

4 September 2018

Dear Parent/Carer,

Cedars School of Excellence, Greenock

HM Inspectors recently visited Cedars School of Excellence. The visit was part of our quality improvement and professional engagement visits with independent schools, which complement the general programme of inspections. The approach allows us to maintain our knowledge of schools in the independent sector throughout Scotland, and provides assurance to parents on the school's capacity for evaluating its own work and making improvements, which have a direct impact on the quality of experiences for its young people. Our visit was based on the school's self-evaluation and priorities identified for school improvement. During our visit, inspectors talked to staff and young people and worked together with the headteacher and senior staff about the planned developments, to ensure outcomes for children and young people continue to improve.

How well does the school ensure outcomes for children/young people continue to improve?

The strong and effective leadership of the headteacher empowers staff to do their very best for all children and young people. The headteacher is highly respected for the way that she has built up Cedars School of Excellence to cater for children and young people throughout the primary and secondary stages. Along with her senior leadership team, she has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Staff lead change very effectively in their areas of expertise, as well as for the whole school. They are productive in taking forward opportunities for leadership that the school offers them. Staff are able to demonstrate sound progress towards meeting priorities in their three-year improvement plan. These priorities focus mainly on the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. Staff engage in many professional discussions on improving Cedars School of Excellence. HM Inspectors have asked that these discussions are more closely aligned to national self-evaluation frameworks. This would help staff better measure their progress against national standards. Additionally, it would help ensure that the improvement plan is more responsive to new and emerging priorities during the three-year cycle.

Seniors leaders are very well supported by a board of governors. The board members' collective skills and experiences are carefully considered to enable them to fulfil their full role in governance. They work closely with Struthers Memorial Church on ensuring that the school is meeting its core purposes. The board shares the same plan for improvement as that for the school. The headteacher writes an annual standards and quality report for the board and other stakeholders. Parents appreciate how this report has been revised to summarise their children's achievements. Senior leaders should continue to make this report more evaluative by basing it on more

systematic and evidence-based approaches to self-evaluation. The school seeks the views of parents. Overall, parents are very happy with the service that the school provides. A few would appreciate more information on the work of the board of governors.

Across the primary and secondary stages, children and young people are highly motivated in their learning. They are dedicated to making the best possible progress. Children and young people enjoy exceptionally positive relationships with staff. There is a very strong commitment by all to being kind and patient towards each other. In most of the lessons we visited, children and young people were clear of the purpose of their learning. They could articulate how they will achieve success. In almost all cases, learners' experiences are well matched to their needs through differentiated activities. Teachers are skilled in asking questions to check for understanding, build on prior learning and encourage children and young people to think deeply about their learning. Teachers demonstrate good impact from their professional learning on how to support children and young people who need additional help with their learning. Children and young people are making outstanding use of a range of digital technology to enrich and facilitate their learning. The school has shared their practice in digital technology to support other schools' improvement, including internationally. Senior leaders should now encourage more sharing of best practice in learning and teaching amongst staff. They should also give teachers feedback to help the highest standards that we observed to become embedded practice across all classrooms.

Teachers are making well-judged use of a range of assessment information from observations of learning and formal assessments. They use this information well to plan next steps for learners. HM Inspectors have asked staff to increase the pace of implementing national advice on assessment across P1 to S3. At this time, senior leaders do not have an overview of how well children and young people are achieving in Curriculum for Excellence levels. In the senior phase, senior leaders shared last year's attainment data with us. This shows that just over a half of young people are achieving grade A in National 5 National Qualifications, with a third achieving grade A in Highers. Senior leaders recognise the importance of developing approaches to monitoring and tracking of progress, achievement and attainment, for individuals and groups of young people as they move through the school.

Children and young people benefit from a range of opportunities for personal achievements. They are encouraged to be kind to others by raising funds for charity and by preparing 'Back Home Boxes' to help those newly home from hospital. They exhibit their musical skills at the Inverclyde Music Festival and through membership of the school's choir. Art exhibitions, as well as displays in the school, show young people's very high-quality skills in art and design. Children and young people have opportunities to apply their skills in real-life contexts by managing the school's bank. They take account of national priorities, such as raising attainment in literacy, through their commitment to challenges for reading books. The school uses a few accreditations, including John Muir Award. It would be now be beneficial to help young people identify the skills they are developing from participating in opportunities for achievements.

Staff have had many successes in developing the curriculum. At the primary stages, they are increasing learning outdoors. There is a regular time for children in P1 to P3 to participate in “Welly Wednesday”. Young people in P7 take part in a year-long programme to support transitions in the curriculum. In the senior phase, there has been an increase in the range of courses offered that lead to qualifications and awards. Senior leaders and guidance teachers work closely with young people and their parents to provide very individualised learning pathways. On the whole, they meet most of young people’s preferences for the subjects that they wish to study. A few young people would like senior leaders to continue to extend the range of courses on offer which lead to qualifications and awards. Senior leaders support family learning well. Their use of digital technology gives parents access to their child’s course programmes. Parents can also attend courses organised by the school. In line with Cedars School of Excellence’s principles, parents may study to deepen their knowledge of Christianity. They are also offered a course to help them manage personal finances.

We are confident the school has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and board of governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the progress of the school.

Joan Esson
HM Inspector

Additional evidence for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <https://education.gov.scot/inspection-reports/inverclyde/8681139>

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