

Secondary Inspection Findings: Curriculum



Secondary curriculum briefing

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The photographs used in this report were taken before Covid-19 restrictions were in place.

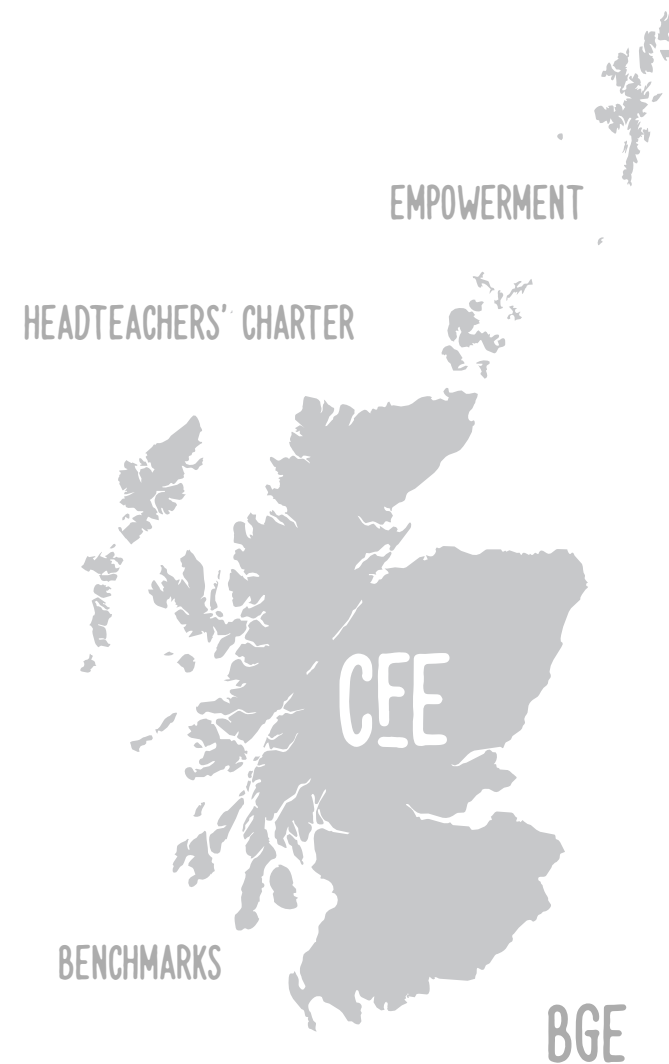
Context

Over the period from 2016-2018, [National Benchmarks](#) were developed for each curriculum area to provide clarification on National Standards expected within each curriculum area at each level within the broad general education (BGE). Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs) for aspects of reading, writing and numeracy were introduced for P1, P4, P7 and S3. Updated national guidance was also published in 2016 to provide clarification on expectations of S3 in relation to the transition from the BGE to the senior phase. Qualifications also continued to evolve and develop over this period with the removal of unit assessments² from National 5 to Advanced Higher qualifications and the removal of recognising positive achievement. Secondary schools have had to make year-on-year changes to their curriculum to take account of these changes.

[The headteachers' charter for school empowerment, 2019](#) clarified that in relation to leading learning and teaching, headteachers should lead collaborative work to codesign and develop the curriculum and learner pathways, including transitions, which best meet the needs of all children and young people. It made clear that this should take account of the national framework for Scotland's curriculum along with the needs of the local context, as agreed between schools and the local authority.

The following sections present our scrutiny findings and professional view of HM Inspectors on the quality of the secondary curriculum to support and promote improvement.

2. Changes to assessment of National Courses



1. Introduction and context

In Scotland, scrutiny activity is a crucial tool which supports improvement, as well as providing assurance and public accountability. The scope of our inspection activities at a local level gives us a unique evidence base drawn from observing practice at first hand across the country. HM Inspectors of Education inspect quality and improvement of education across Scotland's schools using the quality indicators and the six point scale as set out in *How good is our school?* (4th edition) (HGIOS4) quality improvement framework. Evaluations of the quality indicators (QIs) across a sample of schools feed directly into the evidence base for the National Improvement Framework (NIF).

As part of secondary school inspections, HM Inspectors explore how well the school promotes equity of achievements for all young people. This includes evaluating QI 2.2 Curriculum theme on learning pathways in a sample of schools. This enables HM Inspectors to explore the extent to which the curriculum provides flexible learning pathways to meets the needs and aspirations of learners, taking account of the unique context of the school. HM Inspectors link the extent to which the curriculum offered leads to positive outcomes for young people as evaluated through QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement. This briefings draws on a range of evidence including:

- a sample of 56 secondary school inspections where we evaluated the learning pathways theme for QI 2.2 Curriculum from the three-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19
- the views of young people, parents/carers and teachers from pre-inspection questionnaires for all the inspections carried out in secondary schools 2018/19¹
- The [Thematic inspection of personal and](#)

[social education/health and wellbeing in Scotland's schools and early learning and childcare settings, 2018, Thematic Inspection of Readiness for Empowerment, 2018, Thematic Inspection of Empowerment for Curriculum Leadership, 2019, and National thematic inspection: numeracy and mathematics, 2019](#)

- focus groups of HM Inspectors from the Secondary School Inspection Team.

1. In 2018-19, 18,885 young people, 4542 parents and 1976 teachers completed the pre-inspection questionnaires for the 27 Local Authority secondary and all through schools which were inspected between August 2018 and June 2019.



2. Curriculum empowerment

Secondary headteachers and schools are embracing empowerment to design and deliver a curriculum which meets their own school's local context afforded by Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The [Thematic Inspection of Readiness for Empowerment, 2018](#) and the [Thematic Inspection of Empowerment for Curriculum Leadership, 2019](#) both reported that almost all headteachers and schools feel empowered to make decisions about their curriculum to best meet the needs of their children and young people within the local community. They develop distributive leadership and staff feel empowered to work with pupils, parents/carers and partners with the aim of improving outcomes for learners, reducing inequalities and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This represents significant progress in the sector. Key drivers in delivering a high-quality curriculum include strong senior leadership, effective self-evaluation for improvement and professional learning based on curriculum development. Staff in secondary schools understand that the sector includes a very diverse range of schools in terms of size, geography and socioeconomic contexts and that these require unique solutions to providing the best curriculum for the young people attending the different schools. In secondary schools, almost all principal teachers and faculty heads continue to be

key leaders of learning and teaching and the curriculum, supporting teachers to lead within their curriculum areas and subjects. Effective collaboration and participation in career-long professional learning (CLPL) is supporting secondary staff in developing a clearer understanding of the social, economic and cultural context of the school community. Principal teachers and faculty heads are now clear about their role and contribution to developing the curriculum to meet the range of young people's needs within the school. While almost all staff are keen to take a lead on elements of learning and teaching they sometimes find this challenging due to difficulties finding staff cover. Where there are staffing shortages in secondary schools, these are barriers to empowerment as they limit the provision of flexible pathways in the curriculum.

While almost all headteachers consult with parents/carers and pupils on the vision for the curriculum, they do not yet collaborate with them sufficiently in discussions about curriculum design or evaluating the impact of curriculum change. A few schools have formal mechanisms in place which harness the skills and knowledge of parents/carers and partners to support the delivery of the curriculum. Where this works well, it promotes co-designing learner pathways which best meet the needs of all young people.

Pupils



My school offers me the opportunity to take part in activities in school beyond the classroom and timetabled day

87%

All or some of the time



I have the opportunity to discuss my achievements out with school with an adult in school that knows me well

62%

All or some of the time



I was given good advice to make choices about taking the subjects that are right for me

60%

All or some of the time

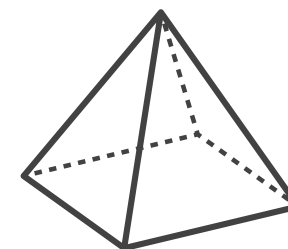
3. Developing the school curriculum rationale

Most secondary schools have a clear curriculum rationale linked to the school vision values and aims. While almost all headteachers consult with parents/carers and young people on the vision for the curriculum, they do not always publish the agreed curriculum rationale. In most schools, curriculum rationales aim to raise attainment and close the poverty-related attainment gap by meeting young people's needs and preparing them for positive destinations.

Increasingly, secondary schools are using a wide range of evidence and information to inform their development of the curriculum. This can include using assessment information on attainment of CfE levels, Insight data on young people's attainment and achievement, self-evaluation evidence, and using local labour market intelligence which takes account of the school's local context.

In coming to decisions about developing further the curriculum framework for the school's local context, senior leaders aim to address a number of factors to continuously support improvement. These include how to:

- raise attainment and achievement by providing a range of flexible progression pathways that build on young people's prior learning and support their interests and aspirations
- increase the variety of provision in the senior phase to meet a wider range of young people's needs often linked to increasing staying-on rates
- provide an increasing range of vocational provision, work placements and links with employers to support positive destinations into further and higher education as well as employment
- improve the range of opportunities for personal achievement leading to accredited awards linked to progressive skills development
- provide more time for in-depth learning, and reduce the assessment burden for young people
- address drop-out rates in some subjects and support young people's wellbeing due to the assessment burden when studying, for example eight subjects/courses
- address 'a two term dash' for qualifications and ensure a more even gradient of learning throughout the senior phase
- provide the BGE and senior phase entitlements including universal support, and wider range of opportunities for personalisation
- ensure all faculties/departments within the school provide an increasing range of provision at different Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels to meet the wider range of young people's needs
- maximise staffing resources and partnerships to ensure the widest range of progression pathways for young people.



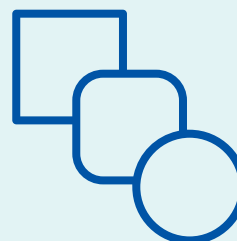
The number of subjects/courses available in any one year within the senior phase is often debated and has been discussed widely. The rationale for some schools reducing the number of subjects/courses studied in S4, for example from eight to six, was to provide more time for in-depth learning in S4 and to provide opportunities for more subjects/courses, often at a higher SCQF level than previously, in S5 and S6. For others the rationale was that reducing the number of subjects/courses studied in any one year in the senior phase

would reduce the assessment burden for young people. This would then address for some young people any wellbeing concerns linked to the pressures of assessment. In other schools the rationale was to ensure that the notional 160 hours of learning for SQA qualifications was provided. Senior leaders are aware of the importance of involving parents/carers in discussions about the possible range and numbers of subjects/courses on offer to help parents/carers understand the reasons for decisions made.

Features of effective practice at transitions

- The school works closely with all partners to plan progressive learning experiences for all young people at times of transition.
- Teachers work together across sectors and departments on moderation pupils' work across all curriculum areas using the National Benchmarks. This supports sharing of standards and improving the reliability and validity of teacher professional judgement on progress and achievement across all learning.

- Senior managers plan professional learning time for staff which includes opportunities for collaboration and professional dialogue with colleagues across the school and in other sectors. This enables staff to develop and improve courses and programmes.
- Learners' understanding of their progress, skills and attainment, linked to profiling, supports successful transitions.



Parents

My child is making good progress at the school

84%

All or some of the time



My child was well supported to make choices about taking the subjects that are right for them

60%

All or some of the time



The school takes my views into account when making changes them

45%

All or some of the time



4. Providing a coherent curriculum 3-18: primary-secondary transitions

Effective primary to secondary school transition arrangements are in place for learners in the majority of schools. Although schools provide children with effective pastoral support at points of transition, the curriculum is not yet experienced as a coherent whole particularly when children move from P7 to S1. Links between teaching staff across the sectors vary from connections in all subject areas to literacy or numeracy only. While there are examples of good practice in this area, further work is required across all curriculum areas to ensure programmes of learning are jointly planned with staff in associated primary schools. This should support a shared understanding of standards and support progression in learning across all curriculum areas.

5. Providing a broad general education S1-S3

Providing breadth across all eight curriculum areas

In all the schools inspected, teachers are using CfE experiences and outcomes to plan learning during the BGE from S1 to S3. In most schools, young people are learning across all eight curriculum areas. However, in around half of the schools, all young people are not receiving their full entitlement to a BGE. Courses in S1 and S2 are mainly based on third level experiences and outcomes but too often this is provided as a 'common course' with all young people following the same programme of learning. Such provision does not always build on young people's prior attainment and achievement across all curriculum areas. Schools are offering learning at second level, usually in English and mathematics, for some young people to appropriately build on their prior learning and attainment. More flexibility is needed in the BGE to cater for different learning pathways and progression from S1-S3.

Increasingly, senior leaders and teachers recognise that the quality of the BGE curriculum is a driver to raise attainment and achievement both in S1-S3 and in the senior phase. Most

secondary schools are now reviewing their BGE curriculum with the aim of providing appropriate learning pathways better matched to the needs of young people, rather than the 'one size fits all' model which remains in the majority of schools.

The majority of schools are at the early stages of using the National Benchmarks to understand what success looks like at each level. Further development of staff's understanding of standards within the National Benchmarks should also help inform improvements to the BGE in all curriculum areas. In taking forward their reviews of the BGE, schools should ensure all young people receive their entitlement to a broad, general education S1-S3.

Learning and teaching in the BGE to support development of the four capacities

Providing more exciting, engaging and relevant learning and teaching in every school is a key aspiration of CfE. Defining the curriculum expectations through the experiences and outcomes also aimed to emphasise that well-planned experiences are important and valuable in their own right. Using the experiences and outcomes to plan learning in the BGE has supported teachers in trying out a range of new approaches to engage

Challenging, relevant and rewarding learning experiences, which will continue to help learners make connections in their learning, will drive their motivation and sense of purpose and enable them to develop deeper understanding. The improved approach to learning embedded within Curriculum for Excellence helps learners develop attributes, capabilities, skills (including higher-order thinking skills), knowledge and understanding in greater depth. This depth can be applied across their learning experiences and to life beyond school.

Curriculum for Excellence Briefing 7:
Progression from the Broad General
Education to the Senior Phase, December
2012

and motivate young people. Examples include enquiry-based learning, young people leading collaborative tasks, engaging with a range of relevant resources available through digital technology, taking responsibility for their own learning through understanding the purpose of learning and their next steps in learning, and participating in self and peer assessment. However, too often, learning is overly teacher-led. Most teachers need to review their approaches to achieve an appropriate balance between teacher-led and learner-led activities to better meet the individual needs of learners.

Achieving consistently high-quality learning and teaching within and across faculties remains work in progress in almost all secondary schools. Increasingly, the use of agreed effective learning and teaching policies, underpinned by schools' vision and values, is leading to greater consistency in well-planned and structured lessons. Overall, secondary schools need to continue to develop their approaches to supporting young people to:

- learn independently
- take responsibility for learning
- be active in their learning
- participate in collaborative learning
- have a wide range of opportunities to apply their learning and skills development.

Personalisation, choice and specialisation

» *Personalisation and choice*

Staff in secondary schools appreciate that opportunities for personalisation and choice is an important part of maintaining young people's motivation. Such opportunities can also provide appropriate challenge and support young people in progressing through the BGE and onto to the senior phase.

The majority of secondary schools provide a range of electives throughout the BGE S1-S3. These aim to develop skills and provide opportunities for further study in a relevant and enjoyable way. In a minority of schools, such courses offered as electives do not provide sufficient depth or progression which can result in learners being disadvantaged by gaps in their learning. In other cases, the elective programme is built around teachers' skills and interests rather than being based on meeting young people's needs. More work is required to ensure electives are planned using the experiences and outcomes and provide appropriate progression for young people. Consideration should also be given to building in more choice within ongoing learning and teaching activities throughout S1-S3 to build young people's confidence and skills in making informed choices.

In many cases, key aspects of learning at CfE third and fourth levels during the BGE will be directly relevant to learning which will need to be demonstrated to gain a qualification. Schools should take this explicitly into account in planning their BGE provision...

Although formal qualification courses will not begin before S4, learning which takes place in the BGE can and should contribute to learning for qualifications. This can and should be done without compromising the entitlement to a BGE in S3...

Schools should provide learning in S3 which rounds off effectively the BGE phase and, at the same time, covers learning which will prepare young people well for qualification courses they may follow in S4.

Progression from the Broad General Education (BGE) to the Senior Phase
– updated guidance, May 2016

» **Specialisation**

All secondary schools provide opportunities for young people in the BGE to specialise in aspects of their learning and to study subjects or new areas of learning in-depth. The time that such opportunities for specialisation are built into S1-S3 varies across schools with some offering this at the end of S1 or S2.

Although most schools offer such opportunities for specialisation at fourth level in S3 to support the transition to the senior phase, pathways through the BGE do not always support young people in progressing from their prior levels of attainment.

Secondary schools need to keep under review points at which young people make choices for specialisation to ensure they continue to experience a broad, general education to the end of S3 and avoid limiting choices for progression into the senior phase.

Improving S3 to support the transition to the senior phase

Staff in secondary schools have found it challenging to achieve a balance between providing all young people with their entitlement to a BGE in S1-S3 while providing appropriate depth in learning during the BGE to prepare young people for progression to qualifications in the senior phase.

Staff welcomed the [updated national guidance published in 2016](#) which provided clarification on expectations of S3 in relation to the transition from the BGE to the senior phase.

In light of their experience in delivering National Qualifications, staff recognise that young people require suitably challenging learning in the BGE to prepare them well for the level of challenge in the senior phase as appropriate for young people's prior learning, progress and attainment. Most schools are beginning to improve their arrangements in S3 in the BGE because too often progression routes in the BGE are not providing learning which allow young people to make a smooth transition to the senior phase. They are aiming to ensure the offer of specialisation effectively supports additional depth and challenge, while ensuring that learners continue to receive the entitlements of the BGE.

Examples of practice in improving the BGE in S3 include:

- maintaining study in all eight curriculum areas with opportunities to specialise within curriculum areas
- providing opportunities to study more than one subject in a curriculum area, for example, an additional science subject or take on new subjects/courses related to possible senior phase pathways
- improving planning around the fourth level

Features of effective practice in the S3 curriculum

- Young people are learning at a level in line with their prior progress and achievement.
- S3 courses provide in-depth learning, appropriate challenge and support higher-order thinking.
- Many young people are specialising and working at fourth curriculum level across their learning. The curriculum also provides courses at second and third curriculum level which consolidate learning for those who would benefit from it.
- The curriculum provides appropriate learning opportunities to ensure young people with additional support needs continue to make progress in their targets.
- Electives, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement are well-planned using the experiences and outcomes with a clear purpose and provides young people with progression in their learning.

- Breadth in S3 means planning learning using the experiences and outcomes and National Benchmarks to support assessment in all curriculum areas (English; Gaelic; mathematics; modern languages; social studies; science; expressive arts; technology; health and wellbeing; religious and moral education/religious education). This includes year-long courses as well as short courses.
- Young people are well-informed about their progress. They are taking increasing responsibility for tracking their own progress and profiling their achievements. This supports decisions about which subjects/courses they will choose at the end of S3 to take forward into the senior phase and about qualifications at the appropriate level.
- S3 is not about a curriculum dominated by the assessment standards for qualifications and practising for examinations.

experiences and outcomes to provide a stronger foundation for moving onto qualifications in S4

- providing opportunities for consolidation of learning at third level experiences and outcomes
- aligning carefully subject/course choices in S3 and senior phase subject/course choices including building in sufficient flexibility to be able to choose different options in S4 and beyond
- designing electives and/or interdisciplinary learning options which enable young people to continue learning in those subjects they have not selected for specialism and to provide opportunities for young people to apply learning across different contexts
- increasing the focus on supporting young people in making informed choices, for example, 'World of Work Week', work placements and input from partners.

Secondary schools need to build on such work to ensure an appropriate balance in all curriculum areas between extending knowledge, understanding and skills required for progression into senior phase qualifications with achieving the third and fourth level outcomes. Care needs to be taken to avoid narrowing learning in S3 courses by having too much focus on the requirements for a qualification.

In taking this work forward, senior leaders and teachers should develop clearer progression pathways through S1 to S3 and between CfE levels into the senior phase. This needs to include a wider range of CfE levels and learning pathways which provide young people with a range of opportunities to revisit and consolidate of their learning so that they can apply and extend their learning at levels appropriate to their prior progress and attainment.

Young people also need to be appropriately supported to ensure that their subject choices/ specialisation in the BGE do not lead to gaps in learning required for progression in the senior phase.

Monitoring and tracking of progress and attainment in the BGE to ensure appropriate learning pathways

Schools are at different stages of developing systems to track and monitor progress of young people across their learning during S1-S3. Too often, schools do not have valid and reliable assessment information about young people's progress in the BGE across all curriculum areas from S1-S3. This is not supporting schools in reviewing learning pathways to ensure appropriate provision for all young people to progress and attain as best they can. Only a few schools have robust tracking and monitoring of progress across the BGE which allows planning

Features of effective practice in monitoring and tracking in the BGE

- Staff gather evidence from day-to-day learning and teaching and well-planned assessments. Assessment planning takes into account the National Benchmarks for each curriculum area.
- To ensure the validity, reliability and robustness of teachers' professional judgements, teachers participate in effective approaches to moderation within and across schools.
- Staff make holistic judgments on a range of assessment evidence that demonstrates how well young people are progressing and achieving CfE levels. This builds staff confidence in developing their understanding of standards for assessment. It also establishes the moderation process across departments as a regular vehicle for wider discussions

about improvements in courses, and in learning and teaching.

- The school has ensured that everyone understands the purpose of the monitoring and tracking system and what it is trying to achieve.
- Progress and achievement in all aspects/ contexts of learning is recorded in the system.
- The school's monitoring and tracking system provides information for timely and coherent intervention.
- The system is proportionate and manageable.
- The system records when young people have achieved a CfE level.



for improvements in the curriculum in order to raise attainment of young people.

The lack of robust data on attainment in the BGE can result in young people undertaking courses leading to qualifications at inappropriate SCQF levels.

6. Providing flexible progression pathways in the senior phase

Designing the curriculum framework/model

There has been much debate about the number of subjects and courses secondary schools provide within their curriculum frameworks/models for the senior phase. Some teachers express concern about a decline in uptake in their subjects. Some others, including parents/carers and young people, are concerned about the variability in provision in secondary schools which may result in a perceived inequality of offer. For example, a few parents/carers responding to the preinspection questionnaires in 2018/19 commented on the number of subjects and qualifications available for young people. Their concerns focused on comparisons with what was on offer in nearby schools and the impact on future career pathways for their children.

Factors that affect how many qualifications a young person is presented for include the number of choice columns, the offer in each of the columns, the school presentation policy and pathways beyond S4, including whether the senior phase is planned as one cohort with S4, S5 and S6 timetabled together.

Increasingly, secondary staff indicate that the focus of professional debate needs to be less about the number of subjects/course and more about how to deliver the senior phase entitlement in creative ways. These need to meet the range of young people's needs and develop their skills, attributes and capabilities as well as opportunities to attain qualifications that support positive destinations taking account of the school's unique context.

The extent to which the curriculum offered leads to positive outcomes for young people depends on a number of factors; it is not just about the number of subjects offered in any one year in the senior phase. Some of these factors which contribute to ensuring young people attain and achieve the best they possible can, are:

- the quality of leadership of change
- the curriculum as experienced by young people in their day-to-day learning, 'the enacted curriculum', which can be linked to the quality of learning and teaching
- the effectiveness of the BGE in supporting progression to the senior phase
- the range and quality of learning pathways provided which best meets the needs of learners within the school.

Teachers

Children and young people are provided with experiences which meet their learning needs

95%

All or some of the time



Have a shared understanding of their 'responsibility of all' in literacy and numeracy and health and wellbeing

88%

All or some of the time



I have regular opportunities to help shape the curriculum through discussions with colleagues, parents and partners

77%

All or some of the time



Building the senior phase curriculum around young people's needs interests and aspirations

Secondary schools have had an increased focus on having a learner-centred approach to building the senior phase around young people's choices, interests, needs and aspirations. They now have a greater focus on providing a range of learning pathways including bespoke pathways for individual young people.

Providing an appropriate curriculum which supports positive initial destinations for all young people, as well as those at risk of disengagement and those with additional support needs is a high priority for secondary schools. This has involved a move away from a fixed timetable/column structure approach to subject and course choices to one which offers young people a free choice and builds the timetable around those choices within the resource constraints of the schools. Such approaches offer the opportunity for greater learner engagement and motivation as a result of them studying subjects/courses which better meet their needs and aspirations.

Some unintended consequences have also resulted, such as a reduction in uptake of some subjects and courses. Other factors can influence young people's choices such as some subjects/courses not being sufficiently relevant

or interesting, perceived not to be needed for progression or aspirations. Constraints in breadth/number of subjects/courses on offer, perceived difficulty as well as the quality of teaching and experience within departments/faculties have also contributed.

Approaches to maximising the senior phase curriculum offer

» *Making structural changes to the timetable and column choices*

Many secondary schools have carried out a review of the structure of their timetables to maximise the range of provision in both the BGE and in the senior phase. This has included changes to the numbers of periods available each week and provided, for example:

- specified periods for the provision of the entitlement to universal support,
- opportunities for personalisation; and
- delivering national expectations in relation to the provision of religious and moral education and physical education.

» *Collaboration with other schools and providers*

Consortium arrangements across groups of schools increasingly allow young people to have a broader range of curricular options that would otherwise not be possible due to staffing and resourcing constraints within any one school.



Almost all schools are now working with local colleges and partners to offer an increasing variety of learning pathways, including those with a specific vocational focus. Alignment of timetables is an important consideration in order to ensure young people do not miss out on learning in their own school when attending other learning establishments. Whilst this approach works well in areas where schools and colleges are in close proximity, there remain challenges for those schools that are more geographically isolated.

Work with community learning and development (CLD) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) partners is making an increasingly more active contribution to successful developments in this area. In a minority of schools, CLD staff offer valuable one-to-one support and group work.

In general, partnership links with post-16 providers are more often with those providing further education rather than higher education which could be further developed. Links with local businesses and third sector organisations continue to be an area of development in the majority of schools.

In almost all schools, these partners work as individuals with the school; a whole school strategic approach to partnership

working would bring further benefits for the curriculum and young people.

» **Planning S4-S6 as one cohort**

In some schools the senior phase allows young people from S4, S5 and S6 to study and learn together. This can provide young people with opportunities to study with peers learning at the same SCQF level rather than always learning alongside their stage peers. This approach can provide more flexibility for learners to study at different SCQF levels across the senior phase.

» **Multi-level classes**

Classes in the senior phase may have young people that are aiming for the qualification at different SCQF levels. This varies across schools and across courses and is more prevalent in smaller schools. The successes and challenges presented by this arrangement vary from subject to subject and depend on factors such as the size of the class and the design of the qualifications. Teachers, young people and parents/carers responding to the pre-inspection questionnaires in 2018/19 did not raise multi-level teaching as a concern.

» **Use of technology**

Increasingly, schools are including online learning as part of their curriculum offer. This includes, for example, using the national

digital platform E-Sgoil, SCHOLAR or a local authority supported Virtual Academy to provide a wider and more equitable choice of subjects and courses for young people. Ensuring young people have independent learning skills and are able to take responsibility for their own learning are key to the success of such provision. How young people are supported by teachers and have opportunities to collaborate with other young people undertaking such studies are important considerations for such of such provision.

Range of learning pathways for qualifications

The senior phase curriculum in secondary schools remains dominated by preparing young people for qualifications. As new qualifications have been phased in, teachers have been planning courses designed around the requirements of a widening range of qualifications which better meet the needs of young people. The increase in the range of courses on offer includes pathways offering progression through different levels of the SCQF. Whilst most young people follow courses leading to National Qualifications, the senior phase curriculum increasingly provides courses leading to, for example, Awards and Foundation Apprenticeships.



Secondary schools have been successful in increasing the range of learning pathways to better meet the needs of young people at risk of leaving school without a positive destination. The broadening range of learning pathways needs to be further developed especially for those 'middle attaining' young people.

Young people do not always have a good understanding of the range of pathways and courses available to them, particularly vocational courses. Relatively small numbers of young people are participating in Foundation Apprenticeships in most schools. Staff need to improve young people's understanding of the pathways through and beyond school from an earlier stage. This includes the need to help young people's understanding of labour market intelligence and careers options. Most schools work well with SDS career coaches to provide effective support for young people to make the transition to further education, higher education, employment or training.

Using self-evaluation evidence to inform the curriculum offer

Staff in secondary schools are making increasing use of Insight, the senior phase benchmarking tool, to evaluate the success of their courses. Analysis of data in Insight is providing staff with evidence about the progress of different groups of learners such

as low and high attaining, those requiring additional support and care experienced young people. This is beginning to inform curriculum developments in schools to better meet the needs of all young people. Staff are aware that the curriculum will need ongoing evaluation and change due to both the needs of the differing cohorts of young people and the changing external environment.

Work with partners, including employers and colleges, still needs to be more systematic in terms of developing and reviewing their contributions to planning and evaluating their contributions to the curriculum.

Monitoring and tracking in senior phase

Monitoring and tracking of young people's progress and attainment across the curriculum is well established in the senior phase.

This information is used to plan appropriate interventions to support young people in making better progress in an ongoing way. It is also used to make decisions about which level of qualification individual young people are most likely to succeed in. Such approaches to monitoring and tracking in the senior phase, together with whole school presentation policies, support informed decision making across all of the learning of an individual young person.

Features of effective practice in providing the universal support entitlement



- All young people have an adult who knows them well and regularly discusses their progress across all aspects of their learning.
 - One-to-one discussions about progress, informed by well-considered profiling processes, support young people in understanding their strengths and areas for development.
 - Young people are supported in setting relevant and challenging learning targets for themselves.
 - Staff plan and take forward interventions successfully to ensure all learners achieve as highly as possible across all aspects of their learning.
 - Staff are helping young people to develop the skills to review and improve their learning and progress.
- Staff support young people in making informed decisions in relation to choices at the end of the BGE for courses leading to qualifications in the senior phase.
 - Staff involved in discussing progress with young people have had appropriate professional learning to undertake the role.
 - Staff have a manageable number of young people with whom they engage on a frequent and regular basis.
 - Staff understanding of local employment opportunities and employers' needs is high. Their knowledge of vocational, college and university courses is updated regularly and is used to help young people understand the range of provision on offer.

7. Using the four contexts of the curriculum

Staff continue to offer an improving range of opportunities across the four contexts for learning of CfE, namely the ethos and life of the school, curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement. The curriculum framework in secondary schools is mainly based around provision of courses within curriculum areas and subject. Learning pathways are not planned as a coherent experience across the four contexts of the curriculum, linked to the experiences and outcomes. Schools need to support further young people to make better connections across their learning.

Ethos and life of the school as a community

The wellbeing of young people continues to be at the heart of the ethos and life of almost all secondary schools. Positive relationships create a supportive climate for learning in almost all secondary schools. This is a key strength of secondary schools. A high priority has been given to developing inclusive practices with staff participating in effective professional learning, for example in nurturing principles and restorative approaches. This has resulted in schools

moving away from disciplinebased models to promoting positive relationships and respect. These improvements in the ethos and life of secondary schools are leading to young people feeling included, respected and valued.

Young people and staff are increasingly aware of the rights of children as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Young people in most secondary schools benefit from opportunities to express their views and influence decision making. The range of ways in which young people are involved is highlighted in The Thematic Inspection of Empowerment for Parent and Pupil Participation, June 2019. This includes a variety of participation activities such as pupil parliaments, focus groups, and through committee or house structures. Increasingly, young people feel involved more in sharing their views on their learning experience, school improvement planning and helping to review school policies. The majority feel that the school takes their views into account. There are a few strong examples of secondary schools engaging young people in developing and evaluating the curriculum. However, overall this is a key aspect for further development across secondary schools. Schools should continue to support and encourage young people better to participate in decision making activities which lead to school improvements.



Almost all schools offer an increasing range of opportunities for young people to develop their confidence and leadership skills through roles such as house captains, buddies, ambassadors, sports leaders, mentors and event organisers. It is important that schools continue to develop these opportunities for young people across all stages of the school. Overall, there is more work to be done to ensure young people influence what

and how they learn; and take responsibility for their learning. Most secondary schools encourage young people to engage in the wider community through a range of planned activities and experiences. There are good examples of young people raising money for local and international charities, or taking part in sustainability activities in the school community. Schools should continue to enhance their links with the local community to provide opportunities for young people to develop as responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Interdisciplinary learning

The majority of secondary schools are at the early stages of providing meaningful, relevant learning experiences which enhance young people's understanding of the links in their learning through interdisciplinary learning (IDL) in the BGE. IDL is not a feature of senior phase provision in secondary schools. Further work is required to provide IDL for young people to apply and consolidate their learning in a planned way which ensures progression and leads to measurable outcomes.

Opportunities for personal achievement

All secondary schools inspected offer a wide range of opportunities beyond the classroom in which young people can participate and

develop their skills. Activities range from sport and culture to volunteering in the local community and participating in visits both near home and abroad. Accreditation for developing skills and attributes continues to increase and is recognised through a wide variety of awards including Sports Leadership Awards; Saltire Awards; The Duke of Edinburgh's Awards; Employability Award and ASDAN certificates of personal effectiveness. Schools recognise that more needs to be done to track young people's participation and support them to articulate the skills they are developing. This work is underway in most of the schools.

Skills for learning, life and work

Literacy and numeracy

Developing literacy and numeracy across the curriculum and embedding skills for learning, life and work are ongoing priority areas in the schools inspected and still require improvement. Staff in all secondary schools are aware of their responsibilities in developing literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Staff are using the National Benchmarks to develop a shared understanding of standards. Where there is an agreed collaborative approach across the school with collective leadership, this is leading to a better pace of change and improvement in developing young people's literacy and numeracy skills. Overall, schools remain at the early stages of

developing a strategic approach to the teaching and assessing of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. The promotion of health and wellbeing as a whole school responsibility is at an early stage of implementation in most schools.

Digital literacy

Improvements in the use of digital literacy to support learning are beginning to be seen in a minority of secondary schools. Considerable work remains in the majority of schools to embed the use of digital technology as an effective tool to motivate and engage learners, preparing them simultaneously with the digital skills required for life as 21st century citizens. Schools are striving to make provision at times within limited infrastructure.

Developing the Young Workforce

The strategic leadership within secondary schools for the development and implementation of the priorities of Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (2014) (DYW) has improved, overall. Early implementation of the strategy is not yet consistent across schools. In order to realise the ambitions of DYW, the pace of progress now needs to increase.

8. Providing the universal support entitlement and supporting young people in making informed choices

In the [Thematic Inspection of Personal and Social Education/Health and Wellbeing, August 2018](#), HM Inspectors highlighted the commitment of staff to ensuring that all young people have access to a member of staff who knows them well as a strength. Most secondary teachers recognise their responsibilities to provide universal support, and the importance of establishing and maintaining positive



relationships with all young people. In all secondary schools, young people are allocated a key adult, usually their pastoral care teacher or their tutor, who knows them well, and to whom they can talk if they have a concern. In most secondary schools, these pastoral care teachers are seen as approachable and are highly regarded by young people, who feel well supported. As a result, almost all young people have someone to speak to if they have a concern or worry.

Increasingly, high-quality conversations encourage rich dialogue between subject teachers and young people, helping learners to understand and evaluate progress and agree areas for development. However, the quality and frequency of planned opportunities for all young people to discuss their wellbeing and reflect on their progress across their learning is too variable. In addition, the variability in the reliability of data on young people's progress and attainment in the BGE does not always support young people well in making informed choices for progression into the senior phase.

All secondary schools have in place arrangements to provide a range of careers advice and guidance services to young people. The majority have in place effective measures to help young people and families make informed choices about future post-

school learning options. As yet, most schools do not provide sufficient information to ensure a successful transition to further learning experiences for young people requiring additional support in their learning.

Overall in secondary schools, a clearer whole-school strategic approach to delivering the universal support entitlement to all young people is required. This includes a need to review the role of pastoral care teachers, and the effectiveness of tutor groups and universal support periods. A better balance of responsibilities across universal and targeted support is needed. Too often, schools have an over-reliance on support for learning or pastoral care teachers in the delivery of universal support. Principal teachers of pastoral care need to be clearer about their leadership role and responsibilities in the delivery of high-quality universal support and monitoring of the progress of young people. This includes providing professional learning for all staff to help them understand their contribution and commitment to universal support.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

Within a context of constant change over recent years, secondary schools have continued to develop and evolve their curriculum. Senior leaders and teachers continue to be committed to design and deliver a curriculum, which meets their own school's local context, as afforded by CfE. They are embracing the focus on school empowerment which is supporting them to make decisions about their curriculum to best meet the needs of their young people within the local community.

Senior leaders appreciate that they need to make important decisions to deliver the school's agreed curriculum rationale. For some this is within the constraints of staffing and resources. They are aware that there is no 'one size fits all' curriculum framework/model and decisions need to focus on providing learning pathways that meet the needs of all their young people. They also play an important role in managing the pace of change within schools to bring about sustained improvements in outcomes for learners.

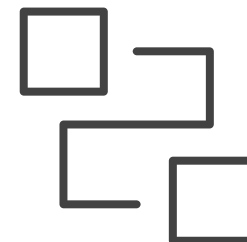


Development of the secondary curriculum has brought about significant improvements. These include:

- secondary schools becoming more flexible and innovative in the range of provision on offer in the senior phase
- effective partnerships with other schools, colleges, employers and thirdsector organisations enhancing the curriculum offer, including to provide vocational pathways
- an increased learner-centred focus by building senior phase learning pathways around young people's choices, needs and aspirations
- positive relationships creating a supportive climate for learning in secondary schools with the wellbeing of young people at the heart of the ethos and life of schools
- young people having a wide range of opportunities for achievement beyond the classroom
- an increase in the percentage of young people moving from school to a positive destination



These positive improvements in the secondary curriculum mean schools are well placed to realise the full benefits of school empowerment in relation to curriculum leadership. Staff in secondary schools appreciate that improving the curriculum is a work in progress with developing partnerships being key to improving the curriculum offer. Schools and teachers now need to be more creative and innovative in developing and delivering a curriculum to meet the needs of learners and the local context.



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The following recommendations aim to support secondary schools in building on the positive improvements in the secondary curriculum to continue to raise attainment and deliver excellence and equity.• Further improve the quality of the BGE curriculum, as a driver to raise attainment both in S1-S3 and in the senior phase, by providing a range of learning pathways for young people from S1-S3 which build on their prior learning and achievement.• Develop approaches to monitoring and tracking of young people's attainment and achievement in the BGE in order to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• analyse progress• evaluate the success of interventions for raising attainment of young people• ensure appropriate progression pathways into the senior phase. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure learning pathways are planned as a coherent experience across all aspects of the curriculum and support young people to make better connections across their learning.• Build on the approaches to supporting young people in gaining and improving their skills through opportunities for personal achievement by planning learning as part of a coherent and progressive experience.• Continue to improve approaches to providing the universal support entitlement for young people to better support them in reflecting on and reviewing their progress, attainment and achievement across all their learning and in making informed choices.• Increase the pace of progress in the implementation of DYW priorities in order to realise its ambitions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better support young people to understanding the range of learning pathways and courses available to them, particularly vocational courses.• Further develop approaches to ongoing evaluation of curriculum development and change to ensure the curriculum continues to evolve to take account of both the needs of the differing cohorts of young people and the changing external environment. |
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