

Summarised inspection findings

Earlston High School

Scottish Borders Council

21 January 2020

Key contextual information

Earlston High School is situated in Earlston, a village in the Scottish Borders. The school links with eight associated primary schools.

The headteacher has been in post for almost four years. He is supported by three deputy headteachers and an acting deputy headteacher.

Attendance is generally above the national average for the years that data is available. Exclusions are decreasing and are below the national average. In February 2019, 6.3 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals. In September 2018, very few pupils lived in the 20 per cent most deprived datazones in Scotland. In September 2018, the school reported that 29.3 per cent of pupils have additional support needs.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- A calm, welcoming and supportive ethos exists across all aspects of school life. Relationships are of a consistently high quality between staff and young people, and amongst young people.
- Overall, the headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team, has taken a strong approach to improving learning, teaching and assessment. The co-construction of 'Earlston's Excellent Learning Framework' is helping staff develop a shared understanding of what they expect effective learning, teaching and assessment to look like in the school.
- Almost all young people have a high degree of self-confidence and a positive attitude to their learning. In most curriculum areas, they use well the strategy of 'pause, reflect and edit' to support them to submit their best work. Young people value the wide range of opportunities which are available to them and display considerable determination and commitment to succeed. They are highly appreciative of the opportunities that exist to support their learning beyond timetabled classes, such as supported study.
- Whilst almost all young people are willing learners and attentive in class, they are too passive in their learning. They need to be encouraged and empowered to be more involved actively in the learning process. Young people lead and direct aspects of school improvement very effectively, through their involvement in the leadership academy. They demonstrate high levels of capability and skill. They would benefit from applying these skills more consistently in lessons, leading aspects of their learning.
- In most lessons, learners' needs are well met. Young people are most engaged when tasks, activities and resources are matched well to their needs and they can work at a pace that meets these needs. Across the broad general education (BGE), a few young people would benefit from increased challenge in their learning. Pupil support assistants work well with

teachers to meet the needs of learners who have identified barriers to their learning. Pupil support teachers provide good support to learners with the most complex needs. They work well with them in small groups and provide appropriate individualised tasks, activities and resources.

- In almost all classes, teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. They structure almost all lessons effectively, supported by 'Earlston's Excellent Learning Framework'. All teachers share the purposes of lessons with young people and identify what successful learning looks like. This helps most young people to understand their learning more effectively. As planned, staff should develop the school's progressive framework of Golden Skills to help young people reflect on their skills more effectively across the school.
- The use of learning logs is supporting young people to reflect on their strengths and next steps in learning. They are being used well in the senior phase to inform learning conversations and are being used increasingly in the BGE. Learning conversations provide highly effective feedback from teachers and are helping young people to understand and discuss confidently their working grades and target grades in the senior phase. They are helping young people to make progress in their learning in a more informed way.
- Young people benefit from using digital technology to enhance and extend their learning. The use of interactive software and digital sharing platforms provide opportunities for young people to collaborate effectively with their peers and staff.
- In most lessons, teachers are developing their skills in questioning well to support young people's learning. There are a few examples where teachers use questioning skilfully to help young people develop higher-order thinking. Staff should share this practice more effectively to enable young people across the school to demonstrate higher-level skills more regularly and consistently.
- Staff make effective use of a range of assessments to determine the progress of all learners. In the senior phase, teachers show a very good understanding of assessment requirements within courses and use approaches that support young people to make progress towards gaining National Qualifications. A number of staff undertake SQA duties which help them to understand national standards. To continue to improve, all staff should ensure that assessment in the BGE is appropriate, enabling all young people to demonstrate effectively their knowledge and skills. Commendably, staff have regular opportunities to explore national standards and expectations through planned moderation activities. The majority of these involve collaboration with colleagues from other schools. This is helping them to develop a more consistent understanding of national standards. Staff make good use of the National Benchmarks to assess young people's progress and achievement.
- Tracking and monitoring in the senior phase is well established. Staff use tracking information effectively to determine young people's progress towards National Qualifications. They intervene appropriately to ensure that young people make expected progress. Departments have their own approaches to monitoring and tracking young people's progress in the BGE. At this stage, staff are not using tracking and monitoring data consistently well to inform the planning of learning, teaching and assessment.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- The school has a clear focus on raising attainment in literacy and numeracy for all young people.

Broad general education (BGE)

- Young people are attaining very well in literacy and numeracy. Over the past three years almost all young people attained third curriculum level in literacy and in numeracy and most young people attained fourth curriculum level. An increasing percentage of young people are attaining fourth level in literacy.
- Staff use national guidance well and engage in a wide range of moderation activities to help them make increasingly reliable professional judgements. Staff also use evidence from Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs) to further support their professional judgements. These approaches are successful in ensuring the reliability of the school's data.

Senior phase

Literacy (leavers)

- Almost all young people left school with SCQF level 5 or better in 2015, 2016 and 2018 and the majority left with SCQF level 6 from 2014 to 2018. The percentage of young people leaving with SCQF level 5 or better in literacy has moved from being in line with the virtual comparator (VC) in 2014 to being significantly much higher than the VC in 2018.

Numeracy (leavers)

- Whilst young people attain well in numeracy (leavers), their attainment is not as strong in this area as in literacy (leavers). From 2014 to 2018, almost all young people left school with SCQF level 4 or better, and most left with SCQF level 5 or better from 2016 to 2018. There has been an improving trend in the percentage of young people leaving with SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. The percentage is significantly higher than the VC in 2018.

Literacy

- In S4, almost all young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in three of the last five years. Most young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in 2019. By S5, as a percentage of the S4 roll, the majority of young people attained SCQF level 6. By S5, there is an improving trend in the percentage of young people attaining SCQF level 5 or better. By S6, there are improvements in the percentages of young people attaining at SCQF level 5 or better and SCQF level 6. At all stages, young people are performing in line with or significantly higher than the VC in literacy.

Numeracy

- In S4, most young people attained SCQF level 4 or better in numeracy from 2015-19. Data from Insight shows a decline in the percentage of young people who attained numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better in 2019. The school provided evidence to show that this figure is incorrect due to a processing error. The school reports that almost all young people attained numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better in 2019. By S5, as a percentage of the S4 roll, most young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in three of the last five years. Almost all young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in 2019. By S6, there is an improving trend in the percentage of young people attaining SCQF level 5 or better. There is also improvement at SCQF level 6. In S4, in four of the last five years, young people are attaining significantly higher or much higher than the VC in numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better. By S5, young people are attaining significantly much higher than the VC in numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better in 2019.

Attainment over time

BGE

- The school can demonstrate the impact of its strong partnership work with colleagues. Close monitoring of young people's attainment and the sharing of standards across the cluster are leading to more consistent improvements in young people's attainment in literacy and numeracy.
- Senior leaders acknowledge the need to capture more effectively BGE assessment data held by subject departments. This will help them to understand young people's progress over time more effectively and take appropriate actions to improve this as required.

Senior phase

- The school is maintaining high levels of attainment. When compared using average total tariff points, the attainment of all leavers has been in line with than the VC from 2014 to 2018. The attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of leavers has fluctuated from 2014 to 2018 and shows no clear pattern of improvement. The attainment of the highest attaining 60% has also fluctuated, although it is significantly higher than the VC from 2015 to 2018.
- In S4, when compared using average complementary tariff scores, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people has fluctuated from 2015 and 2019. It has moved from being significantly higher than the VC in 2018 to being in line with the VC in 2019. The highest attaining 20% are in line with the VC.
- By S5 (based on the S5 roll), when compared using average complementary tariff scores, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% has improved in 2019, moving from being in line with the VC to being significantly much higher and significantly higher than the VC. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% has also improved in 2019. It is in line with the VC from 2016 to 2019.
- By S6 (based on the S6 roll), when compared using average complementary tariff scores, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people shows signs of improvement from 2015 to 2019. The same level of improvement cannot be seen for the highest attaining 20% of young people. The attainment of the lowest attaining 20%, middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people is significantly higher or much higher than the VC in almost all years from 2015 to 2019. Young people who stay on at school until the end of S6 are attaining very well.

Breadth and depth

- The school has an aspirational presentation policy. In almost all curricular areas, the percentages of young people presented for National Qualifications at National 5 and Higher is in line with or significantly higher than the national average in 2019. This is leading to more young people attaining well at SCQF level 5 or better.
- In S4, over the last five years, the majority of young people attained five or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better. The percentages of young people attaining one or more to six or more courses are broadly in line with the VC. At SCQF level 5A or better the percentage of young people attaining two or more to six or more courses is broadly in line with the VC in 2016, 2017 and 2019. In 2018 the percentage of young people attaining two or more to six or more courses is significantly higher or much higher than the VC. The percentages of young people attaining one or more qualifications at SCQF level 5A or better is significantly higher than the VC in the past two years.
- By S5, over the last five years, the majority of young people attained two or more courses at SCQF level 6C or better. In 2019, the percentages of young people attaining one or more to five or more courses is significantly higher than the VC. There are improvements in the percentages of young people attaining one or more to four or more courses at SCQF level 6A or better from 2016 to 2019. The percentages of young people attaining three or more to four or more courses at SCQF level 6A are significantly much higher than the VC in 2019.
- By S6, over the last five years, the majority of young people attain three or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better. From 2015 to 2019, there are signs of improvement in the percentages of young people attaining two or more to three or more courses at SCQF level 6A or better. In the latest year, the percentages of young people attaining two or more or three or more courses at this level are significantly higher than the VC. The school's attainment at SCQF level 7 is very strong. The percentages of young people attaining three or more courses at SCQF level 7C or better are significantly higher than the VC in three of the last five years, including the latest year. The percentages of young people attaining three or more courses at SCQF level 7A are significantly higher or much higher than the VC in four of the last five years. The percentage of young people attaining one or more courses at SCQF level 7A is significantly much higher than the VC in 2019.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people are developing their skills and attributes well. They talk with enthusiasm about their participation in an extensive range of out-of-class-activities and highlight how their confidence and self-esteem are developing. The breadth of activities, which includes sports, expressive arts and digital activities, ensures that young people's interests are met. Young people exercise increasing responsibility as they progress through the school. They are active participants in their local community. An increasing number of young people have achieved accreditation through a wide range of qualifications, such as Youth Achievement, Dynamic Youth and Saltire Awards. All young people in S3 are developing and consolidating skills that are leading to them being presented for SQA Health and Wellbeing and Enterprise and Employability Awards in the Senior Phase. Young people's leadership and team-working skills are developed well through the Leadership Academy and Pupil Parliament. Young people value these opportunities. Young people also take pride in leading school improvements, such as a recent review of work concerning learning logs. Senior leaders review systematically young people's participation in wider achievement opportunities to ensure no young person misses out.

Equity for all learners

- Almost all staff have a clear vision for ensuring equity for all learners. They have a very good understanding of the local context and a good understanding of costs that are associated with the school day. They are proactive in ensuring that young people do not face financial barriers to participating in school activities and excursions.
- Staff have created an 'Earlston Risk Matrix'. This identifies young people who may benefit from additional support. It includes care-experienced young people, young carers and young people who reside in deciles SIMD 1 and 2. The matrix helps staff to have a greater understanding of young people's needs and barriers to learning, enabling them to provide appropriate support. Senior leaders highlight many improvements to young people's wellbeing and progress in learning as a result of staff engaging with the matrix.
- Through using data effectively, staff across the Earlston High School cluster identified correctly how to improve young people's attainment in numeracy. Working collaboratively, they combined Pupil Equity Fund allocations to address this gap. Commendably, staff can evidence clearly the impact of this intervention on the attainment of a group of young people in the BGE.
- Almost all young people leaving school from 2015 to 2019 moved to a positive destination. Over the last two years, most young people left school for higher education or further education. Approximately a fifth left for employment.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Staff at Earlston High School are engaging extensively in professional learning to improve their pedagogy. This includes them using a practitioner-enquiry approach throughout the school. As a result of their work, staff and senior leaders are developing a better understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment. Staff have also adopted a common approach to planning learning, teaching and assessment. This is helping them to improve learning and teaching, to ensure that all young people can benefit from more consistent approaches across the school.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.