

Summarised inspection findings

Pebbles Academy Dunfermline

1 November 2022

Key contextual information

Pebbles Academy is an independent special school located in Dunfermline, Fife. The school caters for young people with social, emotional and mental health needs. At the time of inspection, the school roll was six. The school is being led by an interim Executive Head. The previous headteacher resigned in June 2022. There have been significant changes in staffing, with a number of new staff starting in August 2022. A new headteacher comes into post on 26 September 2022.

All young people in the school are placed from English education authorities. All young people started their placement at Pebbles Academy following prolonged periods of interrupted learning. Most young people began their placement at Pebbles Academy following the periods of lockdown.

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

- Senior leaders and education staff regard all young people with respect and dignity. Teachers and support staff work well together to help young people see the value in their learning. This cohesive approach is helping to re-engage a majority of learners, all of whom have experienced negative previous education placements. Staff are providing young people with a nurturing environment and work hard to strike a balance between supporting learners and challenging them to advance their learning. Teachers are beginning to capitalise on learners' interests using a one-to-one tutoring model that is personalised and intensive. They now need to ensure that young people are spending more time engaged in purposeful learning. Staff across Pebbles Care Limited need to help motivate all young people to participate more fully with the learning activities on offer.
- When in school, a majority of young people can engage confidently with adults and their peers, and are able to listen to and follow instructions well. However, a minority of young people are passive in lessons. Across the school, young people now need to engage in more regular dialogue with peers as part of their learning.
- All young people have refused to engage with learning at previous placements prior to attending Pebbles Academy. Most learners have long standing negative attitudes towards education. This has contributed towards a majority of young people not yet accessing school on a full-time basis. Teachers are providing a range of bespoke learning experiences including home visits, community learning and outdoor pursuits. School support staff have strengthened their partnership working with care staff colleagues. They are beginning to create bespoke learning activities attuned better to young people's interests and aspirations. However, a majority of learners' engagement remains too low. All Pebbles Care staff across care and education need to continue to work closely to improve learners' engagement.

- The new education staff team, including senior leaders, share a positive vision and value base. This is beginning to help young people engage better in learning. Staff understand the importance of building young people's confidence and trust. Teachers and support staff communicate the purpose of learning well. They give clear instruction and explanations, while adopting a relational approach to support progress. Senior leaders should continue with their planned approach to refreshing the curriculum by providing resources suited to the age and stage of young people's development.
- Teachers access a wide range of valuable career long professional learning experiences, including in-depth training in ways to keep vulnerable young people safe. New staff undertake external training on using trauma informed, nurturing approaches. All staff are building their skills well and are striving to provide learning which is motivational and meaningful.
- School support staff have recently started to work jointly with care staff to provide skills based qualifications. This approach is designed to provide a meaningful and productive way to help young people go on to further education, training or work. This is beginning to add depth in learning, particularly for those young people not accessing education within the school setting. Support staff should now aim to enhance the number and range of learning activities young people engage in at home. They should also continue to take a lead role in supporting young people to engage with learning at school.
- Teachers are using individual assessment approaches to plan learning for young people. They should now widen their approaches to assessment and find ways to allow young people to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and capabilities across the curriculum. As planned, senior leaders need to introduce and implement base level assessments as part of the admissions process to the school. This will support teachers better to provide differentiated learning activities which meet young people's needs.
- Senior leaders need to introduce more collegiate opportunities for teachers to analyse the effectiveness of their approaches to assessment. Education staff are starting to build links with neighbouring schools to share good practice and engage in joint training. In taking this forward, senior leaders should identify ways for teachers to moderate their assessment findings with external partners.
- Psychologists offers valuable advice and guidance to young people and staff. They provide therapeutic assessments and interventions which help to meet the complex needs of the diverse school population. Psychologists also work with young people whose learning is adapted for education at home and in other community settings. Senior leaders should monitor the effectiveness of these interventions to track improvements in young people's health and wellbeing. Psychologists should continue to support education staff to help re-engage all young people with their learning.
- The new staff team are developing creative ways to help inform planning across the curriculum. The daily 'home circle' provides a supportive opportunity for learners to participate in conversations about their learning and achievements. Learners meet with carers and education staff daily. Education staff need to work collaboratively with care staff to identify joint approaches to support young people to appreciate the importance of engaging with their learning.

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 representatives of Pebbles Care Limited.

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 over time

- Prior to this session, the strategic approach to raising attainment was not undertaken in a meaningful way. As a result, there is little evidence of young people's attainment over time, in either the broad general education or the senior phase. The interim Executive Head has recently put structures in place to review progress in young people's attainment and achievement in a more effective way. It is vital that senior leaders use a wide range of data and assessment effectively to monitor young people's progress in all aspects of their learning. This must include the impact of their attendance in school and areas where young people have gaps in their learning.
- Most young people's attendance is an ongoing cause for concern and impacts negatively on their attainment and achievement. Most young people are following part-time learning programmes. Senior leaders and staff need to work closely with psychologists and care staff to improve young people's attendance as an immediate priority. In doing so, they should aspire to have all young people following bespoke full-time learning programmes.
- In recent years, most young people in the senior phase attained a small number of National 3 and National 4 course awards and units in English and mathematics. A few learners also gained unit awards in social studies. The design of the current curriculum does not provide young people with a wide enough range of learning experiences. The restricted curriculum prevents young people from following learning pathways which provide accreditation and are in line with their interests and aspirations.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- All young people accessing Pebbles Academy have had significant gaps in their learning. This is largely due to extended periods of interrupted learning prior to attending Pebbles Academy. A minority of learners have struggled to re-engage purposefully with learning following the periods of lockdown. This has had a detrimental impact upon all young people's attainment of Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy in recent years. Overall, the majority of young people are making limited progress with literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders and staff need to adopt a clear strategy to raise young people's attainment and achievement. In doing so, they need to examine better the quality of learning and teaching and the curriculum in meeting the needs and aspirations of learners. Senior leaders should work closely with education authority colleagues to gather more substantial information of young people's learning prior to their placement commencing at the school.

Literacy and English

- Across the broad general education and senior phase, a minority of learners can produce extended pieces of writing. Most learners use worksheets or workbooks to help scaffold their writing during learning activities. A minority of young people are able to create written arguments independently, write short scripted sentences and develop short texts. Most young people need to record information better, write longer sentences and create a wider range of texts. A few young people can engage confidently with adults and their peers, and are able to listen to and follow instructions well.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Most young people are beginning to develop their knowledge and skills with, for example, shapes, fractions, and percentages. A minority of young people can solve number problems and show increasing confidence in budgeting and working with money.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people's achievements are recognised and celebrated across the school. Most young people engage in a range of valuable learning activities within the local community. They build an understanding of citizenship through visiting local businesses and sites of interest. Young people are improving their fitness through engaging in a wide range of outdoor learning experiences and physical learning activities. However, young people are not always aware of the skills and attributes they develop on such learning activities. Staff need to support young people to recognise the skills they are developing as a result of taking part in personal achievement learning experiences. In doing so, staff should also ensure that learning activities are progressive and help young people to build upon their existing skills and attributes. A few young people gain accredited awards for their personal achievements. Teachers now need to develop creative ways to accredit young people for more of their personal achievements.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and teachers need to identify better flexible learning pathways to support all young people to build skills for life, learning and work. In doing so, they need to take due account of national priorities, including closing the poverty-related attainment gap when planning for improvement. This will ensure that no young person is disadvantaged due to their personal circumstances, needs or aspirations.

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.