

8 August 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

In September 2022, HM Inspectors published a letter on Edinburgh Secure Services (Howdenhall & St Katharine's Special School). The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and The City of Edinburgh Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the senior leaders and staff. We heard from the acting Senior Education Manager and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

**As a matter of urgency, local authority officers and senior leaders need to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment.**

Teachers have engaged in professional learning which improved awareness of trauma, nurture and quality interactions with learners. Teachers use the knowledge developed through this professional learning well. As a result, young people have developed supportive relationships with staff and is resulting in positive engagement with learning.

In a minority of subjects, teachers are designing better the structure of lessons. In these lessons, teachers use resources more creatively to support young people develop and apply their skills. Young people respond positively to this approach and are inquisitive when using materials and resources. Teachers now need to consider ways to develop more activities which encourage young people to think for themselves. Teachers should continue to develop these approaches further to ensure consistent and high-quality experiences for young people across all lessons.

Senior leaders and staff understand that improving learning, teaching and assessment is still a priority to be progressed over time. Now that young people access school on a regular basis, teachers should continue to develop their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment further. Teachers should continue to review these approaches in response to the changing needs of young people attending school. Senior leaders should establish regular meetings with teachers to discuss the quality of teaching, learning and progress that young people make.

Teachers, supported by senior leaders, should ensure that all young people's transitions are planned carefully. In doing so, young people and parents should participate in decision making and contribute more fully to the assessment of young people's needs. This will support young people, and their families where appropriate, prepare for significant transitions beyond their current educational placement at Edinburgh Secure Services (Howdenhall & St Katharine's Special School).

**The local authority and staff should take appropriate steps to improve young people's attendance and engagement with their learning.**

Overall, teachers have made significant progress with ensuring all young people on the school roll attend and engage very positively with learning. They ensure that all young people receive a full-time education in line with national guidance. Teachers have created individualised timetables that take account of the interests and needs of the young people. This is supporting young people access learning experiences that they find relevant and meaningful.

Teachers have sought out and accessed relevant professional learning opportunities. These opportunities focus appropriately on developing an understanding of how young people's life experiences impact upon how they cope with challenges. This has supported teachers to consider how they can promote positive interactions with young people. As a result, teachers and young people develop very positive and supportive relationships.

Young people present as confident and know their views are listened to, valued and important. They are beginning to increase their independence with their learning in the majority of learning activities. Teachers should now build upon this positive start. They should provide learning activities which support young people to lead their learning, where appropriate, beyond the classroom environment.

**Senior leaders and staff need to plan better what young people will learn. In doing so, they must ensure that young people engage in learning activities which build on what they already know. Teachers should also improve approaches to measuring young people's progress with their learning.**

Teachers use individual education programmes more effectively to meet the needs of young people. Teacher's planning reflects better young people's interests and strengths. As a result, teachers have taken time to design and organise a planned and relevant timetable for young people. This is helping young people to prepare themselves for what they will learn. Teachers have improved approaches to plan for short and medium term learning pathways. They have linked the learning opportunities to the interests and strengths of the young people well. Young people have responded positively to this approach and have increased their engagement with learning since starting their placement at the school. Teachers have not developed improved approaches to longer-term forward planning. This, in part, relates to the unpredictable potential closure of the school and the significant changes in staffing. Teachers should now develop planning further and consider what skills young people will develop over time. This should include how they plan to check the progress young people make.

Since the original inspection, senior leaders and teachers have yet to make sufficient progress with developing approaches to measuring the progress young people make with their learning. Teachers should continue to reflect on and plan for assessment methods. In doing so, they should evaluate evidence and assess young people's progress in learning then record and report on learning to plan next steps.

**Senior leaders and staff need to improve young people's attainment and achievement.**

For young people who now attend the school, teachers support them well to make progress from prior learning. Since they started to attend school, young people have made appropriate progress with achievement and attainment. Teachers support young people well to link what they learn in the classroom and the relevance of this to real life experiences and the workplace. This is helping young people to consider future options in learning, life and work.

Young people in their senior phase undertake and achieve a range of National Qualifications relevant to their learning. These include unit and full course awards at National 4 in mathematics, practical cookery, modern studies, environmental sciences, history and mental health and wellbeing. Senior leaders and teachers should work together to ensure that available courses do not limit what young people could potentially achieve. Teachers should now consider how they can help young people recognise and celebrate further the skills they have developed using a range of award providers.

**The service needs to develop a high quality broad general education. They should develop learning pathways which support young people to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy.**

Teachers have worked well to develop the broad general education for young people. They have ensured better coverage of the eight curriculum areas. They should now continue to build on this positive step and develop the curriculum to ensure young people have the opportunity to make progress in modern languages, music and drama. There is a need for teachers to ensure that they do not present young people too early for National Qualifications. It is important for teachers to recognise that young people in S1-S3 should experience a curriculum which meets the purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence.

Overall, teachers have designed appropriate and individual short to medium term learning pathways closely linked to young people's areas of interest and strengths. This should support teachers share young people's educational progress with the schools that young people move to following their time at the secure service.

## What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with The City of Edinburgh Council, regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within six months of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with The City of Edinburgh Council, the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

### **Note**

Education Scotland was informed that Edinburgh Secure Services (Howdenhall & St Katharine's Special School) permanently closed on 28 June 2023.

HM Inspectors will therefore make no further visits in connection with the original inspection.

David McKellar  
HM Inspector