

3 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In June 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Inverurie 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.

Coordinate strategic priorities to focus on ensuring continuing improvements in outcomes for all young people. In order to raise attainment and achievement for all, develop a more rigorous system for monitoring and tracking the progress of young people which is based on reliable evidence.

The headteacher and senior leadership team provide strong leadership and a clear direction for school improvement. Staff, young people, parents and partners express a high level of confidence in them. The systems they have established are supporting staff to work together effectively to bring about improvement. Staff and young people are increasingly taking up leadership opportunities across the school. These are helping to build confidence and empower staff and young people to engage effectively in aspects of school improvement. Staff across the school welcome the positive culture and demonstrate a high level of commitment to working together to secure the necessary improvements. A number of steps are being taken to support raising attainment. These include the development of a system to track how well young people progress in their learning through the broad general education (BGE). Senior leaders continue to identify how this system can be refined further to inform planning for learning. Teachers are increasingly using a wider range of reliable evidence of how well young people are making progress in their learning. This is helping improve the validity of teachers' judgements about young people's progress and attainment. This will provide more robust information that can be used by teachers, young people and parents to make decisions about appropriate course choices as young people progress through school. There are improvements in aspects of attainment since the last inspection. These include improvements in attainment in literacy and numeracy for young people at S4. However, the attainment at S5 and S6 needs to improve, particularly the quantity and quality of Higher qualifications achieved.

Improve learning, teaching and assessment to ensure better motivation and engagement of young people. Ensure appropriate pace and challenge for all young people to maximise progress in their learning.

Senior leaders, along with all staff, have put in place processes and procedures to drive improvements in learning, teaching and assessment. As teachers try out and evaluate the success of different strategies, it is important that they agree a shared understanding of effective approaches to learning and teaching. This needs to support practice across the school which is of a consistently high standard. Senior leaders should continue to ensure

improvements in professional practice are clearly focused on meeting the needs of all young people. Learner engagement is improving and young people are getting more opportunities to lead their learning. However, this is not yet a key feature of learning for young people and good practice in this area should be shared better to improve consistency. Across the school, staff need to have a greater focus on ensuring all young people progress in their learning at an appropriate rate. Young people are now able to talk about the level at which they are working in the BGE. This is a positive step in beginning the journey to enable learners to take responsibility for their learning. Young people need to be more aware of how to improve and what they need to do next. This should help to ensure that they are working at a suitable pace and appropriate level of challenge to support effective progress in learning.

Review proposals for curriculum development, taking account of national advice, to provide appropriately flexible and progressive pathways for all learners. In designing learning pathways ensure all young people's entitlements are being met in line with national expectations.

The school has developed a vision and shared curriculum rationale which takes account of the context of Inverurie Academy and the needs of young people. A new curriculum structure has been introduced with a view to providing appropriate learning pathways for all young people. Senior leaders acknowledge the need to review plans to ensure that all young people receive their full entitlement to a BGE with learning in all eight curriculum areas until the end of S3. In addition the current third year experience is not providing young people with the depth of learning required across all curriculum areas as they move on to qualifications in the senior phase. This results in young people not being as well prepared for learning in the senior phase across all subjects areas as they could be. The senior phase curriculum has been developed to provide a wider range of learning pathways and courses. Young people are benefitting from well-established partnership working. These partners provide additional course options to meet the needs of young people who may benefit from access to a wider range of specialist courses. There now needs to be greater rigour around planning and support for young people's course choice to ensure they are accessing an appropriately informed breadth of learning.

Teachers have made progress in creating a skills framework to support young people to identify and discuss the skills they are developing across their learning. Young people in S6 act as mentors, supporting S1 learners to use this framework. This is beginning to support young people's understanding of how the skills they are developing might apply to areas of work and employment. Along with improved data about attainment, this should help to inform the course choices young people make as they move through school.

What happens next?

The school has made progress across a range of areas since the original inspection. We will liaise with Aberdeenshire Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. In partnership with Aberdeenshire Council, we will arrange a further visit to support the school in making the required improvements. The visit will take place within one year of publication of this letter. When we return to conduct this activity we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

David Drysdale
HM Inspector