

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 most recent inspection of Campbeltown Grammar School, we said that we would engage again with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority, and carried out a visit to the school in partnership with an officer of local authority. 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 the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection with the acting headteacher and local authority officers.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

The school had acted quickly to extend and enhance its capacity to connect through remote learning. Staff provided valuable learning experiences in the first period of remote learning. However, staff later evaluated these early approaches as limited in engaging and driving young people's learning. Staff and young people had carried out important community support activities, including delivering learning resources and food parcels to remote households. Pastoral and support staff were commended for keeping in touch with young people, and in particular for close monitoring of vulnerable young people. Senior leaders described the continuing negative impact of the pandemic on young people's and staff's attendance.

Staff and young people evaluated the second period of remote learning more positively, describing a number of improvements based on the experience of the earlier period of remote learning. A few staff and departments had provided welcome, regular contributions to ensure young people's physical and mental health and wellbeing. Staff and young people reported a clearer focus on wellbeing which continues to influence a range of the school's work. Staff kept in touch with families, for example through 'doorstep visits' to distribute learning resources and, at times, food parcels. The school had organised a number of social and professional sessions for staff, using virtual digital strategies, supporting staff morale and mental health.

Senior leaders integrated the school's targets for recovery within the much-improved school improvement plan. Recent significant improvements in leadership have created a positive climate for learning, boosting morale among young people, staff and the wider community.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The school had refreshed its vision, values and aims responding to the area for improvement in the original report. Further work is needed to ensure the school's values provide a full and accurate reflection of its unique context. The school now demonstrates a clear and convincing sense of direction. The community's pride and confidence in the school has improved.

The school calendar of quality assurance activities supports consistency and effectiveness when judging the school's performance. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the role of self-evaluation in school improvement, which they need to continue to promote among all staff. Staff continue to develop their skills in analysing attainment data to identify aspects for improvement. The school has begun to take closer account of young people's and other stakeholders' views.

The acting headteacher has provided strong strategic leadership since her appointment in August 2021, with important contributions from the local authority. The impact of her leadership in school improvement planning, self-evaluation and staff professional learning is evident across the school. Senior staff are highly visible around the school, promoting a calm and orderly environment. All staff are members of a school improvement group taking forward identified key areas.

Senior school leaders have worked with staff and consulted with stakeholders to review and develop the curriculum to better meet the needs of young people. Learning support and guidance staff are working strategically to ensure that the needs of young people are more clearly identified. Staff across the school are exploring a wider range of courses and learning opportunities for young people. However, the school remains at an early stage of developing a curriculum which meets the needs of all young people. Senior leaders should proceed as planned to develop a curriculum which reflects fully the school's vision, values and aims.

Teachers are developing a clearer understanding of effective learning and teaching. Peer observations and professional dialogue are helping to focus on key aspects such as effective use of questions and supporting independent learning skills. Most young people are attentive but passive when lessons are not at the right level of difficulty.

Supported well by the depute headteacher, guidance and learning support staff have improved strategic approaches to ensuring the wellbeing of young people. Partner agencies collaborate well to meet the needs of young people. A few staff have undertaken additional professional learning from the Mental Health Foundation to be able to provide better support for young people.

The school has demonstrated strong partnership working in promoting the wellbeing of young people. Staff use the national wellbeing indicators to help young people reflect on their wellbeing. Senior leaders and staff recognise the benefits of adopting a nurture-based approach. This will promote young people's wellbeing and further improve relationships in the school.

The school's tracking and monitoring systems now provide clear information on attainment in all areas of the curriculum. This supports teachers' analysis of data and important

discussions about young people's progress. Staff from all subject areas have developed enhanced understanding of assessment standards.

Senior leaders recognise the fundamental need to improve learning, teaching and assessment to a more consistently high standard, as a key to raising attainment. They have taken well-judged steps to address areas of weakness, but these steps have had too little time to achieve significant impact. There is not yet any significant evidence of overall improvement in attainment since the original inspection. Attainment across different areas of the curriculum remains too variable, and at times weak. Overall, young people in the senior phase attain less well than those with comparable backgrounds across Scotland. However, on leaving school, almost all young people progress to positive destinations.

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.

We recognise that the school needs some more time to implement fully its priorities for improvement. We have asked Argyll and Bute Council to provide us with an interim report on the school's progress in six months from the publication of this letter, followed by a thorough analysis of the school's performance in one year. We will work together with local authority officers to agree what will happen next. Should we require another visit to the school, we will inform parents and carers. Otherwise, Argyll and Bute 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.

Bill Geddes
HM Inspector