

Summarised inspection findings

Aberdeen Grammar School

Aberdeen City Council

18 December 2018

School Name **Aberdeen Grammar School**
Council: **Aberdeen City Council**
SEED number: **5244439**
Roll (Sep 2015): **1120**

Key contextual information

Aberdeen Grammar is a non-denominational secondary school which serves an area of Aberdeen City. Aberdeen Grammar collaborates with five associated primary schools. The headteacher has been in post for three years.

Attendance is above the national average for the years between 2012 to 2017. In 2017/18 attendance was 93.6% which is a slight reduction from the previous year.

In February 2017 4.5 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals which is significantly below the national average of 14.4%.

In September 2017, 3.5 per cent of pupils lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2015 the school reported that 29% of pupils had additional support needs which is below the local authority figure of 31% and in line with the National figure of 29%

1.3 Leadership of change

very good

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 school's vision of working together, learning together, achieving together, is reflected clearly in a very positive approach taken by all members of the school community. Since taking up post in 2015, the headteacher has established a school community which has a shared focus on continuous improvement and on high expectations for all its young people. This has involved sustained and successful relationship building with parents, staff, external partners and young people. There is an ongoing commitment to consultation and joint working as the school grows. There are plans in place to revisit the vision, values and aims in 2019, to ensure that they reflect any new developments within the school, particularly in relation to inclusion. The Parent Council is active, supportive and fully involved in discussions about proposed new initiatives. Young people also have many opportunities to provide their views or lead initiatives. The newly established whole school pupil council has made a positive start to its work.
- The headteacher provides very strong, highly effective and supportive leadership. Together with her senior leaders, she has led and managed change sensitively and successfully. Their use of analysis of evidence and data, consultation with stakeholders and clear communication are key features of the school's change process. Their remits ensure effective collaborative approaches to their work. They are very well regarded by parents and staff. School leaders and staff have detailed knowledge of their school's social and economic context and also know their young people very well. Over the past three years they have taken positive steps to ensure that all young people, whatever their background, are well served through the curriculum, learning and teaching approaches, personal support and opportunities for achievement outwith school. Attainment and achievement has improved across most areas of the school and almost all young people continue to go on to positive destinations when they leave school.
- There are several examples of specific changes which have been undertaken successfully in the past three years and are progressing well. Changes include an increased number of external partnerships which support the school's work in ensuring equality of opportunity for all its young people. This has included the development of multi-agency support processes across the associated schools group and also a new pupil support system within the school. While this work is going well, school leaders are aware that there is more to be done to ensure that pupil support systems are fully effective. The head teacher and senior leaders have played a key role in progressing Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) priorities across the school and in establishing constructive external partnerships to support this work. Senior school staff are using local and national labour market and Regional Skills Assessment information increasingly to broaden senior phase learning opportunities and to raise awareness amongst staff and parents of career opportunities for young people. This is having a positive impact on

young people's outcomes and post-school destinations. The school has also introduced a comprehensive approach to classroom learning visits, supported by rigorous training of school leaders and following extensive consultation with staff. Currently, a major review of the school's curriculum structure is underway, underpinned by typically thorough groundwork including the generation of a solid evidence base and wide consultation with parents, staff and partners.

- The school has set out comprehensive plans for the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) which address key issues for the young people involved. These include a pupil mentoring programme, study support materials, revision classes and the services of a school counsellor and youth worker.
- Collegiate working is a major strength of the school and reflects the most significant transformation in school life within the past three years. Leadership of learning at all levels has also become very strong. Faculty principal teachers work well together to provide effective direction to their staff but also enable them, either singly or with colleagues, to take on responsibilities or lead initiatives across the school. The whole school approach to developing literacy across learning, led by the Literacy working group and shared with all staff on the online Staff Hive is a major strength. The Literacy working group has developed student and teacher toolkits for the development of core research skills for use across all curriculum areas.
- The open and creative ethos within the school means that staff feel able to make suggestions and initiate projects. Relationships between staff and young people are very positive and almost all young people enjoy being part of the school family.
- Staff work very well together to enhance the work of the school and there are many positive examples of shared professional learning and leadership of new initiatives. A wide range of working groups has had a significant impact on learning and teaching. Uptake of professional learning activities is very high and there are many opportunities to share learning. Peer to peer learning visits are increasing in number and also contributing to effective collaborative work.
- Following consultation with staff, the Learning and Teaching Working Group has established a simple but effective learning, teaching and assessment policy which has a strong presence in all classrooms and underpins learning visits discussions. This has helped to improve classroom practice significantly, though there is still work to be done to ensure consistency of practice across the school. Learning visits have enabled school leaders to have a very good understanding of learning and teaching within faculties but also across the whole school, which in turn helps identify further improvement strategies. (As detailed in QI 1.2)
- The school has recently introduced a 'quality improvement framework' which provides a simple but appropriate set of improvement activities which dovetail well with each other. This useful document includes quality and school calendars, professional learning, working groups and partnerships. This ensures that all of the school's improvement work is part of an overarching strategy with a primary focus on the learning experience of young people.
- The School Improvement Plan (SIP) reflects national improvement priorities but also reflects extensive analysis of issues particular to the school. Faculty improvement plans link well with the SIP and most provide similarly detailed targets, timelines and responsibilities. While there is an appropriately strong focus on attainment, closing the attainment gap, pace and challenge in learning and employability skills, faculty plans could articulate more clearly strategies for improving the wellbeing of young people. Progress on school and faculty plans and the impact of improvement strategies is monitored and evaluated carefully throughout the year and the

annual Standards and Quality Report is accurate and signposts next steps helpfully. Regular meetings between faculties and link Senior Management Team members ensure a very effective flow of intelligence between senior leaders, faculty heads and staff. This results in detailed, shared understanding of expectations within the school. It has also resulted in consistent improvement in most aspects of the school's work and well-conceived plans to continue this positive journey.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very good

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

- There is a calm, welcoming and supportive ethos that is evident in all aspects of school life. Very positive relationships between staff and young people, and between the young people themselves, underpin all aspects of learning in the school. This culture of mutual respect enables almost all learners to demonstrate the shared values of the school. This is evident in both classrooms and social spaces. Almost all young people value opportunities to learn and to develop themselves as effective learners.
- Staff actively encourage young people's ownership of their learning by promoting a culture of challenge and high expectations. In most lessons, staff share the purpose of learning and build on young people's prior knowledge. In the best lessons, prior learning across subjects is linked together. As a result, young people are encouraged to make their own connections and consolidate learning across the curriculum. Learning intentions and success criteria were evident in most lessons and are communicated in a variety of ways including booklets, profile sheets, via a virtual learning environment (VLE), interactive whiteboard notes and presentations. In most lessons these were linked to Curriculum for Excellence Benchmarks or Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) assessment criteria and there is evidence of young people using these to identify their strengths and to evaluate their progress. Most young people were able to use this information to talk about what they needed to do to improve.
- Effective use is made of the learning, teaching and assessment policy. Staff share a clear understanding of the structure of a good lesson. Almost all teachers make very effective use of starter and learning activities. Most lessons include a plenary which checks understanding against clear success criteria, particularly in the senior phase. In the broad general education (BGE) there is scope to ensure that this very good practice is evident across all curriculum areas, as in a minority of lessons success criteria and plenaries were overly task-focused.
- There are examples of outstanding teaching evident. The existing collaborative approaches mean that the school is ideally placed to spread this practice more widely. In almost all lessons, teachers give clear explanations and instructions. Classroom dialogue promotes learning. In most curriculum areas, young people are challenged to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. Young people understand what is expected and how to achieve success. Through the work of the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) and the many other working groups, staff are modelling a culture of continuous learning, which the young people recognise and value.

- In most lessons staff use skilled and adaptive questioning to engage pupils, to respond to young people's learning needs and to evaluate their learning. In a majority of lessons, this is used to modify the approach during the lesson to better meet the needs of all learners. There is evidence of support staff working well with teachers to meet the needs of learners who have barriers to their learning.
- In all lessons, visual resources are used to reinforce and enhance teacher description and explanation and to stimulate learning and enquiry, frequently by using an interactive whiteboard. Almost all young people are accessing a VLE and all faculties use it to provide access to support and consolidation materials that the young people can access in and out of school. In a minority of subjects inspectors have noted highly effective practice, where the VLE is also being used to provide tailored support and specific feedback on pieces of work. Teachers' collaborative approach to improvement will support wider sharing and development of this approach to learning.
- Almost all young people speak articulately about their learning in classes and their opportunities for wider learning. They appreciate the extensive range of opportunities which exist for them to lead and contribute to the wider life of the school and community. Young people regularly work in groups and this provides many with opportunities to lead aspects of learning in the classroom. In a few examples young people took responsibility for assessing each other's progress and providing constructive feedback to their peers. In a minority of cases tighter time constraints would ensure that the pace of learning was maintained when pupils were working in groups, thus improving the focus and impact of group work.
- Teachers provide support and challenge through a range of feedback strategies, both verbal and written. Across the school these include ongoing feedback and discussion with young people in class, as well as after homework exercises and assessments. In almost all senior phase classes, teachers make use of SQA criteria confidently to assess learning and provide quality feedback to young people. This feedback supports young people to evaluate their own progress on an ongoing basis and identify their own next steps in learning. Examples include, feedback summaries in jotters, workbooks and on the VLE. There is evidence of a minority of faculties using assessment information to adjust programmes of learning and approaches to learning and teaching based on analysis of the assessment evidence they are gathering. This can be more consistent in supporting staff to meet the needs of learners better.
- Learning conversations are valued by young people. This is very evident in the senior phase and increasingly in evidence in the BGE. These high quality conversations encourage rich dialogue between teachers and young people and help learners to understand and evaluate their progress and agree areas for development. In the senior phase, almost all young people know their working and target grades and are able to talk about the steps they need to take to make further progress towards their target.
- There is a collegiate approach to designing learning experiences and moderation approaches across all curriculum areas. This is evident in the work of the TLC and school improvement working groups. The school has a coherent approach to using the National Benchmarks at Associated Schools Group (ASG), as well as at whole school and faculty level. Staff in the English and mathematics faculties have built constructive relationships with cluster primary

schools. These have led to regular moderation opportunities, as well as planning learning which starts in P7 and is completed in S1. Young people in S1 spoke positively about these links and described confidently how this continuity supported their transition experiences. In-service and twilight training with in-house quality and improvement support officers (QAMSOs) supports this collaborative approach. Ongoing development work in moderation and planning across faculties underpins the development of increasingly consistent understanding of standards using the National Benchmarks. This is leading to a robust approach to developing valid and reliable professional judgments in the BGE.

- The school has effective systems which allow staff to monitor young people's progress and make appropriate interventions, where required. Twice in the session, teachers provide assessment information on each young person's progress in learning, and on their effort, behaviour and homework. There are rigorous conversations between senior leaders and faculty heads, as well as between faculty heads and teaching staff. These focus on the progress of individual young people, as well as monitoring the progress of groups of young people such as learners with English as an additional language. This tracking enables senior leaders to identify and take further steps to monitor when young people seem to be underperforming in curriculum areas, and to plan interventions to support their progress.
- Senior leaders have amended the reporting system recently to improve information on young people's progress for learners and parents. The school now issues one full report and one tracking report, as well as one parents' meeting for each year group on an annual basis. Parents have spoken positively about these changes, saying that they feel better informed about young people's progress and their next steps in learning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The existing school curriculum structure is based on a rationale that was developed in 2010/2011. The school is developing a new vision and rationale for the curriculum. The rationale for the curriculum change is based on a clear school vision of working together, learning together, achieving together. Future curriculum plans aim to take account of the entitlements of Curriculum for Excellence and the principles of curriculum design. The school identifies the very high aspirations of learners and parents/carers as a key curriculum driver to meet the needs of all learners, build progression pathways and extend learning beyond the classroom.
- In taking this forward, the school has plans to consult with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that there is a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve for young people. This will also allow stakeholders, greater ownership in taking forward the necessary improvement. Planning should take account of learners' needs and aspirations to inform ongoing development of learning pathways.
- Teachers plan for progression in the BGE using Curriculum for Excellence second and third level experiences and outcomes. The current curricular model assumes that all young people in S1 achieve third level by the end of S1. Senior leaders have already started the process of reviewing these arrangements to ensure that all young people receive their full entitlement to learn across all the experiences and outcomes up to the third level, as far as is consistent with young people's learning needs and prior achievements.
- Currently, young people specialise at the end of S1 choosing subjects over S2 and S3. The school has already identified that the choices made at this stage significantly impact on their learning pathways through the senior phase. Many young people are locked into particular pathways at this early stage. At present young people do not receive their entitlement to modern languages. In the design of the S1-S3 curriculum choices for the senior phase should not be limited by the design of the BGE for young people as they enter the senior phase in S4. Senior leaders are aware that their approaches to assessment and to tracking and monitoring young people's progress throughout the BGE are essential to informing these decisions.
- The S4-S6 curriculum is well planned as a senior phase, with young people having the opportunity to study for six courses leading to qualifications in S4. In S5 and S6 young people take a broad range of courses leading to qualifications and where appropriate additional qualifications are available. The school is committed to providing flexible bespoke senior phase pathways for young people based on their individual needs.
- Increasingly young people are accessing alternative pathways in the senior phase. (YASS courses, Foundation Apprenticeships, Supported link learner courses, North East Scotland College Construction and Beauty and Higher psychology and sociology and arrangements with city campus). The school have worked effectively with key partners at both strategic and operational levels to extend the range of learning pathways available to senior phase pupils, including career related qualifications. This has been achieved through close working with 'City Campus' partners, Aberdeen City Council and a local college. As a result, young people are making choices that are more closely aligned to career aspirations.

- As part of the schools DYW strategy the school has increased the range of courses on offer in S4 to S6 such as sports and recreation skills, religious, moral and philosophical studies (RMPS) and higher economics, as well as increasing the range of business partners engaging with the school.
- Community Learning and Development (CLD) make an active contribution to key aspects of the curriculum such as the delivery of Dynamic Youth Awards in life skills classes, one to one support and group work support. Increased focus and better administrative support for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is increasing completion rates and there is now an improving trend in uptake of the award. There is scope to improve opportunities for accreditation pathways for the wide range of internal and external achievement opportunities available across all year groups. Careers education will form an important part of this work. The school, in partnership with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), is beginning to develop career management skills with young people. Further work is needed to develop and embed career education across the curriculum.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Senior leaders have recognised the need to support and engage with parents more effectively if they are to improve the learning experience and outcomes for all young people. To achieve their ambition the school has broadened the range of activities designed to enable parents to contribute to their child's learning. The 'Planning for Success' programme offers workshops for parents and their child to learn together around the themes of literacy, numeracy, digital research skills and mental wellbeing. Informative booklets with advice to support learning at home are issued to all families and are also available on the website. High quality resources produced through PEF have been made available to young people. Individual 'drop-in' tutorial sessions led by senior students are accessed by parents to support their child studying in the senior phase. Parental evaluations of the programme are very positive.
- The DYW Learner Pathways programme has been developed with SDS, business partners, further and higher education institutions to guide parents and their child when making course choices and deciding learner pathways. It provides careers advice from key industry sectors, Aberdeen City Campus, local colleges and universities. The soon to be launched new 'Learner Pathway' website has been developed for parents and young people to access information linked to their learning needs, career related qualifications, and potential future employment pathways.
- The school communicates very effectively with parents through digital technology including VLE, the website, and other school digital resources. Most parents report they are kept informed about the life and work of the school, the successes of young people, and information on their child's progress.
- The Parent Council is highly supportive of the school, working with the headteacher on school improvement priorities and future developments. Members have funded the new school digital resource. The Parent Council has been consulted on the proposed new curriculum structure. The Parent Teacher Association has raised funds for initiatives identified by the young people and offers support for school events. The Former Pupils (FPs) have donated funds which have benefited the education of all young people.

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

- Effective leadership from the headteacher is supporting the development of inclusive educational practice. Senior leaders are responsive to the context of the school, the needs of their young people and the local community. They make increasing use of intelligence gained through newly established partners, as part of the multi-agency resource group. Collectively, this is helping to inform the strategic approach taken to drive forward improvements in wellbeing, equality and inclusion.
- The school is at the early stages of developing a shared understanding of wellbeing amongst young people and staff. Senior leaders recognise that there is scope to extend the use made of the wellbeing indicators across all aspects of school life. These are currently unfamiliar to young people. This will support all learners to reflect on their progress in being safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, and included. In addition, it will allow senior leaders and pupil support staff to demonstrate improved outcomes for young people better. Revisions to pupil support documentation are beginning to support this aim. The innovative pilot on the use of 'Adaptive Processing Personality Assessment' has the potential to support the wellbeing web to assess need and inform planning.
- Young people report that relationships on the whole are consistently respectful and trusting, with a growing sense of equality and fairness. There is a clear strategy in place for taking forward positive relationships, rooted in the new behaviour for learning framework and associated code of conduct. Young people understand their rights and responsibilities and respond to situations accordingly. A few young people feel that rights and responsibilities need to be a more consistent feature within learning across the school.
- Young people appreciate and value the individual support and pastoral care they receive through having an identified member of staff who knows and understands them. Almost all young people feel that there are members of staff to whom they can approach with any concerns. Work is underway to take forward a whole school approach to the delivery of universal support entitlements. It is important that the role of the key adult is fully explored so that young people have regular opportunities to discuss their wellbeing, learning, achievements and set appropriate targets. The use of tutor time, as part of the provision of universal support, is currently being reviewed and improved.

- Young people have a very good understanding of being active and regularly take up the extensive range of opportunities on offer for sport and outdoor learning. Young people have a sound understanding of the relationship between food and health that supports them in fostering good eating habits. There is scope for greater collaboration with the school catering service to deliver consistent healthy eating opportunities. This can enable young people to make healthy food choices at school through a coherent approach to food provision and food as a context for learning.
- Young people speak knowledgeably about being able to make informed decisions about risk-taking behaviours around substance misuse and alcohol. Whilst young people benefit from regular opportunities to discuss current issues, they would welcome opportunities for continuing dialogue about sensitive aspects of sexual health education and more about staying safe. Young people in the senior phase want more emphasis placed on the development of skills for life, such as personal finance and moving from home. They are keen to take an increased role in shaping the Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme which currently lacks progression.
- Young people with additional support needs have their needs identified well. Staff are making use of strategies to help meet the needs of young people who have English as an additional language (EAL) and those with literacy challenges. Across the school, staff need to develop skills in using the identified strategies and approaches to differentiation to ensure that young people feel included and have a sense of success in their learning. There is potential to build on the Teaching Learning Communities' workshops and the 'Learning Together' series by making more explicit the strategies contained in the 'differentiation document'.
- A clear understanding is required on the differences between forms of support planning. A more manageable set of support plans with clear Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-related (SMART) outcomes would make it easier for appropriate staff to evaluate more rigorously and robustly the extent to which young people are overtaking their targets.
- The headteacher has established an ASG Partnership Forum and Multi-Agency Resource Group (MARG) to facilitate more effective information sharing about young people who require a co-ordinated and coherent package of support from external agencies. A number of targeted interventions have been introduced that are resulting in young people feeling safe, cared for and nurtured. For example, young people who have mental health issues, are benefiting from a school based counsellor and school nurse. They have engaged successfully with their learning, and school more generally. They have someone who they trust and can turn to when needed. There is clear evidence of impact through the MARG process.
- Staff would benefit from professional learning on statutory duties related to wellbeing, equality and inclusion. In particular, clarity on support planning documentation. Consideration needs to be given to whether care experienced young people meet the requirements for having a co-ordinated support plan. Principal Teachers of Pupil Support would benefit from keeping their work under review and looking for ways to improve outcomes of care experienced young people. At present, care experienced young people are not always positive about the support provided to help them achieve their full potential in some important areas. In addition, young carers would benefit from staff having an appropriate understanding or better appreciation of issues associated with caring responsibilities. In line with the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, it is important that young carers are considered for having a young carer statement that contains information about their caring role and the support offered by the local authority.

- The rate of attendance in recent years has shown an improvement and remains consistently above the national average. Both authorised and unauthorised absence shows a declining trend. It is important that senior leaders keep under review the legal entitlement to 27.5 hours of full time education for those young people on part time timetables. There are effective arrangements in place to monitor period anomalies and tackle truancy.
- Exclusion rates are well below the national average. Young people, who have previously been excluded from school, speak positively about the range of flexible and responsive strategies to support them to participate in their learning. They are supported to develop safe and responsible attitudes, including understanding the risks of certain types of behaviour.
- Senior leaders have a good understanding of the Equality Act. Teachers embed discussions of all relevant protected characteristics, and the prevention of prejudice-based bullying into the delivery of PSE. As a result, young people are developing the language, understanding and confidence to discuss prejudice and report prejudice-based bullying and are comfortable with the means of doing so.
- In recent years, there has been a decrease in incidents of bullying, both generally and on the grounds of the protected characteristics. This is as a result of school efforts such as the 'Be Kind Campaign' and establishing the 'Mentors Against Violence' Programme.
- A number of measures are in place resulting in young people feeling a greater sense of belonging in the school. These include increasing the variety of learning pathways, the significant reduction in the number of young people extracted from mainstream class, poverty proofing school policies, and establishing assertive mentors. Young people also report that the school is developing a more inclusive ethos where a broader range of talents, abilities and achievements are valued. There are strong examples of how the school is supporting young people where poverty is a barrier to their learning.
- Young people act as responsible citizens who show respect for others and understand different beliefs and cultures. They are developing informed, ethical views of complex issues, are knowledgeable about equalities issues, and are confident in challenging discriminatory attitudes. They are developing a greater understanding of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) issues. There is potential for staff to develop more fully the cultural diversity of the school through, for example, their provision of sports or food choices.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy:

BGE:

- The school provided the following BGE data which demonstrates a very positive and improving picture of attainment in literacy and numeracy at the end of the BGE. In 2018, by the end of S3, almost all young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence third level in reading, writing, and listening and talking. Almost all young people also achieved third level in numeracy.
- The school provided information to show that a majority of young people achieved fourth level in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3 in 2018, which again sits above the local authority figures. Senior leaders accept that caution needs to be applied in interpreting the reliability of the data as this is only the third set of achievement data for the BGE to be collected. However, senior leaders comment that they have invested a lot of time to enable staff to develop their understanding of the Benchmarks and to participate in moderation activities.
- Teachers use professional judgment, Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs) (once a year) and a range of internal class tests using National Benchmarks as part of their approaches to demonstrate attainment improvement. Young people are also now starting to use National Benchmarks to evaluate their success in achieving a level. In addition, teachers use primary profiles from P7 in numeracy and literacy to help build on prior learning which is enabling them to set better considered milestones for the BGE in S1. Staff have used QAMSO training to build in moderation activities in literacy to support an improved understanding of standards in partnership with their associated primary colleagues. As a result, senior leaders believe that their staff are demonstrating increasing confidence as they go forward this session. Similar work is now being developed for numeracy. The use of team teaching in literacy and numeracy between the secondary and their associated primary schools also continues to aid more reliable judgements of a level. Staff are sharing a literacy toolkit to enhance the amount of third level learning possible within P6 and P7. Middle leaders demonstrated through robust tracking systems in almost all departments, that learners requiring additional support and those from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds are achieving well during the BGE.
- In literacy and numeracy the school is using PEF money to put in place extra staff to identify those who need support and from there to offer these learners supportive mentoring to help improve their learning. These additions are already demonstrating impact in the results from the group that achieved well in 2018. The school is also using PEF money to remove the cost

of the school day for identified young people thus allowing them to benefit from developing a wider range of skills. Almost all young people achieve a literacy or numeracy qualification at SCQF level 4 before leaving school.

Senior phase:

Attainment of young people in Literacy and Numeracy by the time of leaving school:

- Young people are attaining very well in literacy by the time of leaving school. Almost all young people leaving school in the past five years have attained literacy at SCQF level 4 or better. In 2017, most leavers attained literacy at SCQF 5 or better. At SCQF 5 the school is in line with the virtual comparator (VC) over a five year period, however at SCQF level 6 the school performs significantly lower than the VC in four out of the last five years.
- Young people are attaining very well in numeracy by the time of leaving school. Almost all young people leaving school in the past five years have attained literacy at SCQF level 4 or better. In 2017, most leavers attained literacy at SCQF 5 or better. At this level the school is in line with the VC over a five year period. A minority attained numeracy at SCQF level 6 and at this level the school has performed significantly higher than the VC in two out of five years.

Attainment over time:

BGE:

- A new tracking system is being developed in partnership with primary colleagues which will capture attainment over time better with the use of clear milestones.
- The school own figures show that almost all young people are achieving third level in the BGE across subject areas in 2018. Staff can demonstrate an improving picture over a two year period. A majority of young people are achieving fourth level in the BGE across subject areas. Again, staff can show an improving picture over a two year period. The headteacher believes that across all subjects, staff are continuing to improve the reliability of their judgement year on year. School data is available to evidence impact from interventions for identified groups of learners. This data demonstrates an improving attainment picture for those learners at risk of not achieving because of socio-economic disadvantage.
- Most staff analyse subject data well in the BGE. Most teachers use professional judgement well, including from the use of their own internal assessments, to demonstrate progress over time. To support and challenge all staff, senior leaders track progress across all departments. All data is updated by middle leaders twice a year, interrogated by senior leaders and from there agreed strategies and actions are put in place to support improvement across the school. These systems are enabling staff to analyse the progress of learners well overall. From their tracking meetings and from interrogating data, senior leaders and most middle leaders have a clear understanding of the level at which young people are working. Using data collected over time, they are interrogating this well to target particular groups of learners.

Staying on rates:

- The percentage of young people staying in school at the end of S4 is generally in line with the VC in three out of the last five years. Almost all young people go on to a positive destination. For the most case this was a result of the use of a gap year or through a few learners on a college release agreement. Staff continue to work very well with a strong range of partners including social work and health with the aim of achieving 100% positive destinations for all.

Senior phase: Attainment over time

Leavers:

- Performance in raising attainment shows the lowest attaining 20% have average total tariff scores in line with the VC over the last five years. The middle attaining 60% have significantly higher average total tariff scores than the VC in three out of the past five years. In the highest attaining 20% of leavers the school is performing significantly higher or much higher than the VC in two out of the last five years. In noting that the school is in line with the VC in the last two years, senior leaders recognise they need to continue to stretch a few learners further. As such, they have put in place a curriculum review to improve the range of options and extend the pathways available for subject choices

How well is the school improving young people's attainment as they move through senior phase in school?

- **In S4**, the lowest performing 20% are attaining significantly higher than the VC in two out of the last five years. The middle attaining 60% and the highest attaining 20% are attaining in line with the VC in four out of the last five years with last year showing significantly higher attainment than the VC.
- **In S5**, the lowest performing 20% and the middle attaining 60% are attaining significantly higher than the VC in two out of five years. The highest attaining 20% were in line with the VC in four out of the last five years and significantly higher in 2016/17.
- **In S6**, the lowest attaining 20% are performing significantly higher or much higher than the VC in three out of five years. The middle attaining 60% are performing significantly higher or much higher than the VC in four out of five years and the highest attaining 20% are performing significantly higher or much higher than the VC in four out of five years.
- In addition senior leaders provided evidence from insight that learners with EAL (around 25% of their learners) are achieving well. Results for the lowest attaining 20%, the middle attaining 60% and the highest attaining 20% of EAL learners in S4 are above the VC and the national in 2018.

Breadth and Depth:

Qualifications:

- **In S4**, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF Level 3 and 4 or better is significantly higher for the percentage attaining seven or more courses in four out of the last five years. Overall the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 4 or better is in line with the VC between 2013/14 and 2016/17. However, in the latest year performance is significantly higher than the VC. The percentage of young people attaining at SCQF Level 5C or better is significantly higher than the VC in three out of the last five years for four or more courses. The percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 5A or better is significantly higher than the VC in three out of the last five years for three or four or more courses.
- **By S5**, The breadth and depth measures for SCQF Level 5C or better are generally in line with the VC in the last five years for three, or four, or five or more courses. For five or more courses at SCQF Level 6C or better, results are significantly higher than the VC in two out of the last five years. For five more courses the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF Level 6C is higher than the VC in two out of the last five years. For one or two or three or

more courses, SCQF Level 6A is significantly higher than the VC in two out of the last five years.

- **By S6**, the breadth and depth measures for SCQF Level 5C or better, for one to five or more courses, is generally in line with the VC in the last five years with the exception of 2016/17 when results for these courses were mostly significantly lower than the VC. **By S6**, the breadth and depth measures for SCQF Level 6C or better for two or more courses is significantly higher than the VC in three out of five years. The breadth and depth measures for three or four courses at 6C or better is significantly higher than the VC in two out of five years. **By S6**, the breadth and depth measures for SCQF Level 6A or better for one to four courses is generally significantly higher than the VC in three out of five years with five or more courses significantly much higher in 2018.
- In 2018, from additional data provided in Insight, in S5, most learners achieved one Higher (SCQF level 6), the majority achieved three Highers, and less than half achieved five Highers. Five percent of learners achieved six Highers. By S6 less than half learners as a percentage of the S4 cohort are achieving success at SCQF Level 7. In S6 for those achieving three Advanced Highers at Level 7, the school has an achievement level of less than half.
- Senior leaders believe the use of the new curriculum review and the resulting addition of new courses for those attending in S6 can lead to further attainment improvements as they go forward.

Overall quality of learners' achievement:

- Young people have a very wide range of opportunities to engage in activities and programmes and actively contribute to the life of the school. As a result, very high numbers of young people are developing the skills, attributes, knowledge and capacity to succeed in life and work, including through developing their own leadership. External visits develop independent living skills, new knowledge and 'changed perspectives'. Staff make effective use of 'Opportunity for All' funding to enable young people who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation to participate more in skills building beyond the classroom. Learners develop their leadership and citizenship skills through participation in the house system, running clubs and leading a variety of charity initiatives which enable them to raise very large sums for worthwhile causes. Substantial numbers of young people across the school benefit positively from representing and performing in music events or competing in sport. This includes participating in local, and for some at national level events. In areas such as sport, music and volunteering, contributions are recognised through formal accreditation such as Duke of Edinburgh's Award, London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA - Drama awards) and Dynamic Youth Awards. Almost all achievement opportunities are free which is helping to combat barriers to participation. PEF is helping support participation in areas such as music tuition. However, there is scope to progress plans to improve wider use of Youth Achievement Awards to accredit achievements. For example, through building on the High Five Award as part of the P6 enhanced transition work. This will maximise further, achievement progression opportunities.
- The wider achievement tracker captures skills development and engagement in achievement opportunities for all young people across the school. There is potential for this intelligence to be used more widely and to ensure appropriate and relevant accreditation opportunities are put in place. Celebrating achievement is very strong across all year groups. Young people value the recognition given to all types of achievement within and outwith the school. These approaches are supported by six achievement ambassadors from S6 who are pro-active in ensuring

achievement across all year groups is captured and recognised. Overall, a targeted approach to develop leadership skills in S6 is enhancing school capacity. As a result, young people are growing in confidence, improving team work, problem solving and presentation skills. There is scope to promote this approach to other year groups.

Equity for all learners: (SIMD 1-3)

- Staff place a strong focus on raising the attainment for all learners, especially for the 10.2% who live in areas with the highest socio-economic disadvantage. Staff know who these learners are in SIMD 1 to 3 and put extra support in place to enable them to achieve more. This is leading to positive outcomes for young people and closing the poverty related attainment gap. This includes covering costs to support skills development, assertive mentoring, and a variety of helpful inputs to improve pupil fitness levels. Additional staff are in place to support these learners to achieve well. This is reflected in the senior phase results for those in SIMD 2 to 4 where leavers have performed significantly much higher than the National Establishment. The school level of exclusions in 2016/2017 sits well below the national figure at 13.0 per 1000 pupils compared to 47 per 1000 pupils for the national figure.
- The incidence of unauthorised absences in 2016/2017 at 2.3% was below the national average. In 2017/2018 the attendance figure was 93.6% and unauthorised absences from the school's own figures were 2.69% which is a slight increase from the previous year. (The school is reviewing its recording mechanisms to ensure their figures are accurate especially for those in S6 who have study time at present).

Attainment versus Deprivation:

- SIMD shows a profile of 10.2% learners living in deciles 1-3. 18.1% of learners are living in deciles 4-6 and 71.8% learners live in deciles 7-10. For those learners from the most challenging socio-economic backgrounds in decile 2 and 3 the school is demonstrating success in their achievements as reflected in the attainment versus deprivation figures of the total tariff scores where the school is performing significantly higher or in line compared to the National in the last two years. A number of effective interventions are helping to support identified learners to achieve.

How well is the school improving or maintaining positive and sustained destinations for all leavers?

Destinations:

- Over the last five years, almost all young people who left school have moved to a positive destination. In 2016/2017, Most learners left school for either higher education (HE) or further education (FE). For the few going into employment, areas included car mechanics, construction and retail.

Work with Skills Development Scotland:

- The DYW working group in the school are proactive in progressing the DYW agenda within the school and with key partners. Activities are contributing to delivering a number of entitlements within the Career Education Standard (CES). However, work is ongoing with regards to delivering the full range of entitlements and embedding the language of the 'I can...' statements across school learning activities. For example, the use of My World of Work lesson inserts by subject staff to support delivery of the CES entitlements is at an early stage. Although many young people benefit, and feel well supported in securing work experience opportunities, further work is required to ensure the approach to the provision of

work placement opportunities is more systematic. Work Experience needs to be better aligned to the needs of all senior phase pupils and meets the expectations of the Work Placement Standard. This is recognised by the school and arrangements are being reviewed in conjunction with a broader senior phase curriculum review.

Development of career management skills (CMS):

- Young people value the opportunities within PSE sessions to reflect on wider achievement and how this contributes to the development of their employability skills. However, senior phase pupils were not able to link these to the development of Career Management Standard (CMS).

Senior phase subject strengths and areas for development:

- Subject attainment in the senior phase shows departments achieving above the national results. These include for example: History National 5 and Higher, Maths at Higher and Advanced Higher and French at National 5 and Higher. There is scope for further improvement by a few faculty heads focussing more on reducing the number of young people with no award in for example subjects such as Maths at National 5.

Choice of QI: 1.2 Leadership of Learning

- Professional engagement and collegiate working
- Impact of career-long professional learning
- Children and young people leading learning

- Across the school an ethos of professional engagement and collegiate working is evident. The collaborative style of school meetings, coupled with a strong emphasis and value on teachers' professional learning by the senior management team, is leading to improvements in learning and teaching and in positive outcomes for young people. For example, there is an increasing consistency of approach to lessons, use of effective feedback and a willingness among teachers to adopt and adapt different approaches to teaching. This is increasing the participation and engagement of young people in their learning.
- The very enthusiastic TLC, led by a highly motivated group of teachers, is a key driver for improvements in leading change in teaching practice. This has evolved over time to include staff from all curricular areas. Teachers meet regularly to discuss key aspects of learning and teaching, including formative assessment techniques, and giving effective feedback. Most recently the TLC led the school's work in the use of National Benchmarks. A recent self-evaluative activity demonstrated that as a result of this staff are becoming increasingly confident in their use.
- As a result of a collaborative review of interventions suggested in the Education Endowment Foundation teaching and learning toolkit, teachers have created their own 'Staff Hive'. Designed to be a continually evolving project this practical online resource contains professional learning references as well as examples of good practice from within the school. Key headings include ownership of learning, feedback, learner experiences and homework. This has led to an openness and enthusiasm amongst staff who willingly support each other by sharing good practice and engaging in regular professional dialogue.
- Staff work collectively in faculties, across the school and across the associated schools group on areas of common interest. Most recently teachers have rightly had a particular focus on moderation and now engage in cross sector planning groups for literacy and numeracy. Through this teachers are gaining confidence in professional judgement of a Curriculum for Excellence level and in the use of the Benchmarks.
- Working with parents and young people, teachers have developed a suite of support materials, 'Planning for Success', which provide useful hints and tips for parents to support their child as they cope with different study commitments while at school. Young people have delivered presentations to parents and to their peers on this topic. Additionally senior pupils have supported workshops for parents and a useful 'drop-in' where they are able to answer individual queries from parents. This innovative way of engaging with parents is resulting in a greater awareness and understanding of the support that all young people need at different stages in their life. Young people are also developing self-confidence and have a sense of responsibility as they support others.

- An increasing number of teachers are leading working groups within the school. Currently there are 15 working groups which include teachers working collectively in improvement areas such as literacy; numeracy; learning, teaching and assessment; and Developing the Young Workforce. Linked to the conscious decision to drive improvement from the classroom up, many of these working groups are leading directly to improvements in outcomes for young people. For example the successful assertive mentoring programme provides young people with the opportunity to be supported by a teacher to set specific measurable targets which are regularly reviewed. This individual support is helping some young people overcome barriers to attendance at school, engagement in their learning or to increase their level of physical activity. A series of Learning Together leaflets, grounded in research and based on the needs of learners within Aberdeen Grammar School has been developed by staff. These leaflets provide useful hints, tips and information for staff and parents in an easily accessible format. With topics such as learning intentions, success criteria and effective feedback they are having an impact on the approaches taken for individuals and groups of learners within classes. Staff should continue with their plans to extend the range of leaflets in this series.
- The school's professional learning guide for teaching staff details the expectation of, and support for, all staff as they engage in professional learning. All staff routinely engage in the professional review and development process and maintain their own professional update records. This supports teachers to improve practice and informs the comprehensive in-house calendar of professional learning opportunities. Staff feel very well supported as a result and recognise how the continuous cycle of improvement threads through all school activities. This reflects the strong focus on improving the quality of learning, teaching and assessment across all areas of the curriculum. A few teachers are engaging in additional levels of study including at Masters level. As a result of a wide range of professional learning teachers are developing new courses of study for young people and also providing additional support with regard to specific learning needs. For example staff training on differentiation strategies led to a 'pupil support box' being provided for each classroom.
- A large number of staff are actively engaged with the SQA in a variety of different roles. This enhances and deepens their knowledge in curricular areas ensuring that subject knowledge is current. It also ensures that young people are exposed regularly to the language of the SQA which is leading to improved attainment. Approaches to digital learning are developing and include the widespread use of digital classrooms across the school. This enables young people to access information such as the learning from the class, assignments, visual prompts and important dates in a manner which reflects twenty first century education. Young people appreciate this type of support and access to learning as it is provided in a medium with which they are very comfortable. There is opportunity to extend this further to those young people who, for a variety of reasons, may be unable to attend school.
- Young people are given many opportunities to be leaders in learning and are developing the confidence to do so. In S6 young people participate in the wide ranging leadership and wider opportunities programme. This includes opportunities to lead the charities group, the programming club, provide in-class support for junior classes or to become one of the many ambassadors for sports, subjects or other areas within the school. Across the school young people actively engage in the pupil council, lead assemblies and commendably have delivered workshops to staff on additional support needs. The latter example successfully and quickly enabled staff to better understand how they could more effectively support some young people in their classes. As the school develops these opportunities further staff should consider

formalising some of them so that young people receive appropriate accreditation and recognition for the skills they are developing while engaging in these opportunities.

Practice worth sharing more widely

- The whole school approach to developing literacy across learning, led by the Literacy Working Group and shared with all staff in the online Staff Hive. The Literacy Working Group has developed student and teacher toolkits for the development of core research skills for use across all curriculum areas.
- The widespread and effective use of a VLE which helps young people to work well independently and enhance further the quality of their learning. This provides support and consolidation materials that young people can access in and out of school.

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.