

Summarised inspection findings

Castle Douglas High School

Dumfries and Galloway Council

28 May 2019

Key contextual information

Castle Douglas High School is a non-denominational secondary school in the town of Castle Douglas in Dumfries and Galloway. The school has six associated primary schools. The head teacher has been in post for just over one year. He is supported by a School Support Manager and three deputy headteachers, two of whom have been appointed recently. Together, they also form the senior leadership team at Dalry Secondary, located seventeen miles from Castle Douglas High School.

Attendance is generally above the national average (92.5 per cent compared to 91.2 per cent nationally). In February 2018, 9.2 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals. This is significantly below the national average of 14.4 per cent. In September 2017, 0.2 per cent of pupils lived in 20% most deprived datazones in Scotland. Most young people on the school roll live in deciles five and six. In September 2017, the school reported that 27 per cent of pupils had additional support needs which is below both local authority and national figures.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

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

- Staff across the school are strongly committed to supporting young people to achieve and attain qualifications. In most lessons, there are respectful, caring relationships between teachers and young people and among young people themselves. These positive relationships underpin the recently refreshed school vision and values. Young people talk confidently about their learning and in most lessons, they and their teachers interact well with each other. This creates a calm and orderly learning environment.
- In almost all lessons, young people engage well in their learning. They are highly motivated when they have opportunities to exercise choice and take responsibility for their learning. Learners report that they enjoy taking part in more collaborative approaches when they are actively involved in their learning. They would welcome more opportunities to learn from and with each other. At present, lessons are too often overly teacher led and resource driven; these do not support learners in taking responsibility for their own learning. When young people learn through using digital technology or experience interdisciplinary or outdoor learning, they are more fully engaged in lessons and are able to direct their own learning and develop their creative abilities.
- Overall, the quality of learning and teaching is good. The school should take forward its plans for teachers to share the examples of strong practice that exist, thus supporting a greater consistency in high quality learning experiences. Staff should agree the range of approaches which are most effective in meeting the needs of all young people. This would support the professional development of teachers in leading learning. Current educational thinking, including research and professional enquiry, should inform these developments.

- In almost all lessons, explanations are very clear and in the majority of classes teachers demonstrate skill in effective questioning to deepen learning. In lessons where the pace of learning and the level of challenge for all learners are sufficiently high, young people respond very well. They have high expectations of what they want to achieve and are motivated to take on more difficult tasks. The majority of lessons provide appropriately challenging work for young people, however in a few lessons there was a need for greater pace. There is scope for differentiation to meet more effectively the needs of all learners. Staff should ensure that all young people experience pace and challenge matched to their needs.
- While young people's views are sought, there is a need for them to be heard more fully in all aspects of school life, particularly in allowing them to shape and guide improvements in learning. Young people would benefit from having more opportunities to take on leadership roles including leading learning. The school should now progress its plans to observe learning more closely through a more coordinated and systematic approach to self-evaluation.
- Most teachers are beginning to make effective use of assessment to improve young people's engagement in their learning. The majority of staff share the purpose of learning with young people. There is scope to build on the most effective practice observed in a few curricular areas to ensure that young people know what they need to do to be successful in their learning. This good practice should now be extended across the school and developed further to involve young people more actively in planning their learning.
- Staff are taking steps to ensure that approaches to assessment in the broad general education (BGE) are in line with national guidance. They are aware of the need to develop this further so that all assessment is valid and reliable, providing young people with effective feedback. This will in turn inform their progress and next steps, allowing learners to demonstrate more fully their knowledge, understanding, skills, attributes and capabilities. Work is underway across all faculties to use national benchmarks to review courses in the BGE. The school should now ensure that all teachers have regular opportunities to agree standards for learning, teaching and assessment through planned moderation activities. This should include moderation of achievement of a level.
- Teachers are confident about expected standards in National Qualifications. A number of teachers undertake SQA duties and can therefore share a deeper insight into national standards and expectations with their colleagues. Faculties also undertake a range of verification activities to ensure that standards and expectations are consistent. Young people in the senior phase benefit from helpful conversations with class teachers; these improve their understanding of their progress and attainment. Staff should ensure that all young people benefit from consistently high quality feedback to support their continued progress as learners.
- Faculties track and monitor the progress of individual learners in the senior phase and intervene when underachievement is detected. Staff recognise that there is scope for tracking and monitoring to be used more widely in analysing outcomes for specific groups of young people, including those who face barriers to learning. They should now proceed with plans to develop a more consistent whole school approach to tracking and monitoring in the senior phase. This would support a more effective evaluation of interventions designed to improve outcomes for all learners. Similarly, emerging work on the tracking and monitoring of young people's participation in opportunities for wider achievement should be developed further and implemented.
- The school has identified the need to undertake a review of planning, tracking and monitoring in the BGE to ensure that current systems and processes being used across all departments

are consistently rigorous and robust. This in turn would support an increased awareness by young people in S1–S3 of their progress. Data could be used more effectively to monitor the attainment over time of different groups of these learners. The school should ensure that all staff now receive support to make holistic assessment judgements about pupil progress within and between levels, taking account of ‘how much’ and ‘how well’ a young person is learning.

- The targeted group of young people in the learning and nurture bases learn within a supportive environment where staff treat them with care and respect. Staff know the learning and wellbeing needs of those few young people well. They are sensitive and responsive to these needs and provide effective support to young people as required. This helps young people to feel safe, included and confident in seeking support. Nurturing approaches support young people to overcome anxieties they have with their learning. The school should continue as planned to widen evidence-based nurturing approaches in order to support all young people to be included and achieve across the school. The implementation group is at the early stages of progressing this.

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.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

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

Broad general education

- The school submitted figures that show that in both 2017 and 2018, by the end of S3, most young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence third level or better in listening and talking, reading and writing. In numeracy, almost all learners achieved third level or better in 2017, with most achieving this level in 2018. Less than half of S3 learners achieved Curriculum for Excellence fourth level in listening and talking, reading and writing in 2017 and 2018. The majority of young people in S3 achieved Curriculum for Excellence fourth level in numeracy in 2017, while in 2018 less than half achieved this same level. Improvement in attainment in literacy and numeracy is inconsistent across the three year period 2016-2018. In 2018, these figures remained below the local authority and national figures. Senior leaders acknowledge that data provided related to achievement of a level is not robust. Staff would benefit from engagement in moderation activities within department, across departments and with colleagues in other establishments. This will support further confidence in making reliable and robust judgements about progress in young people's learning. Senior leaders have correctly identified the need to ensure that professional judgements in literacy take account of national standards and that these are consistently applied, particularly at fourth level literacy. The Literacy Group is at the early stages of addressing this. Development work continues in school to support further teacher confidence in, and understanding of, the National Benchmarks. Staff are beginning to develop their use of the Scottish National Standardised Assessment as a diagnostic tool to support improvements in young people's literacy and numeracy.

Senior phase

- In the four years between 2014/15 and 2017/18, most leavers attained literacy at SCQF level 5 or better. The majority of leavers attained SCQF level 6 between 2013/14 and 2017/18. Attainment in literacy at SCQF levels 3 or better to level 6 across the five year period is maintained in line with the virtual comparator (VC). It is notable that in 2013/14 and 2014/15, performance at SCQF level 6 was significantly higher than the VC, as it was for SCQF level 5 or better in 2014/15.
- Most young people left school in three years of the five year period between 2013/14 and 2017/18, having attained numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better. In 2014/15 and 2016/17, almost all leavers attained this level. In 2013/14 and 2014/15 and again in 2017/18, the majority of leavers attained at SCQF level 5 or better which was in line with the VC. In 2015/16 and 2016/17, most attained at this level. Between 2014/15 and 2016/17, leavers performed significantly higher than the VC. Performance at SCQF level 6 is significantly higher than the VC in session 2014/15 and significantly much higher for 2016/17 and 2017/18.

- Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy for those who leave at the end of S4 and S5 has been in line with the VC between 2013/14 and 2017/18. In 2017/18, the percentage of S5 leavers attaining SCQF level 4 or better in numeracy fell to significantly lower than the VC. At SCQF 5 or better, in 2014/15 and 2015/16, S5 leavers attained significantly higher than and much higher than the VC in numeracy.

Attainment over time

Broad general education

- The school recognises the need to introduce a whole school monitoring and tracking system which will support a greater understanding of young people's progress across all curricular areas and help identify gaps where further interventions are required. The school has identified that the current arrangements do not provide evidence of progress over time except in literacy and numeracy.

Attainment over time

Senior phase

- The school is working to strengthen its approaches to monitoring and tracking in the senior phase. It recognises that present arrangements do not support the whole school overview of individual learner progress which leads to appropriate, early interventions. It currently relies predominantly on analysis of prelim results rather than continuous assessment approaches. Planned targeted interventions, for example mentoring, will be helpful in further raising attainment.
- The head teacher's detailed analysis of senior phase attainment data helpfully identifies gaps where interventions are required to continue to raise attainment. In addition to whole school training, this is supporting staff to develop their skills in data literacy.
- When measured using total tariff points, performance is significantly higher than the VC for the lowest attaining 20% between 2013/14 and 2017/18, with the exception of 2015/16 and 2016/17 when it is in line. It is significantly higher than the VC for the middle attaining 60% for all years with the exception of 2017/18. Average total tariff points of the highest attaining 20% of leavers is also significantly higher than the VC in 2013/14 and 2016/17.
- In S4, the lowest attaining 20% have performed in line with the VC between 2015/16 and 2017/18 when comparing complementary tariff scores. In 2013/14 and 2014/15, they attained significantly higher than the VC. From 2014/15 to 2017/18, the middle attaining 60% have performed in line with the VC while performing significantly higher in 2013/14. The highest attaining 20% consistently perform in line with the VC.
- By S5, based on the S5 cohort, attainment across the five year period for all groups when using complementary tariff scores is in line with the VC. This is with the exception of the lowest attaining 20% in 2015/16 and middle attaining 60% in 2014/15 and 2015/16 when young people attained significantly higher than the VC.
- By S6, based on the S6 cohort, attainment across the five year period for the lowest attaining 20% and highest attaining 20% when using complementary tariff scores is in line with the VC. This is with the exception of 2014/15 when the lowest attaining 20% performed significantly higher than the VC. In 2013/14 and 2016/17, the highest attaining 20% performed respectively significantly much higher and higher than the VC. The middle attaining 60% perform consistently significantly higher than the VC across the five year period.

Breadth and depth

- In S4, over the past four years, most young people attained six or more qualifications at SCQF level 4 or better. This is significantly higher than the VC in four out of the past five years. Less than half attained six or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better, which is in line with the VC.
- By S5, the percentage of young people attaining at five or more courses and six or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better, is respectively significantly much higher and significantly higher than the VC in 2014/15 and 2015/16. In 2017/18, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 5A or better was significantly higher than the VC across two courses or more to five courses or more. At SCQF level 6, the percentage of young people attaining at all grades and across all numbers of courses was in line with the VC.
- By S6, the percentage attaining six courses or more at SCQF level 5C or better was in line with the VC between 2013/14 and 2017/18 with the exception of 2015/16 when the percentage was significantly much higher than the VC. In 2017/18, all measures are in line with the VC at SCQF levels 5A, 6C and 6A or better.
- Overall, during the period from 2013/14 till 2017/18, the school has performed both significantly higher and much higher than the VC when not performing in line with it. This is across a number of measures and year groups. Senior leaders recognise this variability in performance and are aware that whole school performance is increasingly in line with its VC. The school has already identified the need to strengthen its BGE provision to ensure a solid foundation on which to continue to raise attainment. Through increasingly detailed analysis of data, it is beginning to put in place specific interventions to address this. Its recent review of the curricular structure and planned developments in accreditation of wider achievement support their aim to raise further attainment and achievement.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people have an increasing range of opportunities to achieve and develop skills for life, learning and work. They can participate in wider achievement through for example the school of dance and the school of rugby, in addition to art, music, drama and sports clubs and trips. They engage with leadership roles such as house captains, the steering group for S6 pupils and young leader roles for learners in S1-S3. Through these, they are developing skills in leadership, planning, organisation and team working. They are also contributing to the local community through work placements and volunteering, for example supporting local charities and the wider community. The school is working with a range of partners. This includes local businesses and national organisations such as Princes Trust, for their achievement programme, and the National Trust Threave Garden, for work experience. Young people are developing business and catering skills with a range of culinary partners.
- The school has identified the need to record young people's achievements gained through participating in activities in and outwith school. At the time of inspection, they were unable to provide accurate figures of participation in the range of opportunities on offer. Tracking this will allow staff to target those young people who do not participate as fully as they could. This should also inform the development of achievement and leadership progression pathways. The school recognises the need to explore more fully accreditation in wider achievement.
- Young people gain valuable skills through participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme, the John Muir Award, Sports Leader Award and the Saltire Award. The school is in the process of developing a clear picture of those learners participating in these awards and gaining subsequent accreditation. Young people are developing skills for life, learning and work through employability courses and young enterprise projects. While most understand

they are developing skills, they are not all yet confident in describing these and how they can be applied to their wider learning. As such, there is scope to develop young people's understanding of the skills they achieve through their participation in these awards and experiences. As part of this work, there is a need to ensure that all young people are aware of the range of opportunities available and that they understand the benefits of participation.

- The school recognises and celebrates the achievements of young people in a variety of ways including junior and senior prize giving, social media, 'what's going on at CDHS' newsletters, and through highlighting local newspaper stories which feature young people from the school. There is scope to develop this further to ensure the success and achievements of all young people are recognised and celebrated fully.

Equity for all learners

- Most young people who attend Castle Douglas High School reside in SIMD deciles five and six. Attainment for leavers for the five year period from 2013/14 to 2017/18, based on total tariff points, is overall in line with the VC for young people living in similar data zones elsewhere in Scotland. School leaders report that SIMD does not provide a complete measure of the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by their young people due to the rural setting of the school. They use a range of measures including Free Meal Entitlement to identify the need for interventions. These currently include a programme to support further development of literacy skills and a focus on the development of nurturing approaches.
- Attendance figures have been consistently above the national average in the period for which figures are available. The rate of exclusions is considerably below the national average. Almost all leavers enter a positive destination which is in line with the VC over the last five years. An increasing percentage of young people leave to attend further education while a decreasing percentage now enter higher education. During the same period, school figures have been above both local authority and national figures.

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.