

21 December 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Perth Grammar School, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff, stakeholders and the local authority and carried out a visit to the school. This engagement helped us learn more about how young people and their families have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support young people's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

The school's handling of the pandemic reflects well national expectations and guidance. Routines across the school continue to promote a safe learning environment. Despite the challenges arising from the pandemic, senior leaders have continued to focus on taking forward the school's improvement agenda. Careful planning enabled staff to respond flexibly to the changing circumstances and to deliver blended and remote learning. Overall, young people followed their normal curriculum, subject to any required adjustments.

Young people adapted to the challenges of remote learning and were supported well by their teachers and school staff. A range of supports were introduced to ensure that any issues could be addressed promptly. Through the period of disrupted learning, identified groups and young people who required additional help were supported effectively in school. Support teams provided valuable support to young people and their families on an individual level.

Staff ensured that all learners had access to digital resources and the internet to promote equity. Staff monitored closely the engagement of young people in online learning, with additional resources being made available. Regular communication with the parent body and contact with families offered further ongoing support.

In conversation with learners, almost all young people feel that they have been supported well during the pandemic and in handling the challenges of blended and remote learning. The posting of online learning resources offered young people reassurance and made it easier to keep in touch with classwork while isolating. In response to issues highlighted by young people on their return to school, staff developed health focused initiatives to address these concerns. This response is being received well by young people. Teachers are alert to addressing any gaps in young people's learning. Senior leaders and the local authority are confident that approaches developed in handling the pandemic will continue to feature as the school moves forward to improve experiences and outcomes for all learners.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The school's core values of pride, respect and ambition are key drivers of change. They are promoting higher aspirations and increased expectations for all members of the school community. Staff are working well together to deliver high quality learning and teaching. Shared professional learning by staff is impacting positively on individual practices and whole school approaches.

Senior leaders are working well to improve approaches to the analysis of attainment data to ensure that the needs of all learners are met. There are now effective systems in place to monitor attainment data for all young people. As a result, senior leaders are now better able to identify gaps in attainment and put in place measures to support learners. There have been significant improvements in the school's approaches to monitoring and tracking young people's progress. Improved systems are now enabling staff better access to data. As a result, staff have increased confidence in the use of data to improve attainment. While significant progress has been made in a range of attainment measures, senior leaders acknowledge there are still improvement areas to be addressed to fulfil their aspirational vision for all young people.

Senior leaders recognise that some curricular areas are further forward in developing their approaches to assessing the progress of young people. A few faculties require to make further improvements to their planning and assessment in the broad general education.

Moderation activities are supporting teachers in developing their understanding of progress within and achievement of a level. This is helping teachers to plan lessons to meet the needs of learners. Assessment evidence in literacy and numeracy is moderated through working groups. A newly formed school attainment board analyses data from all curriculum areas. This information is providing senior leaders and staff with a clearer overview of the progress of young people.

Senior leaders have used effectively their allocation of Pupil Equity Funding to support young people with attendance, literacy and numeracy. Staff are working proactively to improve attendance rates. The introduction of pupil care and welfare officers has supported this effort well.

Improved conversations surrounding setting goals and targets, and reviewing progress are helping young people focus on their learning. Achieving consistency in the quality and the regularity of these conversations across all classes will be necessary to secure improved outcomes.

The views of young people are being actively captured through a developing programme of surveys, focus groups and sampling. This information is being used effectively to evaluate the quality of learning and engagement. Once fully developed and embedded across all areas of the curriculum, this will provide senior leaders and principal teachers with a rich source of information to inform priorities and plan improvements.

Young people recognise that the ‘pupil voice’ has been strengthened. They are very positive about having opportunities to share their views and, most importantly, see their impact on improving the life of the school. They appreciate the opportunities that they have to express their opinions and feel ready to be even more involved in the school’s decision making processes.

The school continues to develop effective approaches to recognising and celebrating achievement. The successful online awards ceremony, drama and musical productions have supported young people to demonstrate their accomplishments.

In general across the school, there is a calm purposeful atmosphere that is helping to reinforce a positive learning environment. The positive interactions between learners and relationships between young people and their teachers provide a strong base for learning. In the sample of learning observed, most young people behave well and engage in their learning. They respond promptly to the direction and instruction of their teachers. Teachers offer clear explanations of key learning points. There is evidence of technology being used effectively by teachers to model an answer or provide a stimulus for an activity. Senior leaders recognise the need to continue to promote the good practice that is evident in certain subject areas to ensure greater consistency across all learning.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff are addressing the recommendations from the original inspection successfully, although we recognise that the school needs some more time to implement fully its priorities for improvement. We have asked Perth and Kinross Council to provide us with further information about the school’s progress within one year of the publication of this letter. We will work together with local authority officers to agree what will happen next. Perth and Kinross Council will continue to inform parents about the school’s progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Charles Rooney
HM Inspector