

18 January 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 Hermitage Academy, 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 visit to the 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 acting 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 acting headteacher, appointed in December 2020, has demonstrated strong leadership during a period of significant change and challenge. He has worked well with all stakeholders to support young people, both through periods of lockdown and since the return to school buildings. The focus during lockdowns was to ensure learning and support were available for all young people and their families. The health and wellbeing and development of resilience in young people remain a high priority. The focus on ongoing support through the restructured guidance system is strengthening relationships between staff and young people and their families.

Staff used digital technology very well to support remote learning activities. Teachers' enhanced digital skills continue to be used effectively to support young people who are self-isolating or absent from school. Young people who require additional support were well cared for during lockdown. Digital devices were issued to young people and support packs were also delivered as required. Young people and parents appreciated the regular live lessons and opportunities to interact with staff.

Staff prioritised communication with young people and their families appropriately during lockdown. Young people and parents commented favourably on daily bulletins and regular parental updates. A majority of young people feel the revised approach to communication provides more opportunities for their voice to be heard.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The acting headteacher continues to lead important improvements in the work of the school. Effective approaches to gather self-evaluation evidence from across the school community are leading to the identification of appropriate improvement priorities. This is strengthening relationships and supporting improvements across the school.

The school has made important progress in improving the range of subjects and courses available, especially for young people in the senior phase. An ambitious curriculum is now in

place in consultation with parents, partners and young people. This is improving learning pathways for all learners.

Relationships across the school, amongst pupils and with staff, have improved significantly. The focus on promoting positive behaviour has resulted in almost all staff and young people reporting that the school ethos has now improved.

Staff have continued to develop approaches to learning, teaching and assessment well and this is leading to improvements in learners' experiences. The school's 'Good Lesson' cycle is ensuring staff have agreed expectations of high quality learning and teaching. This includes improving levels of engagement and taking account of young people's prior learning.

Staff monitor effectively the progress of young people in S5 and S6 to ensure they are on track to attain as highly as possible. A new approach to track young people's learning better is supporting most young people to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. This approach, including regular conversations between staff and young people about progress, has the potential to support an increase in attainment across the school. Almost all young people moved to an initial positive destination on leaving school and, of these, a majority attended higher education courses.

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 addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. 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.

John Reilly
HM Inspector