identified young people to develop literacy and numeracy skills. There are indications that these interventions support improvements for young people. Staff need to develop further how they measure their impact systemically.

#### **Senior Phase**

##### **Literacy and numeracy (leavers)**

- A few young people left school without achieving SCQF level 3 or 4 in literacy in 2023/24. Staff should ensure all young people are supported to achieve a literacy award before leaving school.
- Most young people who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy from 2020/21 to 2023/24, apart from 2022/23 when it was almost all leavers. Whilst this picture is generally in line with the virtual comparator (VC), there is no consistent pattern of improvement in this measure over time. A minority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy from 2019/20 till 2023/24, apart from 2020/21 and 2022/23, where the majority of young people attained at this level. This is in line with the VC.

- Most young people leaving school in 2019/20, 2020/21, 2022/23 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This was significantly much higher than the VC in 2020/21 and significantly higher in 2022/23. A majority of young people achieved this level in 2021/22 and 2023/24, in line with the VC. A minority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy over the past five years. This is in line with the VC. The attainment of young people leaving school at SCQF level 6 in numeracy has decreased over time.
- A majority of young people with additional support needs (ASN) who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in three of the past five years, from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Most young people with ASN achieved this level in 2020/21 and almost all young people with ASN achieved at this level in 2022/23. A minority achieved SCQF level 6 during the same period. There has been an increase in the percentage of young people with ASN achieving SCQF level 6 since 2019/20.
- A majority of young people with ASN who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2021/22 to 2023/24. This is above the VC and national attainment data. A minority of young people with ASN achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy in three of the past five years, including 2023/24.

### **Literacy and numeracy (cohorts)**

- At S4, the attainment of young people in literacy at SCQF level 5 or better is inconsistent. In 2022/23 almost all young people attained at this level which is significantly higher than the VC. However, in 2023/24 a majority of young people attained literacy at SCQF level 5 or better which is significantly lower than the VC. By S5, based on the S5 roll, all young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in 2022/23. This is significantly much higher than the VC. In 2023/24, most young people attained at this level, in line with the VC. A majority of young people attained SCQF level 6 from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC. By S6, based on the S6 roll, most young people attained SCQF level 6 from 2021/22 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC.
- At S4, most young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2019/20 to 2021/22. This is significantly higher than the VC. In 2022/23 and 2023/24, this decreased to a majority, which is in line with the VC. By S5, based on the S5 roll, almost all young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in 2019/20 and 2022/23, which is significantly much higher than the VC. Most young people achieved at this level in 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2023/24 which is in line with the VC. The percentage of young people achieving SCQF level 6 has decreased over time. It dropped from a minority of young people in 2021/22 to a few in 2023/24. This was significantly much lower than the VC in 2023/24. By S6, based on the S6 roll, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy from 2019/20 to 2023/24, in line with the VC. Staff need to support more young people in S5 and S6 to attain numeracy at SCQF level 6.

### **National Qualifications (NQ)**

- Young people in S4 attain well in National 5 (N5) English and mathematics, including in applications of mathematics. The attainment in N5 English is generally in line with national figures, with low numbers of No Awards. For N5 mathematics, attainment was above national figures in the most recent year. In 2023/24, just over a fifth of young people were dual presented for National 4 and N5 mathematics. Teachers should improve their approaches to monitoring and tracking young people's progress through mathematics courses. This will reduce the need for dual presentation, as teachers will be able to predict young people's success more accurately. Staff should also review learner pathways for those studying applications of mathematics to ensure the courses are progressive.



- The number of young people in S5 presented for Higher English is strong but the percentage of those achieving Grade A-C passes has been declining over the last few years. The number of young people in S5 presented for Higher mathematics is below national figures but those presented generally attain well, above national figures.

## **Attainment over time**

### **BGE**

- Senior leaders recognise the need to improve their strategic overview of how young people attain through the BGE. Staff gather information on young people's attainment over time but this data is not based on robust and reliable assessments. The data gathered is inconsistent and highly variable across curricular areas, and when compared to previous years. It also does not articulate well with attainment in the senior phase. Senior and middle leaders now need to focus on ensuring the quality and accuracy of information gathered. Teachers should develop their confidence applying teacher professional judgements through high-quality and well-planned moderation. This includes work with colleagues within departments, across the school, with other schools in and beyond the local authority, and with primary colleagues.

### **Senior Phase**

- The attainment of school leavers from 2019/20 to 2023/24 is above the VC, using average complementary tariff points. The attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of school leavers is in line with the VC for three of the past five years, apart from 2020/21 and 2022/23 when it is significantly much higher. There is no consistent pattern of improvement for this measure over time. The attainment of the middle attaining 60%, and highest attaining 20% of school leavers is in line with the VC over the past five years. The attainment of school leavers with ASN, when using complementary tariff points, is above the VC for the past five years.
- In S4, and for S5 based on the S5 roll, and S6 based on the S6 roll, the performance of all cohorts of young people is generally in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24. There is no identifiable pattern of improvement across the stages and cohorts over the same period. Senior leaders need to develop the confidence of middle leaders and staff in using data to help to raise young people's attainment. Staff need further professional learning in this area. This will help teachers to use data strategically to set ambitious targets for young people, to inform targeted interventions, and to adapt learning and teaching to meet learners' needs better.
- Senior leaders created a raising attainment action plan at the start of the session. This action plan identifies various priorities. These include being more aspirational for young people, to embed more regular tracking and monitoring, and to adopt interventions to help young people not on track. This is supporting improved outcomes, particularly for young people with ASN. As a next step, senior leaders should develop a raising attainment strategy, which outlines clearly the responsibilities of all staff to raise attainment of learners.

### **Breadth and depth**

- At S4, the attainment of young people at SCQF level 4 or better for one or more to six or more courses is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24. A majority of young people attained four or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better in four of the past five years. This is in line with the VC. The percentage of young people achieving two or more to six or more awards at SCQF level 5C has been decreasing from 2021/22 to 2023/24. A minority of young people attained four or more courses at SCQF level 5A or better from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC.



- By S5, there are improvements in the number of young people attaining five or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better. A majority achieved at this level in 2023/24, which is significantly much higher than the VC. Most young people attained one or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This is significantly much higher than the VC in 2023/24. A minority of young people attained three or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better in four of the past five years, in line with the VC.
- By S6, a majority of young people attained two or more awards and a minority attained three or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better in 2022/23 and 2023/24. This is significantly much higher than the VC in 2023/24. There is a decrease in the number of learners achieving four or more to six or more awards at this level in 2023/24. A majority of young people attained one or more awards at SCQF level 7C over the five-year period, apart from 2022/23 when it was a minority of young people. This is significantly much higher than the VC in 2023/24. A minority of young people attained one or more awards at SCQF level 7A over the five-year period. This is in line with the VC.

### **Overall quality of learners' achievement**

- Young people feel valued by the range of well-considered ways staff celebrate their achievements. This includes bulletins, assemblies, house points, and celebrating success events. Young people are proud of their achievements and the recognition they receive.
- Almost all young people participate in "Friday Activities" where they develop communication and interpersonal skills through social interactions, learning and games. These include for example sport, drama, music, crafting and boating skills. A group of young people demonstrated well-developed performance skills by competing and winning the Scottish Community Drama Association (SCDA) Northern Division one-act play competition. Young people develop teamwork and creativity through the range of clubs and activities taking place regularly during breaks in the school day. This includes music bands. A few young people and staff worked together successfully to compose and perform a theme song for the upcoming Island Games.
- Staff have positive working relationships with local community learning and development staff. The youth work offer to schools ensures that there are clear, well-developed programmes to help young people achieve. Young people gain accreditation in a range of areas. All young people in S2 achieve a Dynamic Youth Award connected to outdoor education. The number of young people achieving a Duke of Edinburgh's Award continues to increase. Young people in S3 gain skills for life and work through the Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI). They increase their knowledge of social issues by researching charities and their impact on the local community.
- Staff work effectively with a wide range of partners to support and enhance the achievement offer for young people. A key partner is Voluntary Action Orkney (VAO) who work alongside staff to offer young people in the senior phase a wide range of volunteering opportunities. For example, young people volunteer in local care homes and offer classroom support in the school and local primaries. Young people demonstrate strong community values and enjoy giving back to their local area. A few achieve a Saltire award to recognise their volunteering efforts. Staff links with local employers and businesses are widening young people's life experiences. For example, working in a community café, participating in music events, becoming Sports Leaders and helping in the school library. Young people are becoming more active through taking part in a wide range of sports with Active Schools.
- Staff are at the early stages of tracking young people's participation and wider achievements, including out of school. A majority of young people talk confidently about the skills they are

developing through achievements. Staff should develop a skills framework that will help young people communicate better and evidence their skills progression over time.

### **Equity for all learners**

- Senior leaders work well with staff to identify and address socio-economic barriers faced by learners. Senior leaders recognise the rural context may hide financial barriers experienced by families. To address this, they consider a range of factors affecting young people such as receipt of free school meals and challenges such as geographical barriers. Senior leaders use this information to create a broader “at risk” list of young people who are monitored and targeted for support. A few young people accessed an intervention which has led to improved attendance and early signs of improved attainment. Senior leaders should now consider how they use data strategically to plan and evaluate interventions for those on their “at risk” list. Most young people identified as “at risk” access universal supports to reduce the cost of the school day. Staff should consider how to monitor and evaluate this better in order to progress young people to targeted supports as needed.
- Senior leaders use PEF and other funds well to appoint staff and acquire equipment to support targeted young people. This includes ensuring young people who require it, access a digital device. A few staff were appointed recently as curriculum support teachers. They are at the early stages of working with young people to targeted support for their literacy and numeracy skills. These staff need to consider how they measure the impact of PEF spend to ensure they evidence fully that they are accelerating the progress of targeted young people.
- A majority of young people remained at school from S4 to S6 in 2023/24. Young people who left school in 2022/23 and 2023/24 attained in line with those living in similar circumstances across Scotland, when compared using complementary tariff points. Young people predominantly left school to higher education or employment over this five-year period. For the past five years, from 2019/20 to 2023/24, almost all young people left school to an initial positive destination. There is an overall decline in young people entering a positive destination from 2020/21 to 2023/24. Senior leaders should continue to work with partners to support young people to plan and secure a positive post-school destination.

## Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

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

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.