

Summarised inspection findings

Elgin Academy

Moray Council

18 June 2024

Key contextual information

School Name: Elgin Academy
Council: Moray Council
SEED number: 5202736
Roll: 1053 (March 2024)

Elgin Academy is located in the north of the town of Elgin. There are five associated primary schools; Bishopmill Primary; East End Primary; Seafield Primary; St Sylvester's Roman Catholic Primary and West End Primary, which together with Elgin Academy form the Elgin Academy Associated Schools Group.

The acting headteacher, a substantive depute within the school, had been in post for a very short time before the inspection. She is supported by four depute head teachers, one of whom is in an acting capacity. The school has had significant staffing challenges with both permanent and temporary vacancies in departments such as Mathematics and English. Approximately 16% of young people's parents are in the armed forces. This means that a number of young people may have attended a variety of different schools.

Attendance at school in 2022/23 was 90.5%. This represents a slight decline from 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Exclusion rates are generally below the national average. There have been a few exclusions this session.

In September 2022, 7.4% of pupils were registered for free school meals. This figure is significantly lower than the national average.

In September 2022, 7.5% of pupils live in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland. Families face challenges of rurality and a range of financial challenges.

In September 2022, 46.8% of pupils had additional support needs.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

weak

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

- Most young people are polite and show respect for staff and for one another. The majority of young people report that staff are approachable and treat them fairly. This supports a calm environment in most lessons, where the majority of young people remain on task in learning activities.
- Young people's motivation in their learning is variable across the school. In a few lessons, young people benefit from well-structured collaborative learning as well as tasks which require independent or critical thinking. Young people are expected to complete low-level tasks too often. As a result, young people are passive in their learning and become disengaged. Teachers should plan more opportunities for young people to lead their own learning meaningfully and develop independent learning skills. This will help to motivate and engage young people.
- In most lessons, young people are not challenged appropriately. They are expected frequently to work on the same tasks and activities. In these lessons teachers are not meeting the needs of all young people. This leads to young people becoming disengaged and disrupting learning. Teachers should ensure that all young people are supported and challenged to do their best in every aspect of their learning. Staff should ensure a more consistent culture of high aspiration across the school.
- Senior leaders have prioritised a renewed focus on promoting and developing positive relationships across the school. This has yet to impact fully across the school. Young people are generally well-behaved in corridors and common areas at social times. Senior leaders have developed a range of safe spaces across the school, which young people appreciate. Groups of learners are demonstrating low-level and persistent disruption in a few classes when young people are disengaged from their work. Senior leaders have identified young people to work with staff in the 'Achievement Team'. Young people supported by this team are responding positively to the targeted interventions.
- In a majority of lessons, the purpose of learning and how young people can be successful is shared with them. In a majority of lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. Most teachers use starter tasks as part of their classroom routines to help young people focus on their learning, however these activities often take too long. This makes it more challenging for young people to progress their learning appropriately in a lesson. In most lessons, young people would benefit from increased pace. The quality of learning intentions, success criteria and starter activities vary within departments and across the school. Teachers need to develop a greater understanding of high-quality learning and teaching and apply such approaches to all lessons.

- Senior leaders have identified that approaches to learning, teaching and assessment are too variable and not yet of high enough quality across the school. All teachers have undertaken professional learning, primarily around pedagogy, in order to establish a consistent language of learning. Teachers have developed a learning and teaching policy, and they should continue to develop this as a tool that can be used by both teachers and learners. These activities are not yet having a sufficiently positive impact on young people's experiences across the school. Senior leaders should continue to ensure that actions to support a shared understanding of high-quality learning and teaching are planned carefully. This will support all teachers to have a clear understanding of effective classroom practice.
- Most departments use digital platforms to support revision in class and learning at home. The quality of this varies across departments. A significant next step for teachers is to develop young people's use of technologies to enhance their learning.
- Teachers are provided with useful information about young people's learning needs through shared systems. However, in most lessons, young people's needs are not being met well enough. Planning to meet young people's learning needs is overly focused on summative assessments. Strategies to support young people are too often not yet reflected in teachers' planning of learning experiences. This is leading to most young people experiencing learning that does not sufficiently address their barriers to learning or meet their needs. Teachers should ensure that they consider young people's learning needs more effectively in the planning and delivery of learning, teaching and assessment.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers use questions regularly to check young people's knowledge. In a few lessons, questioning is used effectively to check for understanding or to promote higher order thinking skills. Senior leaders should identify and share this good practice more effectively across the school. In a minority of lessons, teachers use a plenary at the end of their lesson. The quality of these plenaries is variable. All teachers should make better use of plenaries as a tool to check for understanding and to support planning for future learning.
- Young people across the school would benefit from more specific and structured feedback on how to improve in their learning. Teachers often provide better quality feedback to young people in the senior phase than the broad general education (BGE) through, for example, learner conversations. Learner conversations and feedback need to be developed further to ensure young people are clear of the expectations of them in order to progress in their learning. Senior leaders should identify where teachers are providing feedback effectively and share this good practice among others. This will help provide greater consistency for young people and help to raise their aspirations.
- Approaches to assessment are variable across the school, especially in the BGE. Teachers In a few departments are exploring approaches to gather assessment evidence from different sources to ensure they have a more reliable understanding of where young people are in their learning. Where this is occurring, this is in the early stages. Teachers in these areas should consider how this information can better inform next steps in their lesson planning, including for those young people with additional support needs. Senior leaders should work to develop this practice and share it more widely across the school.
- Teachers from all departments are involved in moderation activities with other subject specialists within the local authority. A few teachers understand well the moderation cycle and how to moderate planning as well as outcomes for young people. This practice is stronger in the senior phase. Teachers need to improve their understanding of moderation, including between teachers within the same curricular area. Senior leaders should also consider how to work more closely with cluster primary school colleagues to develop more robust moderation

activities. This will help teachers develop a better understanding of standards and make more reliable professional judgements of achievement of a level in the BGE.

- Young people in the BGE receive three tracking reports each year from their class teachers, one of which gives detail about target grades. Young people in the senior phase receive five reports each year. Reports for young people in the senior phase are more detailed and provide targets for future learning. Young people in the BGE would benefit from similarly detailed information more regularly. This would also help parents to have a greater understanding of young people's progress.
- Departments across the school use a variety of different tracking and monitoring systems. These are of variable quality. Whole school tracking and monitoring systems enable staff to track the progress of young people across the school. This allows staff to identify and track different groups and cohorts of young people, both in the BGE and senior phase. The current senior phase tracking process is more effective than the BGE. The effective use of data by teachers to support planning of learning and teaching and interventions for young people is variable across the school. Teachers would benefit from greater consistency of expectation, with regard to the use of data, from middle and senior leaders. This will support teachers to plan more responsive and more appropriately challenging learning experiences for young people.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

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

- In 2022/23 almost all young people achieved CfE third level in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3. Just over half achieved literacy at fourth level in 2022/23. The majority of S3 achieved fourth level in numeracy by the end of 2022/23. There is no consistent pattern of achievement since 2018/19.
- The majority of young people with an additional support need achieved CfE third level in literacy and numeracy in 2022/23 by the end of S3. A minority achieved CFE fourth level for both measures.
- Data provided, based on internal class assessment, by senior leaders indicates that young people's literacy and numeracy achievement for 2023/24 will be broadly in line with that of 2022/23.
- Staff have participated in local authority moderation activities. This is leading to staff having greater confidence in their judgements of young people's attainment. Currently, professional judgements are not robust. Senior leaders have identified the need to re-establish working groups and moderation with the Associated Schools Groups (ASG) with a focus on literacy and numeracy. This will enable them to develop moderation activities across the ASG. This should lead to greater confidence in teachers' professional judgments of achievement of a CfE level.

Senior phase

Leavers (literacy)

- Young people leaving Elgin Academy have maintained steady levels of performance in literacy over the last five years. Most young people leaving school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 achieved Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy, in line with the Virtual Comparator (VC). The majority of young people leaving school between 2018/19 to 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 6. Performance at this level shows a declining pattern over the last three years with a minority achieving this level in the latest year, 2022/23.
- The majority of young people leaving school who have an additional support need achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy between 2018/19 to 2022/23. However, in the latest year 2022/23, performance at SCQF level 6 was at its lowest level and demonstrates decreasing achievement since 2018/19.

Leavers (numeracy)

- Leavers' performance in numeracy over the last five years requires significant improvement. The majority of young people leaving school between 2018/19 and 2022/23 achieved SCQF

level 5 or better in numeracy which has been significantly lower than the VC over this period. Performance at this level has declined in recent years. A minority of young people leaving school achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy which has been significantly lower and much lower in two of the last five years. There is a notable difference between the success young people have in achieving numeracy through units when compared to the percentage who achieve this through a course award.

- There is no consistent improvement in the numeracy performance of young people with additional support needs over the last five years.
- In the latest year, 2022/23, a notable proportion of young people left school with no numeracy qualification.

Cohorts (literacy)

- As young people progress through the senior phase their achievement in literacy is broadly in line with the VC. By the end of S6, almost all young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better in literacy with most achieving SCQF level 6. Over this period, attainment has been in line with the VC.

Cohorts (Numeracy)

- At S4, just over half young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better in 2022/23. This has been significantly lower than the VC since 2020/21. Most young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better by the end of S6, in line with the VC. This shows a pattern of improvement at this level over the past five years since 2018/19. This measure was significantly lower in years 2018/19 to 2020/21 and is in line with the VC since 2021/22. A minority of young people achieve SCQF level 6 by the end of S6 in 2022/23. Whilst this is in line with the VC, there has been a decline in attainment at this level since 2018/19.

National Qualifications

- Attainment in National 5 (N5) English is significantly lower than national average for awards at SCQF Level 5A and 5B but is broadly in line with national average for overall passes. Young people's attainment in Higher English is broadly in line with national average.
- Attainment in National 5 Applications of Mathematics is significantly higher than national average. Overall attainment at National 5 Mathematics is significantly lower than national average. Young people's attainment in Higher Mathematics is broadly in line with national averages.

Attainment over time

BGE

- By S3, most young people achieve CfE third curriculum for excellence level across their curricular choices. The majority achieve CfE fourth curriculum for excellence level. Teachers would benefit from participating in moderation activities that will support them to make reliable and robust judgements of assessment evidence.

Senior Phase

Improving attainment for all Leavers

- When comparing average complementary tariff scores, attainment for all young people leaving school has been broadly in line with the VC since 2018/19. For all young people, whilst these percentages are in line with the VC, this indicates an overall decline.

- For the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people with an ASN, there has been a decline in the average complementary tariff points attained since 2017/18. Attainment for the highest attaining 20% of young people with an ASN, has remained static over this period, with no clear improvement.

Cohorts

- In S4, based on complementary tariff scores, attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC for 2022/23 and 2021/22 having previously been significantly lower than the VC in 2020/21. This is showing an overall pattern of improvement. By S5, based on S5 for this group, attainment is significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22 and 2022/23. Previously, in 2020/21, attainment for the lowest attaining 20% in S5 was in line with the VC. For the lowest attaining 20% of S6 based on S6, attainment is in line with the VC and has been since 2018/19.
- In S4 based on complementary tariff scores attainment for the middle attaining 60% of young people is significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22 and 2022/23 having been significantly much lower than the VC in 2020/21. By S5 based on S5 for this group, attainment is in line with the VC in 2021/22 and 2022/23 having been significantly lower than the VC in 2020/21. For the middle attaining 60% of S6 based on S6, attainment is in line with the VC. The tariff points average for this group of young people have broadly increased since 2018/19.
- In S4, by S5 based on S5 and by S6 based on S6, attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC and has been since 2018/19.
- Senior leaders recognise the need to improve attainment for all young people and changed the curriculum offer for young people at S4. Young people at this stage are now studying seven awards rather than six. Tracking and monitoring of attainment for young people takes place regularly. Senior leaders have recognised the need for this to be more rigorous.

Breadth and Depth

- At S4, a majority of young people achieve three or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better, a minority achieve five or more at this level. The percentage of young people achieving three or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better is significantly lower than the VC for 2022/23. A minority of young people achieved three or more awards at SCQF level 5A in 2022/23. This is significantly lower than the VC having been in line with the VC in 2021/22. A few young people attained five or more awards at SCQF level 5A in 2022/23, in line with the VC.
- By S5, a majority young people achieve five or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better. Attainment at this level is in line with the VC having been significantly lower than the VC from 2018/19 to 2021/22. A minority of young people achieve five or more awards at SCQF level 5A and this is in line with the VC in 2022/23 having been significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22. The majority of young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better. A minority of young people achieve five or more awards at SCQF level 6C. A minority of young people achieve one or more award at SCQF level 6A. All these measures are in line with the VC. A few young people achieve five or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better. This is significantly higher than the VC for 2022/23 having been significantly much lower than the VC in 2021/22.
- By S6, most young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better. The percentage of young people achieving one or more, three or more and five or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better is in line with the VC and has been in line with the VC since 2018/19. A majority of young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better. A minority

young people achieve three or more and five or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better. Both measures have been in line with the VC since 2018/19. A minority of young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better, this has been in line with the VC since 2020/21. A few achieve one or more award at SCQF level 7A or better. This is significantly lower than the VC. A very few achieve 3 or more awards at SCQF level 7A or better and this is in line with the VC.

- Senior and middle leaders should consider how to improve the quality of passes young people achieve. Greater use of tracking and monitoring by staff will support them to identify young people not meeting targets at an earlier stage. This will allow for appropriate supports to be provided for young people and help them to achieve as highly as possible.
- Senior leaders need to review the number of courses young people are presented for to ensure that young people maximise success. Young people in S4 are presented for a higher number of SCQF qualifications than the national average. It is important for senior leaders to identify the value added by additional courses to young people's attainment, learner pathways and experiences.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people take part in a wide range of lunchtime and after school activities. These include groups linked to school improvement priorities such as the Equalities group and Reading Leaders. As a result, young people are improving their communication and team working skills. Almost all S6 pupils participate in school committees and are developing leadership skills through these activities.
- A few young people in the senior phase demonstrate important citizenship skills, by volunteering in school clubs, working with charities, and with local primary schools. These young people contribute positively to the ethos of the school and their participation and achievements exemplify the school's values.
- Staff with responsibility for Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) have developed strong partnerships with local businesses. These links support young people to take part in activities such as mock interviews and product development processes. This enables almost all young people in the BGE to develop team working skills and communication skills.
- Young people's successes and achievements both in school and out with school are recognised and celebrated effectively using a range of methods. Local and national successes are recognised and celebrated well. This inspires a greater amount of pride in participating and sharing their involvement in wider achievement activities.
- Staff are at an early stage of tracking young people's participation, and engagement in achievements. Staff should now, along with key stakeholders, develop a system that tracks young people's participation, skills development, and achievements effectively. This will help staff identify more readily those young people who are at risk of missing out from these valuable opportunities.

Equity for all learners

- Staff have developed internal procedures for ensuring attendance procedures are followed. However, these are not resulting in improving attendance for certain young people, nor providing assurances that concerns regarding attendance are addressed timeously. Senior leaders need to ensure all procedures and processes relating to recording and managing school attendance are more rigorous and robust, and lead to improved attendance. Senior leaders and pastoral staff track and monitor the attendance of young people that cause concern. This is partly as a result of the number of young people who find staying in class

challenging. As part of the school improvement process a few staff are developing a toolkit with practical strategies in support of learner engagement and improve attendance. These strategies are supporting young people, their families and staff to improve on these key concerns. Senior leaders also need to review the curriculum offer for young people to ensure that it meets the needs of more young people.

- Almost all staff know young people and their families well and have an understanding of barriers facing them. Steps have been taken to minimise the cost of the school day. For example, senior leaders have ensured there are no additional costs to the curriculum, or to the majority of activities beyond the school day. Parents appreciate the support that the school provides for their young people.
- Senior leaders have a clear plan for the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). Senior leaders have used PEF appropriately to support the majority of young people at risk of not achieving success or becoming disengaged from school. The 'Achievement Team' work collaboratively with senior leaders and pastoral staff to support identified young people. They offer, for example, effective counselling, group work and one to one support provided by the team and appropriate external partners. These supports are enabling a few young people to improve attendance, attainment and their wellbeing. Young people who receive targeted interventions demonstrate increased confidence and readiness to engage in next steps in learning. For a few, this has also led to moving onto a positive destination.
- Senior leaders are at the early stages of tracking the impact of all interventions in closing gaps in attainment. They should continue to develop this in order to ascertain which interventions are making the most difference.
- Pastoral support staff work well with a wide range of partners to support young people at risk of not achieving a positive destination and to plan appropriate supports. Since 2018/19 almost all young people left school to a positive destination which is broadly in line with local and national data.

Other relevant evidence

- The school achieved Gold Reading School accreditation this session. Young people, staff and parents have worked well collaboratively to create a rich reading culture across the school community. The library is a welcoming space within the school and young people work closely with the librarian to review and advise on the types of texts they would like to see available. This has led to an increase in young people accessing texts and in the variety of literature they choose to read. A few senior pupils volunteer as paired readers working with young people in the BGE and children from the associated primary schools.
- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. A few areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

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.