

25 February 2025

Dear Parent/Carer

In May 2024, HM Inspectors published a letter on Portlethen Academy. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeenshire Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher 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.

**Senior and middle leaders need to provide clear leadership and direction to support all staff in driving improvements in attainment.**

Young people's attainment in 2023/24 showed a few signs of improvement in specific areas. This includes the performance of young people at S4 in National Qualifications. However, there remains a continued need to raise attainment across the school. Senior leaders agree that further and more consistent improvement is still required across the school.

The headteacher has acted rapidly and effectively to address concerns raised in the original inspection. He has prioritised raising attainment with staff demonstrating a clearer sense of direction. Middle and senior leaders are working more effectively as a team and are developing a range of approaches to improve attainment. For example, more rigorous attainment review meetings have resulted in a sharper focus on what needs to improve.

School staff have made important progress in aspects of this area for improvement, although there is not yet enough evidence to show that this is having a positive impact on young people's attainment. Staff need more time to demonstrate the impact of their work and new approaches upon attainment. There will be a need for all staff to monitor and consider how well their new approaches to attainment are working. It is vital that all staff continue to work at pace to improve outcomes for young people. Clear leadership from senior and middle leaders will be very important to make sure that consistent approaches to improve outcomes for young people are in place across the school.

**All staff need to work closely together to develop a shared understanding of what high-quality learning looks like. This includes creating a culture of high expectations so that young people achieve more.**

Staff have continued to build on their agreed set of standards for teachers and are engaging in professional learning linked to these. This is helping teachers to begin to develop a better shared understanding of what high-quality learning looks like. Staff are now engaging further with colleagues outwith Portlethen Academy and this should be yet more developed to help them recognise and develop high-quality learning and teaching.

Relationships between teachers and young people in most lessons are positive and respectful. However, stakeholders continue to report some concerns around behaviour. Staff

have undertaken important work to address this. For example, a revised positive relationships policy. Staff at all levels should continue to consider how to ensure there are positive relationships and behaviour at all times.

Young people are beginning to benefit from more positive learning experiences in classes. For example, young people are increasingly understanding the purpose of their learning. Staff should continue to work, at pace, on the quality and consistency of learning experiences for young people. This will be important to help establish better a culture of high expectations. As part of this, there should also be a focus on improving the level of appropriate challenge for all young people across the school.

School staff have made important progress in aspects of this area for improvement. However, school staff have not yet had sufficient time to develop and embed their approaches to demonstrate that they are making a positive impact on young people. Staff should continue their work at pace to improve outcomes for young people. School staff would benefit from further time to develop these approaches further.

**All teachers need to use information more effectively about how well young people are making progress in their learning to plan for groups and individuals. This should lead to learning that is set at the right level of challenge, so that more young people achieve the success of which they are capable.**

Currently, teachers rely too heavily on young people producing different pieces of work when considering how to ensure different young people work at a level best suited for their abilities. It will be important for staff to consider a wider range of tools at the planning stage to ensure young people are experiencing appropriate challenge. Senior leaders should consider how to highlight and share existing effective practice in learning and teaching across the school. Young people's progress, including those young people with additional support needs is now easier to access by staff. This is also now helping to inform planning of learning experiences. It is vital that staff now ensure they use this information frequently and well to support young people's learning and progress.

School staff have worked well to make important progress in aspects of this area for improvement. However, staff have had insufficient time to develop and embed their approaches to demonstrate that they are making a positive impact on young people. Staff should continue their work at pace to improve outcomes for young people. School staff would benefit from further time to develop these approaches further.

**Senior and middle leaders, working closely with teaching staff, need to develop more consistent approaches to the ways they monitor and record how well young people are making progress, based on sound approaches to assessment. This will provide the basis of support that will enable all young people to achieve to their full potential.**

School staff have worked hard to make important progress in aspects of this area for improvement. School leaders have introduced recently a system for consistent tracking and monitoring young people's progress and attainment. An important strength has been the establishment of common language around young people's progression in their learning from S1 to S3. The 'Steps to Success' policy clarifies a learner's progression through these years with reference to 'bronze', 'silver' and 'gold' stages. This common language has

provided more useful and comparable information to staff to analyse progress and coordinate interventions to support young people. As a result, senior leaders are able increasingly to track and understand the progress of learners in all year groups. Staff are now considering different approaches to assessment. It will be important that staff monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches.

Staff have worked well to make important progress in aspects of this area for improvement. At present, it is too early to know how successful these new approaches will be to improve attainment for young people. Staff should continue their work at pace to improve outcomes for young people. The school needs more time to be able to show that these new approaches are having a significant positive impact on young people's attainment.

### What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We recognise that the school needs more time to continue to work on areas for improvement. We will liaise with Aberdeenshire Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Aberdeenshire Council the details of this inspection and how they will support the school to improve. When we return to inspect the school we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Graeme M Brown  
HM Inspector