Summarised inspection findings

Mariner Support Service

Falkirk Council

13 March 2018
Key contextual information

Mariner Support Services is a special secondary school for young people in Falkirk Council. The school has recently moved campus to a new building in Laurieston. There have been a number of recent staffing changes and the headteacher has been in post for just under a year. At the time of the inspection a number of teachers were new to the school and one DHT was class committed due to staff absence. The school roll is currently 20.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.3 Leadership of change</th>
<th>good</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community</td>
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<td>▪ strategic planning for continuous improvement</td>
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<td>▪ implementing improvement and change</td>
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Recently, staff, parents and partners of the Mariner Support Service reviewed its vision, values and aims and agreed an ambitious strategy with a focus on developing a community where everyone is valued and respected and delivers improved attainment and achievement for learners. Staff model the school’s values well through their interactions with young people. All staff have an understanding of the unique social, economic and cultural context of the wide community the school serves.

The headteacher has worked with his two very committed deputes to agree clear roles and responsibilities across the senior leadership team (SLT). Collectively they are implementing more strategic working practices including leading improvement groups across the service. The SLT are approachable and operate an open-door policy for staff. The headteacher should develop the roles of the SLT team members further using high quality professional and research based learning focussed on strategic leadership. This will help explicitly identify individual members responsibilities in taking forward priorities for school improvement.

The headteacher is respected by children and young people, staff, parents and partners. He is working effectively to develop strong and beneficial links with the local community including other secondary schools in Falkirk Council. The effective partnerships impact positively on the breadth of young people’s learning experiences. The additional partnerships planned by the headteacher with local schools will help to widen the curriculum further for Mariners’ learners and promote equality of opportunity. The headteacher has also established an inter-authority partnership with headteachers from neighbouring local authorities. The three headteachers competently undertake joint evaluative activities to provide suggested improvements to Mariner Support Services which are being implemented. The expansion of this partnership to include staff at all levels would support peer collaborative learning.

The SLT promote and encourage improvement through professional learning across the service. Staff at all levels are provided with protected time to lead and contribute to change and improvement, for example they are developing better models for tracking and monitoring young people’s progress in learning. The headteacher judges the pace of change well and is focused on the wellbeing of staff and young people. Staff have opportunities to plan and
develop new initiatives to enhance the quality of learners’ experiences, for example upcycling, bike academy, and animal husbandry. The school should continue to increase staff awareness of the relationship between effective self-evaluation and school improvement.

- The school has established a quality assurance framework to provide more formalised and consistent practice for continuous improvement. There is a detailed collegiate improvement calendar in place with quality assurance activity planned across the school years. The SLT and staff should develop further rigorous self-evaluation using the national curricular benchmarks and look for opportunities to work collaboratively with other schools.

- The SLT support all staff to identify areas for personal and professional development. As a result, staff have systematic and frequent opportunities to review and refresh their own practice. Recently, the professional capacity of staff has been built through high quality professional learning on trauma in childhood, nurture and Getting it Right for Every Child. Staff report that their newly acquired knowledge and skills is already having an impact on their practice.

- The school has experienced a number of staffing changes in recent times. The SLT has shown effective management skills in regards to the recruitment of new staffing. The school has been successful in attracting seconded staff from other Falkirk secondary schools on two year placements. As a result of these appointments, the curriculum has been broadened in areas such as mathematics, science and information communication technology (ICT).

- The SLT have created an environment and culture where staff are encouraged to be creative and suggest ideas to improve learning experiences for young people. For example staff are currently creating a more extensive library based on young people’s personal interests to encourage reading.
2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment | satisfactory

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

The learning environment is built on a foundation of caring, nurturing relationships. All staff have an insightful understanding of the wellbeing needs of young people and their families. They help learners to feel included and young people told us that they are supported even 'when they are in the wrong'. All staff are being trained well in therapeutic strategies and interventions to support young people to overcome adverse life experiences and engage more in learning.

Teaching and support staff provide well-judged support and challenge which is developing young people’s readiness to learn and reduce their levels of anxiety. Overall, when motivated to learn and appropriately supported, the majority of young people engage in lessons. In most classes observed, young people worked independently on tasks supported by a high level of attention from staff. However, the level of support does at times limit young people’s independence and discourages responsibility for their own learning. Learners’ experiences are too often teacher led and centred on textbooks or worksheets. Teachers should plan lessons which offer young people improved opportunities to lead their own learning. Lessons should also provide increased challenge and be delivered at a brisker pace.

A key improvement priority of the school is improving young people’s learning in health and wellbeing. The school has developed its programme of outdoor and community education and its life skills curriculum. Staff creatively use the outdoor environment to provide motivating contexts for learning. Young people learn to care for farm animals at Langlands Farm, design, build and sell garden furniture at the summer fete and make bath bombs with a local cosmetic company. Learners’ achievements and activities in and out of school are celebrated and shared well on attractive and visual online newsletters.

Young people’s learning is being enhanced by the increased use of digital technology across curricular areas including social subjects and technology. The school recognises there is a need to develop this area further with the appointment of a new member of staff for technology.

Young people are encouraged to share their views on the pupil council and were successful in getting the school to change their lunch menu and invest in improving the outdoor areas. There is a commitment to develop creative ways to include young people more meaningfully in improvement planning. Young people’s personalised support time in the morning should be reviewed to ensure the sessions are providing high quality feedback to learners. This will help young people to have a more accurate understanding of their progress in learning and what they need to do to improve.
Teachers use a range of assessment processes to assess young people’s abilities during an induction period of six weeks. This helps staff to get to know each young person’s areas of strength and any barriers to their learning. Staff get to know each young person and their family well throughout this initial assessment period. Once staff have a more detailed knowledge of each young person, they take good account of their unique and varied needs to help plan learning activities and this is leading to most young people making appropriate progress in their learning. The school, supported by the local authority, should ensure mainstream secondary schools provide more accurate and detailed information regarding each young person’s learning prior to them starting at Mariner Support Services. The school should develop further young people’s initial assessment period to provide more detailed information regarding barriers to learning and any identified additional support needs.

In almost all lessons staff provide appropriate verbal feedback, or written feedback in jotters, to promote young people’s understanding of how successful they have been and what steps they need to take to improve. The school should continue with their plans to improve the quality of feedback given to young people to ensure they have a greater understanding of their learning needs and how they can improve.

Ongoing assessment is not yet an integral part of planning for progression in young people’s learning. The school now needs to develop approaches to assessment so that teachers have up to date accurate information on each young person’s learning. This information should be used to ensure planning leads to improvements in young people’s progress.

Teachers are beginning to use the Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes to plan young people’s learning experiences. A few are developing systems to track and monitor progression in young people’s learning. The school now needs to develop a consistent whole school approach to tracking and monitoring young people’s progress with their learning.
2.2 Curriculum: Learning and development pathways

The rationale for the school’s curriculum reflects the context of the school and the profile of its young people. Partners talk about how the unique features of the school community inform the design of the curriculum including the increased focus on experiences beyond the classroom.

Over the last year, there has been an increase in the range of curriculum options thus providing more flexible learning pathways attuned to the aspirations and interests of young people. The school has successfully engaged with a wide range of partners and providers to ensure young people experience more personalised, high quality active learning. As a consequence of these partnerships the school is now delivering learning more through the four contexts of the curriculum including theatre visits, outdoor education and music workshops. The school needs to develop further plans for progression to show how knowledge, understanding and skills are developed over time. Staff should plan to develop learning approaches across subject areas to ensure all young people are benefiting from their full entitlement in all curricular areas.

Staff are committed to developing more flexible pathways to provide opportunities for all young people to engage with class activities and develop skills for learning life and work. They recognise the need for more choice in the senior phase and are planning to offer a wider range of qualifications and accredited courses. The headteacher’s plan for sharing resources with referring schools will help this process. For example, through using the swimming pool at a local mainstream secondary school. A restructuring of the school day would allow flexibility to ensure young people can attend all timetabled classes and outdoor activities.

Young people are developing skills in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and digital literacy in a progressive way. However, they would benefit from staff taking more responsibility for the development of these key areas across all areas of the curriculum. This will require staff to have a shared understanding of what progression looks like. An effective tracker will capture these skills at a high level in a variety of meaningful contexts.

The school has designed a care course with opportunities to gain the qualification by developing their skills through work based deployment in care settings including a local nursery. The school is negotiating to have the course recognised as an alternative learning pathway to a Modern Apprenticeship to promote equity of access with learners attending other schools.
2.7 Partnerships : Impact on learners – parental engagement

- See Choice QI 2.7
2.1 Safeguarding

- 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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.
3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school’s approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people’s ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Young people experience positive relationships with staff and their peers and this supports the child centred ethos across the school. Young people, many of whom have previously disengaged from education, are treated with respect and this results in the school re-engaging most young people into full-time education. Staff model positive behaviours well in their daily interactions with each young person and are adept at developing positive relationships with parents. This is resulting in parents feeling welcome in the school and supports a very genuine sense of partnership working between the school and parents. A few parents state that their relationship with the school has led to improvements in their own wellbeing.

- All staff have an understanding of Getting it Right for Every Child and take account of each young person’s unique needs and interests when planning learning activities. Teachers use the wellbeing indicators to reflect on and assess each young person’s wellbeing. This supports them to identify areas of concern and any required interventions. Interventions are appropriate, timely and lead to young people being more able to engage in their learning. Where young people become distressed all staff are adept at reducing young people’s anxieties and are able to re-integrate most young people back into their lessons with the minimum of disruption. The school should continue with their plans to develop young people’s knowledge and understanding of the wellbeing indicators and help enable them to use the indicators to identify progression in the development of their own wellbeing.

- All staff have undertaken a range of relevant professional learning opportunities. This has resulted in staff having a greater understanding of the effects of trauma and attachment issues. As a result staff are continuing to develop the nurturing approach evident across the school and most young people say they enjoy learning at the school and feel valued.

- The support staff in the school work well with young people and their parents. Support for learning assistants help young people to understand what they are working on and to overcome any barriers to their learning. Family support workers encourage young people to attend school in the morning through home visits and join them on learning activities such as horse riding lessons and up-cycling. This is resulting in improvements in young people’s attendance and participation in learning activities. Family support workers also play a key role in supporting parents through the work of the well-established parents group. This group has helped parents to develop their own confidence and a few report that the group has helped them to better understand their child’s needs. Inclusion workers offer support to young people in activities such as outdoor learning, bicycle maintenance and art. The community learning and development worker supports young people at points of transition particularly when moving onto post school placements. The support for learning teacher works off-site with those young people currently attending the school on a part-time basis. This ensures these
young people have regular contact with the school and are supported to continue with their education. As a result of the range of support this group of staff offers, almost all young people are seen to re-engage with education, be more able to develop positive trusting relationships with adults and to undertake new challenges. The roles of the different support workers often overlap and the school should consider how best the unique experience, talents and skills of this group are deployed to maximise their impact on improvements in outcomes for young people.

- Young people are not receiving their full entitlement to education and there is too much time during the current school day which is not focussed on meaningful learning activities. Senior managers require, with the support of the local authority, to make improvements to the school week to ensure young people have access to their full entitlement to education. This review should include time currently dedicated to ‘key group’ and ‘green seats’. A number of young people attend the school on a part-time basis. Whilst plans are in place for these young people to attend full-time the school should, again with the support of the local authority, review these arrangements to ensure these young people do not miss out on their full entitlement to education.

- Young people have a say in how the school is run through the work of the pupil council. The school should continue to support young people to develop their confidence so that they can make full use of the opportunities the pupil council provides to contribute to school improvement.

- All young people’s targets are captured in their child’s plans. These are reviewed regularly by support teachers, young people and their parents to identify progress in meeting targets. Target setting should be more explicitly linked to planned learning to support tracking and monitoring of progression in young people’s skills development.
3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

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
- equality for all learners

At the time of inspection, there were 20 young people attending the school from first to fifth year. Young people in the senior phase are routinely provided with opportunities to attend college part-time as part of their planned curricular programme. All young people attending the school have a history of disrupted schooling which has impacted on their attainment and rates of attendance. This has resulted in the referring schools not always being able to provide accurate evidence of levels of attainment and achievement. However, the evidence from regular support and challenge meetings between individual learners and their key teacher shows that most young people are making appropriate progress from prior levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy whilst at Mariner Support Services. Most young people in the senior phase are working towards nationally accredited courses in a range of subject areas.

The school monitors young people’s attendance well. Overall, based on the data provided by the school, attendance rates of most young people has improved since transferring to the Mariner Support Service.

Commendably, the school works with a comprehensive range of partners to provide young people with a wide array of opportunities for achievement beyond the classroom. This includes a range of skills useful for employment such as repairing bikes, caring for older members of the community and planning routes, equipment and supplies for expeditions on the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme. This is supporting young people to develop further their skills for work. The school should continue to increase opportunities for young people to gain increased levels of accreditation for their achievements.

From the information provided by the school, there has been a marked increase in the number of SQA units and courses achieved over the last three sessions. The number of course awards increased from two in 2014/15 to 13 in 2015/16; and then to 25 in 2016/17. These increases were seen across National awards at level 2 - 4.

The number of awards of national units increased from 20 in 2014/15 to 30 in 2015/16, an increase of 50%; and then to 113 in 2016/17, a further increase of 126%. These increases were seen mainly at National levels 2 and 3; at National levels 4 and 5 there was a decrease from 10 units in 2015/16 to 4 units in 2016/17. The number of SCQF awards increased from six in 2014/15 to 10 in 2015/16 and then to 16 in 2016/17.

There was a notable increase in the numbers and range of courses on offer at the school. In 2014/15 the courses and units achieved by young people were in a limited range of subjects
such as numeracy, mathematics and communication. By 2016/17 the range had expanded considerably, to include Morality and Belief, Scottish Studies, Life in the Roman World and Classical Greece, Performing Arts, Behaviours and Relationships, Working with Materials and Craft Tools. The introduction of more courses and units at National 5 and above would provide increased challenge and progression for a number of young people.

- Over the last three years, based on the school’s own data, of the 21 school leavers 19 entered a positive destination. The destinations are mainly attending courses at college or undertaking an activity agreement.

- Young people are working towards a widening range of achievements. These include ASDAN, care qualifications and The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. Young people are developing their confidence from an outdoor educational programme including animal husbandry.
2.7 Partnerships

- The development and promotion of partnerships
- Collaborative learning and improvement
- Impact on learners

The school engages well with a wide range of partners. Specialist inputs from, for example, educational psychologists support the school to ensure targets within child’s plans are appropriate and focus on the needs of each individual young person. Partners speak highly of the openness and approachability of the staff in the school. This supports effective planning across agencies to ensure interventions are appropriate and result in improved outcomes for young people. The school should now develop further their partnerships so that partners are more fully involved in joint self-evaluation of the work of the school.

There is regular communication between partners and staff in the school and all partners are clear as to the purpose of their involvement with each young person. Partnership agreements, where used, are effective and ensure all young people receive the input they expect from each partner. Agreements are reviewed regularly and updated as required to guarantee that the partnership is working effectively and delivering the level of service agreed with the school. All partners are committed to working with the school and have a good understanding of each young person’s learning needs. They adapt their input appropriately and take good account of each young person’s aspirations when offering support and challenge. This is resulting in young people accessing a wide range of activities which are developing their skills and confidence.

Commendably the school has productive working relationships with parents of young people attending the school. Parents speak very highly of the trust and mutual respect they have developed with staff at the school and how this supports them to engage meaningfully in their young person’s education. The nurturing and caring environment which young people experience extends beyond the school to include a range of supports offered to parents. This ensures they are treated as equal partners in their young person’s education and are welcome and encouraged to be fully involved in the life of the school. Events planned by the family support, and community learning and development, workers during the summer break ensure families are well supported throughout this time. This supports parents and young people well to maintain positive links with staff at the school. On returning to school after the summer break young people who access support during the summer break settle back into school routines well knowing there are adults in the school who they know well and can trust.

The well-established parents group runs sessions which have led to improvements in parents wellbeing. A few parents who spoke to HM Inspectors commented that the work of the parents group has led to them developing a better understanding of their young person and has improved their relationship with them. The parents who attend the group see themselves as learners and this supports them to understand how they can better support their young person with their learning. Parents attending the parents group are very proud of having won a national gardening award for their work in the school garden. They are proactive in encouraging other parents to join and attend the group. Parents at the school are fully involved in the school’s journey to improvement and contribute to the school improvement plan.
Explanation of terms of quality

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

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost all</td>
<td>91%-99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>75%-90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>50%-74%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minority/less than half</td>
<td>15%-49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A few</td>
<td>less than 15%</td>
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Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.