

25 February 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In March 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Knox Academy. The school includes Meadowpark, a local authority provision catering for young people with a range of language and communication needs. The letter in 2017 set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and East Lothian Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in June 2018. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the headteacher. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

The school should involve all stakeholders in revisiting the vision and values of Knox Academy to ensure that there is a shared understanding of respect and the value of learning. This work should underpin improvements in collaborative self-evaluation and school improvement planning.

Since her appointment in August 2018, the new headteacher has led important improvements in the work of the school. She has won the confidence and respect of staff and parents. She is providing clear strategic direction for change and improvement. The senior leadership team are working well together and providing effective leadership for guiding and managing the pace of change.

The values of ambition, respect and community continue to inform the life and work of the school. The school has a relentless focus on the value of respect, resulting in improvements in daily interactions in and beyond classrooms. Staff, young people and parents have worked together in recent months to develop a new vision statement for the school. This was finalised in early November 2019 and launched through assemblies, headteacher updates, Meadowpark Matters and the use of social media. The vision firmly embeds the values and underpins a climate in which young people are valuing their learning opportunities. Improvement priorities are now informed by a range of evidence gathered from surveys, 'walk through' classroom visits and faculty reviews. The school improvement plan is now more focussed and staff are working well together to take forward changes which will benefit young people.

A new re-invigorated whole school approach to equalities and inclusion is required. The school should review policies and procedures to ensure a clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and high-quality support.

Senior leaders have developed a range of policies relating to equality, wellbeing and inclusion. The new aspirational statement for inclusion encapsulates the school's vision for all young people to be valued and respected. A range of stakeholders were consulted during the development of the equality and diversity policy. This work is helping support children's rights

and staff are now able to monitor incidents more effectively, including bullying. Staff are increasingly aware of their key role in getting it right for every young person in their classroom so that all learners achieve as well as possible. Senior leaders are continuing to develop effective systems to enable them to record, monitor and track the progress of individuals and groups of young people, including those with protected characteristics.

All staff have participated in a range of professional learning opportunities relating to meeting the needs of young people. They now feel more confident in supporting young people with a wider range of additional support needs within the mainstream learning environment. Further improvements are needed to the sharing of specific strategies, which would support learners requiring additional support.

Staff need to continue to develop a consistent approach to planning to meet the needs of young people requiring additional support, including those on adapted timetables. They should ensure that plans consistently record needs, identify next steps and monitor progress in individual young people's learning. Staff seek and record the views of young people and their parents about the content of plans. Across the school and in Meadowpark, the targets for young people are not yet specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic or time bound.

Senior leaders should continue to review the curriculum to ensure that all young people attending Meadowpark receive their entitlement to a broad general education. Work to improve progression pathways in the senior phase has led to a few young people enjoying a supported transition, working with partners from Edinburgh College. Senior leaders should continue to explore a range of flexible pathways available for young people in Meadowpark.

The school has consulted widely to develop a very helpful learning and teaching policy. While implementing this policy, the school should continue to focus on ensuring young people experience consistently high-quality learning that meets their needs.

The school has placed a high priority on promoting respectful relationships and providing a positive learning environment for all young people. Senior and curriculum leaders have supported teachers well to reach a shared understanding of approaches which establish positive relationships for learning. In most lessons, the ethos is now calm and purposeful. This is an important improvement since previous inspection visits. Young people relate well to each other and to their teachers.

Across the school, helpful routines are being established. Young people have contributed meaningfully to the revised Promoting Positive Relationships and Behaviour policy. Teachers value the wide range of professional learning opportunities on relationships for learning. Most teachers now feel better equipped and empowered to manage behaviour that is more challenging. This has lessened disruption in lessons and the number of calls for promoted staff intervention has reduced significantly. The number of young people out of class without good reason has dropped significantly.

The senior leadership team has ensured a strong focus on high quality learning and teaching through the key improvement priorities and the focus for evaluating practice. For example, the 'walkthroughs' where lessons are observed and the robust faculty reviews with the spotlight on learning. These examples allow teachers to engage in helpful professional dialogue and to share effective practice. The school's improved planned programme for

career-long professional learning for teachers has placed emphasis on approaches to ensuring high quality teaching and learning. The pace of learning, notably in S1 to S3 should be increased further. Too many lessons are overly teacher-led as evidenced through the school's own self-evaluation analysis. Teachers should continue to improve approaches to ensuring all young people have learning tasks with appropriate levels of challenge.

The pupil learning team makes a valuable contribution to faculty reviews, which are shaping improvement priorities. Teachers are now using feedback from learners more regularly to make learning more effective. The school should extend opportunities for learner participation, particularly in S1 to S3, as it seeks to ensure high quality learning and teaching across all classes.

Staff should build on the approach to discussing progress with learners in S4 to S6 to support all young people across the school to know their own strengths and next steps in learning.

Staff now gather information on the Curriculum for Excellence levels which young people have attained in all curricular areas across the broad general education. Teachers are using experiences and outcomes to plan learning, and must now ensure a consistent application of National Benchmarks to assess progress. This will lead to a better understanding of how young people in S1 to S3 are progressing in their learning. Most young people feel the feedback they get on their work helps them to improve their learning. They also have opportunities for learner conversations with their class teacher and with their guidance teacher. More frequent, formal conversations would support young people to understand better their strengths across their learning and how to improve their attainment.

What happens next?

The school has made good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. East Lothian Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Carol McDonald
HM Inspector