

Secondary schools

Overall, inspectors generally found that young people in secondary schools were well motivated to learn, achieve and succeed. In many cases steps taken by schools to develop partnerships with others, including with parents, employers, universities, colleges and the local community were having a positive impact on the range and quality of learning experiences available for young people.

Between 2012-16, curriculum planning and structures within secondary schools evolved progressively as new qualifications replaced old ones and programmes such as Developing the Young Workforce started to be implemented. As a result, inspectors found that secondary schools were providing more opportunities for young people to achieve across a range of areas. There is a continued need to focus on improving young people's attainment and achievement ensuring, for example, the curriculum provides suitably flexible pathways to meeting young people's individual learning needs. Schools should also make better use of evidence gathered through self-evaluation to focus on priorities which will have the greatest impact on improving learning.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Over the period of this report there have been important improvements in the quality of learning in secondary schools. Overall, inspectors found that young people in secondary education were motivated and had a positive attitude to their learning. The quality of conversations between teachers and individual young people, about their strengths and their next steps in learning has improved significantly. This is helping young people to become more independent in their learning.

In most schools inspected, staff provided young people with relevant contexts for their learning. We saw good examples of schools, along with partners, providing a commendably wide range of learning experiences for young people, including work placements, college learning and career advice. However, the quality of learning that young people experienced varied too much within schools and between schools. In some schools we found that the level of variability was increased by difficulties in recruiting staff. Improving the consistency of learning and teaching needs to be a key priority for all secondary schools.

While most young people felt they are treated fairly and with respect in the secondary sector⁵, inspectors found that some schools had a narrow view of young people's rights. Such schools need to consider new, creative ways of supporting all young people to express their views, and to take these into account.

There is a steady improvement in the percentage of young people leaving school for positive destinations. The percentage of leavers attaining at SCQF 4 and SCQF 5 in National Qualifications in literacy and numeracy has improved as has the attainment of young people living across almost all Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles.

Schools used a wide range of accreditation to recognise achievements. Beyond accreditation, inspectors noted that young people were developing attributes and skills through charity fundraising, voluntary work in their local community and taking on leadership roles in the school such as members of the pupil council, prefects and buddies to their younger peers. They were developing global citizenship skills through their participation in twinning arrangements with schools in other countries.

⁵ Based on the responses to Education Scotland's pre-inspection questionnaires over the period 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016

Our inspection evidence shows that staff were aware of the importance of promoting and developing young people's numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, many schools remain at an early stage of implementing this successfully. In literacy and English, inspectors found that young people were articulate and presented information and ideas well in a variety of contexts. Where talking activities had a relevant and real-life context, such as campaign speeches or persuasive talks, young people applied their learning about language effectively. We also found that young people responded well to the analysis of literature and close reading of non-fiction texts. Schools need to continue to ensure that young people engage with texts of appropriate complexity and challenge, particularly when developing higher-order reading skills.

Inspectors found that schools need to continue to work on assessing progress during the broad general education and to develop a better shared understanding of standards. There were some schools that could not provide robust information about the progress that young people were making in their learning.

How well do secondary schools support young people to develop and learn?

Curriculum planning and structures within the sector have continued to evolve progressively as new qualifications replaced old ones. Over the past four years, the main focus for the sector has been the development of courses in the senior phase. Schools have been reviewing and developing their curriculum structures to take account of their experience of delivering National Qualifications and the need to create greater flexibility in the senior phase to help meet the needs of all young people. Schools should continue to pay particular attention to reviewing young people's experience in S3 to provide the culmination of the broad general education whilst also providing effective transition to the senior phase and courses leading to qualifications. Inspectors have observed that, as yet, opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, work-based learning, creativity and personal achievements were not always being planned well enough to ensure that all young people can apply their learning and progress with sufficient pace and challenge. Towards the end of the period covered by this report we found that many schools were indeed re-visiting the design of their S1 to S3 curriculum in the light of the experience they had gained of designing new senior phase programmes.

We found that many schools have responded well to the challenges of designing pathways for learners through the broad general education and the senior phase, and explaining the changes to parents and learners. In the best practice, schools were very clearly designing the senior phase curriculum as a coherent three-year phase, including pathways involving providers beyond the school as appropriate. All schools need to continue to focus on ensuring all young people have learning pathways to enable them to make the best progress. This includes continuing to work with primary schools to build on prior learning which has taken place at the primary stages. In some cases we found that schools needed to increase significantly the pace and depth of the work they were doing on developing the curriculum.

Since the publication of *Developing the Young Workforce*, Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy in June 2014, inspectors have noted a greater focus on developing young people's skills. This includes an increased commitment and drive in developing partnerships with families, local businesses and community learning and development organisations to contribute to young people's learning. Some schools need to improve the pace with which they widen their provision to develop young people's experiences and progression in skills. In particular, schools need to work with young people and their parents to ensure that young people have a clear understanding of their own skills and their application and relevance beyond school.

Young people would, for example, benefit from further support in describing the skills they have gained to employers. We have observed that Skills Development Scotland Careers Coaches support school staff to gain an understanding of the pathways available to school-age young people. To improve these further, schools now need to make better use of career-planning resources such as [My World of Work](#)⁶.

There remains room for improvement, particularly in providing young people with appropriate levels of challenge and opportunities to apply their learning in different contexts. As yet, approaches to personalising learning to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners are not always effective. Further work is required to ensure that all groups of young people, including those with additional support needs, move on to a positive destination.

Across the sector, inspectors have highlighted the school ethos, pastoral support provided to young people, and the quality of help for young people requiring additional support as areas of strength. Schools used a wide range of approaches to encourage positive relationships and behaviour. Overall, we found that staff promoted positive relationships and behaviour, and responded to negative behaviour appropriately. There has been a steady reduction in the number of temporary exclusions from schools over the period covered by this report.

We have seen schools become aware of their roles within Getting It Right for Every Child and work with partners to develop a more consistent, shared language to describe health and wellbeing. More work now needs done to ensure that Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education provides young people with knowledge and skills to make informed, responsible and healthy choices about their lives, the real world and online world.

How well do secondary schools improve the quality of their work?

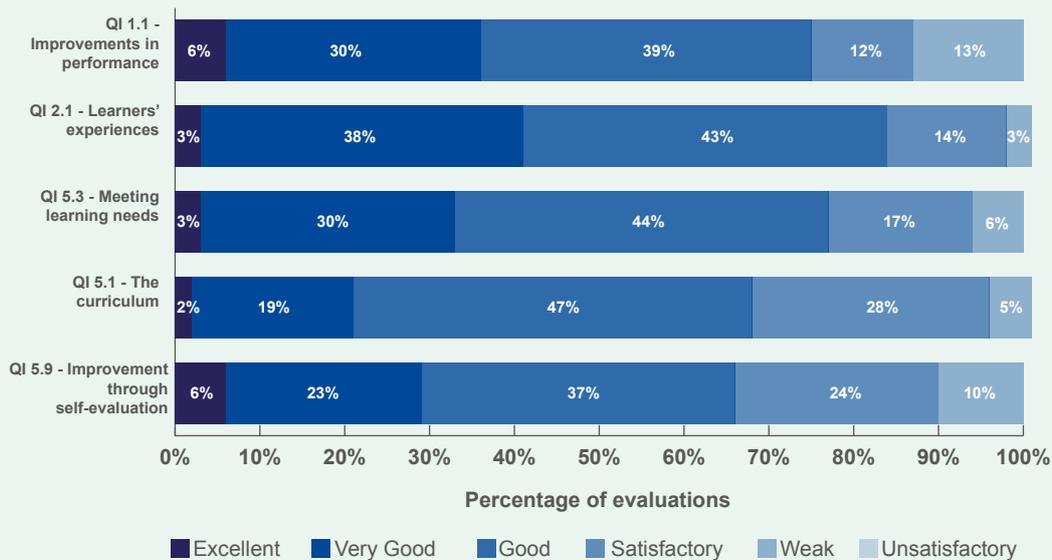
In many schools inspectors judged aspects of the leadership of the headteacher and the senior leadership team as key strengths. In particular, many headteachers showed skill in leading improvement with clear vision and drive. We found that the most effective headteachers used data and research well to inform improvement. In most secondary schools inspected, leadership at all levels was generally effective. This included the leadership of all staff, including faculty heads, principal teachers and newly qualified teachers, and the leadership of young people. In the best cases, a focus on distributed leadership was strengthening the capacity of these schools to work collaboratively and empowered leaders at all levels to drive change resulting in positive outcomes. Professional relationships between schools and their partners were also often found to be strong.

Over the course of the period covered by this report we have seen positive improvements in approaches to career-long professional learning (CLPL). In most secondary schools, leaders and teachers were committed to and engaged in a wide range of CLPL opportunities in school, within their local authority and nationally.

Inspectors found that most schools had a range of effective processes in place for gathering evidence about the quality of their work, but this was not always used effectively to plan for and secure improvements in outcomes for young people. There remains a need for schools to improve how they work with partners to evaluate the impact of joint working on improving outcomes for young people. The quality and impact of assessment, monitoring and tracking of young people's progress during the broad general education is an area requiring on-going development. Too many of the schools inspected were unable to provide whole-school data on achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels during S1 to S3.

⁶ Web service to support effective career planning

Quality indicator evaluations of secondary schools - 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016



From 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016 we carried out inspections in 109 secondary schools across Scotland. Most secondary schools received a positive inspection⁷.

Improvement through self-evaluation and learner voice

In Bearsden Academy, East Dunbartonshire Council, the headteacher and depute head with responsibility for self-evaluation have a very clear vision for school improvement. They give self-evaluation and improvement activity a very high priority in the school's day-to-day work. Principal teachers and other staff play a very important role in school improvement. Staff and young people support this vision, and understand that school improvement is the responsibility of all. As a result, there is a very strong culture of continuous improvement focused on ongoing drive to maintain very high standards of attainment and ensure positive destinations for all.

Young people are central to self-evaluation processes and outcomes. They are insightful, open and keen to improve their school. Learner voice has been an ongoing priority across the school for a number of years. Recently it has included the creation of the Bearsden Aspirational Team, which involves 30 young people from S1 to S6. Young people are skilled in sharing evaluative comments on the quality of their learning with staff in a respectful, helpful and positive manner. Young people complete a pupil improvement plan and work collaboratively to take responsibility for the delivery of that plan.

From this work, staff explore their practice and identify actions for change. There is clear evidence that these processes are leading to improvement in the school. Young people are learning more about school improvement through producing their own version of the Standards and Quality report. Pupils presented to their parents on 'growth mind set'. As a result, parents have a better understanding of their children's learning experiences in the school. This work was followed by visits by parents to subject departments to participate in typical lessons to get an experience of a Curriculum for Excellence classroom.

⁷ Satisfactory or better in each of the following quality indicators: improvements in performance, learners' experiences and meeting learning needs in secondary schools inspected between January 2012 and June 2016

Partnership working to enhance young people's personal achievements



In Eastwood High School, East Renfrewshire Council, effective partnership working with community learning and development services and others is successfully supporting young people to increase their personal achievements. Young people are engaging positively with a range of experiences beyond the classroom, many of which are supported by partners. These experiences offer opportunities for young people to develop and apply their knowledge and skills in relevant and purposeful contexts.

Young people in S5 and S6 are developing their skills for life and work through a range of leadership opportunities including leading after-school and lunchtime activities such as Bollywood dance and cheerleading groups and the Scalextrics club. Young people in the drama group are writing scripts and leading the group to produce a school show. As a result, they are developing their confidence and self-esteem. Young people who attend the 'Style Academy' took full responsibility for organising a fashion show and further developed their skills in organisation and teamwork.

A 'Schools to Market' class ran in conjunction with the Soil Association and a local business. This provided the opportunity for young people to work with children from associated primaries and with a chef to produce a product for sale to the public. In response to interest from young people in S6, the school has developed a programme to build capacity in supporting the mental health of their peers by training a group of young people in mental health first aid. Senior pupils organised activities to raise funds to undertake a qualification in Emergency First Aid with St Andrew's First Aid and raised awareness of the work of this service in the school's community.