

22 February 2022

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 Bell Baxter High School, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a virtual meeting to Bell Baxter High School. Our 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

Throughout the pandemic, staff have been responsive to the needs of young people. Staff reflected and built effectively on the first period of remote learning by providing improved learning experiences and support for young people during the second period of remote learning. Senior leaders reported that the majority of young people benefited from the live interactions delivered by staff during this period. Pupil support teams provided valuable support to young people and their families. Regular access to guidance staff, year group online spaces and weekly updates allowed young people to connect with school staff and each other.

Staff, who were more experienced in the use of digital technology, led the development of the online learning offer for young people and professional learning for all staff. Staff worked well to ensure that all learners had access to digital resources and could access the internet. Staff monitored closely the participation of young people in online learning. They took prompt action to address any challenges where they were identified. Staff also made additional learning and wellbeing resources available across the local area to support families. Regular communication and contact with families offered further ongoing support.

Staff have taken action to identify and address learning and wellbeing concerns on young people's return to school. They are monitoring closely any identified gaps in learning and are providing additional targeted support to young people where required. Staff and pupil absence, directly or indirectly related to COVID-19, continues to be a challenge. However, staff continue to use digital platforms to support young people with their learning, including during periods of absence from school.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Senior leaders have worked well with staff to improve approaches to evaluating the work of the school and planning for improvements. Senior leaders offer a range of professional

learning opportunities which are supporting staff to better understand the improvement planning process. Staff are now better placed to contribute and lead whole school priorities.

Staff across the school continue to develop approaches to raise attainment. All staff are engaged in developing and reflecting on their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Senior leaders report this is having a positive impact on the consistency and quality of learners' experiences. This is beginning to lead to improvements in attainment. Senior leaders have developed a long-term plan to improve learning experiences in S1 to S3. Staff are actively developing the curriculum and approaches to assessment in S1 and are planning to extend this to the S2 and S3 curriculum. Staff should continue to develop the curriculum to ensure all young people receive their full entitlement to a broad general education, particularly in S3.

Staff continue to monitor the progress and attainment of young people. They take necessary action to support young people not on track to achieve. Senior leaders are clear in their ambition to raise attainment. Staff have introduced a broader range of courses and qualifications to young people in S4 to S6. Senior leaders are closely monitoring the impact of these changes on course uptake and attainment. They are working with young people to promote a balance of range and challenge in their course choices, particularly in S5.

Staff have made significant improvements to approaches to wellbeing and inclusion. Senior leaders have made important changes to support structures and staffing which are having a positive impact on young people. Staff are now better placed to identify needs and take action more quickly to support young people requiring additional support. Staff have improved communication both within the school and with external partners to support this further.

Young people have regular opportunities to share their views on aspects of school life. Staff gain valuable information from wellbeing surveys. As a result, all school prefects are now trained mental health first aiders. Staff have also successfully taken steps to improve approaches to relationships and bullying.

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 have also been making progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. Fife 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.

Stuart Cathro
HM Inspector