

30 May 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

Stewart's Melville College, Edinburgh

HM Inspectors recently visited Stewart's Melville College. The visit was part of our quality improvement and professional engagement visits with independent schools which complement the general programme of inspections. The approach allows us to maintain our knowledge of schools in the independent sector throughout Scotland, and provides assurance to parents on the school's capacity for evaluating its own work and making improvements which have a direct impact on the quality of experiences for its young people. Our visit was based on the school's self-evaluation and priorities identified for school improvement. During our visit inspectors talked to staff and young people and worked together with the Principal, Head of School and senior staff about the planned developments to ensure outcomes for children and young people continue to improve.

How well does the school ensure outcomes for children / young people continue to improve?

At all stages of the school, boys are friendly, courteous and articulate. The ethos created by staff provides a supportive, caring and motivating environment for boys to learn. As they progress through the school, they develop respectful and positive relationships with staff and with each other. Overall, in lessons which were observed during the visit, boys at all stages engaged well with their learning. Almost all who responded to the Education Scotland questionnaire were positive about their school experiences. They appreciate the interactive teaching approaches which they feel match well with their preferred style of learning. Overall, standards of learning and teaching across the school are very high. In the best lessons observed, teachers gave well-timed interventions to support and challenge boys. They used praise very well and demonstrated very effective active teaching methods to motivate learners. Boys told us that they value the supportive relationships they have with their teachers, particularly the lively dialogue and discussions during lessons. Digital technology is used very well by teachers and boys across the school to enhance learning and teaching. For example, senior boys used technology very well to revise their vocabulary and grammar acquisition in languages lessons; younger boys in a coding class enjoyed the creative task of programming a 'micro:bit' to play the game 'rock, paper, scissors'. Parents, staff and boys appreciate the effective electronic systems that the school has established to keep track of homework and study tasks, school events and individuals' progress in learning.

The curriculum at S1 and S2 ensures that all boys are able to study a broad range of subjects. A progressive curriculum is in place for boys at S3 to S6, offering personalisation and choice in learning. Staff are currently reviewing the curriculum on

offer to make the most of the rich and varied extra and co-curricular activities, which complement the high-quality experiences for boys in lessons. Staff have identified ways that the curriculum can be refreshed, including placing greater emphasis on how well valuable skills for learning, life and work are being developed for each boy across their school experience. From S1 to S5, boys told us that they appreciate learning in a boys-only environment. They feel this helps them to concentrate on their learning. They also value the regular opportunities to liaise and mix socially with the girls at The Mary Erskine School. At S6, boys and girls learn together in mixed classes across the two schools. This approach allows for a high level of flexibility in curriculum planning. Young people at S6 therefore have access to a wide range of subject and course choices. Staff make every effort to provide a bespoke, highly personalised senior year for all.

Stewart's Melville College is a high-performing school and overall standards of attainment are very strong. The school can demonstrate that they are improving attainment levels at S3 to S6, year on year. In 2016, almost all boys in S4 presented for National 4 and National 5 qualifications performed very well. Almost all boys sitting Higher examinations achieved very good grades. There was an increase in the percentage of boys achieving an A-grade at Higher level, with most boys awarded this standard in examinations. There was also an increase in the percentage of boys achieving five Higher qualifications at an A-grade. At S6, almost all of boys presented for Advanced Higher examinations were successful. Just over a half achieved an A-grade at this level, which demonstrates an improving trend in recent years. All boys progress on to a positive destination, with almost all going on to attend the university of their choice. Boys are provided with an exceptional level of information and advice in terms of further and higher education courses which are available nationally and internationally. The approach which the Principal, and senior staff, have taken in leading this work is outstanding.

The school takes particularly good account of the needs of all boys and seeks to ensure they attain to the best of their abilities. The school's approaches to offering and organising additional support for learning are excellent. The highly-effective and skilled support for learning staff provide thorough and very well-judged support for all learners. This includes equipping all boys with important study skills; carrying out a programme of assessments at S1 to S3 to ensure that any literacy difficulties boys may encounter can be quickly addressed; and providing high-quality personal support for boys who need extra assistance in their learning. Very good support is provided for boys who live in the boarding house, through the provision of an academic house tutor and supervised study during exam leave. As part of the visit, the school submitted information relating to child protection and safeguarding approaches. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the visit, there were no identified areas for development. The school's approach to creating an electronic system for tracking and monitoring the care and wellbeing of boys is sector-leading. Commendably, school leaders also pay close attention to the promoting the wellbeing of staff.

The co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes provided by the school are excellent. They give extensive opportunities for boys at all stages to engage in sports, music, drama, debating, art, culture and enterprise activities. From these highly

relevant, worthwhile and challenging opportunities, many boys demonstrate outstanding achievements in a wide variety of fields. Boys have extensive opportunities to develop both musical and dramatic performing arts skills. This includes a large number of musical groups, bands and choirs which run throughout the year and through major dramatic performances, musicals and concerts. Outdoor education is a strong feature of the boys' experiences and includes a full programme of international trips to Europe and beyond. There is an active Adventure Club offering hillwalking expeditions and offsite residential weekends. The S1 and S2 project residential trips and the long-running Carbisdale S3 residential experience are very popular with boys. Many boys benefit from the youth leadership and personal development opportunities provided, for example through the Combined Cadet Force and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, as well as by holding responsibilities such as prefects, house captains and mentors. Boys have increasing opportunities to have a say in influencing their school experiences. We have asked the school to review how the Pupil Council and other pupil-led committees operate in order that boys can take more responsibility to lead and direct school improvements.

The Parents Liaison Committee provides a valuable focus for representative parents from each year group to share their views on various aspects of school life. Parents who met with inspectors commented very positively on the openness of approach taken by the leadership team. They appreciate the way, and timely nature, in which any issues that parents raise are followed up. Almost all parents who responded to our questionnaire were happy with the school and the way in which the school was led.

Stewart's Melville College is always looking to improve. School leaders have been using self-evaluation approaches very well over time to ensure that there are very positive outcomes for boys. The school is in a strong position to continue to build on the very good and often excellent practice which is evident across many aspects of its work. The inspirational and dynamic leadership of the Principal is a key strength of the school. Over time, he has succeeded in achieving his clear vision for the Erskine Stewart's Melville Schools and has empowered staff at all levels to have the confidence and skill to lead improvements. As a result, leadership at all levels is very effective, with teaching and non-teaching staff showing high levels of commitment to the school and its continuing development. Parents and boys alike feel that staff 'go the extra mile' for the benefit of the whole school community. The senior leadership team, led by the Head of School, carries out its role very effectively. All promoted staff show commitment to their roles, are knowledgeable about the needs of boys and take an active role in self-evaluation and school improvement. Heads of department and Heads of house carry out their responsibilities very well. There is scope for Heads of department and teachers to share good practice across the school, particularly in how individual departments track the progress of learners and plan for improvement. Non-promoted staff take part in identifying priorities for improvement. They have regular opportunities to be involved in leading and participating in working parties to take key developments forward. The school has clear and very effective procedures in place for strategic leadership and governance. The Board of Governors take an effective and extremely supportive role in the life of school, as well as providing appropriate levels of scrutiny and challenge where necessary.

We are confident the school has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and Board of Governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the progress of the school.

Alan Urquhart
HM Inspector

Additional evidence for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <https://education.gov.scot/inspection-reports/edinburgh-city/5583438>.

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