Summarised inspection findings

Montrose Academy

Angus Council

25 February 2025

Key contextual information

School Name: Montrose Academy
Council: Angus
SEED number: 5308038
Roll (Nov 2024):   877

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

Exclusions are generally above the national average.

In September 2022, 16.6 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2023 0.3 percent of pupils live in 20 per cent most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2022, the school reported that 47.5 per cent of pupils had additional support needs.

The headteacher has been in post for seven years. He is supported by four depute heads, one of whom is in an acting role. The school has had significant staffing challenges with both permanent and temporary vacancies across a few curricular areas.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	weak
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	

■ Relationships between almost all members of staff and young people are positive resulting in a supportive and caring ethos. The majority of young people demonstrate a responsible attitude to their learning and participate well in the activities within the classroom. A few young people are not fully engaged in their learning. At times they demonstrate low level disruptive behaviours that distract other learners from the focus of the lesson. Senior leaders should continue to support staff in embedding the school value to "Be respectful" and expectations of the school's learning framework. Staff should have higher and more consistent expectations of young people and what they are capable of.

■ In a minority of lessons, teachers plan a range of activities for young people that meet their needs well. However, young people's learning experiences are too passive in the majority of lessons. The majority of class tasks and activities are insufficiently challenging across all year groups, particularly in the Broad General Education (BGE). As a result, learning does not always meet the individual needs of young people and a majority of learners would benefit from a greater degree of challenge.

■ There are six zones of supported classes across the school that collectively support 51 young people from S1 to S6. Across the zones, activities are planned and delivered to meet the needs of learners well. In a few zones, the pace of learning is too slow. Teachers need to take better account of the individual needs of young people when planning and delivering activities. At times, young people experience learning that is too easy, whilst for others, activities are too challenging and do not take appropriate account of their ability. The use of concrete materials, assistive technology and more varied activities would better engage young people.

● Most young people in the supported zone classes benefit from positive relationships with staff and with each other. For those with severe and complex needs, staff have created a nurturing and supportive ethos that helps young people to feel safe and settled. For those young people who have limited or no verbal language, staff employ a range of helpful strategies to support and enable understanding and communication. Use of on-body signing, mutual signing, sensory stories and visual supports is enabling young people to progress well with their learning. This strong practice could be shared more widely across other supported classes.

■ In a few subject areas, pupils are given opportunities to lead their learning very well. In a majority of subject areas, there is an over reliance on teacher-led activities. Teachers and middle leaders should work together to develop a greater range of teaching approaches designed to support all learners to engage fully with their learning. Teachers need to ensure an appropriate balance between teacher-led activities and independent, enquiry-based learning.

■ In almost all lessons, teachers share the main purpose of learning and how young people can be successful in their learning. This is an ongoing school improvement activity. The quality of the ways teachers frame learning is very variable. In a majority of lessons these were not tailored to the individual needs of learners. Young people would benefit from having a clearer understanding of the purpose of lessons. This would support them to be able to evaluate their progress in learning more effectively. Teachers should plan for more opportunities for young people to co-create success criteria and take more responsibility for their learning. In a minority of lessons, effective use of starters and plenaries demonstrate that learning is planned effectively for the next lesson and builds on learners' prior learning.

■ In most lessons teachers' instructions and explanations are clear. Teachers use questioning techniques to check for understanding and recalling information. A minority of teachers make use of skilled questioning techniques. They support pupils in a minority of classes to be more engaged in their learning and make links across their learning. Senior leaders should support staff to share examples of effective practice. This would support teachers to have a greater focus on developing the use of effective questioning and promote higher order thinking.

■ In most lessons digital tools such as smart boards are used to support learning. In a few lessons, pupils benefit from digital resources that enhance their learning experience. Teachers should provide more opportunities for young people to lead learning and apply skills in different contexts.

■ Teachers use a variety of assessment approaches to check for understanding. Most teachers use summative assessments to measure progress and attainment at all levels. Young people would benefit from more regular use of formative assessment. This should support young people's understanding of their strengths and how assessment helps them to improve their work. The development of an assessment policy would allow teachers to develop further their shared approaches and understanding about the principles, purposes and aims of assessment.

■ Middle leaders and teachers participate in moderation activities in their subject areas with colleagues from other schools across the local authority. This is building their confidence when

making judgements on young people's progress in the BGE. A minority of teachers are taking on roles of quality assurance and moderation support officers as part of planned school improvement priorities. This group has representatives from almost all faculties. The work of this group is at an early stage. Senior leaders should support teachers in continuing to develop their shared understanding and application of the achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels. Having a greater understanding of national standards has the potential for teachers' planning to support appropriately all groups of young people. A few teachers refer to moderation and verification interchangeably. Teachers would benefit from a shared understanding of the full moderation cycle.

■ Most teachers take part in verification activities for their subject within the school. A few teachers participate in work nationally with SQA and contribute to discussions at a subject level. This is supporting a few teachers to have a stronger understanding of national standards. Senior and middle leaders should consider how best to share this knowledge more effectively to support assessment judgements across all curricular areas.

■ Teachers are beginning to integrate learner conversations when planning lessons. In a few subject areas, these conversations help a minority of young people in understanding their progress and next steps in learning. There needs to be greater consistency in the purpose and quality of these conversations. The targets arising from these conversations should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. This will support teachers to monitor and measure the impact on young people's learning and attainment.

■ Across the school, all faculties use a variety of approaches to track and monitor the progress of young people in both the BGE and senior phase. Although this provides helpful information about young people's progress, these systems are variable in quality and effectiveness. Teachers now need to use this information more effectively to help inform their planning of tasks and activities that are set at the right level of challenge. A greater understanding of the links between monitoring and tracking progress and planning learning, teaching and assessment is required.

■ Senior leaders should continue to review the impact of the reporting system to support young people's learning and progression. Parents would benefit from further information about how their child is assessed and making progress in their learning.

■ Teachers across a variety of curriculum areas are beginning to work together to support staff to improve the quality of learning and teaching. This work is at an early stage and as yet is not impacting fully on improving the learners' experiences. Senior leaders should proceed as planned to develop a shared understanding of high quality 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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	weak

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

■ In 2022/23, almost all young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level or better in literacy by the end of S3. The majority achieved CfE fourth level. In 2022/23, the majority of young people achieved CfE third level or better in numeracy. A minority achieved fourth level in numeracy. This represents a significant decline in numeracy achievement from 2021/22. More robust tracking of attainment is being developed to ensure gaps in learning are identified earlier. This will allow for appropriate supports to be put in place at an earlier stage.

■ Young people who require additional support are supported well by a range of strategies which help them in their progress towards achieving expected levels.

■ Teachers with responsibility for literacy engage in regular moderation activities with departmental colleagues. As a result, judgements regarding young people's attainment in literacy are gradually becoming more robust and consistent.

■ Teachers with responsibility for numeracy have identified the need to develop a more consistent approach to teaching numeracy skills.

Attainment over time
Senior phase

Leavers (literacy)
■ Most young people leaving Montrose Academy have maintained steady levels of performance in literacy over the past three years, with the exception of SCQF level 6. Between 2020/21 and 2022/23 most young people achieved Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy, in line with the virtual comparator (VC). Although performance is in line with the VC, at SCQF level 6, there is a decline in attainment over the last three years.

■ The majority of young people leaving school who have an additional support need (ASN) achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. A minority of young people in this group achieved SCQF level 6. Performance at this level represents a declining pattern of achievement since 2020/21.

Leavers (numeracy)
■ Leavers' performance in numeracy over the last two years requires improvement. The majority of young people leaving school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. Whilst this measure has been in line with the VC each year from 2019/20 to 2021/22, for 2022/23, this measure is significantly lower than the VC. This represents a declining pattern of achievement. A significant minority of young people leaving school

achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy. This has been in line with the VC for each year since 2019/20. Whilst in line with the VC, it does represent an overall decline in attainment over this period.

- A minority of young people leaving school who have an ASN achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. A few young people in this cohort achieved SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy. There is no consistent pattern of numeracy performance for young people with an additional support need.

Cohorts (literacy)
- As young people move through the school their achievements in literacy are broadly in line with the VC. At S4, by S5 and by S6, there is no consistent pattern of improvement.

Cohorts (numeracy)
- At S4, by S5 and by S6, attainment has been significantly lower or much lower than the VC. There is no consistent pattern of improvement for numeracy.

National Qualifications
- Attainment at National 5 (N5) and Higher English is below the national average for all levels of awards.

- Attainment at National 5 Applications of Mathematics is much lower than national average. Overall attainment at National 5 and Higher Mathematics is much lower than national average.

- Senior leaders need to review dual presentations in S4 given that nearly a third of young people are dual entered for both National 4 and National 5.

Attainment over time BGE
- Senior leaders are able to demonstrate attainment over time. By the end of S3 in 2023/24, most young people achieve CfE third level across their curricular choices with the majority achieving CfE fourth level. These judgements are not yet reliable or valid across all curricular areas and therefore further moderation is required.

Senior phase

Improving attainment for all
Leavers
- When compared using average complementary tariff points, the attainment of young people leaving school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 is generally in line with the VC. Whilst in line with the VC, there is no clear pattern of improving the attainment of young people. The average complementary tariff points achieved by the lowest attaining 20%, and middle attaining 60% show a pattern of decline since 2020/21.

- The attainment of young people with an ASN, demonstrates no clear and consistent pattern over the five years since 2018/19.

Cohorts
- At S4, the complimentary tariff scores for the lowest 20% and middle 60% show a declining pattern over the last five years with performance significantly lower or much lower than the VC. By S5 and by S6, there is no consistent pattern of improvement and attainment is significantly lower or much lower than the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

Breadth and Depth

■ At S4, performance at SCQF level 5C or better for one or more to six or more courses shows a declining pattern of attainment. Attainment for this measure is consistently significantly lower than the VC and in the latest year, 2023/24, the school are performing significantly much lower than the VC. The percentage of young people attaining top quality awards at SCQF level 5A or better also shows declining attainment for one or more to five or more courses. This is consistently significantly lower or much lower than the VC.

■ By S5, performance at SCQF level 5C or better for one or more to four or more courses shows a declining pattern of attainment. The school performs significantly lower or much lower than the VC. At SCQF level 6C or better, including top quality passes, there is no consistent improvement over time and the attainment for this measure is significantly lower or much lower than the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

■ By S6, performance at SCQF level 6C or better for one or more to five or more courses shows a declining pattern of attainment. The represents significantly lower or much lower attainment than the VC.

■ A minority of young people leave S6 with no course awards from their final year in school. Senior leaders should review the appropriateness of courses for young people and support them to achieve more highly.

■ Senior leaders are reviewing the ways in which the progress of learners is tracked and monitored. A pilot of this project targeting S5 learners aiming for three or more and five or more passes at level 6 had led to an improvement in attainment for this group. This approach should now be applied to more learners and target learners at an earlier stage.

■ Young people's attainment across the supported zone classes is evidenced in different ways including support plans, learning targets and pupil profiles. There is a need to develop more consistent approaches to assessing and tracking and monitoring young people's attainment. This will help to ensure that they provide a range of robust data, which captures young people's attainment reliably. This should include how well young people are attaining across all areas of the curriculum. In the supported classes, a few young people at senior phase gain National Qualifications (NQs). There is a need to consider whether young people would benefit from a greater range and higher levels of NQs including skills-based courses.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

■ The majority of young people benefit from taking part in a range of wider achievement activities. Across S1-S6, young people take part in a wide range of activities that include sport, music, arts, STEM, personal development and citizenship activities. Young people speak positively about their involvement with Angus Youth Orchestra, Men's Shed, Somerfield Spitfire Project, Young Befrienders and the Youth Philanthropy Initiative. School staff have developed effective partnerships with local groups and community organisations. Through these activities, young people are developing important skills including increased confidence, communication and teamwork.

■ A few young people are developing useful leadership skills by participating in activities linked to the pupil parliament and through roles including junior librarians, prefects and school captains. A minority of young people in S6 are progressing to lead learning and support younger children, for example as subject ambassadors and through volunteering. A few young people are being accredited for their involvement in wider achievement activities, for example, as STEM Leaders, through a well-established Duke of Edinburgh programme, and by participating in the Rugby Achievement Programme that supports S1-3 to gain qualifications in rugby,

coaching and refereeing. There is scope to explore accreditation of achievements for a greater number of young people.

- Senior leaders and staff celebrate the success of young people's achievements in a number of ways. This includes praise postcards, communications home, departmental noticeboards and well-received weekly newsletters. Recently, young people who consistently demonstrate the school values have been recognised and celebrated at dedicated house assemblies. The school has an established system for collating young people's wider achievements. Young people's participation both in and out of school is recognised at the annual wider achievement ceremony. This incorporates a colours programme which celebrates a few young people who represent the school regionally, nationally and internationally. Young people speak positively about the colours programme which inspires a great amount of pride and supports school ethos. The next step for senior leaders and staff is to use the data collected to identify young people not participating in wider achievement and address gaps in engagement. Senior leaders and key staff plan to develop a framework linked to skills for learning, life and work. This will help develop young people's ability to recognise and articulate the skills they are developing as a result of participating in wider achievement.

Equity for all learners
- Staff understand the social, cultural and economic context of the school. They are aware of the importance of removing the costs associated with school day. Senior leaders have ensured there are no additional costs to the curriculum, or for the majority of activities beyond the school day. Senior leaders and staff recognise the importance of building positive relationships with families to improve experiences for young people affected by poverty, those with lower levels of attendance and those with an ASN.

- When compared using average complementary tariff points, in 2022/23, young people leaving school who reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 3 and 6 attain in line with other young people living in the same deciles across Scotland. Attainment is lower than the national average in 2022/23 for young people living in deciles 5, 7, 8 and 9.

- Young people at risk of underachieving are supported effectively through the inclusion hub to attain a suite of SCQF level 3 and 4 qualifications. There is a current priority on literacy and numeracy for those intending to leave school. Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) has been used to employ additional staff and to purchase resources and the services of outside providers. The PEF focus has been on supporting a few young people most at risk of not achieving success and becoming disengaged from school. Senior leaders are at the early stages of tracking the impact of PEF interventions in closing gaps in attainment. They need to carefully monitor the impact of this work to ensure it is improving outcomes for these young people, and to ascertain which interventions are making the most difference.

- Attendance in the school is in line with the national average. Whilst attendance procedures are in place and are followed, these are not yet improving attendance for certain individuals and groups of young people. Senior leaders and pastoral staff track and monitor the attendance of young people that cause concern, including those who find staying in class challenging. Staff should, as planned, now look at implementing practical strategies to support learner engagement and improve attendance and timekeeping. A few young people have improved their engagement in learning through involvement with dedicated school supports. These involve the inclusion hub and the PEF-funded Home Learning programme.

- The number of exclusion incidents has increased in recent years. Staff are aware of the need to consider all factors impacting on a young person's life before excluding them from school. There is a need to ensure effective planning is in place to reduce the likelihood of similar

situations arising in future. This includes analysing the reasons for exclusion incidents and contributing factors.

■ Most young people stay on at school beyond S4, with a minority continuing to the end of S6. Staff work with a range of partners to support young people when they leave school. Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, almost all young people entered a positive destination on leaving school. This has been broadly in line with the VC over this period.

Other relevant evidence

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. Several areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

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.