

Questions

1 Our proposals for the key measures of progress towards closing the poverty related attainment gap are based on a number of key principles. Are there any other principles that should be included?

Yes

Please add your response in the text box:

Local authorities are under a legal duty to provide education that is 'directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential.'

(Reference - Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 s 2 (1))

The key principles should give full recognition to the variation in potential among individuals and should recognise that 'attainment' is not a uniform measure across age groups, schools, or other cohorts.

The principles should be expanded to consider how the wider environment impacts on the ability of children and young people to do well at school.

Evidence (Robertson, L; McHardy, F. (2021) The Poverty-related Attainment Gap: A review of the evidence. Poverty Alliance.) suggests that the following are all protective factors in relation to poverty/attainment, and the indicators should be expanded to include these:

- How well the school is able to engage parents and carers in their child's learning
- Strong school leadership
- The breadth of the wider school community – what other organisations are coming in to support pupils and enrich the life of the school?

2 Should the two sub-measures covering attendance and exclusion at secondary schools be promoted to key measures?

No

Please add your response in the text box:

In the same way that there is an observed pattern of higher exclusion rates and lower attendance for children living in the most deprived areas, there is also an observed pattern that children with ASN live disproportionately in the most deprived areas. For example, 39.3% of pupils with ASN live in the 3 most deprived SIMD deciles. In addition, children with ASN are excluded from school at 5 times the rate of those with no ASN. (Reference: Pupil census 2021 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/> (Accessed 20/06/2022)). This statement – 'If children are not at school, then it is far more difficult to take the steps necessary to close the attainment gap' could easily be substituted by a statement that 'If children with ASN do not receive the support they need to learn, it is far more difficult to take the steps necessary to close the attainment gap.' Therefore, there should be measures in place that will support schools to improve the support available to pupils with ASN.

Anxiety-related absence from school is a recurring problem for children and young people who are neurodivergent. Many neurodivergent children do not attend school full time – some are on part-time timetables while others are participating in 'flexi-schooling.' This does not necessarily mean that they won't achieve their full potential. Where they are happening with the consent of the young people and their parents/carers, these arrangements can often give neurodivergent children and young people the best chance of following the curriculum and achieving qualifications. Measures that increase pressure on all children to attend school should be carefully considered so that they don't force 'attendance' on children and young people who can't cope with full-time in-school attendance.

However, there are also many neurodivergent children and young people who are not attending school to any meaningful degree. We have a caseload including many who have not been in school, or receiving any education, for over a year. This is due to the inability of the school/local authority to meet the needs of the young people. To measure their non-attendance at school in order to understand the poverty-related attainment gap will skew this measure by linking apparent lack of local authority resources to poverty.

3 Should data on confidence, resilience, and engagement from the new Health and Wellbeing census be included in the basket of measures?

No

Please add your response in the text box:

Before the inclusion of these measures, the question should be asked, how will this measurement contribute to addressing poverty? Measures that address children who start the school day hungry, or who are affected by digital poverty and exclusion would go more directly to the heart of the problem.

4 At the moment, the measure of achievement in the senior phase is the National Qualifications achieved by young people at the point which they leave school (SCQF levels 4, 5, and 6 – 1 or more on leaving school). Do we need to add other measures to cover wider achievement and attainment?

Yes

5 If you answered yes to Q4, in the "more information" box below, we have set out two options for consideration. However, we would also welcome any other suggestions for additional measures.

Please provide your views on the options presented, and any other suggestions or comments in the text box. :

Measures which also address other ways for children and young people to achieve would increase equality and inclusion. For example, how can children and young people be recognised for making a positive contribution to their school community? This might be through befriending, fundraising, or environmental activism. At an individual level, a child who finds social communication very difficult could be recognised for small but transformative gains, such as improved attendance at school, managing group or paired activity, or speaking up in class. This would involve schools setting individual goals and recording the extent to which those goals had been achieved. The IEP provides a potential model for this.

We agree that vocational qualifications should be included as a measure. But evidence suggests there has been a narrowing of the curriculum and schools are offering fewer options than before. This reduces the chances of children and young people finding courses that allow them to develop their fullest potential. It is essential to support schools to offer the broadest range of qualifications possible.

In some cases, the curriculum has narrowed because of the pandemic. For example, in a small qualitative study Education Scotland found, "A number of schools have also reviewed and adapted the curriculum to have an enhanced focus on literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. In a few cases, the increased allocation of time in these curricular areas impacts on young people's entitlement to a broad general education."

(Reference: Education Scotland report: <https://education.gov.scot/media/ndpiqj3g/local-approaches-to-recovery.pdf> accessed 06/07/22)

There is also emerging evidence that enrolment in national 5 qualifications is declining, and that " This decline in S4 is more rapid in schools situated in areas of higher socio-economic deprivation (Shapira, 2018), suggesting that curriculum narrowing is socially stratified." Therefore, there should be some measurement of option choices available, and not just measurement of uptake.

(Reference: Shapira, M., Priestley, M., Peace-Hughes, T., Barnett, C. & Ritchie, M. (2021). Preliminary findings from the secondary school leaders survey: a summary. Nuffield Project, Working Paper No. 2. Stirling: University of Stirling.)

6 In terms of measuring progress beyond school, should the percentage of school leavers going to a "positive destination" on leaving school be included alongside the participation measure?

Yes

Please add your response in the text box:

The percentage of school leavers going to a "positive destination" should be included alongside the participation measure, in order to fully address the poverty related attainment gap.

While Skills Development Scotland's Annual Participation Measure provides valuable information about the 16-19 cohort, Positive Destinations statistics add a further dimension to our understanding of the outcomes for young people with additional support needs.

While the positive destinations statistics initially portray an overall positive picture of post-school attainment for young people in Scotland, closer analysis shows a pattern of long-term disparity in outcomes between young people with additional support needs and those without additional support needs. The most recent statistics show that school leavers in 2020/21 with an Additional Support Need (ASN) were less likely to go on to a positive follow-up destination than leavers without a recorded ASN (89.2 per cent compared to 95.5 per cent)

In addition to being less likely to achieve a positive destination than their peers, young people with ASN are more likely to be underemployed (i.e., in jobs below their educational level), further compounding economic inequality for this cohort. As mentioned in Q2, young people with additional support needs are already more likely to be living in economically deprived areas, and this additional disadvantage can further entrench poverty and intergenerational poverty.

Furthermore, many neurodivergent conditions have a strong hereditary link and therefore failure to consider the additional barriers young people with ASN face when attempting to close the intergenerational poverty-related attainment gap is likely to produce incomplete and less effective policy.

7 What more do we need to do in order to ensure that a wider range of measures are in use across the education system, and that they are valued as equally as traditional attainment measures?

Please add your response in the text box:

Angela Morgan's report "Support for Learning: All Our Children and All their Potential" (June 2020), states that "The dominance of attainment and qualification results as the measure for success in Scotland's Education system...devalues and demoralises children and young people who learn and achieve in other ways, and it devalues and demoralises the staff who work with them" .

Furthermore, the fact that young people with ASN are also often underemployed suggests that economic disadvantage cannot be resolved purely through academic attainment; and consideration should be given to whether a wider understanding of attainment and a greater emphasis in the curriculum on developing 'soft skills' amongst this cohort may help to close the equality gap.

To combat this issue, Education Scotland's Young Inclusion Ambassadors created the Vision for Success framework. In 2022, the Young Inclusion Ambassadors launched the first "Success Looks Different Award", where Scottish schools are celebrated for the ways in which they celebrate the achievements of pupils with additional support needs, with nominations invited from the public. These initiatives will provide valuable qualitative data that will give a clearer idea what young people with ASN and their supporters value in terms of personal achievement, leading to creation of a framework of alternative forms of personal achievement with measurable outcomes of success in celebrating wider forms of attainment. While it's unlikely that such a framework could include every possible form of attainment, if the framework has enough flexibility and avoids being too prescriptive, it could act as a useful means to measure progress in this area. With measurable outcomes, the pledge to value wider attainment could become a meaningful ambition.

8 Are the existing wider data collections, and the new data developments enough to ensure that the National Improvement Framework reflects the ambitions of Curriculum for Excellence, national policy priorities such as health and wellbeing and confidence, and key priorities

for COVID-19 recovery and improvement, as recommended by Audit Scotland?

No

Please add your response in the text box:

The OECD's review of the Curriculum for Excellence has recommended that, for schools to meet more fully the 'Responsible Citizens' criteria of Curriculum for excellence, children with Additional Support Needs should have their views on their learning and the curriculum sought more often. This supports our recommendations in Q7 that further stakeholder engagement with this group of young people is needed to ensure that the Curriculum for Excellence is meeting their needs as learners. Given the evidential link between poverty and Additional Support Needs, a better understanding of the needs of this cohort will be crucial to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Additionally, Audit Scotland have identified that young people with additional support needs (along with care-experienced young people) experienced greater detrimental effects due to the pandemic, including being more likely to experience challenges learning at home, being more likely to disengage from schoolwork and they were also found to experience higher levels of anxiety (Reference: Audit Scotland "Improving outcomes for young people through school education" (2021) p21) . Audit Scotland is not currently tracking the long-term outcomes for these pupils, but they have indicated that this may be a potential area for future research. We would suggest that addressing this gap in data will be important in helping the Scottish Government achieve their aims of closing the attainment gap and promoting Covid-19 recovery.

9 How can we make better use of data to focus and drive improvement activity at school, local, regional and national level?

Please add your response in the text box:

The OECD evaluation of the Curriculum for Excellence found that, while the Scottish Government currently collects a large amount of data relating to education, there can be a lack of rigorous analysis of this data, occasionally resulting in superficial findings or a lack of clarity (Reference: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1f83b2d7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/1f83b2d7-en#section-d1e4633> (Accessed 04/07/22)) . An example of this is the 2021 Head Teacher Survey, which showed that Head Teachers' confidence in the progress being made towards closing the attainment gap does not match the published attainment data. More work is needed to understand the link between data and performance/outcomes (reference: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/attainment-scotland-fund-evaluation-headteacher-survey-2021-report/pages/4/> (Accessed on 11/07/22)). In their evaluation of data collection around Curriculum for Excellence, the OECD concludes that "Collecting data is not the same as collecting high quality research, which contributes to understanding and to offering meaningful feedback and feedforward to the system" (Reference: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1f83b2d7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/1f83b2d7-en#section-d1e4633> (Accessed 04/07/22)). Further stakeholder engagement with learners with Additional Support Needs is likely to produce this meaningful feedback and feedforward that will drive change and improvement.

10 How can we make better use of data to help reduce variation in outcomes achieved by young people in different parts of the country?

Please add your response in the text box:

As we note in Q2, school pupil census data shows children with ASN live disproportionately in the most deprived areas. Therefore, when considering the variation in outcomes achieved by young people in different parts of the country, the needs of children with ASN, who have been shown to have lower levels of attainment, lower levels of positive destinations, and be more likely to be underemployed according to their educational attainment level, should be looked at in more detail to ensure that Curriculum for Excellence is working for all pupils.

Without considering this demographic of children and young people, generational inequality is likely to remain entrenched.