

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels 2020/21

14th December 2021

This statistical publication:

- Provides information on national performance of school pupils in the **literacy organisers** (i.e. reading, writing, and listening and talking) and **numeracy**.
- Reports on the percentage of pupils who have achieved the expected Curriculum for Excellence level in these organisers, based on teachers' professional judgements.
- Covers all Primary 1 (**P1**), Primary 4 (**P4**) and Primary 7 (**P7**) **pupils** in publicly funded mainstream schools.

Data for secondary school pupils and special school pupils were not collected in 2020/21 and data was not collected for any pupils in 2019/20; for more information see Chapter 1.3.

The time period covered by these statistics means that the results will be affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and this should be kept in mind when interpreting results; for more information see Chapter 1.3.

Full results are available from the [supplementary tables](#).

School level results (where available) are accessible from the [School Information Dashboard](#).

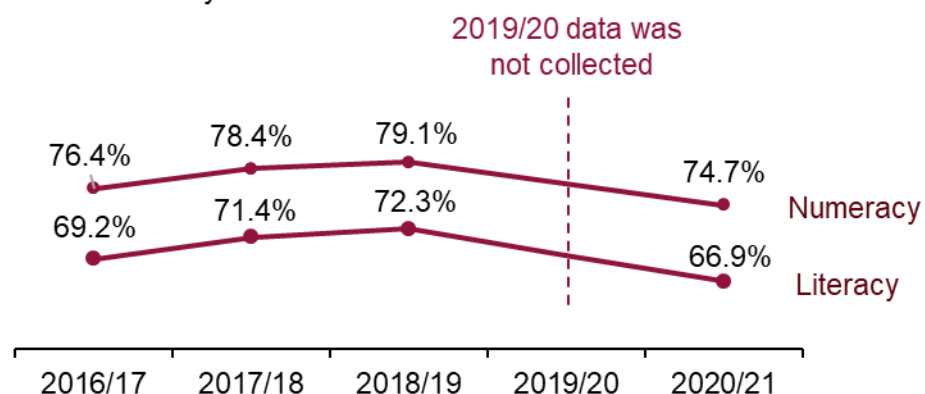
- **ACEL 2020/21** publication covers **Primary school children (P1, P4 and P7)**. Secondary school and special school data were not collected.
- **ACEL 2019/20** collection and publication **was cancelled**.

For more information on the impact of Covid-19 on these statistics please see Chapter 1.3.

The percentage of pupils achieving the expected CfE Level has **decreased in 2020/21 across all organisers and stages** compared to 2018/19.

The proportion of **primary** school pupils achieving the expected CfE Level in **literacy and numeracy** has **decreased** by **5.4** and **4.4** percentage points respectively between 2018/19 and 2020/21.

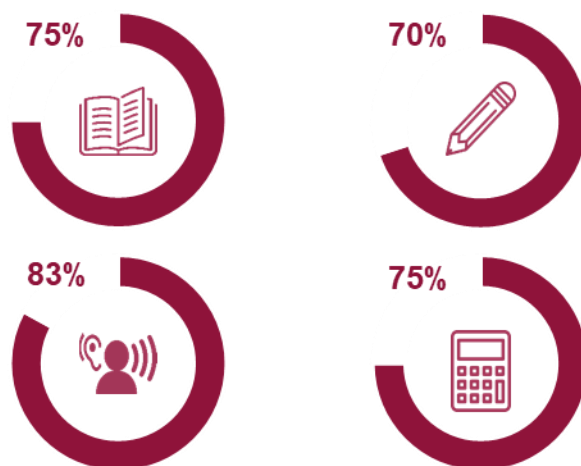
Percentage of primary pupils achieving expected level in Literacy and Numeracy



75% of primary school pupils achieved the expected CfE Level for **reading** and **83%** for **listening & talking**.

70% of primary pupils achieved the expected CfE Level for **writing**.

75% of primary pupils achieved the expected CfE Level for **numeracy**.

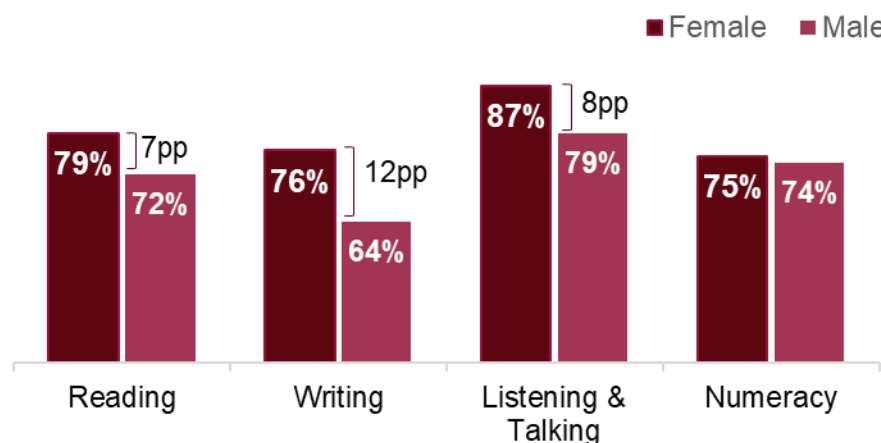


At all stages and across all literacy organisers, **females outperformed males**; this pattern has been consistent since 2016/17.

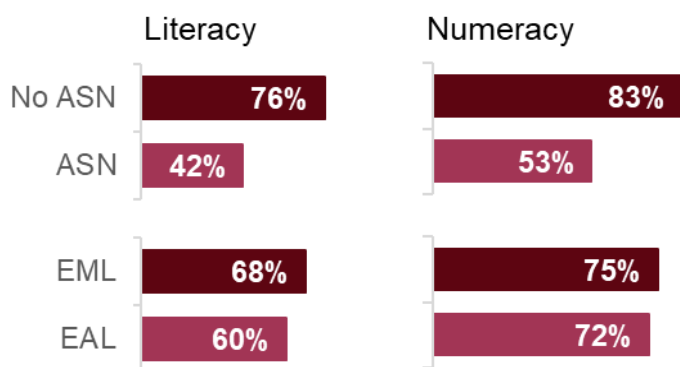
The **largest difference** in performance at primary was in **writing** with **females outperforming males** by **12 percentage points**.

Across all organisers **the smallest difference** in performance by sex was in **numeracy**.

Percentage of primary pupils achieving expected CfE Levels by sex



Percentage of primary pupils achieving expected CfE Levels by Additional Support Need (ASN) Status and by English as an Additional Language (EAL).

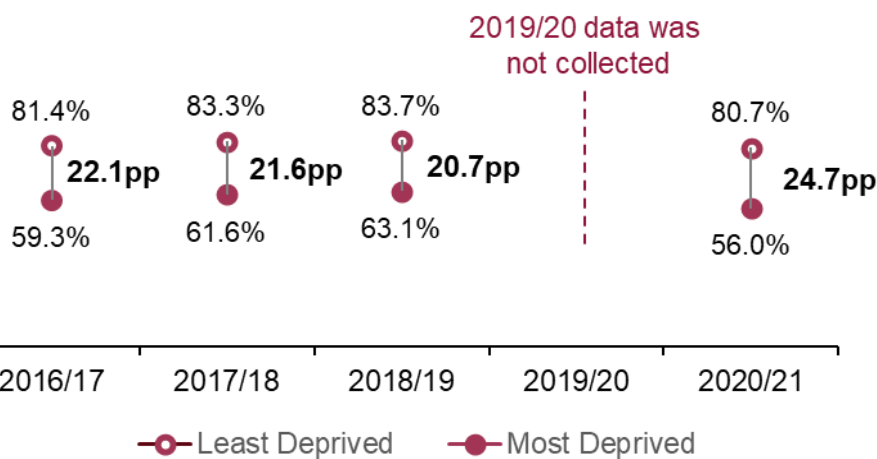


The proportion of pupils achieving the expected level across all stages and organisers **was lower for pupils with an Additional Support Need** than for those without.

Across all stages and organisers the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level **was lower for pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL)** than for those with English as Main Language (EML).

This pattern has been consistent since 2016/17.

The attainment gap in literacy between primary school pupils in the most and least deprived areas, 2016/17 to 2020/21.

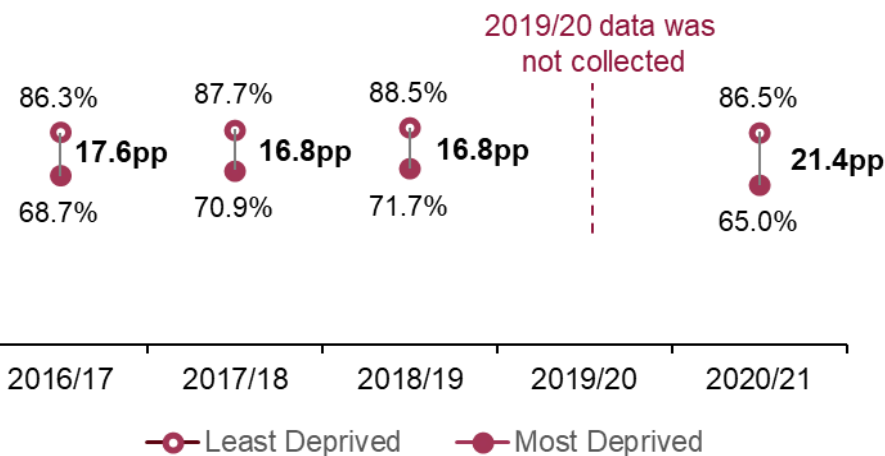


The proportion of **primary pupils** achieving the expected levels in **literacy and numeracy** has **decreased** for both pupils in the most and least deprived areas, in 2020/21.

The **attainment gap** between pupils in the most and least deprived areas in **literacy and numeracy** has **increased** in 2020/21 because pupils in the **most deprived areas experienced a bigger drop in attainment**.

The **attainment gap in literacy** among **primary school pupils** increased **from 20.7** percentage points in 2018/19 **to 24.7** percentage points in 2020/21

The attainment gap in numeracy between primary school pupils in the most and least deprived areas, 2016/17 to 2020/21.



The **attainment gap in numeracy** among **primary school pupils** increased **from 16.8** percentage points in 2018/19 **to 21.4** percentage points in 2020/21.

Notes:

- pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- Caution should be exercised when making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	5
1.1 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels Data	5
1.2 Curriculum for Excellence Levels.....	6
1.2.1 Pupils with complex needs	7
1.2.2 Pupils for whom the teacher was unable to make a judgement.....	8
1.3 Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on these statistics.....	8
1.3.1 Impact on data collection for 2019/20 and 2020/21	8
1.3.2 Impact on children’s learning.....	8
1.3.3 Impact on data quality	8
Chapter 2: Achievement of CfE Levels at Scotland level	10
Chapter 3: Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation	12
3.1 Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation – P1 pupils	13
3.2 Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation – P4 pupils	15
3.3 Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation – P7 pupils	17
3.4 Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation – P1, P4 and P7 pupils.....	19
Chapter 4: Achievement of CfE Levels by pupil characteristics	21
4.1 Achievement of CfE Levels by Sex.....	21
4.2 Achievement of CfE Levels by Ethnicity.....	22
4.3 Achievement of CfE Levels by Additional Support Need (ASN) status	24
4.4 Achievement of CfE Levels by English as an Additional Language (EAL) status.....	25
4.5 Achievement of CfE Levels by Urban Rural Classification.....	27
Chapter 5: Achievement of CfE Levels in Gàidhlig	29
Chapter 6: Achievement of CfE Levels by local authority	32
Chapter 7: Glossary	34
Chapter 8: Background notes	36
8.1 Sources, coverage, methodology and quality assurance.....	36
8.1.1 Sources	36
8.1.2 Coverage.....	36
8.1.3 Methodology.....	36
8.1.4 Data quality and quality assurance.....	39
8.2 School level data	42
8.3 Supplementary tables.....	43
8.4 Revisions policy.....	43
8.5 Rounding	43
8.6 International and UK comparability.....	43
8.7 Further information on attainment.....	44

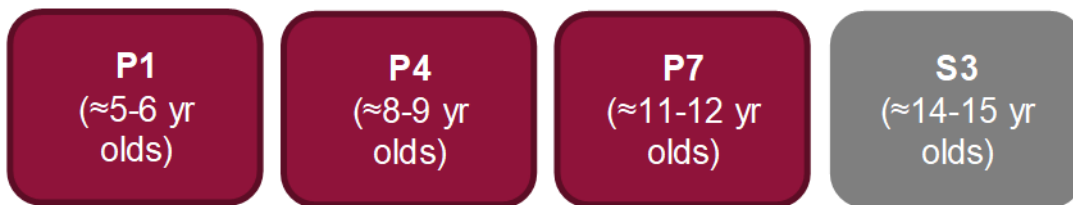
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels Data

This publication provides information on the proportion of school pupils who have achieved the **expected Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels** in literacy and numeracy relevant to their stage.

Achievement of CfE level data is based on **teachers' professional judgements** of individual pupil performance (see Chapter 8.1.1 for more information). This report refers to the **school year 2020/21**; the data reflects what pupils have achieved by the end of the school year – i.e. June 2021.

Figures are based on pupils in **publicly funded mainstream schools**, in the **32 local authorities and one grant aided school**. Data is collected for pupils in the stages¹ that follow. Data for S3 pupils was not collected in 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3.



From these, a combined primary figure (P1, P4 and P7) has also been calculated.

The national and local authority data within this report covers pupils within mainstream schools, including those in special units integrated within mainstream schools.

Usually this publication would present data for pupils attending standalone special schools or units in a separate chapter. However, for 2020/21 this data was not collected; for more information see Chapter 1.3.

A small number of pupils (less than one percent) for whom the teacher has been unable to make a professional judgement are not included.

¹ Pupils ages are based on approximate age ranges, more information is available from [the pupil census](#).

Data is collected on pupil performance in four areas, known as **organisers**:



Reading
(English and Gàidhlig)



Writing
(English and Gàidhlig)



Listening and Talking
(English and Gàidhlig)



Numeracy

The achievement of '**literacy**' is also included in the publication (English and Gàidhlig). A pupil is reported to have achieved the expected level in Literacy if they have achieved the expected level in all three of the literacy organisers: reading, writing, and listening and talking. For more information on how this has been calculated, see Chapter 8.1.3.2.

This publication focuses on the organisers based in the English language and Numeracy. For pupils based in Gaelic medium schools/classes, the English language organisers are collected at relevant stages and are included in the national and local authority data. Information on achievement of CfE levels in Gàidhlig can be found in Chapter 5. For more information about Gaelic medium education, see Chapter 8.1.3.3.

1.2 Curriculum for Excellence Levels

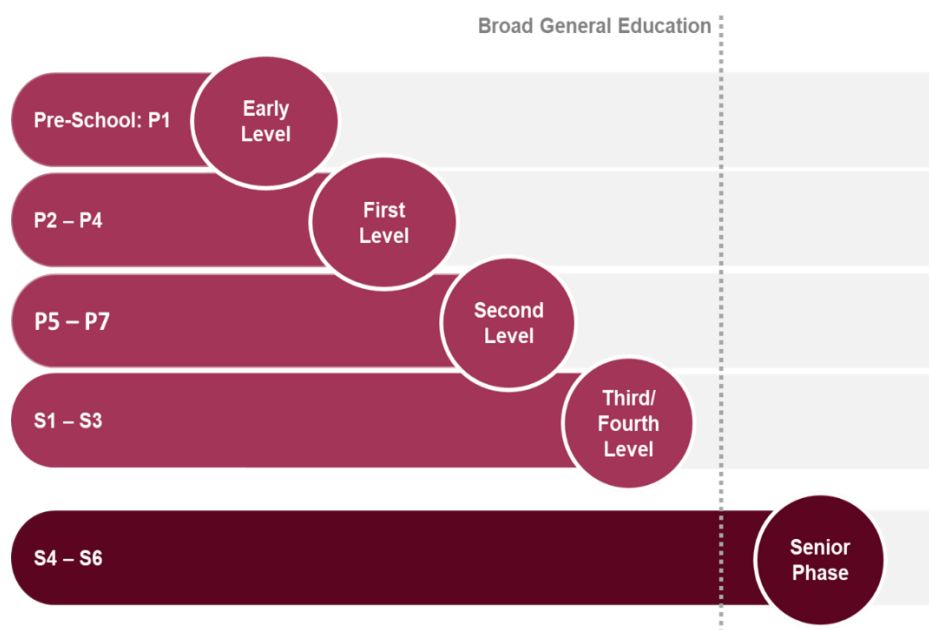
[Curriculum for Excellence](#) is designed to provide a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum for children and young people aged from 3 to 18. The curriculum includes the totality of experiences, which are planned for children and young people through their education, wherever they are being educated.

Curriculum for Excellence defines five levels of learning. The first four levels in the Broad General Education phase are described in the [Experiences and Outcomes](#), with progression to qualifications described under a fifth level, the [Senior Phase](#).

The path most children and young people are expected to follow through the levels reflects the stages of maturation of children and young people and the changing ways in which they engage with learning as they develop.

Some children and young people will start learning at these levels earlier and others later, depending upon individual needs and aptitudes. The framework is, however, designed to be flexible in order to permit careful planning for those with additional support needs, including those who, for example, have a learning difficulty or those who are particularly high attaining.

The diagram below shows the five curriculum levels²:



The publication focusses on the Broad General Education phase which covers children from pre-school through to the end of S3. However, S3 pupil data was not collected for the 2020/21 publication; for more information see Chapter 1.3.

The Senior Phase is for young people in S4 to S6 and is designed to build on the experiences and outcomes of the Broad General Education phase, and to allow young people to take qualifications and courses that suit their ability and interests. Scottish Government statistics on the attainment of young people in senior phase are based on point of leaving; these statistics can be found on [School education statistics](#).

1.2.1 Pupils with complex needs

The majority of school pupils in Scotland follow CfE; for a very small percentage of pupils it is unlikely that they will progress through the CfE levels during their time in education. This is due to pupils having long-term significant and complex additional support needs.

In some local authorities, pupils with complex needs are integrated into their mainstream schools; data on the performance of these pupils has been included throughout this publication.

However, in other local authorities, school pupils with complex needs may attend a special school or standalone special unit. Usually in this publication information on the performance of these pupils would be presented separately reflecting the fact that it is not necessarily appropriate to assign them to a specific stage. This year however, data was not collected for pupils in standalone special schools; for more information see Chapter 1.3.

The treatment of pupils with complex needs across different local authorities should be kept in mind when making comparisons between local authorities, or between individual schools.

² Source: [Education Scotland](#)

Young people with long-term significant and complex additional support needs are recorded within the data as ‘pupil following individual milestones’. Where these pupils are learning within a mainstream school or special unit integrated within a mainstream school they will be included in the national and local authority analysis and counted as not having achieved a CfE Level.

1.2.2 Pupils for whom the teacher was unable to make a judgement

Children for whom the teacher has been unable to make a professional judgement are not included; for example, if a pupil has recently moved to the school, and the teacher feels there has not been sufficient time to form a professional judgement of a pupil’s performance. This affects less than one per cent of pupils within the Achievement of CfE Levels data. These pupils are not included in the calculations of the proportions of pupils achieving the expected CfE Levels.

1.3 Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on these statistics

1.3.1 Impact on data collection for 2019/20 and 2020/21

The Scottish Government did not collect Achievement of CfE Levels data for any pupils in 2019/20. Schools were closed in Scotland between March 2020 and the end of the academic year as a result of the pandemic meaning that they were closed on the planned ACEL census date of 8th June 2020. It was concluded that it would not be possible to collect consistent data that was fit for purpose and that any attempt to do so would add considerably to other pressures on school and education authority staff. The decision was therefore taken to suspend the data collection.

For 2020/21 (this publication) we have collected data for Primary school (P1, P4 and P7) pupils only. Secondary school and special school data was not collected due to other pressures on these schools including implementation of the SQA National Qualifications Alternative Certification Model which was used to award National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021.

The current intention is to collect all data– for Primary, Secondary and Special school pupils – in 2021/22, although this will be kept under review.

1.3.2 Impact on children’s learning

The closure of schools in March 2020 and January 2021 is likely to have had a negative effect on some pupils’ progress and attainment with socio-economically deprived children amongst those who may have been most negatively affected³. It is therefore likely to have had an impact on the CfE levels some children have achieved. This will be reflected in the 2020/21 figures in this report and should be kept in mind when interpreting these and, in particular, when comparing with figures for 2018/19 and before.

1.3.3 Impact on data quality

As part of the quality assurance process, feedback was sought from local authority data suppliers on the process of compiling the data and on factors which may affect data quality. Feedback was received from 27 out of 32 local authorities. The majority of data providers

³ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact of school building closures - equity audit](#)

provided substantive feedback covering the assessment process followed by schools, their own quality assurance of the data and any concerns over the quality of the data.

In general most local authorities indicated that they were confident in the data quality with a number citing further improvements planned for future data collections. A small number of authorities noted that they still had concerns about the consistency of judgements across schools within the authority and, therefore, across the country as a whole.

Many authorities noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had had an impact on the data submitted this year. Whilst most local authorities said that they were confident that the data provided was an accurate reflection of the assessment that had been possible a number reported that the pandemic meant teachers had reduced opportunities to gather evidence on which to make judgements. This was due, for example, to school closures and self-isolation of pupils and teachers.

The pandemic has also impacted on the nature and quantity of the moderation exercises (which help develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations) which some schools and local authorities have been able to conduct. In particular local authorities mentioned that face-to-face moderation could not take place and that moderation exercises were often limited to in school rather than between schools. This may have impacted on the consistency of some of the teacher judgement data this year.

Chapter 2: Achievement of CfE Levels at Scotland level

- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected CfE level in 2020/21 is lower than in 2018/19 for all stages and across all organisers with decreases generally in the range of three to six percentage points.

Compared to 2018/19 the percentage of pupils achieving the expected CfE levels in 2020/21 have decreased across all organisers and all stages. The size of these decreases range between three and six percentage points and are generally larger than previous changes at national level. This is not unexpected due to the disruption to learning and teaching due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Prior to 2020/21, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected levels increased across almost every organiser and stage. In the two year period between 2016/17 and 2018/19 the proportions of P1 and P4 pupils achieving the expected level increased by between one and two percentage points across all organisers and stages. The increases for P7 pupils were larger at between four and six percentage points.

Around two-thirds (67 per cent) of primary school pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) achieved the expected CfE Level for literacy in 2020/21.

In numeracy, three-quarters (75 per cent) of primary school pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) achieved the expected CfE levels in 2020/21.

As in previous years, across all stages (P1, P4 and P7) the proportion of pupils achieving the expected CfE level was highest in listening & talking and lowest in writing in 2020/21. For listening & talking, 84 per cent of P1 pupils, 82 per cent of P4 pupils and 82 per cent of P7 pupils achieved the expected CfE level. Meanwhile for writing, 74 per cent of P1 pupils, 67 per cent of P4 pupils and 69 per cent of P7 pupils achieved the expected level.

Across all organisers the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level was highest amongst P1 pupils and lower for P4 and P7 pupils in 2020/21. Again this is consistent with the pattern observed in previous years.

Table 1 shows the proportions of pupils achieving the expected CfE Levels for all stages and organisers for 2016/17 to 2020/21.

Table 1: Percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE Levels, 2016/17 to 2020/21^a

Year	Stage/Level	Reading	Writing	Listening & Talking	Literacy	Numeracy
2020/21	P1 - Early Level	77	74	84	71	81
	P4 - First Level	73	67	82	64	72
	P7 - Second Level	76	69	82	66	72
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	75	70	83	67	75
	S3 - Third Level or better	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	S3 - Fourth Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
2019/20	P1 - Early Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	P4 - First Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	P7 - Second Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	S3 - Third Level or better	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	S3 - Fourth Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
2018/19	P1 - Early Level	82	79	87	76	85
	P4 - First Level	78	73	85	70	77
	P7 - Second Level	80	74	86	71	76
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	80	75	86	72	79
	S3 - Third Level or better	91	90	91	88	90
	S3 - Fourth Level	55	52	57	48	59
2017/18	P1 - Early Level	81	78	87	75	85
	P4 - First Level	77	72	85	69	76
	P7 - Second Level	79	73	84	70	75
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	79	74	85	71	78
	S3 - Third Level or better	90	89	91	87	89
	S3 - Fourth Level	53	51	55	46	56
2016/17	P1 - Early Level	80	77	85	74	83
	P4 - First Level	77	71	83	68	75
	P7 - Second Level	76	69	81	66	70
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	78	72	83	69	76
	S3 - Third Level or better	90	89	91	87	88
	S3 - Fourth Level	51	48	51	44	56

Notes:

a. Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

Chapter 3: Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation

- 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 increased from 20.7 percentage points in 2018/19 to 24.7 percentage points in 2020/21.
- 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 increased from 16.8 percentage points in 2018/19 to 21.4 percentage points in 2020/21.
- For both primary literacy and primary numeracy the sizes of the gaps in 2020/21 were larger than at any previous point since 2016/17 (the first year for which comparable data is available).

This chapter provides an overview of achievement of CfE Levels by pupils based on the deprivation level of the area they live in, as measured by the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\)](#). It provides information on literacy and numeracy for P1, P4 and P7 as well as for P1, P4 and P7 combined. Full details (including all organisers and all SIMD quintile categories) are available in the [supplementary tables](#).

When considering data by SIMD as a measure of multiple deprivation, it is important to note that the data shows the difference between young people living in the most and least deprived areas. What SIMD data does not show is the difference between young people from poor or rich backgrounds.

The figures shown in Chart 7 and Chart 8 (see pages 19 and 20) provide two of the 11 key [National Improvement Framework](#) measures used to measure the poverty related attainment gap. The key measures chosen include:

- Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected Level in Literacy;
- Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected Level in Numeracy;
- Percentage of S3 pupils achieving Third Level or better in Literacy and;
- Percentage of S3 pupils achieving Third Level or better in Numeracy.

The last two measures are not available in this report as data for S3 pupils were not collected in 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3.

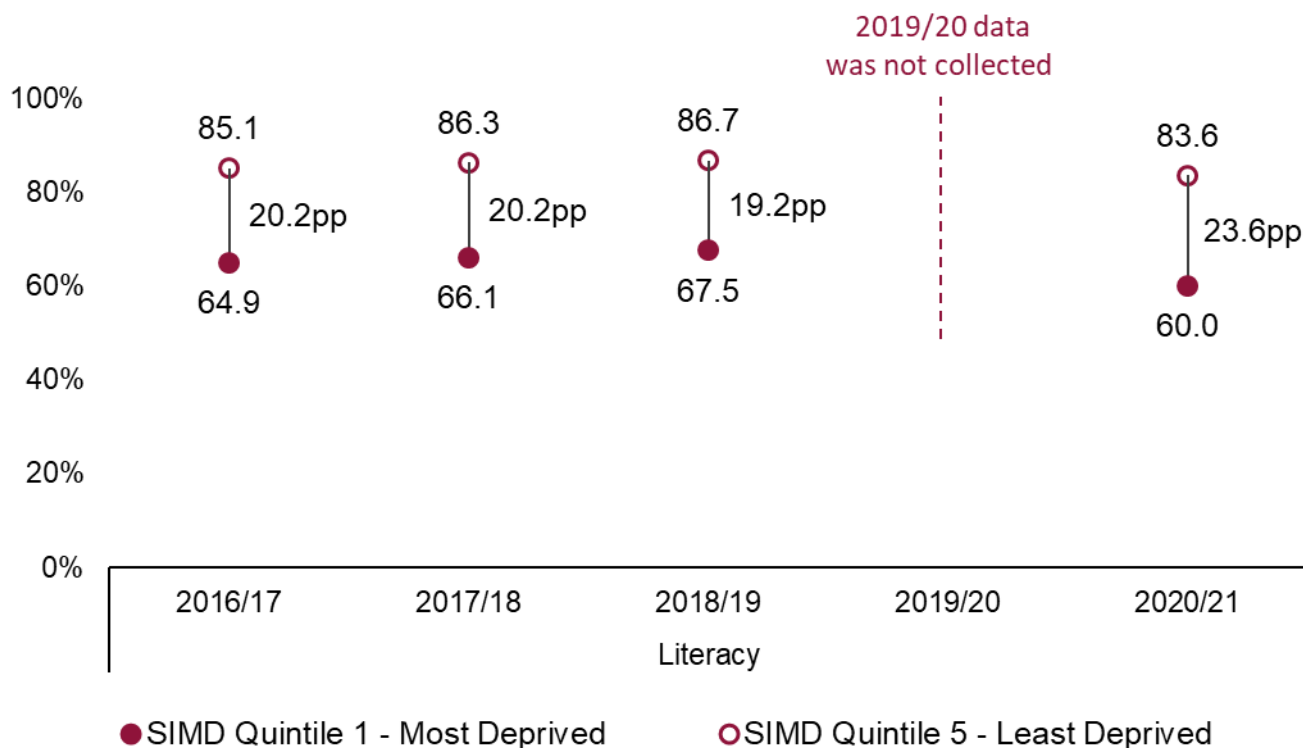
The charts below show Achievement of CfE Levels by SIMD since 2016/17.

3.1 Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation – P1 pupils

Chart 1 shows the proportion of P1 pupils who achieved the expected levels in literacy, for pupils in the most and least deprived areas.

After decreasing from 20.2 percentage points in 2016/17 and 2017/18 to 19.2 percentage points in 2018/19 the P1 attainment gap in literacy increased to 23.6 percentage points in 2020/21. The proportion of P1 pupils achieving the expected literacy level has decreased in 2020/21 for pupils in both the most and least deprived areas. The gap has widened because the decrease was greater for pupils from the most deprived areas.

Chart 1: Percentage of P1 pupils achieving expected CfE Level in Literacy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2020/21^{a,b,c}



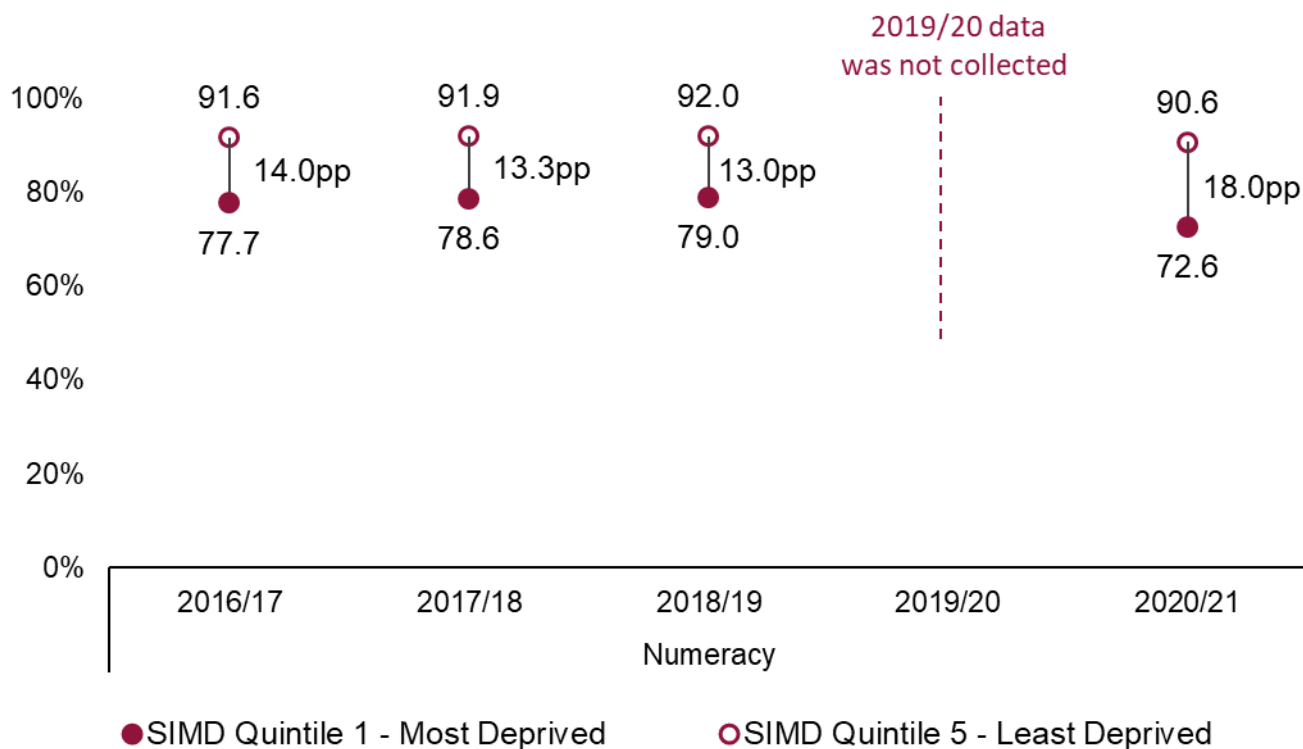
Notes:

- a. pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- b. Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- c. Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

Chart 2 shows the proportion of P1 pupils who achieved the expected level in numeracy for pupils in the most and least deprived areas.

The P1 attainment gap in numeracy reduced slightly each year between 2016/17 and 2018/19 (from 14.0 percentage points in 2016/17 to 13.3 percentage points in 2017/18 and to 13.0 percentage points in 2018/19) and increased to 18.0 percentage points in 2020/21. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected numeracy levels has decreased for pupils in both the most and least deprived areas in 2020/21 compared to previous years.

Chart 2: Percentage of P1 pupils achieving expected CfE Level in Numeracy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2020/21^{a,b,c}



Notes:

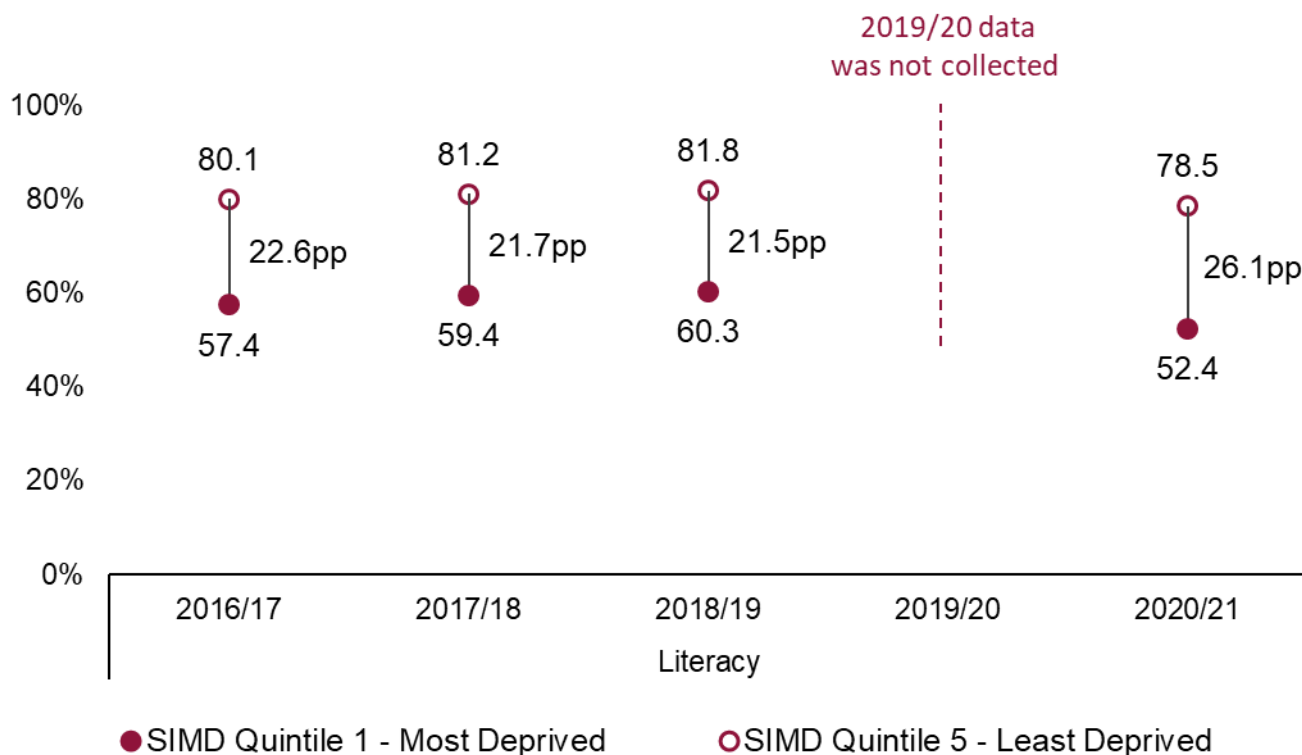
- a. pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- b. Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- c. Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

3.2 Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation – P4 pupils

Chart 3 shows the proportion of P4 pupils who achieved the expected levels in literacy for pupils in the most and least deprived areas.

The P4 attainment gap in literacy reduced from 22.6 percentage points in 2016/17 to 21.7 percentage points in 2017/18 and to 21.5 percentage points in 2018/19. In 2020/21 the attainment gap increased to 26.1 percentage points. The proportion of P4 pupils achieving the expected literacy level has decreased for pupils in both the most and least deprived areas compared to previous years. The gap has widened because the proportion decreased by more for pupils from the most deprived areas than for those from the least deprived areas.

Chart 3: Percentage of P4 pupils achieving expected Level in Literacy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2020/21^{a,b,c}



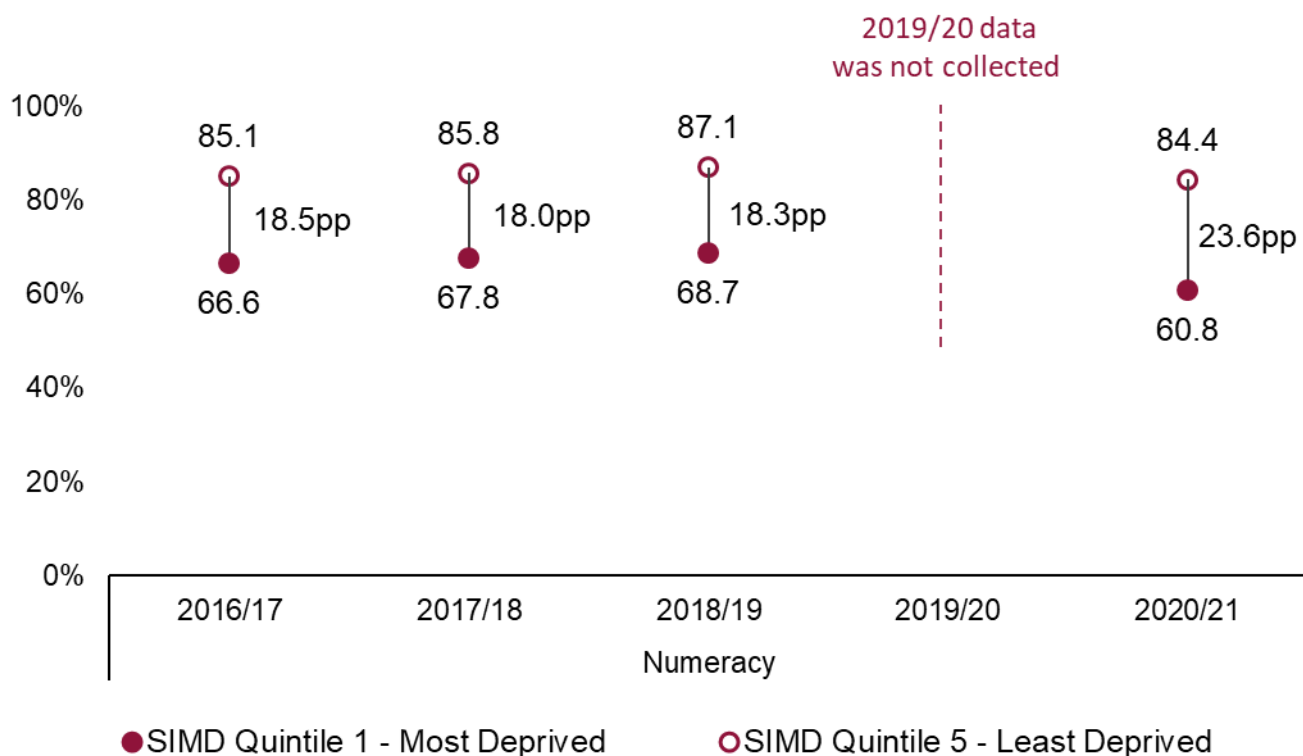
Notes:

- pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

Chart 4 shows the proportion of P4 pupils who achieved the expected levels in numeracy for pupils in the most and least deprived areas.

The attainment gap in P4 numeracy remained broadly stable between 2016/17 and 2018/19 at around or just over 18 percentage points but increased to 23.6 percentage points in 2020/21. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected numeracy levels has decreased for both pupils in the most and least deprived areas in 2020/21 compared to previous years.

Chart 4: Percentage of P4 pupils achieving expected CfE Level in Numeracy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2020/21^{a,b,c}



Notes:

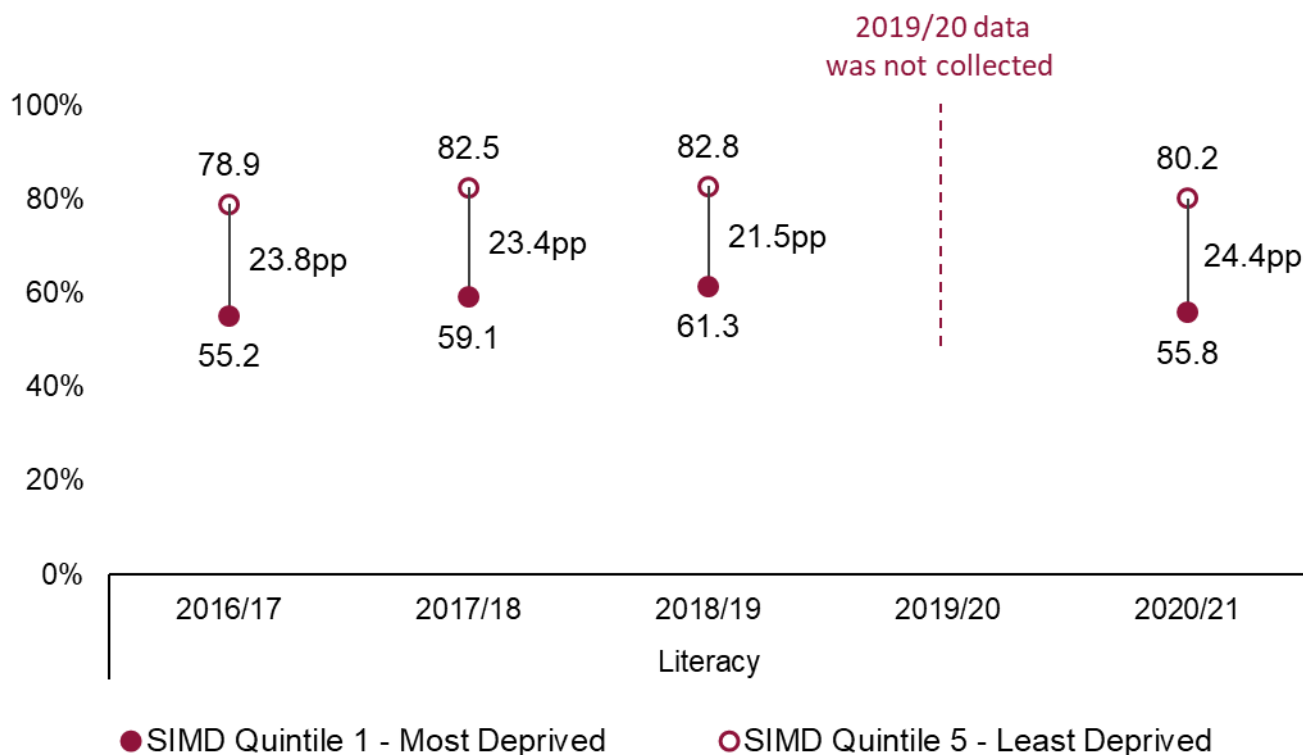
- a. pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- b. Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- c. Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

3.3 Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation – P7 pupils

Chart 5 shows the proportion of P7 pupils who achieved the expected levels in literacy for pupils in the most and least deprived areas.

The P7 attainment gap in literacy remained broadly stable between 2016/17 and 2017/18 before falling to 21.5 percentage points in 2018/19. In 2020/21 the gap has widened to 24.4 percentage points. The proportion of P7 pupils achieving the expected literacy levels in 2020/21 decreased from 2018/19 for pupils in both the most and least deprived areas. The gap has widened because the proportion decreased more for pupils from the most deprived areas.

Chart 5: Percentage of P7 pupils achieving expected CfE Level in Literacy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2020/21^{a,b,c}



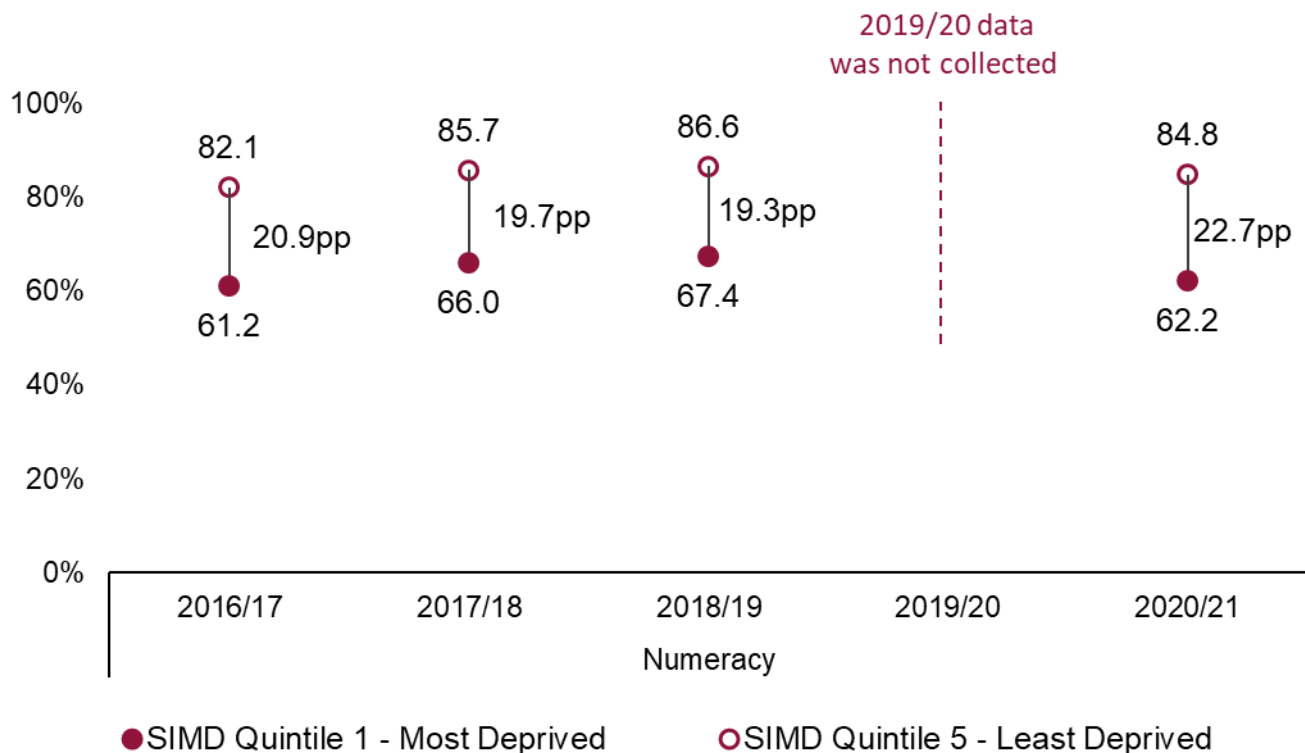
Notes:

- pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

Chart 6 shows the proportion of P7 pupils who achieved the expected levels in numeracy for pupils in the most and least deprived areas.

The attainment gap in P7 numeracy reduced from 20.9 percentage points in 2016/17 to 19.7 percentage points in 2017/18 and reduced slightly further in 2018/19 to 19.3 percentage points. In 2020/21 the attainment gap increased to 22.7 percentage points. The proportions achieving the expected numeracy levels in 2020/21 have decreased from 2018/19 for pupils from both the most and least deprived areas but the decrease has been greater for pupils from the most deprived areas.

Chart 6: Percentage of P7 pupils achieving expected CfE Level in Numeracy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2020/21^{a,b,c}



Notes:

- pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

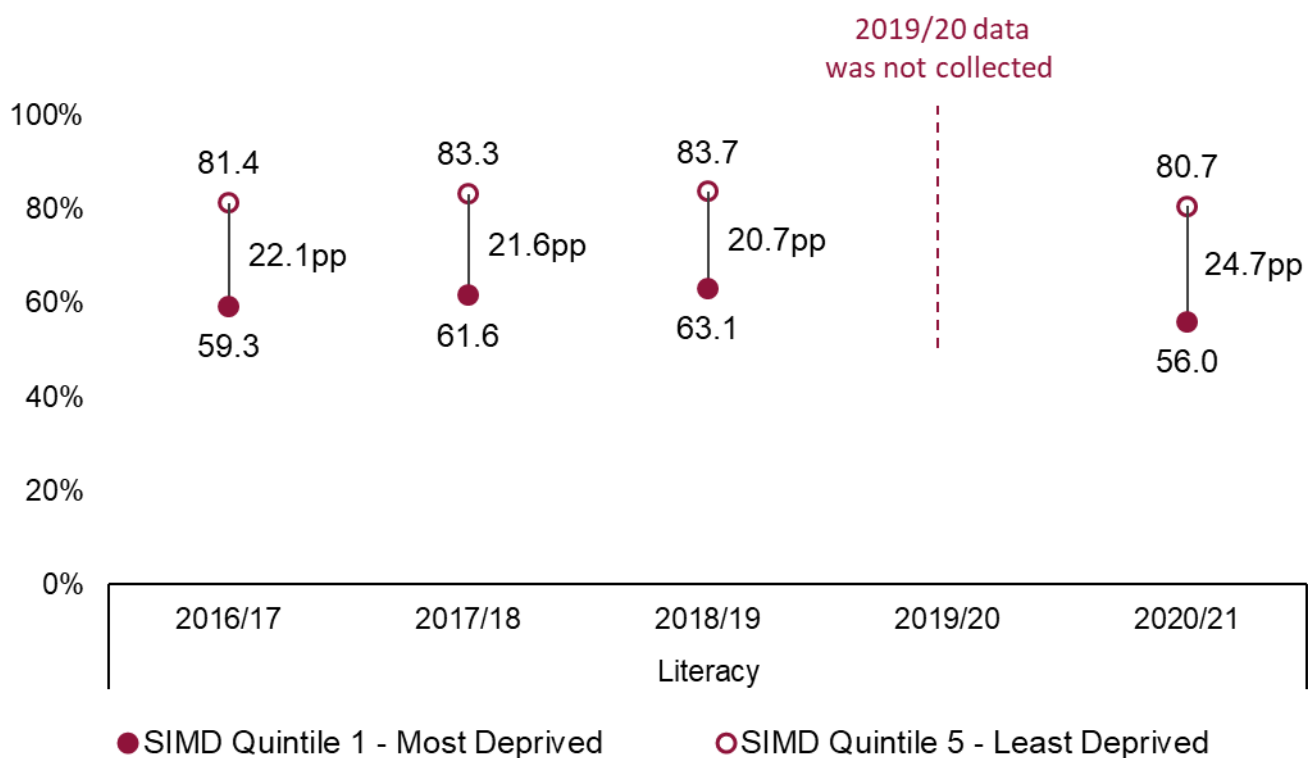
3.4 Achievement of CfE Levels by Deprivation – P1, P4 and P7 pupils

Chart 7 provides information for P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined who achieved the expected levels in literacy for pupils in the most and least deprived areas.

The attainment gap in literacy reduced from 22.1 percentage points in 2016/17 to 21.6 percentage points in 2017/18 and reduced further in 2018/19 to 20.7 percentage points. In 2020/21 the attainment gap increased to 24.7 percentage points - the largest the gap has been since 2016/17 (the first year for which comparable data is available).

The proportions of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving the expected level in literacy in 2020/21 have decreased for pupils in both the most and least deprived areas. The proportion decreased more for pupils from the most deprived areas which has led to a widening of the gap.

Chart 7: Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils (combined) achieving expected CfE Level in Literacy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2020/21^{a,b,c}



Notes:

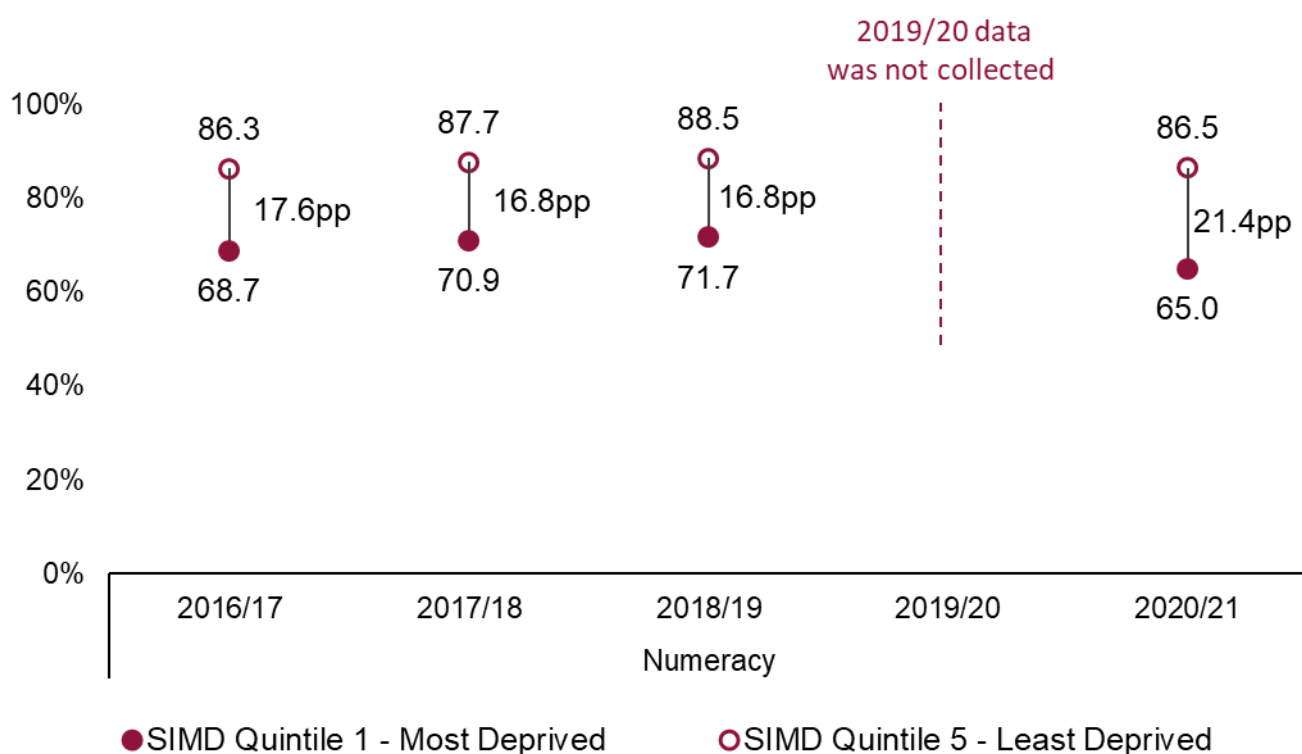
- pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

Chart 8 provides information for P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined who achieved the expected levels in numeracy.

The numeracy attainment gap for P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined reduced from 17.6 percentage points in 2016/17 to 16.8 percentage points in 2017/18 and remained at this level in 2018/19. In 2020/21 the numeracy attainment gap increased to 21.4 percentage points - the largest the gap has been since 2016/17 (the first year for which comparable data is available).

The proportions of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving the expected numeracy levels have decreased for both pupils in the most and least deprived areas in 2020/21. The gap has widened as the proportion decreased more for pupils from the most deprived areas.

Chart 8: Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils (combined) achieving expected CfE Level in Numeracy by SIMD, 2016/17 to 2020/21^{a,b,c}



Notes:

- pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived
- Based on SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2018/19 and on SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).
- Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

Chapter 4: Achievement of CfE Levels by pupil characteristics

- Female pupils outperform male pupils across all literacy organisers at all stages.
- Across all stages and organisers the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level was lower for pupils with an Additional Support Need than for those without. This was also true for pupils with English as an Additional Language.
- A higher percentage of pupils of Asian – Chinese ethnic background achieved the expected CfE levels in numeracy compared to pupils of other ethnic backgrounds.
- At P1, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level for their stage was highest for pupils living in accessible rural areas. At P4 and P7, performance was highest for pupils from either large urban areas or accessible rural areas.

4.1 Achievement of CfE Levels by Sex

Compared to 2018/19 (See Table 3 in the [supplementary tables](#)) the proportion of pupils achieving the expected CfE levels in 2020/21 has fallen across all stages and organisers for both males and females. The size of these reductions was broadly similar for males and females.

In 2020/21, females outperformed males across all literacy organisers at all stages. The biggest difference was in writing. This pattern has been consistent since 2016/17.

In 2020/21, females outperformed males in numeracy in P1 and P7; this pattern has been consistent since 2016/17. In P4 males and females had a similar performance.

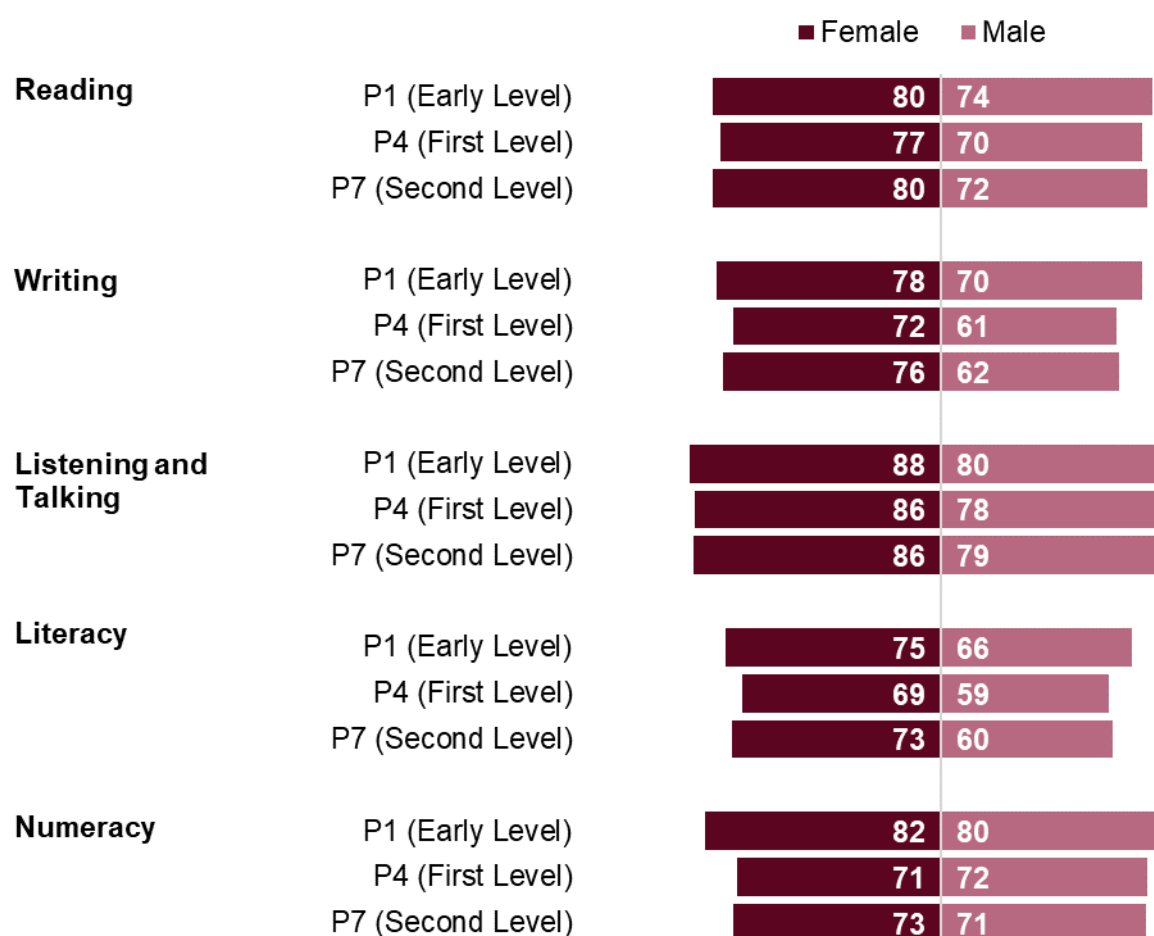
The largest difference in performance in literacy among primary pupils in 2020/21 was in writing in P7 with females outperforming males by 14 percentage points. The smallest difference at primary for the literacy organisers was in reading for P1, where females outperformed males by six percentage points.

The gap in literacy performance by sex increases through the primary stages, with females outperforming males by 9, 11 and 13 percentage points for the P1, P4 and P7 stages respectively.

Across all stages the smallest difference in performance by sex was in numeracy. In 2020/21 females outperformed males in P1 and P7 in numeracy but by a smaller margin than for the other organisers; females outperformed males by two percentage points at P1 and by one percentage point at P7. Females and males have a similar performance at P4.

Chart 9 shows performance in literacy and numeracy by sex for each primary stage.

Chart 9: Percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE Levels, by sex and stage, 2020/21



4.2 Achievement of CfE Levels by Ethnicity

For context, the majority of pupils in the Achievement of CfE Level data collection were White – Scottish (74 per cent of all pupils), followed by White – non-Scottish (13 per cent of all pupils). The remaining ethnic groups each made up two per cent or less of all pupils.

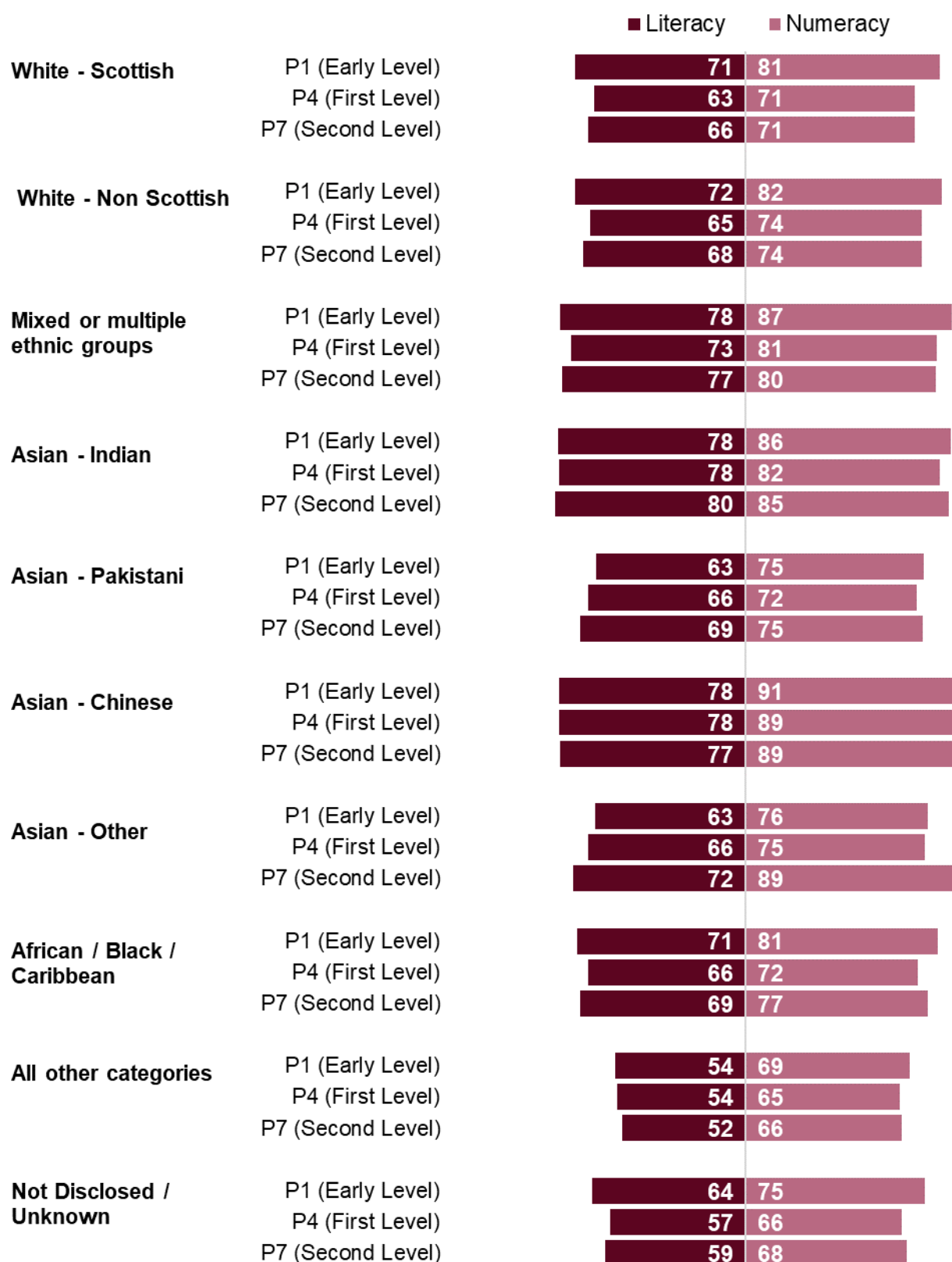
In 2020/21 the percentage of pupils achieving the expected CfE Level in literacy and numeracy has decreased across most ethnic groups compared to previous years, although the overall pattern of performance is similar to that reported in the 2018/19 results (see Table 4 in the [supplementary tables](#)).

Performance in numeracy was highest for pupils of an Asian – Chinese background. This pattern has been consistent since 2016/17. In 2020/21, 89 per cent of Asian – Chinese pupils achieved the expected level in both P4 and P7, rising to 91 per cent at P1.

Performance by ethnic group varies by stage. In P1 performance in literacy was highest for pupils from Mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds, Asian – Indian and Asian – Chinese (all 78 per cent). In P4 pupils from Asian – Indian and Asian – Chinese backgrounds performed best (both 78 per cent) and in P7, pupils from Asian – Indian backgrounds performed best (80 per cent).

S3 figures are not available for 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3

Chart 10: Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils achieving literacy and numeracy CfE levels, by ethnicity and stage, 2020/21

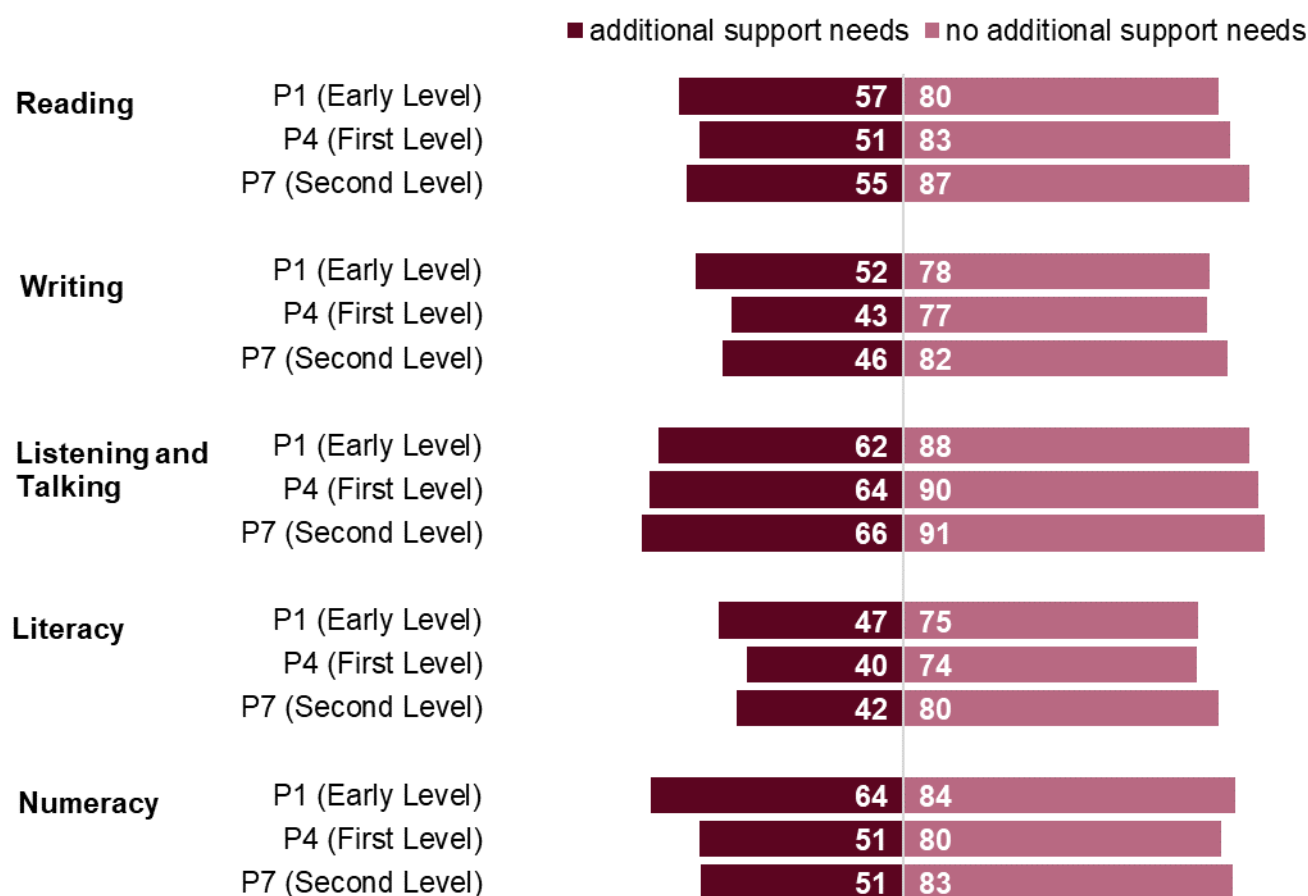


4.3 Achievement of CfE Levels by Additional Support Need (ASN) status

The following chapter provides information on the proportion of pupils with an Additional Support Need who achieved the expected CfE Levels. For context, 13 per cent of P1 pupils, 29 per cent of P4 pupils and 35 per cent of P7 pupils in the 2020/21 Achievement of CfE Levels data collection were recorded as having an Additional Support Need.

Chart 11 shows that the percentage of pupils achieving the expected CfE level was higher for pupils recorded as not having an Additional Support Need (ASN), compared to pupils with a recorded ASN, across all stages and organisers. Considering the four main organisers – reading, writing, listening & talking and numeracy - the difference in performance in P1 was lowest for numeracy (20 percentage points). In both P4 and P7 it was lowest for listening and talking (both 25 percentage points).

Chart 11: Percentage of pupils achieving CfE Levels, by Additional Support Needs status and stage, 2020/21



In P1 the greatest difference in performance in literacy organisers (between pupils with a recorded ASN and pupils with no recorded ASN) was in listening and talking (26 percentage points). At P4 and P7, the greatest differences in performance were in writing, with differences of 33 and 36 percentage points respectively.

Time series data (available in Table 6 in the [supplementary tables](#)) shows that the percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE levels in 2020/21 was lower than in 2018/19 across all stages and organisers both for pupils with a recorded ASN and for those without.

The sizes of the reductions were broadly similar amongst both sets of pupils (i.e. those with a recorded ASN and those with no recorded ASN).

S3 figures are not available for 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3

4.4 Achievement of CfE Levels by English as an Additional Language (EAL) status

For context, between five and eight per cent of pupils in P1, P4 and P7 in the 2020/21 Achievement of CfE Levels data collection were recorded as having English as an Additional Language (EAL).

The percentage of pupils achieving the expected CfE level was higher for pupils with English as their main language across all stages and organisers (Chart 12).

In 2020/21 the gap in performance between EAL pupils and pupils with English as their main language was lowest in numeracy; ranging from one percentage point for P4 and P7 pupils to five percentage points for P1 pupils.

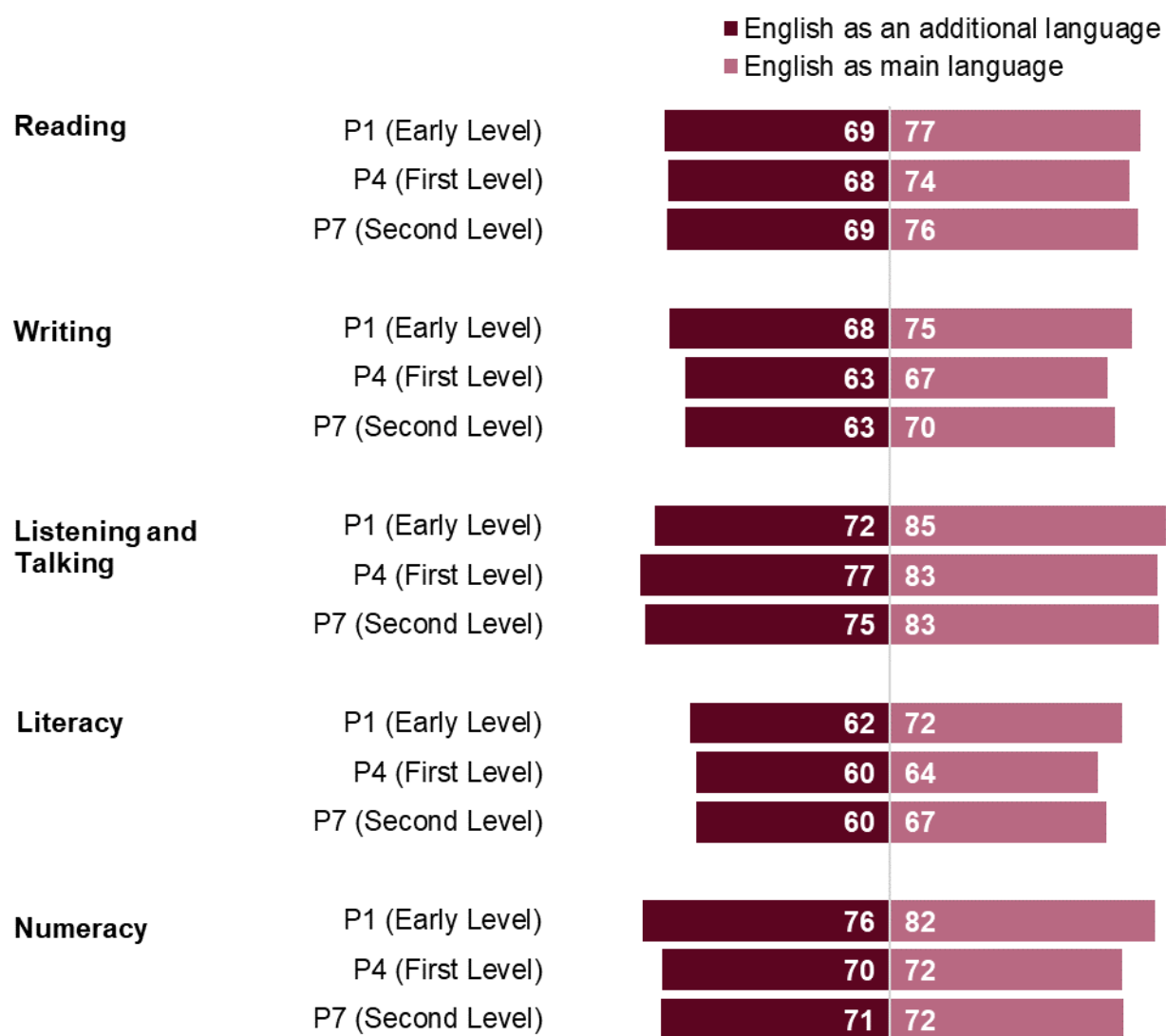
EAL pupils performed better in listening and talking than in the other literacy organisers at all three primary stages (72, 77 and 75 per cent for P1, P4 and P7 respectively); the same pattern observed in the overall results for all pupils. However, the largest gap in performance between EAL and English as main language pupils in the literacy organisers was also in listening and talking (13 percentage points at P1).

The performance gaps in the literacy organisers were generally smallest at P4; ranging from four to six percentage points. In P1 there was a difference of eight to 13 percentage points and in P7, there was a difference of six to eight percentage points between EAL and English as main language pupils across the three literacy organisers.

In comparison to previous years, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected level in literacy and numeracy reduced for both pupils with English as their main language and for pupils with English as an Additional Language. However, the proportions reduced by more for pupils with English as their main language (See Table 7 in the [supplementary tables](#)).

S3 figures are not available for 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3

Chart 12: Percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE Levels, by English as an Additional Language status and stage, 2020/21



4.5 Achievement of CfE Levels by Urban Rural Classification

The Urban Rural Classification used in this publication has six classifications as shown in Table 2. The P1, P4 and P7 pupils in the achievement of CfE Levels 2020/21 data collection were distributed as follows:

Table 2: Percentage of pupils in P1, P4 and P7 combined by Urban Rural Classification, 2020/21

From largest to smallest percentage of pupils

Urban Rural Classification	Percentage
Other urban areas	37
Large urban areas	31
Accessible rural areas	14
Accessible small towns	9
Remote rural areas	5
Remote small towns	3
Unknown	1

Chart 13 shows a summary of the percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE levels in literacy and numeracy, by Urban Rural Classification and stage. Detailed results by Urban Rural Classification can be found in the [supplementary tables](#).

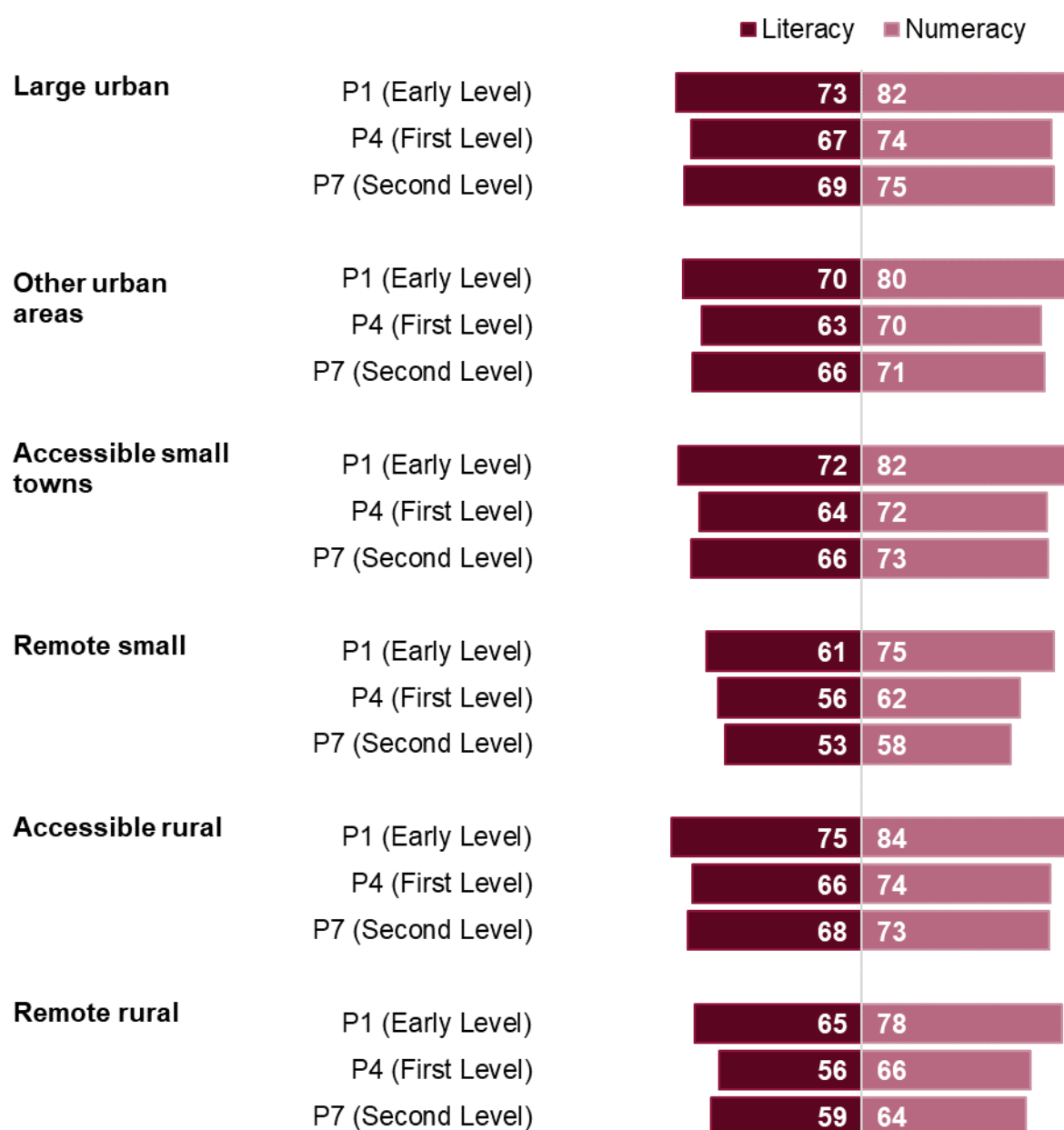
At P1, performance was highest for pupils from accessible rural areas across numeracy and all literacy organisers. Performance was lowest for pupils from remote small towns for all organisers.

The areas with the highest performance for P4 and P7 pupils varied with organiser, and included large urban areas and accessible rural areas. Performance at P4 and P7 was lowest for pupils from remote small towns and remote rural areas across all organisers.

In 2020/21 the percentage of pupils achieving the expected CfE Levels in literacy and numeracy decreased across almost all urban rural categories compared to previous years. The overall pattern of performance is similar to that reported in the 2018/19 results (See Table 5 in the [supplementary tables](#)).

S3 figures are not available for 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3

Chart 13: Percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE Levels, by Urban Rural Classification and stage, 2020/21^a



Note:

a. [Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2016](#)

Chapter 5: Achievement of CfE Levels in Gàidhlig

- The percentage of primary pupils, in Gaelic medium schools/classes, achieving the expected CfE level was highest for Gàidhlig listening and talking, and lowest for Gàidhlig writing at all stages (P1, P4 and P7).

Information on the Gàidhlig data collected as part of the achievement of CfE levels can be found in Chapter 8.1.3.3. A combined literacy variable for Gàidhlig has been created; this has the same methodology as the English literacy variable. Numeracy and English literacy data for pupils learning in Gàidhlig are included in the other chapters of this report.

Around 1,595 pupils in the Achievement of CfE Levels data are in Gaelic medium schools/classes; 606 pupils at P1, 518 pupils at P4 and 471 at P7.

The pattern of performance in the Gàidhlig reading and writing organisers was similar to that seen in English-language reading and writing: the percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE levels was highest in P1 and lower in P4 and P7. For Gàidhlig listening and talking, performance was highest at P4 with 80 per cent achieving the expected CfE level, and lower at both P1 and P7 (both 78 per cent).

At all stages (P1, P4 and P7) Gàidhlig, listening and talking results were highest whilst Gàidhlig writing results were the lowest (Chart 14).

The proportions of pupils achieving expected levels in Gàidhlig organisers were generally lower in 2020/21 than in previous years with the biggest reductions between 2018/19 and 2020/21 generally seen in P7. (See Table 8 in the [supplementary tables](#)).

S3 figures are not available for 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3

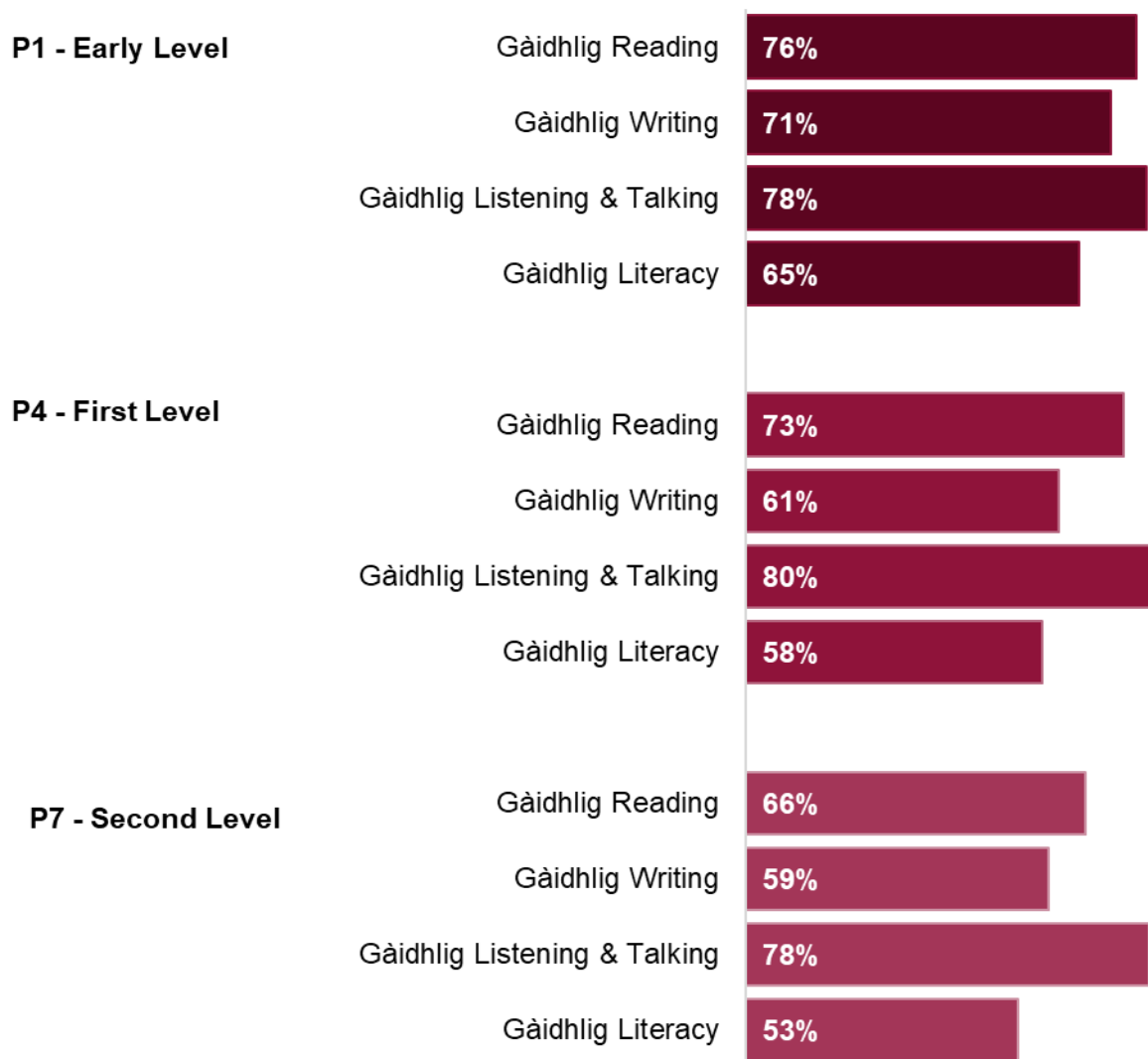
Table 3: Percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE Levels in Gàidhlig, 2016/17 – 2020/21^a

Year	Stage/Level	Reading	Writing	Listening & Talking	Literacy
2020/21	P1 - Early Level	76	71	78	65
	P4 - First Level	73	61	80	58
	P7 - Second Level	66	59	78	53
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	72	64	79	59
	S3 - Third Level or better	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	S3 - Fourth Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
2019/20	P1 - Early Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	P4 - First Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	P7 - Second Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	S3 - Third Level or better	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
	S3 - Fourth Level	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]
2018/19	P1 - Early Level	78	71	83	68
	P4 - First Level	74	64	78	62
	P7 - Second Level	73	66	83	63
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	76	67	81	64
	S3 - Third Level or better	83	80	81	80
	S3 - Fourth Level	57	52	58	49
2017/18	P1 - Early Level	84	77	88	74
	P4 - First Level	74	71	79	66
	P7 - Second Level	72	67	85	63
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	78	72	84	69
	S3 - Third Level or better	97	97	97	96
	S3 - Fourth Level	61	49	49	42
2016/17	P1 - Early Level	81	80	81	75
	P4 - First Level	78	71	83	69
	P7 - Second Level	73	62	80	60
	P1, P4 and P7 combined	78	72	81	69
	S3 - Third Level or better	98	94	98	94
	S3 - Fourth Level	55	40	52	36

Note:

a. Caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time; for more information see Chapter 8.1.4.3

Chart 14: Percentage of pupils achieving expected CfE Levels in Gàidhlig, 2020/21



Chapter 6: Achievement of CfE Levels by local authority

If making comparisons between local authorities we recommend keeping in mind the context of the authorities and their approach to assessment. See Chapter 8.1.4.4 for more information.

This chapter describes the range of data reported by local authorities, and comparisons to the national level results. Full achievement of CfE levels by local authority (2016/17 to 2020/21) can be found in the [supplementary tables](#).

Chart 15: Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils achieving the expected CfE Levels by organisers and local authority, 2020/21

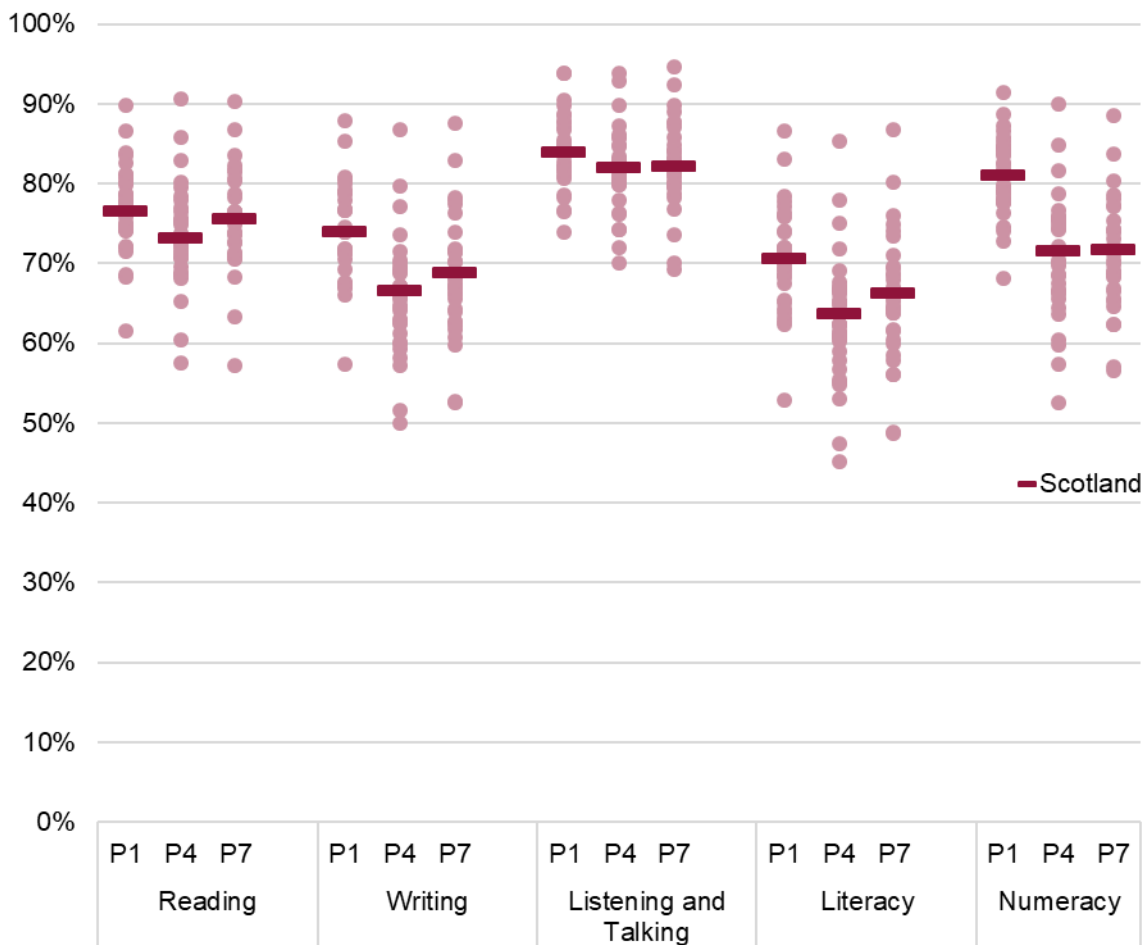


Chart 15, illustrates the range in results between local authorities and organisers for P1, P4 and P7. The largest range in results across the four separate organisers (i.e. excluding literacy) can be seen in numeracy at P4 (ranging from 53 per cent to 90 per cent) and in writing at P4 (ranging from 50 per cent to 87 per cent) – both differences of 37 percentage points.

The smallest range in results by local authority across the four separate organisers (i.e. excluding literacy) is for listening and talking. The range in performance (between highest and lowest) in listening and talking is 20 percentage points at P1, 24 percentage points at P4 and 25 percentage points at P7.

In both literacy, and in numeracy, the range of results between local authorities has increased, at all three stages, between 2018/19 and 2020/21. In literacy, the range for P1 increased from 24 percentage points in 2018/19 to 34 percentage points in 2020/21, for P4 from 30 percentage points in 2018/19 to 40 percentage points in 2020/21 and for P7 from 32 percentage points in 2018/19 to 38 percentage points in 2020/21.

A similar pattern can be observed for numeracy, with the range increasing for all three stages (P1, P4 and P7) from 2018/19 to 2020/21.

There could be a number of reasons for these increases in the ranges across local authorities. They may partly reflect a variation of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children across the country. They may also partly reflect some of the data quality concerns that some local authorities reported (see Chapter 1.3).

Results for local authorities by SIMD quintiles are available in the [supplementary tables](#).

Chapter 7: Glossary

Additional Support Needs (ASN):

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) states that a child or young person has an additional support need where they need additional support in order to benefit from school education.

Broad General Education (BGE):

The [Broad General Education](#) is the first phase of Curriculum for Excellence. It begins in early learning and childcare and continues to the end of S3 (the third year of secondary school).

Code of Practice for Statistics:

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) provides producers of official statistics with the detailed practices they must commit to when producing and releasing official statistics.

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE):

[Curriculum for Excellence](#) is Scotland's curriculum. It helps our children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century.

English as an Additional Language (EAL):

Refers to pupils for whom English is a second or additional language.

Gaelic Medium Education:

Gaelic Medium Education is a form of education in Scotland that allows pupils to be taught through the medium of Scottish Gaelic, with English being taught as the secondary language.

Grant Aided School:

Schools that are directly financially supported by the Scottish Government and follow the Curriculum for Excellence but are independent from local authorities. Grant aided schools are not equivalent to schools termed 'academies' in some parts of the UK.

Grant aided special schools provide for young people with a wide range of ASN. There are seven Grant aided special schools in Scotland.

Government Statistical Service:

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) is a cross-government network led by the National Statistician. The GSS works to provide advice, analysis and a statistical evidence base to help people make better decisions.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD):

The [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Scotland.

Least deprived:

Pupils whose home address is in the 20% of least deprived data zones (small areas) as defined by the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).

Most deprived:

Pupils whose home address is in the 20% of most deprived data zones (small areas) as defined by the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).

National Improvement Framework (NIF):

The [National Improvement Framework \(NIF\)](#) is Scottish Government policy to ensure children and young people develop a broad range of skills and capacities, whilst supporting them to thrive, regardless of their social circumstances or additional needs.

Organiser:

The ACEL data collection collects information on pupil performance in four areas, known as organisers. Organisers consist of Numeracy and the three literacy components; Reading, Writing and Listening and Talking. A combined literacy measure is also produced based on the three literacy organisers: reading, writing and listening and talking (see Chapter 8.1.3.2).

Pupil Census data:

A Scottish Government data collection, collecting a range of information and statistics on school pupils in Scotland. For more information see [School education statistics](#).

Publicly funded mainstream school:

Schools which are run and financed by the local authority and grant-aided schools.

Special schools:

Most children with additional support needs are educated in mainstream schools but some with complex or specific needs are educated in special schools.

Urban Rural Classification:

The Urban Rural Classification is an Official Statistic used to distinguish between rural and urban areas. Within this publication the Urban Rural Classification 2016 has been used. For more information see [Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2016](#)

Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA):

School children in P1, P4, P7 and S3 complete online standardised assessments in literacy and numeracy as part of everyday learning and teaching. The assessments help to identify children's progress, providing diagnostic information to support teachers' professional judgement. More information can be found on [Scottish National Standardised Assessments \(SNSA\) website](#).

Chapter 8: Background notes

8.1 Sources, coverage, methodology and quality assurance

8.1.1 Sources

The data included in the publication are provided to Scottish Government by local authorities and grant-aided schools. Independent schools are not included in the data collection. The assessments of children's progress are based on teachers' professional judgements in schools. A copy of the specification issued to data providers is available at the Scottish Government website ([Scottish Exchange of Data: achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels](#)).

Teacher professional judgements of achievement of a level are based on all of the evidence collected by teachers during the ongoing assessment of children and young people's learning. A wide range of evidence is collected in a variety of ways. This includes observing children and young people at work, assessing their work in class, standardised assessments and assessing children and young people's knowledge and understanding by talking to them about their learning.

The Achievement of CfE Level census date was Monday 14 June 2021. Data was submitted by local authorities to Scottish Government by Friday 27 August 2021. A process of quality assurance between Scottish Government, local authorities and schools occurs before the production of these statistics.

8.1.2 Coverage

The data collected typically covers all pupils in Primary 1, Primary 4, Primary 7 and Secondary 3 in mainstream schools and all pupils based in special schools/units. However, for 2020/21 data was not collected for Secondary 3 or special school pupils. Data was provided for 168,556 pupils. Teacher judgements cover the four organisers of reading, writing, listening and talking and numeracy. Pupils for whom the teacher has been unable to make a professional judgement are not included in the published results. In 2020/21 teachers were unable to make a judgement for around 0.35% of primary school pupils across each organiser. This is slightly higher than in 2018/19 when teachers were unable to make a judgement for around 0.30% of primary school pupils across each organiser.

A very small percentage (less than one per cent) of children have long-term significant and complex additional support needs that mean that it is unlikely they will progress through the CfE levels during their time in education. These children are included within the data as 'pupil following individual milestones'.

8.1.3 Methodology

8.1.3.1 Pupils based in special schools or standalone special units

Data for special schools and standalone special units was not collected in 2020/21. For more information see Chapter 1.3. The text below refers to the data that would typically be collected and which was collected and published for 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Special schools and standalone special units cater for children of all ages. The information gathered as part of the ACEL return does not include a specific stage for these pupils (i.e. they are simply recorded as being a pupil based in a special school or standalone special unit

and not as being in P1, P4 etc.). Therefore, it is not possible to calculate the percentage of pupils who have achieved the CfE level relevant to their stage.

The data (usually) reported shows the overall picture of CfE levels that have been achieved by pupils based in special schools and standalone special units. These data are not included in the headline national and local authority figures; they are reported separately.

It has been reported that some pupils in special schools and standalone special units were recorded as 'Not Assessed' when these pupils are in fact working towards national qualifications and out of scope of this collection on Broad General Education performance. During 2019 we consulted with key stakeholders, including Education Scotland, special schools and standalone special units and local authorities, regarding how these pupils should be appropriately recorded. Based on their feedback we have introduced a new category (code 97) for future Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels data collections. The definition for this is:

For standalone special schools and units, use code 97 if:

- (a) a pupil is in the senior phase and,
- (b) the pupil is being taught at least one qualification, other award, or work-based learning, at SCQF Level 1 and above and,
- (c) teachers would not normally make CfE level judgements for pupils in the senior phase.

8.1.3.2 Derived variables: P1, P4, P7 combined and literacy variable

The publication tables include two derived variables: P1, P4 and P7 combined and literacy.

P1, P4 and P7 combined figures have been available on the [school level dashboard](#) since 2015/16 to provide data for small schools (where data for individual stages would potentially reveal information about individual pupils). P1, P4 and P7 combined figures are available at local authority and national level for comparison purposes.

The literacy variable has been created from the three literacy organisers: reading, writing and listening and talking. A pupil is deemed to have achieved the expected level in literacy if they have achieved the expected level in all three literacy organisers. A pupil is deemed not to have achieved the expected level in overall literacy if they have failed to achieve the expected level in one or more of the individual organisers. If a pupil has not been assessed in one or more of the organisers ('Not Assessed'), their results are not included in calculation of the overall literacy variable.

These two derived variables are used in the key measures in the [National Improvement Framework \(NIF\)](#):

- Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected Level in Literacy;
- Percentage of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected Level in Numeracy;
- Percentage of S3 pupils achieving Third Level or better in Literacy and;
- Percentage of S3 pupils achieving Third Level or better in Numeracy.

The last two measures are not available in this report as data for S3 pupils were not collected in 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3.

8.1.3.3 Gaelic medium education

Pupils based in Gaelic medium primary schools/classes will learn and develop their literacy and numeracy skills in both Gaelic and English.

Pupils in Primary 1 Gaelic medium primary schools will generally be immersed in developing their reading, writing, listening and talking and numeracy skills in the medium of Gaelic.

From around Primary 3, children based in Gaelic medium primary schools/classes will also start to develop their skills in reading, writing and listening and talking in the English language.

It is expected that by the end of Primary 7, most children who have been based in Gaelic medium primary schools/classes should be achieving Second Level in reading, writing, and listening and talking in both Gàidhlig and English.

For pupils based in Gaelic medium primary schools/classes, the following data was collected and published in 2020/21:

	P1	P4	P7
Gàidhlig Reading	✓	✓	✓
Gàidhlig Writing	✓	✓	✓
Gàidhlig Listening and Talking	✓	✓	✓
English Reading			✓
English Writing			✓
English Listening and Talking			✓
Numeracy		✓	✓

S3 data were not collected for 2020/21; for more information see Chapter 1.3

Achievement of CfE levels in Gàidhlig can be found in Chapter 5.

8.1.3.4 Data matching

To reduce the burden on data providers, as per the Code of Practice for Statistics, pupil characteristic information was added to the Achievement of CfE Levels data by using previously collected data from the Pupil Census 2020. The following variables were added:

- Ethnicity
- Additional Support Needs
- English as an Additional Language
- Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
- 6-fold Urban Rural Classification

Achievement of CfE Level data and Pupil Census data were initially matched based on Scottish Candidate Number (SCN) and school or, where an initial match is not made, based on SCN and other demographic information (e.g. sex and date of birth).

8.1.4 Data quality and quality assurance

8.1.4.1 Data quality and feedback from data suppliers

As part of the quality assurance process, feedback was sought from local authority data suppliers on the process of compiling the data and on factors which may affect data quality. Feedback was received from 27 out of 32 local authorities. The majority of data providers provided substantive feedback covering the assessment process followed by schools, their own quality assurance of the data and any concerns over the quality of the data.

In general most local authorities indicated that they were confident in the data quality with a number citing further improvements planned for future data collections. A small number of authorities noted that they still had concerns about the consistency of judgements across schools within the authority and, therefore, across the country as a whole.

Many authorities noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had had an impact on the data submitted this year. Whilst most local authorities said that they were confident that the data provided was an accurate reflection of the assessment that had been possible a number reported that the pandemic meant teachers had reduced opportunities to gather evidence on which to make judgements. This was due, for example, to school closures and self-isolation of pupils and teachers.

The pandemic has also impacted on the nature and quantity of the moderation exercises (which help develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations) which some schools and local authorities have been able to conduct. In particular local authorities mentioned that face-to-face moderation could not take place and that moderation exercises were often limited to in school rather than between schools. This may have impacted on the consistency of some of the teacher judgement data this year.

8.1.4.2 Official Statistics

From 2015/16 to 2017/18 Achievement of CfE Level publications were Official Statistics labelled as 'Experimental Statistics'. This was to reflect the fact that these were new statistics in development, published to involve users and stakeholders in their development and build in quality and understanding at an early stage. From 2018/19 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level statistics are no longer labelled as Experimental Statistics.

The factors that led to the removal of the [Experimental Statistics label](#) can be found in the [Evidence Paper](#).

8.1.4.3 Comparisons over time

This publication, and the associated supplementary tables, provide comparisons back to 2016/17, at a national and local authority level. When making such comparisons, it should be noted that both analysis of the data, and evidence provided to us by local authorities, suggests the robustness and consistency of the data has changed during this period.

Comparisons have not been made with data for 2015/16 - the first year of data collection – in this publication. Analysis of this data, alongside the 2016/17 data, highlighted inconsistencies between the two years. Due to this we do not recommend comparing 2015/16 data with data for subsequent years.

The time period covered by the 2020/21 statistics means that the results will be affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This is likely to have had an impact both on learning and teaching (and therefore the CfE levels achieved) and on the quality of the data submitted for some schools. This should be kept in mind when making comparisons between years.

Developments in the ACEL data collection and publication since its introduction

2015/16

1st year of data collection

Analysis of 2015/16 data, alongside the 2016/17 data, highlighted inconsistencies between the two years.

Due to this we do not recommend comparing 2015/16 data with data for subsequent years and therefore 2015/16 data is not presented in this publication or the associated supplementary tables.

2016/17

Experimental Statistics

These were new statistics in development, published to involve users and stakeholders in their development and build in quality and understanding at an early stage.

The robustness and consistency of these statistics increased over time. This should be kept in mind when making comparisons between years.

2017/18

Official Statistics

From 2018/19 it was decided that ACEL statistics would no longer be labelled as Experimental Statistics.

The factors that led to the removal of the experimental label can be found in a paper, available here (<http://www.gov.scot/ISBN/9781839603488>).

The robustness and consistency of these statistics increased over time. This should be kept in mind when making comparisons between years.

2018/19

Data collection was cancelled

The ACEL collection and publication was cancelled in 2019-2020 due to the difficulties in collecting data whilst schools were closed due to COVID-19.

2019/20

Primary pupils data collection only

The ACEL publication cover Primary school children (P1, P4 and P7) only in 2020-2021.

Secondary school and special school data was not collected due to other pressures on these schools including implementation of the SQA National Qualifications Alternative Certification Model which was used to award National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021.

The time period covered by the 2020/21 statistics means that the results will be affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This should be kept in mind when making comparisons between years.

2020/21

8.1.4.4 Comparing between local authorities

If making comparisons between local authorities we recommend keeping in mind the context of the authorities and their approach to assessment.

In particular, in some local authorities, pupils with complex needs are integrated into their mainstream schools; these pupils have been included throughout this publication. However, within other local authorities school pupils with complex needs may attend a special school or standalone special unit. It is not necessarily appropriate to assign these pupils to a specific stage, and so, these pupils are usually treated separately in this publication. This year data was not collected for pupils in standalone special schools. The treatment of pupils with complex needs across different local authorities should be kept in mind when making comparisons between local authorities, or between individual schools.

8.1.4.5 Assessment of children's progress against CfE Levels

The expected standards under CfE were embedded in the [Experiences and Outcomes](#) from the outset; further to this Education Scotland published draft [Curriculum for Excellence Benchmarks](#) for literacy and numeracy in August 2016 in order to provide a more explicit and clear statement of standards. These standards were available to teachers ahead of the data collection for 2016/17. Final versions of the benchmarks were published in June 2017.

A national programme of Quality Assurance and Moderation has been put in place to provide more support and improve confidence and understanding amongst teachers, and in August 2017, [Scottish National Standardised Assessments](#) were made available for teachers to help inform their judgements.

8.2 School level data

School level results are also being released alongside this publication. They are available in the School Information Dashboard online via this [link](#). Data will be published for all publicly funded primary schools subject to data protection limitations.

All school level results will be presented in ten per cent bandings (i.e. under 10 per cent, 10 per cent – under 20 per cent, ... , 90 per cent or more). To prevent potential disclosure of information relating to individual pupils, any results relating to a grouping of 20 pupils or fewer will be suppressed. This means that around 19 per cent of primary schools will have no information published for them.

As with the national and local authority level data, school results include 'Pupil following individual milestones'. This may have a particularly large impact on schools with an integrated special unit.

Children who were recorded as 'Not Assessed' are not included in the calculations.

The data quality considerations described in Chapter 8.1.4 also apply to school level data. There is greater likelihood that an individual school's results are affected by variations in assessment approach, socio-economic context and school size (for example) than is the case at the more aggregated local authority or Scotland level. If making comparisons between schools we recommend keeping in mind the context of the authorities and their approach to assessment.

8.3 Supplementary tables

The collection involves a large amount of data, which cannot be fully presented in this publication. This report seeks to highlight the key messages and give a flavour of the range of analysis possible. Detailed tables are published as supporting tables alongside this publication, and provide a fuller picture of the findings (see [supplementary tables](#)). As with school level information, a disclosure control policy was applied to supplementary tables.

Within the supplementary tables for 2020/21, trend data for 2016/17 to 2020/21 has been included for pupil characteristics. This includes data by Additional Support Needs, English as an Additional Language, urban rural classification, sex, ethnicity and Gaelic education.

8.4 Revisions policy

Data submissions for the latest year can sometimes identify required revisions for previously submitted data. Scottish Government will revise the previous years' results at the time of publication of the latest year's results. Data revisions must be received by October for inclusion in the next publication.

Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level 2015/16 data was revised and new supplementary tables published in 2016/17 following receipt of revised data from two local authorities and a minor coding revision for two special schools. (See [Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level, 2016/17](#) for details).

Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence for 2016/17 and 2017/18 data was revised in 2019, to use the new data matching basis introduced in 2018/19 and to account for revised data received for one primary school for 2017/18.

With additional time series data now being published (see Chapter 8.3), the opportunity has been taken to revise 2016/17 data by ethnicity, English as an Additional Language and Additional Support Needs. These revised figures take account of an improvement made to the data linkage process between ACEL data and Pupil Census data which was introduced for the 2017/18 publication.

8.5 Rounding

Figures used in the commentary of this report are based on the unrounded data which can be found in the [supplementary tables](#). This means that they may not always match with figures that are derived using the rounded data displayed in tables and charts.

8.6 International and UK comparability

England, Wales and Northern Ireland also report on literacy and numeracy performance based on teacher judgements, however, due to the differing education systems and curriculums, direct comparisons cannot be made.

England: [Statistics at the Department for Education](#)

Wales: [Examinations and assessments](#)

Northern Ireland: [Department of Education Statistics](#)

Scotland participates in the OECD's triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey. This assessment is undertaken by 15 year-olds in over sixty

countries, including all OECD countries, and as such is a key international benchmark of performance. The result of most recent PISA survey is available at the Scottish Government website ([Programme for International Student Assessment \(PISA\) 2018: highlights from Scotland's results](#)).

8.7 Further information on attainment

A range of other information on the performance of Scotland's school pupils is available.

The Scottish Government publishes analysis of school leaver attainment (qualifications) and destinations. The latest data is available [at the School education statistics website](#).

Further assessment and attainment information on schools can be found on the Scottish Government Education [dashboards](#) page.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) publish attainment statistics which can be found [at the SQA website](#).

For updates on new Scottish Government education statistics, any forthcoming changes to Scottish Government education statistical publications and stakeholder consultations please register with Scotstat at the following website: [ScotStat Register: guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

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The data collected for this statistical bulletin

are available in more detail through statistics.gov.scot

are available via an alternative route

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact school.stats@gov.scot for further information.

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