

24 November 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In May 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Golspie High School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement, which we agreed with the school and The Highland Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in March 2019. 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. 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.

Develop the leadership of staff and young people so that they are taking a stronger role in securing better-paced change and improvement.

Since the last further inspection, the headteacher, supported ably by depute headteachers, has taken forward useful short-term action plans. This is helping all staff to be more focused on contributing to school improvement. Senior leaders and staff are making better use of their agreed vision, values and aims. Young people almost always reflect these values in how they manage their behaviour in a positive way. Faculty heads are supporting teachers well in identifying steps that they can take to improve young people's progress within subject areas. Senior leaders need to ensure that key effective practice in some subject areas is consistently embedded across the school. Staff have benefitted from well-focused professional learning and sharing practice with other schools. As a result, some young people have access to a greater range of teaching and learning approaches, and revision materials. Senior leaders should ensure that professional learning continues to remain specific to what will raise attainment. The headteacher continues to work hard to secure teachers for the school. As required, technology is used to reduce gaps in teaching arising from staffing challenges. The headteacher should ensure that pace of change keeps abreast of local and national priorities, moving beyond what was identified in the original inspection. Additionally, he needs to ensure that emerging impact towards action points is sustained.

Most parents welcome that their views are more consistently sought by senior leaders as they plan improvements. They also appreciate the more regular communication from the school. Parents' role in supporting their children's learning would be enhanced further by ensuring that all reports on progress consistently detail focused next steps in learning. Young people in the senior phase benefit from a range of leadership roles, including leading assemblies. Within some departments, young people provide teachers with reflections on their learning experiences. Senior leaders are aware that the school is at the early stages of ensuring that the views of young people consistently influence significant improvements in the school.

Improve further the quality and consistency of learning and teaching to raise attainment and ensure all young people achieve as highly as possible.

On the whole, teachers are improving their learning and teaching practice, the approaches for which have been captured in a whole-school policy. In almost all lessons, young people are clearer of the purpose of learning and how they will be successful. This is helping young people to reflect on their progress and what they need to do next. Designated staff who support learners requiring additional support continue to effectively ensure that young people achieve better. Teachers need to continue to raise their expectations of what all young people can achieve to ensure learning that is more challenging. A few teachers deepen learning by asking questions that require young people to justify their responses, explain their thinking, or use their learning in a different situation. This good practice should be shared more widely. Staff participate in activities to build their understanding of expected standards. This is leading to assessment evidence that is more reliable in a majority of subjects. Young people are very positive about the council's investment in laptop technology. They highlight that this is helping to enhance learning, support revision and presents another way of communicating with teachers to support personalised learning. Teachers need to continue improving their practice and having an impact on raising young people's attainment.

Young people's attainment in literacy and numeracy by S3 and in S4 has improved. Teachers, including staff that support learning, make better use of assessment information to put strategies in place to strengthen young people's progress. Senior and middle leaders review more rigorously young people's progress. Almost all young people leave school for a positive destination. However, attainment from S1 to S6 needs to improve further. The quantity and quality of grades at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels five and six is not yet reflecting all young people's full potential. To assist the school in improving and sustaining high standards, we have asked the headteacher to review how well the curriculum in S1-S3 is providing a foundation for progression to S4-S6.

Improve staff's understanding of their roles and responsibilities in supporting the wellbeing of all young people. There should be a focus on building an ethos of mutual respect, in which every member of the school community feels valued and supported. Positive relationships and shared high expectations for all should underpin the work of the school.

Staff continue to make positive progress in improving this area of work. Almost all staff are clearer about their responsibilities in supporting the wellbeing of young people. In almost all cases, young people and staff enjoy positive relationships built on an ethos of mutual respect. Principal teachers of pastoral care have reviewed and updated the programme for personal and social education and young people's time with their tutor. They use this time to review with most young people their progress and wellbeing. These conversations would be supported by developing learners' profiles so young people discuss how their ongoing education is preparing them to play a full part in life and work. Young people build their awareness of mental health in personal and social education programmes, as well as by having access to other support strategies. A few young people feel this work needs to be developed further to ensure all young people, as required, have strategies to promote positive mental health. Going forward, senior leaders and principal teachers of pastoral care should revisit the purpose of personal and social education and tutor time. In so doing, they

should be clear of the value that each adds to learning and attainment. Senior leaders should continue to improve procedures to encourage good routines for attendance and punctuality.

What happens next?

As a result of our inspection findings, we identified areas where improvements are still required. In light of the current circumstances, we will liaise with The Highland Council to discuss our findings, next steps and support for the school.

Joan Esson
HM Inspector