

Summarised inspection findings

New Struan School, Alloa, Clackmannanshire

13 August 2019

Key contextual information

New Struan School is an independent special school situated in Alloa, Clackmannanshire. The school is the only education provision of Scottish Autism. It provides care and education for children and young people aged 5-19 with a range of additional support needs resulting from their autism spectrum disorder. The school roll is 21, two primary-aged children, nine broad general education secondary and ten senior phase.

1.3 Leadership of change

good

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:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- Led by the senior leadership team, the school has revisited its vision, values and aims. Four key values of happiness, pride, trust and flourish have been selected. The school's aims focus on developing children's and young people's skills across the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. The school charter has a primary aim of realising children's rights in relation to the school environment, relationships and learners' potential. Embedding these values and aims into the life of the school is a priority within this year's school improvement plan. The school has made a promising start to taking this forward particularly in terms of positive relationships and an autism friendly school environment. Although children, young people and parents were consulted in this review, it was school staff who contributed most fully in creating the new vision and aims. The school needs to continue to develop further ways to empower children, young people, parents and partners to be more involved in whole school change and improvement.
- Scottish Autism are in the process of establishing an updated vision and values for the wider organisation including the school. In doing so, it is important that senior managers ensure that the vision and values for the school do not become confused between the school itself and Scottish Autism as a whole.
- In recent times, the school has focussed on developing a positive ethos and culture centred on improving children's and young people's wellbeing. The school has been successful in taking this forward. Effectively led by the headteacher and depute headteacher, all education staff at New Struan School have a child-centred approach to all aspects of school life. This results in an ethos and culture which places the needs of children and young people at the heart of everything that takes place at the school. Staff are committed to supporting children and young people to feel safe, cared for and included. This is having a positive impact on children's and young people's wellbeing. The school now needs to build on this success by focussing more collegiate dialogue on improving outcomes for children and young people. These discussions also need to have a greater focus on attainment and achievement.
- Children and young people offer their views on the life of the school as appropriate. They do this via review meetings, the pupil voice group and learning conversations. Children and young

people predominantly offer their opinion on their own circumstances. They feel listened to and their views often lead to changes in their personal programmes. However, children and young people need to participate more meaningfully in whole school improvement. As planned, the school should continue to enhance the role of the pupil voice group to enable it to offer thoughts and opinions on improvement and change.

- The headteacher and depute headteacher provide highly effective leadership. The school community report that they are visible, approachable and highly supportive. Together, they are providing a clear sense of direction for school improvement. They are ably supported by senior managers at Scottish Autism and the Board of Directors, with governance being a strength of the school. Teaching staff are leading on many aspects of school improvement including pupil voice and distributed leadership. The headteacher, with the support of staff, now needs to monitor children's and young people's progress with their learning in a more focussed and systematic way. The collation of such intelligence and data would also provide valuable evidence to influence future school improvement priorities.
- Teachers and classroom assistants benefit from access to a range of individual and collective career-long professional learning opportunities including autism specific approaches and de-escalation strategies. Staff would now benefit from more training on pedagogy and curriculum development. The headteacher is looking outwardly by building links with senior managers of similar independent special schools and local authority schools. She should now continue with plans to visit other schools to share practice and provide opportunities for more moderation activities to be introduced.
- Recent school improvement priorities are having a positive impact on the life of the school. For example, the recently introduced school charter is having a positive influence on the ethos and culture of the school. Pupil attendance is high and the number of incidents of challenging behaviour are decreasing. Future improvement priorities now need to have success criteria which are more closely linked to improving attainment and achievement.

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

- All teachers and classroom assistants have caring, nurturing relationships with children and young people. They help children and young people to feel safe, happy and included. Most staff understand the needs of children and young people well. They are responsive to these needs particularly when a child or young person is distressed and requiring support. This is supporting children and young people to be motivated and increases their readiness to learn. As recognised by the school, staff now need to be more aspirational and increase their expectations of what all children and young people can achieve. In a minority of lessons, children and young people engage in activities which are not purposeful and do not provide any skills progression or accreditation.
- The school environment is calm, welcoming and autism friendly. Staff make good use of break out areas, outdoor spaces and specialist facilities such as the sensory room. Partners are a positive feature of the school and they offer a range of high quality learning experiences well suited to the needs and interests of children and young people. Children and young people are engaging particularly well with both active and therapeutic sessions including for example, Rebound Therapy, Bikeability and Phyzzpod.
- Although most children and young people engage in valuable, stimulating lessons most of the time, staff need to eradicate unnecessary 'down time' especially at the start and end of the school day. In particular, more able learners would benefit from following bespoke programmes which centre far more on raising their attainment and gaining qualifications.
- Children and young people benefit from regular opportunities to exercise choice, express their views and influence their learning experience. They are able to contribute to the subject matter of many lessons and the individualised bespoke programmes of learning they follow in school. Children and young people take responsibility for sustainability through contributing to the school's Eco-committee and participating in eco-friendly activities. The school should now consider ways to empower children and young people to influence the curriculum on offer and take more responsibility for their own learning.
- Overall, the quality of teaching across the school is variable. In the majority of classes, learning activities are relevant to children's and young people's needs, interests and aspirations. In these lessons, teachers use a variety of scaffolding approaches built on prior learning to help motivate and engage children and young people. Communication aids are used effectively to allow children and young people to contribute in their learning in most lessons. However, a minority of lessons are insufficiently challenging, overly repetitive and delivered at a slow pace. A few lessons are also overly reliant on worksheets, textbooks and desk-based activities. This can lead to children and young people being demotivated and engaging in work avoidance behaviours. In order to help improve this position, teachers would benefit from increased professional learning on what constitutes effective learning, teaching and assessment.

- There is a strong sense of teamwork across the school. Teachers and classroom assistants are highly motivated to meet the needs of children and young people, and support them to achieve. In most lessons, staff work well together to provide engaging learning experiences, offer one-to-one support and help keep learners on task. Most staff are adept at supporting children and young people if they become anxious or distressed. However, in a few classes, the roles of staff are not clearly defined. The school needs to ensure that in all classes, and for all learners, teachers are responsible for the planning, review and assessment of learning. A minority of teachers also need to take more responsibility for classroom management and coordinating any support staff in their class.
- In most classes, instructions and explanations are clear and most children and young people are aware of the purpose of learning. In the majority of lessons observed, teachers and classroom assistants make effective use of questioning to encourage children and young people to think and build on prior learning. However, in a few classes, teachers and classroom assistants were too quick to intervene with an answer before a learner could respond.
- In the majority of classes observed, teachers use digital technology well to enhance learning experiences and help children and young people to communicate. The use of outdoor spaces to enhance learning is widely used by most staff. The school recognises that the use of digital technology and outdoor spaces requires further development. Learning in these areas needs to be more coherent and progressive.
- A range of partners contribute effectively to enhance the curriculum on offer and provide children and young people with highly stimulating and popular learning experiences. This allows children and young people to participate and succeed in activities including, cycling, trampolining, animation and drama.
- Teachers use a range of formative and summative assessment approaches to help monitor how well children and young people are progressing with their learning. Most learning activities build on prior learning and the majority of staff use a sufficient range of assessment approaches to make judgements about children's and young people's progress. There are examples of teachers skilfully using creative assessment approaches to determine whether children and young people achieve identified milestones with their learning. However, the school's approaches to assessment requires further development to ensure that assessment consistently forms a more integral part of the planning process for future learning experiences. Staff need to continue to develop their understanding of assessment to enable them to use a wider range of evidence. This will support them to accurately measure children's and young people's progress with their learning across all areas of the curriculum. There is scope to develop more collegiate approaches to planning for progression across the curriculum, particularly at the broad general education (BGE).
- The school has identified the need for systems for moderating practice and understanding of standards to be strengthened. As planned, staff should be supported in the development of their understanding of shared standards in order to improve consistency across the school. The plan to moderate practice with colleagues in other similar independent special schools will help take this forward.
- The school has made a positive start with gathering data on learners' progress. Teachers are becoming more confident in tracking and monitoring progress including small milestones where appropriate. With the help of a commercial tracking programme, teachers are beginning to track progress across the curriculum. They are also measuring children's and young people's progress in developing independent living skills and meeting individual targets within individualised educational plans (IEPs). However, this remains at a relatively early stage. The

school is not yet able to be confident of how well progress is being assessed over time, particularly for learners whose progress is most difficult to capture.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

See Choice QI below.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The school is held in high regard by parents and carers. They comment that staff are supportive, approachable, understanding and solution-focused. Parents and carers state that the school is inclusive of all children and young people and that the work of the school has helped to reduce anxieties, violence and stress at home. Parents and carers feel that they are able to access advice and report that school training days and conferences are open to them.
- Children and young people who attend the school come from a number of different education authorities and this presents an additional challenge with regard to parental involvement. Despite this, the school has an active Parent Council and a Parent Ambassador. They make contact with new parents and carers when their child is enrolled in the school.
- Parents and carers are consulted on issues relating directly to the education of their child and have frequent communication with the school regarding individual progress. However, parents and carers are unclear about whole school planning. As a result, the school should take steps to consider how to improve consultation with parents and carers and involve them more fully in planning future improvement priorities.

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. An area for development has been agreed with the school and the Board of Directors.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

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

- All staff demonstrate a strong commitment to children's and young people's health and wellbeing. Staff are highly capable, persistent and resilient in their approaches to engagement, especially when children and young people are distressed or are finding communication challenging. As a result, children and young people are regularly helped to be ready to learn.
- All staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and the school has robust policies and procedures in place to ensure statutory requirements are adhered to. All staff are appropriately trained and are aware of the expectations involved in fulfilling their role. While the school acknowledges the need to have more clarity around incident reporting and debriefing, staff feel well supported by the senior leadership team. Staff are also providing each other with peer support following any challenging situations. The school reports a reduction in the occurrence of incidents of challenging behaviour over time. However, reporting needs to be made more robust through better definition and understanding of what constitutes an incident.
- Attendance over time has improved to an average of 96.4% this session from 93% in 2017/18 and most children and young people have an attendance rate of 100%. Exclusions are very low with only one reported temporary exclusion in the last two years. Parents comment favourably about the impact of the school in maintaining high levels of attendance and low levels of exclusion compared to their child's previous experiences of school.
- The school has made a positive start to tracking outcomes achieved within each Child's Plan. Key wellbeing targets set by the 'team around the child' are reviewed at least bi-annually. According to the school's own data, over the last two years, targets met have increased from 36% to 39%. Targets partially met have risen from 55% to 59%. The school now needs to be more robust in the monitoring of these targets.
- Children and young people feel valued and are treated with respect in the school community. Encouraged by staff and at times by their peers, children and young people are generally kind and courteous towards each other, staff and visitors. Incidents of conflict or distress are managed quickly and successfully by staff. As a result, children and young people are learning how to manage their emotions and relationships both in school and at home. Advice and coaching from school staff supports parents to help children and young people to become calmer, less anxious and, in some cases, less violent at home. A few parents report that the school has helped their child be more sociable and included in their community.
- Children and young people benefit from high quality support plans that effectively identify their needs and strategies that work well for them. Children's and young people's views is clearly evident in these plans. Agreed strategies are helping almost all children and young people engage in school life on a consistent basis. A recent restructuring allows children and young

people to be well understood by a consistent team of staff in school. The school should now further develop plans to include a concise summary of the key targets and support strategies for each child.

- As a result of well-matched programs of personal, social, health education developed in partnership with NHS Forth Valley, children and young people are better informed about their identity, relationships and sexual health. Through specifically tailored programmes matched to age, stage and communication skills, children and young people are making safer choices while accessing social media at home or in the community.
- The school has many aspects of wellbeing embedded in courses and programmes. Children and young people are benefitting from learning a range of skills that support their overall health and wellbeing. In home economics, learners are skilfully led to develop cooking skills and parents report positively about how children and young people are trying new foods and using their food preparations skills at home. Sharing video footage of classroom learning with parents is effective in transferring these skills from school to home. While the school recognises the need to address the lack of entitlement to planned physical education, children and young people are developing their skills and are actively involved in Rebound Therapy, Bikeability, outdoor education, horse riding and Daily Mile programmes.
- The school recognises the need to revisit the school week in order to ensure that children and young people are receiving their full entitlements to education and are not disadvantaged in any way. The school does not yet meet the requirement of two hours of physical education per week and needs to address this as an immediate priority.
- A range of therapeutic programmes, interventions and approaches are in place. As a result, children and young people are able to regulate their emotions while developing their ability to engage in physical and communicative challenges. For example, in the Sensory Circuits programme children and young people are achieving developmental milestones and are progressing through levels of measurable engagement. Collaborating with a range of partners including, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and counselling psychology, the school evaluates progress in a rigorous way. As a result, children and young people move on to well-planned next steps in their development.
- Supported by visual and auditory aids, children and young people have a knowledge of scripts, gestures and sounds. Most staff use communication techniques effectively to allow children and young people to express themselves. They also use social scripts and are mindful of attention autism so as to maximise opportunities where children and young people are best placed to communicate and learn. A minority of children and young people are engaging with the wider community with increasing confidence. Working with a range of community partners, a minority of children and young people are applying and developing their communication skills in a variety of settings and are using support well to become more independent.
- While a few children and young people state that their preferred choice of food is sometimes unavailable, most enjoy a healthy, freshly made lunch every day. Children and young people are encouraged to try new foods and, where it is a challenge to do so, eat with increasing independence. Where toileting is difficult for children and young people, they are supported with dignity and respect.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

- Most children and young people are making good progress in writing. Most children and young people are making satisfactory progress in reading and listening and talking, with a few making good progress. Most learners' are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics, with a few making good or very good progress.
- The school now needs to develop further its monitoring and tracking system to produce robust evidence of how well children and young people are attaining in literacy and numeracy. This will better support teachers' judgements and planning for next steps. In taking literacy and numeracy forward, the school should consider introducing champions to lead the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Literacy

Listening and talking

- Most learners are making satisfactory progress in listening and talking with a few making good progress. Children and young people are encouraged to express their views within a supportive environment. At the early level, children and young people are exploring the patterns and sounds of language and are learning to take turns. At the first and second level and in the senior phase, children and young people present at assemblies and, in some cases, create resources for a wider audience. The school should continue to explore opportunities for children and young people to use their talking and listening skills in a variety of different contexts.

Reading

- Overall, most learners are making satisfactory progress in reading and a few are making good progress. Most children and young people show understanding of a range of texts. At the early level, children and young people are developing their knowledge of sight vocabulary and exploring sounds, letters and words. At the first and second level, children and young people are engaging with a variety of texts for a range of different purposes. A minority of children and young people are reading with fluency and using their reading skills to access texts to support their interests.

Writing

- Overall, most learners are making good progress in writing. Children and young people are encouraged to develop their writing skills in a number of creative ways such as through the use of storyboards, animation and a variety of appropriate written tasks. A minority of children and young people are able to use the skills that they have learned for a variety of purposes. These include creating their own stories, producing DVDs and writing to employers to source work experience placements.

Literacy across learning

- Staff should continue to plan and work collaboratively to create stimulating opportunities for children and young people to improve their literacy skills across the curriculum and in a range of contexts. Teaching staff need to lead literacy across learning in a more systematic manner to fully record how literacy is developing across the school.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, the majority of young people at the senior phase are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Most are projected to gain appropriate National Qualifications this session in numeracy. Most children and young people at the BGE are making satisfactory progress. Many learners are having significant difficulty in retaining the numeracy skills they have developed.
- Teachers place great emphasis on children and young people building numeracy skills linked to independent living. Numeracy is taught mostly through topic work in class with a few lessons where numeracy is taught explicitly. Whilst the curriculum framework plans for the teaching of all the organisers in numeracy, most lessons concentrate on the development of early number work. Most lessons involving numeracy focus on working with numbers in real life contexts including counting objects and working with money. Where appropriate, children and young people are developing their skills identifying, ordering, adding and multiplying numbers.
- In line with the focus on independent living, more able learners at the senior phase are working on developing their financial and budgeting skills. Young people are building their confidence working with budgets, and problems associated with budgets. They are using bank statements to calculate net monthly pay and then buying products from a list. They can identify the best deals for products they are buying across a range of shops and supermarkets.
- A number of examples of children and young people developing their numeracy and mathematics skills across other areas of the curriculum, often within real and relevant contexts are evident across the school. Teachers should now improve on this by ensuring that all learning in numeracy and mathematics across the curriculum builds on prior learning, provides sufficient challenge and offers children and young people opportunities to share their learning in unfamiliar contexts. This will support children and young people to retain, consolidate and apply their numeracy and mathematics skills.

Attainment over time

- The school is at a very early stage in measuring children's and young people's attainment over time. Whilst the school cannot yet demonstrate a record of increasing attainment over time, there is evidence of an improving trend over the last two years. Young people are gaining a small number of National Qualification units predominantly at National 2. Projections for this session suggest that young people will achieve a greater number of awards, and at a higher level, including National 3 and, potentially, National 4 units. However, many young people have the potential to attain more, and gain more qualifications and awards. The school needs to focus on raising attainment and achievement as its key priority for improvement over the coming years.
- Based on data provided by the school, pupil attendance is improving across the school. Commendably, this session, the school has attendance figures higher than the national average. The school has had only one exclusion over the last two years and has reduced their number of incidents of challenging behaviour.

Achievements

- The school has an inclusive culture that has recognition of achievement as a core element of its daily work. Children and young people enjoy having their successes celebrated in the school and shared with parents in a variety of ways. Weekly assemblies include opportunities for children and young people to present their accomplishments. A minority of children and young people are able to do so with skill and confidence through music, dance, public speaking and the use of digital technology. For those less able to communicate without support, successes are celebrated in a well-judged way that allows children and young people to feel included, happy and proud. For those less confident in a group setting, achievements are celebrated quietly but in a manner that remains meaningful.
- Opportunities for success and achievement are well matched to the additional support needs of children and young people. The “50 things to do before you leave New Struan” provides a visual representation of personal achievements gained by children and young people in a variety of contexts across home, school and the community. Citizenship skills are promoted by the school and, as a result, children and young people have participated in fundraising and community events such as litter picking, supporting a local food bank and Bikeathon.
- Supported by a range of partners, children and young people are developing their communication skills and confidence across a variety of contexts. The school is effective in matching achievement opportunities to the additional support needs, interests and talents of children and young people. As a result, the majority of learners are able to express themselves and successfully engage in a range of activities such as animation, gardening and photography.
- Whilst a few children and young people are gaining accreditation for their achievements through Dynamic Youth Awards and John Muir Trust Awards, the school needs to develop access to accreditation further.

Equity

- Staff know and treat children and young people as individuals. They are dedicated to meeting their needs and overcoming any barriers to success. The school should continue to identify flexible learning pathways for children and young people to provide equitable opportunities. This will help ensure that no child or young person is disadvantaged due to their personal needs or aspirations.

Choice of QI: 2.2 Curriculum

- Rationale and design
- Development of the curriculum
- Learning pathways
- Skills for learning, life and work

- The rationale for the school's curriculum reflects the context of the school and is in line with school values. The rationale has a strong focus on developing skills for learning, life and work. It aims to develop independent living skills to prepare learners' for a positive post-school transition. New Struan School has links with a number of external curriculum providers which the school uses to enhance the curriculum. This offers further personalisation and choice for children and young people in areas such as horticulture, horse riding, cycling, drama and animation.
- The school has developed a curriculum with a strong focus on wellbeing and this is enabling most children and young people to engage with learning experiences in a positive and supportive environment. However, the school needs to continue to develop the curriculum to ensure that children and young people have their full entitlement in all curriculum areas, such as physical education. In line with national guidance, staff should develop progressive, coherent programmes for children and young people at the BGE. Children and young people need to access a broad and balanced curriculum throughout the school day which provides appropriate challenge for all learners.
- The school is continuing to develop pathways for children and young people to attain skills for learning, life and work. The school recognises the need for more choice in the senior phase and there is scope for a more flexible approach to meet the needs of young people at this stage. The school should take steps to consider how they may offer more bespoke programmes for each young person based on their individual needs, interests and aspirations. A minority of young people in the senior phase would benefit from a stronger academic focus to further develop their skills in literacy, numeracy and in other curriculum areas.
- The school is actively developing a comprehensive programme in relation to careers education and Developing the Young Workforce. A systematic programme has been planned which provides opportunities for vocational education within New Struan School which includes the application process and interview skills. This is helping children and young people to become more aware of the world of work. Children and young people report that these new programmes has helped to increase their confidence and supports them to become more independent in different contexts. The school's recent Careers Fair attracted a range of employers including the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland, National Health Service workers, a writer and a palaeontologist. The Careers Fair focussed on practical and interactive skills. The school should continue to investigate how external partners can assist further to enhance the positive plans already in place.

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.