

7 June 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Douglas Ewart High School
Dumfries and Galloway Council**

We are trying out some new approaches to inspection. You can find out about our engagement with stakeholders and resulting 'try-out' approaches using the link below¹. Your school was inspected during March 2016 using new quality indicators². You can find these new quality indicators at the link below. We focused our inspection work on aspects of leadership and management across the school, the quality of learning, teaching and assessment and how well the school is supporting all young people to make progress and achieve as highly as possible. An additional area selected for focus on this inspection was the curriculum. This letter sets out our findings.

Learning, teaching and assessment

Young people enjoy learning in a caring, inclusive environment with positive relationships across the school. They are very well behaved both within and out of classrooms. In lessons, young people listen well to instructions and respond well to the expectations teachers have of them. They feel that they are encouraged and supported well by their teachers. In a few subject areas such as in the sciences and technologies, the learning planned for young people is challenging them well to develop their knowledge and skills further. The learning planned in such areas meets the needs of all young people well, for example enabling young people beyond S3 to work towards qualifications at different levels within the same classroom. This high-quality planning which meets the needs of young people is not yet a consistent feature of learning across all stages and across the school. The lesson period duration, longer than that of most other secondary schools, is utilised very well across a range of subjects to plan rich learning experiences. For example, it enables better use of the wider community as stimulating and relevant contexts for learning. Learning conversations between young people and their teachers are developing and are helping engage young people better in their learning. In the best examples, young people are identifying appropriate learning targets and, with support from teachers, agreeing strategies which will enable them to improve their work. The 'Junior Phase Learning Profile' used from S1 to S3 is helping with this. Continued focus on sharing these highly-effective approaches to learning and

¹<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/about/principles/futureapproaches/index.asp>

²http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/HGIOS4_tcm4-870533.pdf

teaching will help to achieve consistently high-quality learning experiences for young people.

Across the school, teachers use a range of approaches to assess young people's work, increasingly involving young people in assessing and evaluating their own work and progress. Teachers are working together to further develop their understanding of the standards required to achieve a Curriculum for Excellence level. Teachers of young people who receive support in the educational resources base need further training to develop a better understanding of how to assess the work of this group and use the results to plan appropriate learning and next steps. Revisiting and continuing the work previously carried out with other schools in the Machars community on assessing literacy and numeracy would help achieve more consistent approaches to assessment and reporting across the curriculum. The monitoring and tracking system the school has for young people from S4 to S6 is enabling staff to identify any underachievement and to take appropriate action to support and challenge young people as appropriate. Staff have recently developed a promising system for improving approaches to monitoring and tracking the progress of young people from S1 to S3. Further development of this new system would help teachers to identify earlier any young people requiring additional support of challenge.

Curriculum

The school has taken some innovative steps in its development of the curriculum. Young people study in lengthier periods than in most schools to try to maximise the opportunity for them to learn more thoroughly and deeply. The curriculum is continually developing to increase the range of learning pathways open to young people. For example, mixed stage classes from S4 to S6 allow young people to work towards a Higher qualification at S4. Young people at S5 and S6 can add breadth to their experience by studying for additional qualifications at National 4 or 5 as an appropriate alternative to specialising further in a specific subject area. A range of courses and programmes are being introduced to meet young people's needs. These include computing science at Higher National Certificate (HNC) level, Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) awards in areas including equestrian studies, dairy studies and personal finance at National 3 and 4. The school works very closely with partners to enhance young people's experiences and widen their opportunities. Dumfries and Galloway Council's Community Learning and Development service plays a key role in this regard. The school is aware of the need to bring forward its plans to revisit and develop aspects of its curriculum to address legislative requirements for all young people to experience religious and moral education and have opportunity for religious observance. The curriculum for young people at S3 needs further development to allow specialisation in chosen subjects within all curriculum areas. This would enable young people to build a strong foundation for continuing study to qualifications at S4 or beyond. In addition, there is a need to develop further whole-school strategies for ensuring that young people's literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are being developed across the curriculum. Planned work on personal and social development across the school will help to strengthen young people's experiences in health and wellbeing.

Young people's attainment and achievements

The proportions of young people who are successful in moving on to a positive destination such as employment, training or further learning on leaving Douglas Ewart High School have been increasing over recent years. In 2015, almost all moved on to a positive destination, with an increase in the proportions moving on to higher education. The school's recently-developed monitoring and tracking system for young people from S1 to S3 has the potential, in time, to provide a clear picture of young people's attainment across curriculum areas for these stages. Overall, young people from S4 to S6 perform as well as young people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. The proportions of young people achieving National Qualifications at the end of S4 are showing signs of improvement in a range of measures, particularly in the last two years. The school recognises that there is room for improvement in young people's attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Young people who attend the educational resource base are achieving some National Qualifications. There is a need to ensure that these young people experience learning at the most appropriate level for them to reach their full potential.

Young people's learning, particularly for those at the upper stages, is enriched through a wide range of opportunities for achievement within and beyond school. Senior pupils make a very positive contribution to the life of the school and the local community. For example, they have developed leadership and citizenship skills through raising awareness of issues with their peers and the wider community in a range of contexts. These include planning or participating in an annual road safety event, the 'Looking Forward not Back' project to promote anti-sectarianism and the 'Do the Right Thing' programme raising awareness of issues such as peer pressure. Young people show and develop a caring attitude towards others through substantial volunteering and fund-raising activity. Such work is contributing to strengthening community relationships. Some young people have become 'Scotland Reads' tutors for primary children. Others have supported elderly community members through the 'Salon' project or contributing to building community resilience during recent flooding incidents. Significant numbers of young people reflect on the skills they are developing and increase their understanding of their achievements through successfully completing national programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's, John Muir, Saltire and Sports Leaders awards. Young people supported in the educational resources base are developing skills through participating in leisure, sporting, enterprise and cultural activity. They are working towards Personal Achievement awards. The school should continue with its work to ensure that these young people are fully included in the life of the school and attend a range of clubs, events and activities alongside their peers.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has shared a clear and ambitious vision for the school related to agreed school principles of 'Innovate, Include and Evolve'. He is clear that effective self-evaluation is crucial to school improvement and promotes this strongly. Ensuring a full complement of staffing has brought its challenges and he has led change courageously and imaginatively. Some of these changes, such as the introduction of mentoring groups need to be reviewed. Under his leadership, staff feel empowered to be creative and to try out new approaches. Staff, both teaching

and non-teaching, are committed to making the learning environment as positive as they possibly can for young people. Staff are reflective practitioners and continually evaluate their work and that of their department in contributing to how well young people learn and achieve. More opportunities for discussion amongst staff across departments would support school improvement further. Young people and parents overall told us that they valued the education offered at Douglas Ewart High School. There is scope for young people and parents to have more influence in shaping learning and the direction of school improvement. The headteacher, supported by two deputy headteachers, has encouraged departments to select for themselves and use a wide range of approaches to monitor their performance across the school year. The flexibility, although welcomed, has allowed inconsistency in approach and effectiveness of self-evaluation across the school. All senior leaders now need to consistently challenge their link departments to ensure that all self-evaluation arrangements result in positive outcomes for young people.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Young people's exemplary behaviour and engagement with learning as a result of positive relationships with peers and staff.
- Young people's personal achievements facilitated by extensive and high-quality opportunities, particularly at the upper stages.
- The key role played by Community Learning and Development staff in building partnerships which enhance the curriculum.
- The sense of empowerment amongst all staff to make suggestions and take decisions to improve young people's achievements and experiences.

We discussed with staff and Dumfries and Galloway Council how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to raise young people's attainment, particularly in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- Develop a more effective strategy to support young people's learning across the school, particularly for those supported in the educational resource base.
- Ensure greater consistency across the school in self-evaluation to increase the impact on young people's learning and achievement.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are confident that the school has capacity to continue to improve and we will make no further visits in relation to this inspection. The school welcomes the offer of specialist input to help it support young people who require additional support with their learning better. Our Area Lead Officer will maintain contact with Dumfries and Galloway Council to strengthen further capacity for improvement and monitor the school's progress. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, Dumfries and Galloway Council will inform parents about the school's progress.

Marie McAdam
HM Inspector

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0131 244 4330, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.