Summarised inspection findings

Girvan Academy

South Ayrshire Council

5 March 2024

Key contextual information

School Name: Girvan Academy
Council: South Ayrshire
SEED number: 8236534
Roll: 539

Girvan Academy is a non-denominational secondary school, situated in Girvan, in South Ayrshire. The school links with six associated primary schools. The headteacher has been in post since August 2021. He is supported by three depute headteachers.

A local authority Support and Wellbeing Department is located within the school. This is led by a principal teacher.

Attendance is generally below the national average.
Exclusions are generally above the national average.
In September 2022, 24 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals.
In September 2022, 24.8 per cent of pupils lived in 20 per cent most deprived data zones in Scotland.
In September 2022, the school reported that 35 per cent of pupils had additional support needs.

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, led by senior leaders, have worked hard to create a very positive ethos at Girvan Academy. This is underpinned by a relentless focus on respectful and positive relationships between young people and with staff. As a result, learners benefit from a calm and productive learning environment. Staff and young people have also improved the physical learning environment. This includes refurbishing facilities and improving the appearance of corridors and classrooms. This investment has improved young people's sense of being valued and belonging in the school.

■ Staff have developed a shared understanding of the features of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment. Senior leaders have led this strategically and ensured that staff are supported by a wide range of professional learning activities. These promote collegiate work and enquiry. As a result, staff are very well placed to ensure even greater consistency in the quality of learning and teaching. They are also well placed to build on a few existing aspects of very strong practice across the school.

■ Senior leaders are increasingly taking account of young people's views on learning. This is beginning to lead to staff adopting a variety of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. As a next step, senior and middle leaders should work with staff to enable all young people across the school to contribute their views on learning and teaching more easily.

They should also consider how these views can impact more consistently on lessons across the school.

■ Young people are motivated to learn, and they engage well in most lessons. Teachers are using increasingly a variety of approaches which involve young people working collaboratively or independently. In a few lessons, young people experience learning and teaching that is overly teacher-led. Staff should now consider how to build on collaborative practices. This will support young people in becoming more engaged, creative and active in their learning.

■ In the majority of lessons, young people are supported well by teachers in linking new and prior learning. This helps young people to understand how their learning progresses over time. In the majority of lessons, teachers use a range of effective feedback techniques. However, the use of high-quality feedback is inconsistent. Senior leaders should identify and share the most effective practice in this area to provide young people with more opportunities to understand better their progress and next steps in learning There is scope for teachers to develop the quality of written feedback, particularly in relation to young people's written work. In a few lessons, teacher and peer feedback is used to develop a more sophisticated understanding among young people as to how they can improve.

■ In almost all lessons, teachers' instructions are clear, and lessons are well structured. In most lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning with young people. Staff have developed the Girvan Academy Skills Framework to support young people's development of skills across the curriculum. Teachers should develop this further so that it allows young people to identify, reflect on and develop meaningfully their skills.

■ Almost all staff are aware of the needs of young people. The majority of staff are able to intervene to support young people's learning well. Pupil support assistants offer valuable targeted support to individuals. A next step for staff will be to ensure that all lessons are differentiated appropriately to meet the needs of all learners. This includes the most able learners, who would benefit from increased pace and challenge to suit their learning.

■ A few teachers use digital technologies well to enhance young people's learning. A significant next step for the school will be to develop young people's use of technologies to further develop their digital skills and enhance their learning.

■ In the majority of lessons, teachers use assessment effectively to check for understanding. This includes them using 'show me' boards, appropriate questioning techniques and plenary activities. Across the school, teachers use questioning appropriately to check young people's learning. Most teachers should continue to develop their approach to questioning to provide learners with additional challenge. Teachers should now use all assessment evidence to help inform planning of learning, teaching and assessment.

■ Progress through the levels within the broad general education (BGE) is well understood by staff and mapped in learner-friendly, subject-specific posters. Robust moderation arrangements are in place at school and authority level to ensure a shared understanding of standards. As a result, staff interpret tracking data well to identify groups of young people who would benefit from additional interventions.

■ In the BGE and senior phase, young people have regular learning discussions based on tracking data, with a relevant member of staff. These conversations enable young people to identify and focus on areas of their learning which should lead to improvement. Mentors conduct these tracking discussions in the senior phase. The mentoring programme is open to all young people in the senior phase and almost all staff give of their time to support learners in

this way. Young people value this approach. The majority of young people can articulate specific areas for improvement in their learning.

■ In the senior phase, staff have a confident understanding of assessment standards in all Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) accredited courses. Their confidence is supported by participation in robust moderation activities within faculties, at local authority level and through wider National networks. They also engage with staff at Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) events.

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
BGE

■ In 2022/23, most young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level or better in literacy by the end of S3. The majority of young people achieved CfE fourth level. The percentages of young people attaining CfE fourth level show signs of improvement over time. In 2022/23, almost all young people achieved CfE third level or better in numeracy. A minority of young people achieved fourth level. The percentages of young people attaining numeracy at these levels show signs of improvement.

■ Young people who require additional support with their learning are supported well by a range of targeted interventions. These interventions include young people working in small groups, and on a one-to-one basis with staff. The interventions help young people to make accelerated progress in achieving expected levels.

■ In 2022/23, almost all young people with an additional support need achieved individual milestones and / or CfE third level or better in all or almost all their curriculum areas by the end of S3. A minority of these young people achieved CfE fourth level in most of their curriculum areas by the end of S3.

■ Staff have been working to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy across the BGE, in partnership with staff from the associated primary schools. This has included staff working with targeted groups of young people as they transition from primary to secondary school. It has also included staff from Girvan Academy working closely with staff from the primary schools to moderate children and young people's work. Teachers have also worked collaboratively to develop and promote common vocabulary, and common numerical processes, to strengthen children and young people's literacy and numeracy skills across curriculum areas.

Senior phase
Leavers (literacy)

■ Most young people leaving school between 2017/18 and 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is in line with the virtual comparator (VC), except in 2018/19 and 2019/20 when it was significantly much higher. The majority of young people leaving school in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2020/21 achieved SCQF level 6, although this dropped to a minority of young people in 2019/20 and 2021/22. This is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2021/22.

■ The majority of young people with an additional support need leaving school in 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. A minority achieved this in 2017/18 and 2020/21.

Leavers (numeracy)

■ Most young people leaving school between 2017/18 and 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This is significantly much higher or significantly higher than the VC from 2017/18 to 2020/21. At SCQF level 5, 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. A minority of young people leaving school achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy over the same time period. This is in line with the VC.

■ The majority of young people with an additional support need leaving school in 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. A minority achieved this in 2017/18 and 2020/21.

Cohorts (literacy)

■ As young people move through the school their performance in literacy is broadly in line with the VC. By S6 (as a percentage of the S4 roll), most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Almost all young people achieved literacy at this level in 2021/22. By S6 based on S4, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy in 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2021/22, with the minority achieving this in 2022/23.

Cohorts (numeracy)

■ At S4, most young people achieved numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better in 2019/20, 2021/22 and 2022/23. This is significantly much higher than the VC. By S5 based on S4, and by S6 based on S4, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in most years from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Young people's performance at this level is almost always significantly higher or significantly much higher than the VC. Numeracy attainment at SCQF level 6 is in line with the VC.

■ As young people move through the school, a few young people do not achieve literacy or numeracy at SCQF level 3. Senior leaders and staff work well to ensure young people achieve at this level. They are targeting young people at risk of not achieving SCQF level 3 at an early stage, using individualised strategies to provide them with additional, effective support.

Attainment over time
BGE

■ Most young people attain third curriculum for excellence level across all curricular areas by the end of their BGE. This standard has been maintained over the last few years. A few young people are making very good progress. A comprehensive school tracking system is in place, which helps senior leaders and teachers to monitor very well the progress of young people across the BGE. The system enables staff to provide appropriate and timely interventions for individuals and groups of young people. Young people who require additional support with their learning are tracked closely. The system allows them to see young people's progress across the school and to build on strategies that work well in accelerating young people's progress and raising attainment. Staff track and report on young people's progress regularly throughout the school year.

■ Departmental and faculty tracking systems provide further detail on young people's progress and attainment, supporting staff further in meeting young people's learning and wellbeing needs.

Senior phase
Improving attainment for all

Leavers
■ When compared using average complementary tariff points, the attainment of the lowest 20% of young people leaving school is significantly higher than the VC for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2021/22. The attainment of the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of leavers is broadly in line with the VC from 2017/18 to 2021/22.

■ When compared using average complementary tariff points, the attainment of young people living in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2 leaving school is broadly in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2021/22.

Cohorts
■ At S4, by S5 based on S4, and by S6 based on S4, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people is often significantly higher than the VC from 2018/19 to 2022/23. In S4, for the middle attaining 60% of young people, attainment is significantly much higher or significantly higher than the VC from 2019/20 to 2021/22. By S5 based on S4, and by S6 based on S4, for the middle attaining 60% of young people, attainment is broadly in line with the VC. For the highest attaining 20% of young people, attainment is broadly in line with the VC. There was a decline in attainment for S6 based on S4 in the latest year.

Breadth and Depth
■ At S4, most young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 4 or better from 2018/19 to 2022/23. This is significantly higher or significantly much higher than the VC. Most young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better, with the exception of 2019/20 when almost all young people achieved this. A minority achieved five or more awards at this level during the same time period. The percentage of young people achieving one or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better is significantly much higher than the VC from 2019/20 to 2021/22. The majority of young people achieved one or more award at SCQF level 5A or better from 2019/20 to 2022/23. This is significantly much higher or significantly higher than the VC from 2019/20 to 2021/22. The percentage of young people achieving four or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better is broadly in line with the VC from 2018/19 to 2022/23.

■ By S5, the majority of young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better in 2020/21 and 2021/22. A minority of young people achieved five or more awards at this level in 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2022/23. Attainment at this level is broadly in line with the VC in four of the five years from 2018/19 to 2022/23. Most young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better in 2020/21 and 2021/22. The majority of young people achieved one or more awards at this level in 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2022/23. Attainment at this level is significantly much higher or significantly higher than the VC from 2020/21 to 2022/23. A minority of young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better, which is broadly in line with the VC. The majority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better in four of the five years from 2018/19 to 2022/23, including the latest year. The percentages of young people achieving one or more to four or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better are broadly in line with the VC from 2018/19 to 2022/23. A minority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better during the same time period, which is broadly in line with the VC.

■ By S6, the majority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better from 2018/19 to 2022/23. The percentages of young people achieving one or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better are broadly in line with the VC during this time period. A minority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better, which is

broadly in line with the VC. A few young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better in four of the years from 2018/19 to 2022/23, including the latest year. A few young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 7A or better. This is broadly in line with the VC.

■ Staff continue to develop the curriculum, supporting all young people to achieve success in a wide range of courses and awards, including cyber security, Scottish studies, travel and tourism and automotive skills. These courses and awards help young people to attain a greater breadth of skills and qualifications, enriching their curriculum. The courses and awards also support them well as they transition to positive destinations. Senior leaders should continue to consider the added value of all courses for young people.

■ The percentages of young people leaving school at S6 who attain five or more qualifications at SCQF level 5 or better show signs of improvement over the five years from 2017/18 to 2021/22. The school has performed better than the VC in four of these five years, including in the latest year. The percentages of young people at S6 who attain one or more qualification at SCQF level 6 or better also show signs of improvement over these five years. The school has performed better than the VC in three of these five years, including the latest year.

Achievements

■ Most young people across the BGE and senior phase develop skills such as team building and communication through their participation in activities beyond the classroom. Staff and key partners, such as the Girvan Youth Trust, Skills Development Scotland, Ayrshire College and South Ayrshire's 'Thriving Communities' team work very well to provide young people with a broad range of activities which contributes to the development of their skills for learning, life and work. The school's 'extra-curricular passport' helps staff to understand and reward young people's participation well. Staff also use an effective whole school tracking system to monitor and encourage young people's participation in various achievements. They identify and support those not currently involved to become involved.

■ Most young people engage in the wider life of the school through a wide range of activities, and trips. They report being proud to represent their school in performances and competitive events and they enjoy taking part in fundraising activities. These activities help them to develop increasing loyalty to the school and to one another.

■ The school's sport academy and other initiatives enable the majority of young people to become accredited in leading sports, first aid, safeguarding and lifeguarding. A few young people have used accreditations to access work placements and paid employment opportunities. Young people further develop their leadership skills by supporting clubs, activities and transition events within local primary schools.

■ A minority of young people develop leadership skills through specific roles across the school. For example, they support younger people through accelerated reader and Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programmes, an 'eco-group' and the Rights Respecting Schools steering group. A few young people in the senior phase secure SQA awards in leadership and volunteering skills. The Duke of Edinburgh's scheme is well embedded in the school and a few young people talk positively about the support they receive during their bronze, silver and gold programmes. This includes young people in the support and wellbeing department. Staff are very effective in celebrating young people's achievements within and out with the school. For example, through achievement walls, prize giving events, assemblies and social media.

■ The school has been recognised as a Bronze SCQF Ambassador School, reflecting staff's commitment to supporting young people in their wider achievements. Staff have also

developed senior phase pathways in line with the Developing the Young Workforce strategy to provide equality between vocational and academic qualifications. This has allowed young people to gain a wide range of additional qualifications to support their journey to a positive destination when they leave school.

■ The school was accredited with the first CyberFirst Gold Schools Award in Scotland, raising the profile of the school at a national level. This enables the school to broaden the range of cyber security courses on offer and develop strong links with industry partners, colleges and universities. A team of girls in S2 became the Scottish champions in the CyberFirst Girls Competition and young people in S6 hosted and won the first ever Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge for schools. This is normally only available for universities to compete in. A few young people speak passionately about their involvement in these initiatives.

Equity

■ Staff use funding from the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) to target specific areas to close the poverty-related attainment gap and to secure positive destinations for young people. They use school data effectively to determine these priorities. For example, an Education Support Officer, who is integral to the care and wellbeing team, helps to provides effective, individualised support to young people and their families. They target areas such as improving attendance, attainment and wellbeing in different ways. Young people and their parents speak positively of this work, which is leading to examples of success across the school. For example, in relation to improving a few young people's attendance.

■ Staff have increased their support and commitment to Girvan Youth Trust, a key partner in supporting staff to impact positively on targeted groups. This includes them prioritising The 'Girvan Academy Joint Venture', which allows young people to enhance their team building skills, and build relationships, self-confidence, self-esteem and employability skills. It also allows them to achieve national accreditations.

■ Almost all young people leave school to a positive destination, including those with an additional support need or those from SIMD deciles 1 and 2. The majority of young people leave school to go to higher education or further education. A minority leave to go to training or employment. Young people talk confidently about their future aspirations. The 'Positive Pathways & Wellbeing' strategy group supports much of the school's work in ensuring positive destinations. This group meets regularly to discuss and plan interventions such as the Joint Venture programme and transition support for our young people.

■ A minority of pupils in S4 undertake an extended work placement programme in partnership with South Ayrshire employability and skills team to help them access apprenticeship schemes. This is helpful in ensuring these young people can have a positive destination on leaving school.

Context

The support and wellbeing department (SWD) is an integrated part of the whole school. The SWD provides individualised programmes of learning for young people with significant additional support needs. At the time of inspection, 32 young people were placed in the SWD. In addition to this, young people requiring additional support in the mainstream provision also join classes in the SWD to help meet an identified need.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

■ Across the SWD, young people benefit from a positive learning environment and a calm, settled culture for learning. Staff have developed caring relationships with young people and families. They use their extensive knowledge of young people to help them overcome any barriers to learning. This supports most young people to attend school regularly. A number of young people who had extended periods of interrupted learning are participating successfully in their learning upon starting a placement at the SWD. All staff consistently encourage young people to do their best.

■ Teachers are highly enthusiastic about getting it right for learners and provide learning experiences which are consistently motivating for most learners. Most young people enjoy being at school and engage purposefully in learning activities that suit their needs and interests. They work well in group and individual tasks and activities. Most young people are particularly motivated by practical learning activities including physical education, art and home economics.

■ All teachers have high expectations of young people and promote independence in learning. In most classes, young people have an understanding of the purpose of their learning and how they can be successful. Teachers could develop further their use of questioning to assess all young people's level of understanding of what they have learned. Teachers should also support young people in the BGE to take greater ownership of their learning, particularly their targets in literacy and numeracy.

■ Supported by specialist partners, staff carry out detailed, holistic assessments when young people begin their placement at the SWD. The resulting assessment information identifies factors impacting upon a young person's wellbeing and any potential barriers to learning. As a result, teachers are provided with a detailed assessment of young people's learning needs. This helps enable staff to develop effective, targeted interventions based on young people's individual needs.

■ Across the SWD, teachers monitor effectively young people's progress at the senior phase in a consistent manner. Within the BGE, teachers are at the early stages of using early level milestones and Benchmarks to assess, track and monitor young people's attainment and progress across the curriculum. Senior leaders now need to provide teachers with continued support in making professional judgements about young people's progress through the early level, identifying small successes as appropriate. In taking this forward, senior leaders should increase opportunities for teachers to engage in moderation activities within the SWD and with colleagues from neighbouring special schools.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

■ Overall, taking account of individual learner profiles, most young people are making good progress in literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics. A minority of young people are making very good progress, particularly at the senior phase.

■ Most young people at the BGE are making good progress with their learning and engagement over time. A minority of young people are making very good progress. However, a few young people are making limited progress as a result of their personal circumstances and barriers to learning.

■ Recently introduced tracking systems in the SWD do not yet provide sufficiently reliable information for staff to track all young people's attainment and progress over time at the BGE. Senior leaders and staff need to continue to develop their approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's progress over time more robustly.

■ At the senior phase, most young people are attaining successfully a number of National Qualifications and wider awards. Most young people attain a good range of course and unit awards at National 3 and National 4 with a minority attaining at National 5. Young people are gaining qualifications across a wide range of curriculum areas including, history, biology and classical studies.

■ Young people participate purposefully in a wide range of personal achievement activities. These include a number of valuable visits to local community partners including Dumfries House and Bio Sphere Bikes. Through participating in personal achievement activities, learners are building skills in communication, working with others and problem-solving. At the senior phase, all young people participate successfully in a meaningful work placement, often closely aligned to their interests and aspirations. Although staff in the SWD place great emphasis on promoting learners' skills for life, learning and work, young people do not yet consistently appreciate the skills they are developing through their achievements. Staff should continue to support young people to recognise the skills they are developing, notably those skills for life, learning and work outwith communication and numeracy.

■ Senior leaders and staff have a detailed understanding of the range and complexity of young people's needs in the SWD. They provide bespoke, equitable support which helps young people to attend school and engage with their learning experiences. Young people in the SWD participate successfully in whole school PEF funded initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Other relevant evidence

■ Staff are highly attentive to the wellbeing needs of all young people in the SWD. All young people have detailed staged intervention information and personalised wellbeing targets. Staff work together very well to provide appropriate care and support to improve young people's wellbeing and develop their confidence. As a result, young people feel valued and cared for, and are improving their wellbeing. There is a strong focus on inclusion between the SWD and the wider school as a whole. Bespoke learning programmes and personalised strategies are in place to support most young people to access learning experiences alongside their mainstream peers. Young people enjoy engaging in these valuable opportunities, participating well and building new friendships. Staff should continue to identify creative ways for all young people in the SWD to be more involved in the wider life of the school.

■ The principal teacher of attainment and achievement has established a commendable range of interventions for young people in the senior phase. This includes a mentoring programme for most young people in S5 and S6, grade booster programmes and additional residential study opportunities. This focus is leading to greater success for young people and ensuring that young people can participate in activities which will impact on their attainment and achievement.

■ An effective partnership exists between the school and the Parent Council. The Parent Council has raised significant funds to support 'positive behaviour activities', which encourage young people's wellbeing. The Parent Council has also supported the Supporting Families Initiative, which provides equity of access to all opportunities for young people. The breakfast station, preparation stations, Christmas assistance, help with school uniform, self-care, and transport for school trips help almost all young people to engage more effectively with the school.

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.