

25 January 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Hazlehead Academy, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to Hazlehead Academy. Our engagement helped us learn more about how young people and their families have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support young people's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection, published in January 2020.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

### **Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19**

Since the initial inspection there have been changes in the senior leadership team. Currently two substantive depute headteachers and two acting depute headteachers support the headteacher. Both the leadership capacity and staffing across the school have been significantly affected by COVID-19. Staff are supporting each other well to manage this. However, the impact of staff absence as a result of COVID-19 means that they are not able to take forward all the priorities for improvement at a pace that they expected. This has also impacted on the provision of Gaelic Medium Education.

The periods of remote learning in spring 2020 and early 2021 meant that learning and teaching was delivered largely through the use of digital platforms. This led to both young people and staff developing their digital skills quickly.

As well as the digital delivery of the curriculum, in order to support young people and their families, a team of staff developed a useful home-learning website. This includes practical strategies for learning at home, advice on self-care for parents and families and mental wellbeing at home.

Senior leaders continued at pace to develop a bespoke tracking tool to bring together a wide range of information about young people. This includes, for example, learners SIMD decile, their additional support information and also allows teachers to input assessment information regularly.

### **Progress with recommendations from previous inspection**

Almost all young people now leave Hazlehead Academy with a literacy award at SCQF level 4 or better. In both 2019 and 2020, almost all leavers attained a numeracy award at SCQF level 4 or better. Most young people now leave with a literacy award at SCQF level 5 or better and the majority now leave with a numeracy award at the same level.

Whilst the overall attainment of young people in S4 has improved, the attainment of young people in S5 and S6 is consistently lower than comparable schools across Scotland. We have advised senior leaders that faculty heads and teachers need to focus more on improving the quality of learning and teaching, and on having higher expectations of what young people can achieve. Consistently, almost all young people leaving Hazlehead Academy enter a positive destination, and in 2020 the percentage of young people from S4 leaving for a positive destination was significantly higher than comparable schools across Scotland.

The school improvement plan is not yet focussed enough on what staff need to do to ensure young people have high quality educational experiences in both English and Gaelic Medium Education. Senior leaders, along with stakeholders, should now work together to be clearer about what will make the biggest difference to improving the attainment and achievement of all young people. They should then develop a plan to check the progress being made.

Staff have made some changes to courses and programmes offered in the school in the senior phase. This is improving the options for young people. We have asked senior leaders to consider working more closely with other partners or agencies to extend the curriculum choices further. This includes ensuring that choices are offered at the right level to allow young people to achieve the highest level of qualifications they are capable of.

In most classrooms there is a positive and purposeful atmosphere. In a few lessons, young people are highly engaged and motivated in their learning. There remains scope to provide tasks and activities which are well matched to the needs of young people.

Teachers have worked well to develop the ways they provide feedback to young people about their learning. This includes using digital methods, and written and verbal comments, specifically designed to help young people know what it is they need to do to improve their learning. This is working better for young people in the senior phase. Teachers are continuing to develop the quality of feedback for young people in S1 to S3.

Staff are at the early stages of developing their plans to take forward improvements for Gaelic Medium Education. As a result of staff changes the school was without a teacher of Gaelic for some time. This has now been resolved and there are early indications of positive impact. This has the potential to enhance the development of Gàidhlig as a National Qualification, and further learning through Gaelic. Senior leaders need to ensure that they continue to develop Gaelic Medium Education leading to young people's achievements being recognised with appropriate National Qualifications and awards.

## What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have also been making progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. We recognise that the school needs some more time to implement fully its priorities for improvement. We have asked Aberdeen City Council to provide us with further information about the school's progress within 18 months of the publication of this letter. We will work together with local authority officers to agree what will happen next. Should we require another visit to the school, we will inform parents/carers. Otherwise, Aberdeen City Council will continue to inform parents/carers about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Frances E. Graham  
HM Inspector