Summarised inspection findings

Vale Of Leven Academy

West Dunbartonshire Council

5 February 2019

School Name: **Vale of Leven Academy**
Council: **West Dunbartonshire Council**
SEED number: **8304831**
Roll (Sep 2017): **980**

Key contextual information

Almost a third of the school's population stay in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) two. Taking SIMD one and two together, this represents just under a half of the school's population (46%). Most young people, 86.1% reside in SIMD one to five.

Attendance is generally below the national average. For 2016 - 2017, the total percentage attendance was 87.6% compared to 91.2% nationally. At the time of the inspection, the school reported that attendance was improving thus far this session.

Exclusion rates are above the national average. For 2016-2017, there were 144 cases of exclusion, which is 152.9 per 1000 pupils. The national average is 47.7. At the time of the inspection, the school reported that exclusions were declining thus far this session.

In February 2017, 25.2% per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2017, the school reported that 47% of pupils had additional support needs (ASN).

The headteacher (HT) has been the substantive post holder since May 2018. From August 2017, he was seconded to the post to cover for absences. A new depute headteacher (DHT) has been in post since June 2018.

In 2016-2017, the school's middle management structure was adjusted to have subjects leaders in addition to those who are curriculum leaders.

1.3 Leadership of change	satisfactory

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The recently appointed HT has worked with staff, young people and parents to renew the school's vision statement. The vision is based on a sound understanding of the social, economic and cultural context of the school. Senior leaders should now ensure that all staff have a sufficiently detailed and well-informed understanding of the context of the school and local community. They need to ensure that this is taken into account more directly when planning appropriate and relevant learning experiences.

- Since taking up his post, the HT is providing effective leadership and starting to establish a sense of direction for staff. Most teachers describe a feeling of coming together in a common purpose. They feel that the HT is approachable and visible in the school. They welcome the increased opportunities to take responsibility for aspects of school improvement.

- Across the school, teachers are increasingly taking responsibility for aspects of school improvement. Depute headteachers (DHTs), curriculum and pupil support leaders, principal teachers (PTs) and class teachers report that they feel encouraged and supported by the HT in developing their leadership roles. A few working groups provide opportunities for teachers to be involved in leading school improvement. It would be helpful if teachers had more opportunities to undertake professional inquiry linked to aspects of school improvement. Senior leaders should now consider how they can provide greater strategic guidance, with a sharper focus on key agreed improvement activities. Teachers would welcome this guidance to help them understand how their own work contributes to clear targets related to improvement priorities.

- A review of the curriculum is currently under way. A curriculum rationale should be developed to reflect the renewed vision, values and aims. Senior leaders need to prioritise providing a strategic overview of how the curriculum will be improved to raise attainment.

- There is a recognition among teachers that planning for continuous improvement is not yet sufficiently informed by, or linked to, effective self-evaluation. As a result, all teachers have recently participated in professional learning to build their skills in self-evaluating learning and teaching. Processes to support self-evaluation are being put in place. These should have sufficiently detailed expectations of outcomes for young people from improvement activities. This will help identify appropriate evidence to support effective evaluation of success and inform future interventions.

- The school improvement plan is focused on a manageable number of priorities. These have the potential to support the work of the school in meeting its aims, while developing excellence

and equity for all learners. Similarly, Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is being used to support projects which have the potential to address barriers to closing any attainment gaps. The rationale for use of PEF could be more clearly related to how gaps in attainment will be reduced.

■ A recently established Leadership Team of young people in S6 is beginning to involve their peers in activities connected to improving the school. Young people in S6 feel that they now have a stronger voice in school improvement. Across other year groups, young people would benefit from having more regular and structured opportunities to have a voice in school improvement.

■ The recently revised school vision statement emphasises preparation for a successful career. The school has recognised that it needs to build further upon its successful links with local business, college and community partners by taking a more formal and structured approach. As a result, the school improvement plan includes the commitment to develop self-evaluation with learners, partners and parents in 2019. Senior leaders need to consider how school staff and partners will establish a clear strategy and management structure to develop the Careers Education Standard (CES).

■ The recent revision to DHT roles and responsibilities is providing a more cohesive focus on Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and employability. Senior leaders and staff are working well with local authority leads and partner agencies to support young people's transition to positive destinations. There are many examples of staff working with partners to support young people living in poverty, or who are most at risk of disengagement.

■ The school has established, strong collaborative arrangements with individual partners to provide young people with an appropriate and inclusive range of opportunities to gain and develop new skills. The school has good partnership working with other secondary schools to enable pupils to access a wider range of subject areas. An appropriate range of part-time school-college provision is providing good opportunities for 47 young people to access vocational programmes at West College Scotland. Young people would benefit from further progression opportunities being made available. There is a need for the school and education authority to engage further with the college to explore ways to maximise progression opportunities for learners.

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

■ Young people benefit from the positive ethos in the school. In this context, the recently refreshed vision and values are beginning to support an ambitious climate for learning. In almost all lessons, there are very positive relationships between young people and their teachers. This creates a supportive environment for learning. The majority of young people enjoy and show respect for learning. They are motivated, well behaved in class and engage in learning activities. When young people work independently and in groups, their motivation increases and deeper learning takes place. Similarly, when given responsibility for aspects of their learning, young people respond maturely and develop skills in leadership and teamwork. Such approaches to providing rich learning experiences should become more consistent across the school. Too often, lessons are overly led by teachers, with learners' experiences too passive.

■ In a minority of curricular areas, young people are provided with regular advice that clearly confirms next steps in learning to support further progress. In several curricular areas, young people are able to speak articulately about their learning. Most learners feel that they are given opportunities to influence what and how they learn. In a minority of curricular areas, young people participate in activities that evaluate and improve learning and teaching. Opportunities for peer and self-evaluation should be increased. This will support learners' understanding and deepen engagement. The buddy system, and role of senior students as classroom support, is successfully assisting individual learners in classes.

■ Senior leaders acknowledge that the quality of teaching is variable. There is strong practice, which could beneficially be shared across the whole school. In almost all cases, lessons have clear objectives. Associated success criteria are not always shared with young people. Most teachers demonstrate skilful questioning that encourages young people's participation and reflection. Teachers explain tasks clearly. They select activities, which are relevant to the context of learning. In a few cases, activities are differentiated to match the needs of all young people. However, the pace and challenge of learning is not always appropriate. The school is beginning to consider how plans for learning and teaching can incorporate the development of skills for learning, life and work. Extending this, and implementing a whole-school approach to developing higher-order thinking skills, would improve outcomes for learners. In most curricular areas, teachers are using digital technologies that enhance young people's motivation and learning experiences. Young people are increasing their access to learning materials at home. These provide a context for reflection and target-setting. There is potential to use digital technologies to increase opportunities for interactive learning.

■ Young people have highly positive experiences in hairdressing and cosmetology as part of the Skills Academy. They enjoy learning within a salon environment and engage enthusiastically in

class and peer activities. The teacher coordinates a wide range of opportunities for young people to demonstrate and apply their skills within the local community. Young people benefit from these experiences to develop confidence and further their interest in the vocational area.

■ Teachers use a range of approaches to formative and summative assessment. In a few curricular areas, assessment is integral to planning learning and teaching. Such practice is not yet embedded across the school. There is insufficient use of data to plan next steps in learning that are agreed with young people. Teachers should now confirm a whole-school approach to ensuring assessment activities, which lead to interventions that support learning.

■ Teachers are at an early stage in understanding and applying National Benchmarks. In curricular areas where moderation activities have taken place, teachers have an enhanced appreciation of how to determine levels of attainment within the Broad General Education (BGE). The consistency of teachers' judgements is improving. They feel that further support is needed to ensure further sharing of standards as part of professional learning.

■ In the Senior Phase, teachers show a strong understanding of assessment requirements within courses. Almost all teachers use assessment information successfully to provide young people with feedback that assists them to make progress towards gaining National Qualifications.

■ Within the BGE, departments have implemented a range of systems for tracking and monitoring the progress of young people. Data is not used consistently to support learning. The school plans to implement a revised approach that more widely leads to appropriate interventions that support improving outcomes for young people. Reporting on progress is not giving parents and young people enough information, including to support decisions on course choices. The school should continue to work with the local authority to improve reporting as part of the local improvement agenda, while taking account of bureaucracy.

■ Within the Senior Phase, a more developed approach to tracking and monitoring is in place. Teachers' analysis of attainment data leads to targeted interventions with learners and assists in the wider evaluation of the learning process. Across the school, there is an extensive mentoring programme that supports learners who are identified through analysis of attainment data.

■ There is scope for tracking and monitoring to be used more widely in analysing outcomes for specific groups, including those facing barriers to their learning. Similarly, emerging work on the tracking and monitoring of young peoples' participation in opportunities for wider achievement should be developed further. This would provide the school with information that can be used to evaluate equity of access to such activities.

■ The work of staff and working groups funded through PEF is beginning to influence improvement. There is now a need for the school to implement a strategic approach to learning, teaching and assessment that builds on and extends areas of existing effective practice. This will confirm definitions of high-quality practice and provide a clear reference point for appropriate professional learning and planned self-evaluation activities.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

■ Young people in S1 learn in all curricular areas. The majority of young people are working on third level Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os). Teachers across associated primaries and the secondary have not yet established robust joint planning which enables smooth progression and coherence in the curriculum. Currently, there is some repetition of content. Senior leaders recognise that narrowing the curriculum in January of S1 is compromising Curriculum for Excellence entitlements.

■ Young people in S2 and S3 are working on third and fourth level Es and Os in a reduced number of subjects. Arrangements for filling gaps in coverage of Es and Os through electives are not underpinned by robust assessment, monitoring and tracking. As a result, young people continue to miss out on the breadth, depth and application of learning. A more strategic overview is required to ensure that young people have opportunities to complete their entitlement to a BGE. This should include all the Es and Os to third level across all curriculum areas.

■ The Skills Academy has been developed to offer new progression pathways for some young people in S2 and S3. This offer includes the schools of dance and football, along with design, engineer, construct (DEC), hairdressing, cake craft, photography and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) qualifications. Data held by English, modern languages and pupil support departments support staff in targeting the young people for whom this pathway is most appropriate. The school's data evidences an increase in the uptake for hairdressing and dance. The hairdressing tutor's established partnerships with local salons is enabling young people to progress to employment and training.

■ The school is making some progress with implementing a 1+2 Approach to Languages. Teachers should increase their engagement with primary colleagues to agree pathways for the first additional language.

■ To increase choice, the senior phase is designed as a three-year experience rather than planned for each year group separately. A commendable range of pathways is provided in the senior phase. These lead to National Qualifications, Awards and work-based learning.

■ There are six courses available for all young people to follow in S4, with five or six courses for those in S5. The majority of young people in S6 study four courses. HM Inspectors have asked senior leaders to prioritise with teachers further work on the BGE. This should focus on having coherent pathways, and an overview of young people's progress by the end of the BGE. At the time of the inspection, too many young people had embarked on courses leading to qualifications in S4 for which the BGE had not paved a smooth progression. Young people have identified that repeating courses leading to qualifications in S5 can be de-motivating. The school should consider course arrangements that better meet young people's need for a more gradual progression in learning in the senior phase.

■ A few young people are benefitting from Foundation Apprenticeships at college. There are also skills for work courses at National 4 and National 5 in childcare and motor engineering. The school should analyse the reasons for a few young people's non-completion of skills for work courses in the latest year.

■ Young people studying four or five Highers in S5 have five periods of study time per week, which is supervised by staff. Staff and young people have expressed the view that it would be

more beneficial for this time to be spent with their subject specialist teachers. The school should review this to support better attainment outcomes for young people.

■ Young people in S5 and S6 are benefitting from tailored work experience placements. These are closely linked to young people's career and university aspirations. Teachers are now considering how work experience may be accredited. They are also looking to improve provision for young people who are less motivated, or not yet clear about their career aspirations.

■ It would be helpful if the course choice booklets illustrated more explicitly the post-school destinations connected to each subject. Pathways to college courses should be outlined to all learners. Some young people identified the need for more support when making choices about courses. At some points in the year, requests to access Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Career Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) services outweigh availability. The school should ensure that young people are fully supported in making appropriate and aspirational course choices.

■ Young people in the senior phase are not receiving their entitlement to Religious and Moral Education (RME) and Physical Education (PE).

■ The mathematics and English departments lead the teaching and assessing of numeracy and literacy. Staff are at a very early stage of developing these skills as a responsibility of all.

■ The school is investing in the development of an online resource to allow young people to access digital learning materials in class and at home. Young people speak highly of this initiative and can describe how they are using this resource to support their learning. The school should now plan the development of digital skills across all areas of the curriculum.

■ Young people would benefit from opportunities to develop and apply their knowledge and skills in different contexts, such as interdisciplinary learning projects. The nature of skills being developed needs to be clearer. Staff should make more use of the agreed skills framework for learning, life and work. They should link these to the range of learning pathways on offer.

■ Staff work hard and conscientiously to provide opportunities tailored to the needs and aspirations of individual young people. The Senior Phase worker in the school works closely with the SDS careers advisor to coordinate preparation for early transition. The school places importance on developing young people's awareness of the range of post-school learning opportunities available to them within the local and wider community.

■ Employability skills are promoted extensively and well across the school community. There are many examples of staff proactively promoting occupational opportunities to young people. These include coordinating a series of vocationally specific events and a large scale careers fair. The fair has representation from a wide range of employers, private training providers, community organisations, colleges and universities. Teachers now need to consider how they can embed employability skills more effectively within learning activities in all subjects.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

■ Parents appreciate the recently appointed HT's vision for improving their school. They find him to be approachable, willing to listen to their views and take, as appropriate, resultant action. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, most parents agreed that the school is well led and managed. Parents highlight their appreciation of the HT's focus on improving learning. The school works effectively with parents and families on an individual basis to meet specific needs. Parents note all staff's commitment and care for their children.

■ Parents are kept informed about their child's progress in learning and school activities. They appreciate the school's use of social media, the recent improvements to the website, and information and engagement evenings and events. However, not all parents feel well informed of their child's progress. They do not find the written summary of progress to be sufficiently detailed.

■ Opportunities are offered to parents to help them understand their child's work and be more confident in providing support at home. Parents welcome most teachers' use of a digital platform to provide them with information to support learning at home. They do, however request more consistency in the use of this digital platform. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, over a third of parents requested more information and events to help them support their child's education.

■ The school has an active Parent Council. They have endeavoured to ensure that they are representative of the entire catchment area. As yet, they feel that this is still to be achieved. The Parent Council feel well informed of key matters relating to the school's core business. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, about half of parents feel they are involved and well informed of the work of the Parent Council. The HT and Parent Council should continue to engage parents more fully.

2.1 Safeguarding

■ The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion	good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- ■ wellbeing
- ■ fulfilment of statutory duties
- ■ inclusion and equality

■ Pupil support staff and community partners demonstrate a strong understanding of the local context and community in which Vale of Leven Academy's young people and their families live. Most staff and young people enjoy mutually caring and positive relationships. This results in most young people confirming that they have someone with whom to talk should they have concerns. Commitment to the importance of relationships is evident in the pupil support structure, which ensures that young people have daily contact with the same class tutor during both registration and for personal, social and health education (PSHE). This caring ethos is encapsulated in the school's recently developed vision and values which includes building confidence and belief in potential.

■ Young people are learning to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing through the PSHE curriculum. This is influenced by the local context by, for example raising an awareness of the dangers of railway trespassing in response to local intelligence. The impact of the PSHE programme is evaluated on a regular basis by formal written feedback, pupil focus groups and staff views. This good practice should continue to ensure progression and consistency in quality of provision.

■ Most young people demonstrate respect through their interactions with both peers and staff. However, the school has already identified the need to ensure that all young people feel safe. They have recently re-established an anti-bullying club. This is led by anti-bullying ambassadors. As planned, staff should review the school policy and procedures for promoting positive relationships in the classroom, school grounds and wider learning community. This should take account of recent national guidance. The school operates a merit and demerit system. Young people who receive a number of demerits are targeted for interventions to improve their behaviour. The school-based youth worker leads some of these activities. A useful next step would be to undertake an evaluation of the impact, outcomes and benefits of the current merit and demerit system and associated interventions.

■ Young people confidently undertake roles of responsibility. They talk insightfully of their role in promoting mental health. They provide inputs at assemblies and events. Young people identify how this work could be developed further. As part of a local charity, Y Sort-it, young people who themselves are young carers undertake leadership opportunities as ambassadors and role models for other younger carers. The school should build on these approaches, and continue to ensure that all young people feel that their views are listened to and taken into account.

■ The school's commitment to supporting the wellbeing of its most disadvantaged learners can be seen in a number of successful initiatives. The breakfast club is valued by those who attend

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for its safe, nurturing environment and opportunities to make friends. Evaluations confirm that this provision encourages almost all of the young people involved to attend school, and to concentrate and learn better.

- The school is now well placed to take a more strategic approach to embedding wellbeing across the school, For this, a shared understanding and more explicit use of wellbeing indicators should be adopted. The Health and Wellbeing Group has a key role to play in taking forward planned developments. They are piloting tools to collate data on the impact of targeted interventions. This will be useful in taking forward their workstreams, including the need to develop a whole-school system to monitor and track learners' wellbeing across the school. This system should draw on the strengths of the extended pupil support and health and wellbeing teams to ensure a coherent, coordinated approach.

- Senior leaders have a good understanding of statutory requirements. Pupil support leaders know what is expected in fulfilling these duties to support wellbeing, equality and inclusion. Regular review meetings are in place to monitor progress. Further work is required to ensure all nutritional regulations are being met for food and drinks provided at lunch time.

- A range of committed staff work collaboratively with partner agencies to provide effective targeted interventions for almost all young people who have ASN. For example, the Tullochan Trust and the school's youth worker successfully provide a space for identified young people at risk of disengagement. This aims to build their self-esteem and confidence. Creative approaches include the Learning to Grow community gardening project and the fishing club. These support the further development of teambuilding and interpersonal skills.

- Staff for ASN provide information to teachers, outlining identified barriers and strategies to support learning. This information could be improved by including more detail about individuals' strengths and interests, as well as specific needs and targets for learners. Teachers of ASN should continue to support class teachers in differentiating learning more effectively for all young people. We have discussed with pupil support teachers how they can now develop support plans for learners requiring targeted support. This includes simplifying short-term targets, with measureable outcomes and timescales. These should be shared with class teachers as appropriate. Young people need to have greater ownership of their targets.

- Overall, senior leaders need to take a more strategic overview of ASN. Staff should be more aware of supporting care experienced young people and those with protected characteristics. This includes reviewing available accommodation and resources, and targeted interventions. Staff need to ensure that they can evidence that all young people who face barriers to their learning are making the best possible progress. There needs to be a much greater focus on improving attendance and timekeeping, as well as reducing the level of exclusions. As planned, staff should continue to implement a whole-school nurturing approach. This should build on the good start made in supporting a small number of young people to improve confidence and readiness to learn. This will be instrumental in the further development of an ethos, which supports positive relationships, rights and respect.

- The school prides itself on being inclusive, and valuing everyone as one of its core aims. Staff understand equalities. They support young people to understand and celebrate diversity, and to challenge discrimination. The school's good work in support of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community, led by young people, has been recognised nationally. One of the school's S6 pupils is a National Inclusion Ambassador. The ambassador

recently presented at the Scottish Parliament about their positive experience at Vale of Leven Academy. Positive awareness training for P7s, S3 and S5 led by staff in the Communication Base as part of the transition programme, is resulting in improvements in young people's understanding of disability and the different supports which individuals need. Commendably, this work is being shared as an example of good practice across the local authority. Young people are developing as global citizens through their involvement in the Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI). Senior leaders should ensure that there are progressive opportunities for all young people to learn about equalities and diversity through their entitlements to RME and religious observance.

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

- There is a need to raise attainment and achievement. All staff need to take action on areas that are constraining standards in attainment and achievement.

- Over a five-year period, there are improvements in some of the school's attainment at the Senior Phase. However, in the latest year, or two years improvements are not always being maintained. The recently appointed HT has correctly identified that the curriculum needs to be reviewed. Aspects of the curriculum are limiting outcomes for some young people, with resultant impact on a number of the school's benchmarking measures across the Senior Phase. At pace, staff should improve continuity and progression in the BGE. This should result in smoother transitions to courses leading to qualifications and other awards and to work-based learning in the Senior Phase. For some young people, the lack of coherence in the BGE is resulting in time pressures for coverage of National 5 courses by the end of S4. As a result, some are not ready to sit National Qualifications. For other young people, their progress is hindered by repeating courses. This is then slowing their pace in progressing within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The punctuality and poor attendance of a small number of young people is adversely affecting their attainment.

- Alongside reviewing the curriculum to raise attainment, senior leaders need to embed a systematic and rigorous approach to monitoring progress in the BGE. This should include regular discussion with teachers on how they are evidencing raised attainment. At this time, data for BGE is not sufficiently analysed to support further improvements in whole-school attainment. Staff should continue to engage in a range of moderation activities to increase the reliability of their professional judgements on achievement of curriculum levels. They need to be clearer about their individual and collective responsibilities in raising attainment.

Attainment in literacy
- In 2016 and 2017, by the end of S3, the school reports that almost all young people are achieving the third curriculum level or better in listening, talking, reading and writing. In the latest year, this has declined to most young people achieving the third curriculum level or better in these skills.

- By the end of S3, over the last three years, about a third of young people achieved the fourth curriculum level in reading. However, the percentage of young people achieving the fourth curriculum level in listening, talking and writing has declined over the last three years. Staff should plan meaningfully opportunities for young people to apply their skills in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

■ Overall, the school performs in line with its virtual comparator (VC) for attainment of all leavers in literacy. Over the past five years, almost all young people left Vale of Leven Academy having attained literacy at SCQF level 4 or better as part of a course. Over the last four years, up to 5% of leavers have not attained SCQF level 3 or better in literacy. In the latest year, there has been an increase in the percentage of young people attaining SCQF level 5 and level 6 or better, while remaining in line with the VC.

Attainment in numeracy

■ In the latest three years, by the end of S3, the school reports that almost all young people are achieving the third curriculum level or better in numeracy. By the end of S3, around half of young people are achieving the fourth curriculum level in numeracy. Teachers should prioritise converting the performance at the fourth curriculum level to qualifications at SCQF level 5 or better.

■ Over the last four years, the school sometimes performs significantly higher than the VC for attainment of all leavers in numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better and level 6 or better. At the other SCQF levels, young people's performance is in line with the VC. In the last three years, most young people are leaving the school having attained numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better. However, there is an increasing gap in the percentage of young people having their skills in numeracy recognised as part of a course award. Over the last five years, up to 6% of leavers have not attained SCQF level 3 or better in numeracy.

Attainment over time

■ While data for the BGE is collated by PTs, senior leaders are at an early stage of having a whole-school overview of how well young people are attaining across the BGE. Overall, in the Senior Phase, the school performs in line with its VC for young people by the time they leave school. As young people move through the school, the middle 60% are often performing significantly higher than the VC. For other attainment groups, the school is broadly in line with the VC.

At S4

■ At SCQF level 4, in the first three of the five years on which the inspection's evidence is based, the percentage of young people attaining one or more to five or more courses is sometimes significantly higher than the VC. The school does not sustain this improvement, with the percentage of young people attaining at this level has fallen to being in line with the VC in the latest two years. At SCQF level 4 for six or more courses, the school is in line with the VC. In the latest year, about half the cohort were achieving six or more courses at SCQF level 4 or better.

- The percentage of young people attaining one or more to four or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better was significantly higher than the VC in previous years. The school then declined to in line with its VC from 2016/17. The percentage of young people attaining one or more courses at SCQF level 5A or better was significantly higher or much higher for four years before declining to being in line with the VC in 2017/18.

By S5
- The percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 5C or better has been significantly higher than the VC in past years. However, there has been a decline in the percentage attaining at this level in 2018.

- The percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 6C or better increased between 2013/14 and 2015/16. However, in the past two years there has been a decline in the percentage attaining at this level. Overall, the school performs in line with the VC.

By S6
- The percentage of young people attaining six or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better or and four or more courses at grade A is overall significantly higher than the VC in four out of the five past years. The percentage of young people attaining five or more to six or more courses at SCQF level 5 at grade A is in line with the VC.

- The percentage of young people attaining one or two or more courses at SCQF level 6C or better is significantly higher than the VC over the past three years. In the latest year, the school has improved to be significantly higher than the VC at SCQF level 6 or better for three or more courses at grade C.

- The percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 6 or better at grade A is in line with the VC.

- The percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 7 or better for one or more courses is broadly in line with the VC.

Equity for all learners
- Over the past five years, attainment of all leavers residing in SIMD deciles one to five has broadly been in line with that for young people living in the same deciles nationally. This represents all but a few of the school's pupils. Staff have been reducing the barriers to learning of the lowest attaining 20%. This has included working with partners to fund projects in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing using PEF.

- The proportion of young people who leave school and achieve a positive destination is in line with the VC for four of the five past years. There has been an increase in the percentage of young people moving on to higher education and employment on leaving school. As teachers review the curriculum, HM Inspectors have asked that they ensure that they retain a focus on the outcomes for the highest attaining 20%.

- The focus on creating individual learning pathways, including through the 'Skills Academy', is improving outcomes for the more disadvantaged young people. The school's Employability Skills Programme provides young people with a useful insight into and experience of the world

of work. However, the school has recognised the benefits of providing formal recognition of the learning gained through participation.

■ A high-quality careers fair provides excellent opportunities for young people, along with their parents and carers, to learn first-hand of a range of post-school destinations. Partner agencies gave detail of pathways entailing community projects, independent training providers, employers and universities. This highly-engaging event involves young people working very positively with others to host the event.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

■ Young people have access to a wide range of groups and clubs. Teachers show a very high level of commitment in providing these opportunities. An increasing number of young people are taking on leadership roles and achieving Saltire Awards. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is well established in the school. This year, 12 young people have achieved Bronze Awards and a few have gained silver. Young people in S5 and S6 are taking part in other groups external to the school. For example, Police Scotland Youth Volunteers through which young people are gaining leadership skills and other awards. Those young people who are motivated to take part in clubs and groups enjoy their experience and recognise the benefits to their learning and development. Young people taking part in ambitious foreign trips have gained significant insight into global issues, as well as memorable experiences. For example, young people worked to support a Women's Cooperative in Costa Rica last year. A trip to Vietnam is planned for 2020.

■ Staff do not yet have a full picture of young people's achievement of accreditation or awards, either within school or through external organisations. There is scope to broaden approaches to accreditation of achievement, including through a planned approach with partners. The school has recognised that it is not yet able to analyse patterns of participation to, for example, identify those young people at risk of missing out through taking part in few or no opportunities.

- The development and promotion of partnerships
- Collaborative leaning and improvement
- Impact on learners

- Relationships between partners, PTs and other school staff responsible for linking to individual organisations are positive. Partner organisations, including the Tullochan Trust and a 'Working 4U' Community Leaning and Development (CLD) youth worker are helping to improve outcomes by reducing risks for targeted young people in need of support. The school has engaged with a range of business and higher education partners to support young people to pursue their career aspirations. Staff recognise that they need to establish a more strategic approach to collective planning and regular self-evaluation with partner organisations. This is an action in the school improvement plan. Developing a more comprehensive analytical overview of the impact of partnership working will be an important first step in this process.

- The school has recently used PEF to employ a full-time youth worker. They focus on targeted groups of young people living in SIMD deciles one, two and three. Initial work has included a well-informed programme for S2 boys, with partners such as No Knives Better Lives, Sky Academy, Mountains and the People Project. The outcomes of the programme were evaluated through feedback from participants and teachers. Impacts included improved behaviour, reduced risk-taking, enhanced confidence and stronger ability to handle emotions. The programme has helped to inform current targeted group work which includes an S2 Boys Group, an S4 Youth Achievement Award Group, a Nurture Group and an LGBTI group. Although at an early stage, the addition of a full-time youth worker post is having a significantly beneficial impact on the school's approaches to working with vulnerable young people.

- The Joint Assessment Team (JAT) exists as an effective forum for partners to discuss and respond to the needs of individual young people. However, the school does not have a forum to enable effective communication for partner organisations, including youth work providers, to discuss, plan and evaluate their work. At present, exchange of information is largely at an informal level. The school has no formal link to the West Dunbartonshire Youth Alliance. There is no clear way for partners to influence school policy issues, other than through direct conversation with the HT.

- Primary HTs value working with staff at Vale of Leven Academy. They have taken forward work to improve enhanced transitions for children identified as requiring support, and a general transitions programme of visits. A project to work across the learning community on assessment and moderation in numeracy and a related intervention programme is currently being introduced. Leaders from cluster schools attend a bi-annual Education Leader Conference at which other partners are represented to provide information on their work. The learning community HTs are well informed on needs within the community. This helps to inform transition planning and is informing the use of PEF funding.

- Employability partners are linked to the West Dunbartonshire Strategic Employability Partnership, which sets priorities and programmes for DYW. Partners would welcome a forum to improve communication, coordination, information sharing and evaluation within Vale of Leven Academy.

- Teachers value the opportunity to work jointly with partners on the delivery of learning programmes. Youth workers and teachers have benefitted from sharing their experience and knowledge. As a result, some teachers have gained a better understanding of group work with disaffected young people. Youth workers have gained an improved knowledge of skills assessment.

- A Police Youth Engagement Officer is working with Vale of Leven Academy and the cluster primary schools. He is well informed of wider community safety issues. Joint preventative work with the school-based youth worker and Tullochan Trust is currently being planned.

- An extensive range of partnerships with employers and community partners are providing a wealth of opportunities for young people. These partnerships are based on providing an inclusive and collaborative approach to meeting the individual needs and aspirations of young people. The school has established open, positive and productive relationships with SDS to support young people to develop career management skills (CMS) and to progress to a positive destination. SDS has recently introduced training for tutor teachers on developing CMS.

- The school enjoys good relationships with West College Scotland. Staff work well with colleagues in college staff to plan and deliver provision, which meets the needs of a diverse range of young people. Staff contribute productively to West Dunbartonshire Council Senior Phase team to provide opportunities for young people.

- Overall, key staff and partners do not share a consistent knowledge and understanding of key priorities. These include CES, CMS and the content and ambition of the SDS Scottish Partnerships Academy (SPA). This is resulting in missed opportunities for combining and integrating services which are all focused on achieving the same positive outcomes for young people. In short, all the components are there to provide a high-quality service which are ready to be joined-up. There is a need for staff, along with partners, to focus on systematically reviewing and planning activities to provide a cohesive approach.

- The young people attending school-college programmes have not been asked by the school about their college experience. This is a missed opportunity for surfacing and resolving issues. Overall, partnership working, at subject level between school and college practitioners, is not yet developed. This is resulting in duplication in what both sets of teachers are delivering.

- All young people on school-college programmes value their college programme to build relationships with others, take responsibility for their learning and gain experience of working to commercial pressures. They enjoy the theory aspects of programmes which are contextualised to a vocational area. As a result of college experiences, some young people have pursued additional qualifications out with school, to extend further their employability options.

Quality of provision of Special Unit

Context

■ The Communication Base (CB) is an on-site provision with a current caseload of 25 young people from S1 to S6 (15 BGE, 11 senior phase). The CB is an authority-wide provision whose intake is from S1. Staffing comprises 3.4 teachers and six support staff. The CB is managed by two PTs, one of whom is 0.6 FTE, and the other who also covers a wider ASN remit across the school. Young people's attendance is determined by a multi-agency planning process, which includes Educational Psychology and a range of partners. Almost all young people attending the CB have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Some young people may have other identified ASN. Young people learn for the majority of the time in mainstream classes, supported by one of the staff from the CB. Attendance in the CB is currently averaging 95.4%.

Leadership of change

■ The PTs who manage the CB have a clear sense of the purpose and rationale for the base. The PTs know the young people and families well. They aim to ensure that all young people are fully included in the school community. The PTs have compiled a list of improvement priorities for the CB. They should continue with their plans to work with staff to raise their understanding of the purpose of the CB, and how they can contribute to its effectiveness.

■ PTs now need to gather robust quantitative data, use observations and gather the views of young people and partners to be clearer on how, when, why and by whom outcomes are being achieved.

Learning, teaching and assessment

■ The ethos and culture of the CB reflects a strong commitment from staff to meet young people's needs in a very sensitive manner. Young people engage well in learning tasks, showing independence and motivation to progress in their learning. Staff provide well-matched emotional support.

■ Overall, young people, supported by the CB staff, engage well in lessons when in mainstream. Their engagement is highest when learning tasks are motivating, active and enjoyable. However, young people's quality of experience is variable across the school. Young people generally make effective and appropriate use of digital technologies in a range of lessons.

■ The CB does not discretely plan, track or monitor learning, attainment or wider achievement across the curriculum for the young people attached to CB. Young people are not always fully involved in, or aware of plans for their learning. They are not always clear on their attainment pathways. The CB should consider how to use data to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and then plan strategies to meet needs and improve outcomes.

Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

■ Young people in the CB feel safe, secure and included. Staff are sensitive and responsive to the wellbeing of each individual. High-quality dialogue between young people, and teaching and support staff leads to young people feeling heard and understood.

■ The two PTs responsible for the CB share a clear sense of purpose for the base. Young people are successfully included within the school community. Almost all young people spend the majority of their week integrated into mainstream classes. Young people report that the support they get is helping them achieve success at school.

■ Young people and their families benefit from the pastoral care system that allocates a key teacher to each young person. A sample of parents were consistently of the strong view that communication is very helpful and meets the daily needs of young people. They confirm that key information is shared very well. Of those sampled, parents also report that they are fully aware of and involved in the planning around the young person. This planning begins during transition from P7 to S1 through to effective support in planning for positive destinations.

■ Relationships between staff and young people in the CB are strong. Young people from across the school benefit from the calm, settled and supportive culture of the CB. All young people asked state that they feel safe and welcome in the CB.

■ All young people in the CB have both a single agency plan and a pupil support plan. However, these could be made more concise. Young people should be more involved in planning as a step towards making support strategies easier to understand and targets more likely to be achieved. Plans do not fully detail some of the strategies being used to keep young people engaged. The PTs recognise the opportunity to be clearer about the support strategies they agree with young people and parents. Careful consideration should be given to the use of 'free time' to ensure activities are planned and meet identified needs.

Raising attainment and achievement

■ Bespoke, flexible and responsive approaches are, for some young people, leading to positive outcomes in learning. Almost all young people in the BGE attend the majority of their classes alongside their mainstream peers. In the senior phase, young people are studying a range of courses at National 4, National 5 and beyond. Teachers in the CB do not track their pupils' attainment outcomes over time to inform strategies for universal and targeted support.

■ Young people in the CB have access to a range of wider achievement opportunities. Some of these are recognised with ASDAN awards. In partnerships with Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, a commendable number of young people have gained the John Muir Explorer Award and the Discovery Awards. This session, seven young people have gained Junior Park Ranger status.

■ A few young people in the senior phase benefit from well-supported work experience opportunities. At times, this is linked to weekend employment and progression pathways with West College Scotland. Almost all young people, over the last three years, left the CB to a positive destination. These included college, university and West College Scotland's Learner Development Programme.

Practice worth sharing more widely

- Employability skills programme.

- Careers events/fair.

- The hairdressing unit's approach to meeting the needs of young people.

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.