Summarised inspection findings

Dumbarton Academy

West Dunbartonshire Council

4 March 2025

Key contextual information

School Name: Dumbarton Academy
Council: West Dunbartonshire Council
SEED number: 8304130
Roll: 694

Dumbarton Academy is a non-denominational secondary school located in the town of Dumbarton. The school serves the areas of Dumbarton and Milton. It has four associated primary schools: Aitkenbar Primary School; Braehead Primary School; Dalreoch Primary School; and Knoxland Primary School. In September 2023, 20.4% of pupils lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland. In September 2023, 22% of pupils were registered for free school meals. In September 2024, the school reported that 38% of pupils had additional support needs (ASN).

The headteacher has been in post for five years. She is supported by four depute headteachers, three of whom are substantive. The headteacher is also the headteacher of Dalreoch Primary School.

Attendance is generally in line the national average. For 2023/24, attendance is 89.66%. Exclusions are generally above the national average.

Senior leaders highlight on-going challenges with staffing. This is particularly evident in the computing, home economics and mathematics departments.

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

■ Staff have worked very well to create a warm ethos across the school that provides a calm climate for learning. This is underpinned well by the embedded school values. In almost all lessons, young people benefit from positive relationships and interactions with staff. Young people appreciate the help provided by teachers to support their learning. Almost all young people demonstrate positive behaviour across the school. Teachers use strategies effectively to address occasional low-level disruption from a few young people who are not focussed within classes.

■ Most young people participate well during class discussions and group work when provided with the opportunities to do so. In a few lessons, young people are fully engaged when they are provided with rich contexts for learning. These include when young people work collaboratively with others, use digital technology, or lead aspects of their learning. Young people would benefit from more opportunities to work in these ways. In a majority of lessons, young people are passive learners due to activities that are overly teacher directed. The majority of teachers need to increase the pace of learning and ensure all time in lessons is used purposefully. A majority of young people require greater challenge in their learning. Too often, young people complete tasks which are at too low a level for them and do not challenge them. Teachers should continue to develop a range of relevant tasks and appropriately challenging activities to support all young people's progress and learning.

■ Staff are developing a shared understanding of the features of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment through the schools 3 Es: Engagement, Experience and Ethos. In most lessons, teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. Almost all teachers share the purpose of learning and how young people will be successful. In the majority of lessons, learning intentions were task based and success criteria linked to completing tasks. Teachers need to ensure that the purpose of learning is more explicit for young people. They should place emphasis on learning outcomes rather than the completion of tasks. Senior leaders should build on the effective practice in a few classrooms to improve teachers understanding of the sharing the purpose of learning. Staff should ensure this leads to young people making progress in their learning. All teachers should ensure they reference the success criteria during and at the end of learning to help young people evaluate their success in learning.

■ In a few lessons, staff use digital technology well to engage and support young people with their learning. The majority of teachers share resources through digital platforms to support revision and the completion of work. Staff need to extend and develop the use of digital technology to enhance learner's experiences across the school.

■ Almost all teachers demonstrate awareness of the needs of young people who require additional support with their learning, and the strategies required to support them. Teachers

are at an early stage of ensuring lessons are planned carefully to take account of the needs of all young people. All young people undertake the same tasks and activities too often. teachers need to plan to meet the needs of all young people more effectively. In doing so, they should provide appropriately differentiated learning activities.

■ Almost all teachers use praise to motivate learners. A majority of teachers use questioning well to check for young people's understanding. Most teachers should improve the use of open-ended questioning to encourage young people to think more deeply about their learning.

■ Young people have insufficient opportunities for choice in what and how they learn. Young people would benefit from further opportunities to be actively involved in planning their learning to motivate and engage them further. Teachers should gather feedback regularly on young people's experiences of learning, teaching and assessment to better inform their planning. Teachers need to provide more meaningful written and verbal feedback to support learners better across learning.

■ Almost all teachers check young people's progress in learning through periodic summative assessments. Teachers should develop a more consistent approach to formative assessment to support their understanding of young people's learning and to inform their planning for next steps. A few teachers use peer and self-assessment purposefully. This helpful practice should be extended across all curriculum areas to assist young people to identify their strengths and next steps in their learning. Teachers should use assessment data, particularly in the broad general education (BGE) more effectively and consistently to improve their planning of learning.

■ Most teachers have useful learning conversations with young people in the senior phase. These help young people discuss and understand their progress and to set targets. As a result, most young people in the senior phase understand their working grade and how to progress their learning to maximise their attainment. Teachers track young people's progress against their target grade. Young people find this useful in understanding their next steps in learning. A few young people in the BGE are aware of the level they are working at and their next steps to improve their learning. Middle leaders and class teachers should develop purposeful learner conversations in the BGE. This will support young people to better understand their progress and next steps in their learning.

■ Teachers regularly track and monitor the progress of young people in their classes. Senior leaders should now work closely with middle leaders to develop a more rigorous and consistent approach to tracking young people's progress across the school. This includes developing robust approaches to monitoring the progress of young people who require additional support.

■ Almost all teachers have participated in professional learning through in school Assessment and Moderation leads and with local authority colleagues through Curriculum Support Networks. As a result, teachers are becoming increasingly confident of the learning, teaching and assessment cycle. This supports their understanding of appropriate progression pathways for young people in line with national expectations. Senior and middle leaders should continue to develop their understanding of assessment to better meet the needs of all young people. Senior and middle leaders should further develop the whole school approaches to moderation. A significant number of staff undertake Scottish Qualification Authority duties and participate in professional learning events relating to understanding standards. As a result, almost all teachers have a sound understanding of assessment standards in National Qualifications (NQs) and plan learning based on these standards.

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 the education authority.

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

BGE

- Young people's achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third and fourth level has improved from 2021/22 to 2022/23. In 2022/23, most young people achieved CfE third level in literacy by the end of third year. A minority of young people achieved CfE fourth level in literacy by the end of S3. Almost all young people achieved CfE third level in numeracy by the end of S3. A minority of young people achieved CfE fourth level in numeracy by the end of S3. However, senior leaders provided data for 2023/24 which shows a decrease in young people's achievement at CfE third and fourth level in literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders are aware of the need to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. This is particularly important for groups for young people who require additional support with their learning or those entitled to free school meals. Teacher professional judgements in numeracy are reliable. Teachers should continue to work to improve the reliability of their professional judgments in literacy.

- By the end of S3 most young people who require additional support achieved CfE third level literacy. The majority of young people with ASN achieved CfE third level numeracy by the end of S3.

Senior phase

- Attainment in literacy and numeracy in the senior phase requires improvement. This is particularly evident at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5. Almost all young people leave school with SCQF level 3 or better in literacy and numeracy. This is in line with the VC. A few young people leave school without literacy or numeracy awards.

Leavers

- The majority of young people who left school between 2020/21 and 2022/23 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is significantly lower than the virtual comparator (VC) in 2020/21 and 2021/22 and significantly much lower than the VC in 2022/23. Young people's attainment at this level has been decreasing since 2018/19 when most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better and attainment was in line with the VC. A minority of young people who left school between 2019/20 and 2022/23 achieved SCQF level 6 or better in literacy. Young people's attainment at this level has been in line with the VC since 2020/21. However, the percentage of young people achieving SCQF level 6 or better has decreased from 2018/19, when the majority of young people achieved this level.

- Most young people who left school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 achieved numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better. Young people's attainment at this level is significantly lower or much lower than the VC and has decreased over the five-year period. Overall, the majority of young

people who left school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 achieved SCQF level 5 or better, however this is inconsistent. Attainment at this level was significantly much lower than the VC in 2019/20, significantly much higher in 2021/22 and significantly lower in 2022/23. A minority of young people who left school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 achieved numeracy at SCQF level 6 or better. This is in line with the VC.

Cohorts

- In S4, the majority of young people achieved literacy at SCQF level 5 or better between 2019/20 and 2023/24. Young people's attainment at this level between 2020/21 and 2023/24 was significantly lower or much lower than the VC. By S5 based on S4, young people's attainment at this level between 2021/22 and 2023/24 was significantly lower or much lower than the VC. By S6 based on S4, attainment was significantly lower than the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24. By S5 and S6 based on S4, young people's attainment at SCQF level 6 is broadly in line with the VC, with a minority of young people achieving this level.

- In S4, a minority of young people achieved numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better between 2019/20 and 2023/24. Young people's attainment at this level between 2020/21 and 2023/24 was significantly lower than the VC. By S5 based on S4, young people's attainment at this level was significantly much lower than the VC in 2023/24. By S6 based on S4, the majority of young people achieving at SCQF level 5 or better is in line with the VC between 2020/21 and 2023/24. By S5 and S6 based on S4, young people's attainment at SCQF level 6 is broadly in line with the VC, with a minority of young people achieving this level. The exception being, by S5 in 2023/24, where few young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better, significantly lower than the VC.

- The percentage of young people presented for National 5 English in 2023/24 was in line with the national average. This in an increase on most previous years. The percentage of young people who achieved a grade A to C is above the national A to C rate for the latest five-year period except in 2021/22 where it was below. The majority of young people presented for Higher English were awarded a grade A to C in 2022/23 and 2023/24. This is a decrease from previous years.

- The percentage of young people presented for National 5 Mathematics in 2023/24 was above the national average. This in an increase on previous years. The percentage of young people who achieved a grade A to C is below the national A to C rate for the latest five-year period except in 2020/21 where it was above. Most young people presented for Higher Mathematics achieved a grade A to C in the latest five-year period.

- Most young people who require additional support with their learning who left school between 2019/20 and 2022/23 achieved SCQF level 4 or better in literacy. The majority achieved this is numeracy. In both literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better, 5 or better and level 6, the attainment of young people who require additional support with their learning who left school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 is below that of the VC.

Attainment over time

BGE
- Most young people achieve CfE third level or better by the end of S3 in curriculum areas beyond literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders use a whole school tracking system to monitor young people's progress through the BGE. Senior leaders should now establish more effective systems for quality assuring achievement of a level by the end of S3 across all curricular areas.

Senior phase

Improving attainment for all

Leavers
- When compared using average complimentary tariff scores, young people who left school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 generally attain below the VC. Attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of young people has decreased since 2018/19 and is significantly lower than the VC in 2022/23. For the middle attaining 60% of young people, attainment has also decreased since 2018/19 but is in line with the VC for 2021/22 and 22/23. For the highest attaining 20% of young people, attainment is in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2022/23, having been significantly lower in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

- When compared using average complimentary tariff scores, the attainment of young people in S4, S5 based on S4 and S6 based on S4 is broadly in line with the VC. The main exception being for the lowest attaining 20% of young people in S4 in 2021/22. As this group of young people move through the school to S5 in 2022/23 and S6 in 2023/24 they attain significantly lower or much lower than the VC.

- When compared using average complimentary tariff scores, young people who require additional support with their learning leaving school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 generally attain below the VC.

Breadth and depth
- Senior leaders identified a number of factors that have impacted on young people's attainment. These include long term staffing challenges in English, mathematics, home economics and computing departments. Also, in 2020/21, senior leaders identified a few young people who did not re-engage with learning following COVID-19. This cohort's lower attainment has carried through the attainment data for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

- Senior leaders are aware of the need to raise attainment. There are signs of attainment improving in S4 from previous years. However, attainment in S5 and S6 is decreasing. Senior leaders should continue with their strategies to raise attainment. They should build on the positive impact found through their 'every award matters' approach, increased focus on data analysis and the study café.

- Senior leaders and curricular leads need to continue to work together to ensure their vision for an ambitious presentation policy is enacted fully. Currently, teachers in a minority of curricular areas are overly cautious in their recommendations for young people's courses and levels.

- A minority of young people were presented for both National 4 and National 5 Mathematics in 2023/24 in S4. There was no dual presentation in S5 and S6.

- Staff in several curricular areas have supported young people to achieve very well in the subjects they were presented for. For example, all young people presented for art at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher were awarded a grade A to C between 2020/21 and 2023/24. All young people presented for music and music technology at National 5 were awarded a grade A to C between 20219/20 and 2023/24. Almost all young people were presented for physical education (PE) at National 5 and all who were presented for Advanced Higher attained grade A to C.

- In S4, the percentage of young people who achieved one or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better has improved from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Most young people achieve one or more award at SCQF level 5C or better, in line with the VC. A minority achieve five or more awards at this level. This is in line with the VC for 2023/24 and improved from being significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22 and 202/23. The majority of young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better. This is significantly higher than the VC.

- By S5, the percentage of young people achieving one to five or more qualifications at SCQF 5C is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24. A minority of young people achieve five or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better. This is significantly lower than the VC. A minority of young people achieve one or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better in 20222/23 and 2023/24. This is in line with the VC although attainment in this measure has decreased from 2019/20. A few young people achieve four or more or five or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better in 2023/24. Young people's attainment is significantly lower than the VC for this year. A minority of young people achieved one of more awards at SCQF level 6A or better between 2019/20 and 2023/24. This is in line with the VC. Few young people achieved two or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better in 2023/24. This is significantly lower than the VC for two or more awards.

- By S6, the percentage of young people achieving one or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 4 or better is significantly lower or much lower than the VC in 2023/24. For the previous four years achievement at this level had been in line with the VC. The percentage of young people achieving one or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 5C, 5A, 6C and 6A or better is generally decreasing. Attainment is however broadly in line with the VC. The percentage of young people attaining one or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better is inconsistent, though is in line with the VC for 2019/20 to 2023/24.

- In S4, by S5 and by S6, young people gain awards beyond NQs and Skills for Work courses. Senior leaders in recent years have developed a wider range of curriculum pathways. For example, a few young people now gain awards in mental health and wellbeing, leadership, computer games development and Foundation Apprenticeships in social services. A few young people also gain awards at SCQF level 7 though courses such as Scottish Football Association: Refereeing.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people develop their skills and confidence through participation in a wide range of groups and activities both within school and in their local communities. Young people recognise that they are developing a range of useful skills such as leadership, teamwork and communication. A few young people use these skills in other contexts such as supporting at parents' evenings and working with associated primaries or events in the school.

- Young people are developing their skills through involvement in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, Saltire, Sports Ambassadors, Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics leaders, SCQF Ambassadors and other youth awards. Young people gain accredited awards at SCQF level 5 and 6 as a result of volunteering. Young people in S6 contribute to the life of the school through a range of leadership roles. They engage positively in the well-developed subject based ambassador program in S6. Through this, young people develop further their skills in working with others, communication and their organisational skills. Senior leaders should develop a more strategic approach to leadership and achievement progression pathways including further use of recognised or accredited awards. Leadership opportunities across the BGE could be developed further.

- By the end of S3, almost all young people have a well-developed world of work profile. This supports young people to develop important skills for learning, life and work. Young people value their profile and understand how it will support them to move into the senior phase and beyond. All young people in S2 develop their confidence and their understanding of local issues and local charities by participating in the Youth Philanthropy Initiative. A few young people in the BGE contribute to school improvement by working with a local school as Leaders of Learning.

- Staff have developed positive relationships with a range of partners. Partners work well with the pupil support department to offer targeted support for a few young people. This includes Tullochan Trust a local charity, Mark Scott Leadership for life, The Phoenix Centre, Working for You and Canine Concern therapets. Young people develop their confidence and achieve better in school through this targeted work.

- Young people's achievements and engagement in activities within and beyond school are tracked by senior leaders. Senior leaders are not yet using this information to plan achievements, identify the extent to which young people are participating or the skills they are developing. Senior leaders should develop a strategic overview of young people's achievements in order to support staff to identify young people who are at risk of missing out. Staff are at the early stages of considering how best to develop the West Dumbartonshire skills framework the '6Cs' (creativity; citizenship; collaboration; communication; character; and critical thinking.) in a meaningful way for young people.

- Young people's achievements are recognised well in almost all departments through the departmental 'bonus merit system' incorporating pupil of the month. Young people's achievements are also celebrated through whole school assemblies, newsletters, positive texts home and the daily news. The annual award ceremonies in the BGE and senior phase recognise well young people's achievement through the school lens of 'striving for excellence' and 'WeCare'.

Equity
- Senior leaders and staff have a strong understanding of young people and their families' individual circumstances. They have a clear rationale for the use of PEF. Staff have focussed on addressing specific attainment gaps; engaging young people in their learning; promoting parental engagement; removing barriers to learning such as cost of the school day; and improving attendance, relationships and wellbeing across the school. Senior leaders should develop improved ways to evidence the impact of their strategies to improve attainment. This includes how they evidence the acceleration of young people's progress who are supported by interventions through PEF.

- Additional staffing through PEF is supporting attendance and attainment for young people at risk of not achieving awards in literacy and numeracy in the senior phase. Identified staff, working collaboratively, has resulted in a few young people engaging better with their learning. As a result, a majority of young people supported through this work have achieved literacy and numeracy awards. Senior leaders have identified an attainment gap at the BGE in literacy and numeracy for young people in receipt of free school meals and for young people who required additional support with their learning. They, along with key staff, are taking steps to address these gaps

- Senior leaders have strong systematic approaches to monitoring attendance. Staff have successfully improved attendance and reduced in-school truancy. Senior leaders led a successful whole school focus on the importance of attendance at school. Staff engaged well with parents and young people, through home visits and other out of school environments, to

help them realise the importance of being in school to learn. Staff are aware of the need to continue to build on improvements made this year for specific groups including young people who require additional support. For this session to date, a minority of young people have an attendance rate of below 90%.

■ When compared using average complimentary tariff scores, young people who left school between 2018/19 and 2022/23, and who live in Scottish Index of Multple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles one and two, attain broadly in line with young people who reside in similar deciles nationally. There is, however, no clear pattern of improvement with attainment in 2020/21 being significantly lower than national figures. Attainment for young people leaving school in the same five-year time period living in decile ten has decreased between 2018/19 and 2022/23. It is significantly lower than the VC for 2020/21 and significantly much lower than the VC in 2021/22 and 2022/23.

■ Almost all young people moved on to a positive destination on leaving school between 2020/21 and 2022/23. This is an improvement from 2019/20 when most moved on to a positive destination. The percentage of young people going to a positive destination in in line with the VC except in 2020/21 when it was significantly lower. The majority of young people go to further or higher education on leaving school. Staff have positive partnerships with several higher education providers to support widening access to university for young people. A minority of young people go to employment such as hospitality or local engineering firms. A minority of young people left school after completing S4. The percentage of young people staying on to S6 is lower than the national average. Very few young people leave school at the new year holidays during S5.

■ Almost all young people who left school in 2022/23 and 2023/24 who reside in SIMD one and two entered a positive destination. All young people who require additional support with their learning progressed to a positive destination on leaving school in this time period. Senior leaders and staff have improved the percentage of young people in receipt of free school meals leaving school to a positive destination. Almost all left to a positive destination in 2022/23.

Other relevant evidence

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole-school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. Several areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

- Young people receive three periods of high-quality physical education (PE) in S1 to S3. In S4, young people do not receive the recommended two periods of PE per week. They currently receive one period of PE.

- Young people experience learning in religious education from S1 to S6. In S1 to S4, they receive one period a week. In S5 and S6, they experience learning in religious education as part of a rota with personal and social education.

- Senior leaders do not yet consult all parents and young children with how PEF is spent. Current approaches involve sharing the planned PEF spending with the Parent Council. Senior leaders should now consider how they can consult all stakeholders in how PEF is allocated, including working with young people on the participatory element of the spending.

- Young people experience learning in French and Spanish as part of the school's approach to meeting the Scottish Government's 1+2 language policy.

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.