Summarised inspection findings

Queensferry Community High School

The City of Edinburgh Council

5 December 2023

Key contextual information

School Name: Queensferry Community High School
Council: The City of Edinburgh Council
SEED number: 5518334
Roll: 1130

Queensferry Community High School is located in South Queensferry. Almost all young people who attend the school live in South Queensferry. There are four associated primary schools. In September 2022, most young people lived in the least deprived data zones in Scotland. In February 2023, 11.2% of young people were registered for free school meals.

The headteacher has been in post for two years. He is supported by four depute headteachers, all of whom have been appointed in the last four years.

In September 2022, the school reported that 39.9% of young people had additional support needs. The number of young people identified as having an additional support need (ASN) has increased since September 2018 when 18.1% of learners were identified as having an ASN.

Since the return to school from the COVID-19 pandemic, the attendance rate has been consistently higher than the national average. In 2020/21 the attendance rate is 92.7%. Exclusions are below the national average.

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

■ Senior leaders and staff ensure there is a strong focus on positive relationships with high expectations of all members of the Queensferry High School community as the starting point for high-quality learning. This is strongly evident across the school. Almost all interactions between staff and young people are encouraging and built on mutual respect. Helpful routines are evident and young people are clear about expectations.

■ In the majority of lessons, almost all staff share the purpose of learning. This is supporting young people to have a clearer understanding of what they are learning. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not link learning intentions or measures of success to planned learning. Teachers should develop a greater shared understanding of these key concepts to support young people to reflect on what they have learned.

■ Most learners participate well in most lessons. Most teachers ensure lessons are well structured to keep learners on task. They make good use of learning spaces and break out areas to enhance learning. In a minority of lessons, learning is not sufficiently challenging to promote active engagement and pace is too slow. Teachers should develop further opportunities for young people to take responsibility for their learning. In a few lessons, learners benefit by being more active in their learning with activities such as investigations, exercising choice or sharing their learning with peers.

■ Most teachers provide clear explanations and use a range of well-prepared resources to engage learners. Teachers use well-considered starter activities routinely to engage young people well in learning. In a few classes, these starter activities provide a concise opportunity for retrieval practice or a measure of prior knowledge. In a few lessons, starter activities were overly long and had limited impact or relevance.

■ In a few lessons, staff use questioning well to extend and deepen young people's thinking. A few teachers used digital applications effectively to ensure all young people are thinking and engaging with questioning. This practice is inconsistent and in too many lessons, questions are low level, with limited wait time. Teachers now need to improve questioning techniques to check for understanding of all learners and plan responsively.

■ In a majority of lessons, tasks are well-matched to young people's needs and staff use a variety of strategies to differentiate learning. In a minority of lessons, the whole class do the same task at the same pace directed by the teacher. When young people are not appropriately challenged or supported, a few learners do not engage well with the learning. Senior leaders have rightly identified differentiation, pace, and challenge as areas for improvement going forward.

- Staff are continuing to develop their expertise in using digital platforms to promote both collaborative and independent learning. In a few lessons, teachers use technology to support learning effectively. Most teachers make effective use of digital platforms, and this is enabling young people to access resources such as class notes, presentations, and assignments in class and at home. Young people are benefitting from techniques such as the use of assistive technology for those requiring additional support and applications that enable learners to collaborate. Staff should continue with their plans to develop and share best practice in this area so that it becomes a consistent strength across the school.

- Young people undertake a range of relevant assessments throughout the school. The majority of teachers use learning conversations linked to internal assessments effectively. Where these are used well, discussions support young people to identify more easily their strengths and next steps in learning.

- Senior leaders have introduced a consistent, robust process of moderation of courses and assessment processes in the S1 to S3 or broad general education (BGE). As a result, staff are reviewing their approaches to assessment and identifying where improvement can be made.

- Almost all departments are using the language of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) second level to fourth level within learning in the BGE. Almost all departments are planning and tracking progress against National Benchmarks, ensuring staff make confident professional judgements about young people achieving a level. Teachers share success criteria to illustrate progression from one level to another. Staff should consider consistently sharing success criteria to ensure all learners are clear about their progress within a level and what their specific next steps in learning are.

- Within the senior phase, there are effective, well-planned moderation arrangements. This is ensuring staff are confident in their professional judgements about the progress young people are making. Staff engage with a variety of professional networks, including The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), other departmental staff across their local authority schools, and colleagues nationally. These networks and moderation activities are supporting teachers to have a good understanding of national standards.

- A minority of staff use assessments or feedback from day-to-day learning to help inform subsequent planning to improve learners' progress effectively. Staff should work collaboratively to share good practice and ensure greater consistency to support learning and teaching across all stages.

- Classroom teachers effectively monitor and track progress of their learners. They input this into a whole school tracking system that then allows teachers to gauge how well their learners are progressing across a number of curricular areas. Teachers should continue to reflect on how this system helps inform their planning for individual learners.

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

Senior leaders have implemented highly effective tracking process, and this is leading to impactful interventions in the senior phase and in the BGE. Although it is too early to note impact in terms of the attainment of leavers, this is improving the attainment of young people who stay on at school until S6. Senior leaders demonstrate raised attainment with confidence for cohorts. Their effective use of data and their predictive model show that improvements should continue.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy
- In 2022/23, almost all young people achieved CfE third level, and the majority achieved CfE fourth level in literacy. This high level of achievement has been sustained between 2018/19 to 2022/23. Staff responsible for literacy engage regularly in moderation activities with cluster schools and other local secondary schools. As a result, teachers have a strong understanding of national standards. This is supporting them to make reliable and robust professional judgements.

- In 2022/23, almost all young people achieved CfE third level and most achieved CfE fourth level in numeracy. Staff responsible for numeracy are aware of the need to develop more reliable and robust approaches to teacher professional judgement. They should ensure consistent assessment approaches that use National Benchmarks from S1 to S3.

Senior Phase Leavers
- Most young people leaving school between 2017/18 and 2021/22 achieved Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy. This is in line with the VC. The majority of young people leaving school in the same time period achieved SCQF level 6, in line with the VC.

- Most young people leaving school between 2017/18 and 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This is in line with the VC. A minority of young people leaving school in the same period achieved SCQF level 6. This is significantly lower than the VC in 2019/20 and 2021/22.

- 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 at S4, by S5 and by S6. This remains an important area for improvement.

- The majority of young people with an ASN achieved literacy at SCQF level 5 or better from 2017/18 to 2021/22. There have been improvements in the percentage of young people with ASN achieving SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This has improved from a minority in 2019/20 and 2020/21 to a majority in 2021/22.

- In both literacy and numeracy, a few young people leave school without achieving at least SCQF level 3 or better. Senior leaders recognise this is a priority for improvement. Robust approaches are in place to identify young people at risk of leaving school without achieving the appropriate level of literacy and numeracy qualification and target support for those most at risk.

Cohorts
- At S4, most young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. These standards have been maintained over the last five years. By S5 and S6, the majority of young people achieve SCQF level 6. Attainment in literacy is broadly in line with the VC from 2018/19 to 2022/23 across S4, S5 and S6.

- Young people's attainment in National Qualifications (NQs) in English in the senior phase is very strong. At both National 5 and Higher, young people's attainment is significantly higher than the national average.

- At S4, the majority of learners achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in four of the last five years. Senior leaders are taking steps to improve attainment in National 5 mathematics. By S5 and S6, most young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better. A minority achieved numeracy at SCQF level 6. Attainment in numeracy is broadly in line with the VC, except for the 2019/20 cohort as they moved through the school from S4 to S6, where it was significantly lower or much lower for most measures.

- Senior leaders are clear in the need to improve attainment in numeracy at SCQF level 5 and, attainment in National 5 mathematics at S4. Staff have made changes to the BGE courses. They have also increased targeted support of groups and individuals to support improving attainment in mathematics. They are working to improve the consistency of teaching across the mathematics curricular area.

Attainment over time
BGE
- Most young people achieve CfE third level across their chosen subject by the end of S3. The majority achieve CfE fourth level.

Senior Phase
- The new senior leadership team has been effective in raising attainment for cohorts of young people as they move through S4 to S6. Senior leaders are instilling a culture of ambition with a more aspirational presentation policy. They are also making better use of tracking data to ensure learners make better informed course choices. In addition, a higher staying on rate at school supported by more flexible learning pathways in the senior phase are all collectively supporting improved attainment across a number of measures.

Leavers
- Attainment for leavers in the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people was significantly much lower or lower than the VC from 2018/19 to 2021/22, when compared using complementary tariff points. Attainment for the highest attaining 20% of young people has improved from 2018/19 to 2021/22 to being in line with the VC. There have also been improvements for the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people with ASN from 2018/19 to 2021/22.

Cohorts
- Overall, there is an identifiable pattern of improvement for young people in S4 and S5 over the latest five-year period. Attainment in the lowest and middle attaining groups have shown a pattern of improvement from being below the VC to being in line with the VC in 2021/22.

Breadth and Depth

■ At S4, the percentage of young people attaining National Qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better and SCQF level 5A or better for one or more to six or more courses shows improvement. The majority of young people in the latest two years attained five or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better. Attainment at this level in 2021/22 and 2022/23 is now in line with the VC having been significantly much lower or lower in previous years.

■ By S5, attainment has improved at SCQF level 5C or better, SCQF level 5A or better, SCQF level 6C or better and SCQF level 6A or better for one or more to five or more courses. Attainment at this level in 2022/23 is now in line with the VC having been significantly much lower or lower in previous years. A minority of young people attain five or more courses at SCQF level 6C or better.

■ By S6, there is no consistent pattern of improvement at SCQF level 5C or better, SCQF level 5A or better, SCQF level 6C or better and SCQF level 6A or better for one or more to five or more courses. At SCQF level 5, the school performs significantly lower than the VC over the last five years.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

■ Most young people develop a range of skills and attributes through activities beyond the classroom. These well attended clubs and outdoor learning experiences are delivered by young people, staff, parents and partners. Young people also experience success by performing in events and competing locally and nationally. Most young people are developing citizenship through initiatives to promote young people's rights, sponsored events, charity work and volunteering in the local community. A minority of young people develop leadership and organisational skills through specific roles in curriculum areas or across the school.

■ Staff in all curricular areas are proactive in working collaboratively with a range of partners to provide experiences for young people to achieve. As a result, most young people are developing their teamwork, resilience skills and increasing their knowledge of the world of work well.

■ Senior and middle leaders effectively track the participation of young people taking part in achievement activities. Pastoral staff use this information well to identify and remove barriers to individual young people's participation. They support young people and their families sensitively.

■ Staff celebrate young people's achievements effectively through a range of well-considered approaches. These include 'celebrating success' assemblies, displays, social media, newsletters, certificates, medals, daily announcements, formal awards ceremonies and specialist sport ceremonies. Young people's achievements are also noted in subject areas through awards such as pupil of the week/month. Staff also use the whole school online reporting system to share success with parents.

■ A few young people receive accreditation for their achievements through National Progression Awards, Youth Achievement Awards, John Muir Award and Duke of Edinburgh. Senior leaders recognise the need to continue to explore opportunities for greater numbers of young people to receive accreditation for their achievements.

■ All young people need to understand better how their achievements are developing their skills for learning, life and work across the curriculum. Senior leaders should build on the Skills Academy model in exploring approaches to track the skills that young people develop as a result of their achievements.

Equity for all learners

■ Staff closely track and monitor all young people. This includes those who face barriers to learning due to socio-economic circumstances or an additional support need. As a result, all staff know who is on track with their learning and those who are not. Staff have also taken steps to reduce the cost of the school day. This is providing equity of access to all opportunities. Senior leaders successfully implemented approaches to raising attainment through their attainment hub. As a result, there are improvements in attainment for young people who face barriers to learning through socio-economic disadvantage.

■ Senior leaders have used Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) successfully to improve attendance, provide nurture, support and resources and develop bespoke pathways with partners. Most young people supported by PEF have improved attendance or wellbeing outcomes. For the majority of young people targeted there has also been improvements in their literacy and numeracy attainment. Supported by these interventions, whole school attendance is improving, and exclusions have reduced significantly since 2018/2019.

■ Senior leaders and staff are proactive in tracking young people from S3 onwards to target future positive destinations. As a result, almost all young people leaving school since 2017/18 moved to a positive destination.

Quality of provision of Special Unit (contributes to school evaluations)

Context

The enhanced support base (ESB) currently supports 15 young people from S1 to S5. The ESB was created in 2020 to support young people with additional support needs in the Queensferry area. Young people gain a place at the ESB following the local authority's multiagency planning process. A majority of young people in the ESB participate in mainstream classes across the school.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

■ All staff across the school establish positive relationships with young people in the ESB. Staff's whole school commitment to protecting young people's rights is evident in how young people in the ESB are treated. Young people come to school each day keen and eager to learn. They interact positively with all staff and are kind to each other. Staff encourage young people to share their learning and express their opinions. Most young people talk confidently about the things they enjoy learning in school.

■ The school's vision underpins teaching in most lessons. Young people are encouraged to work together on tasks, which motivate them in their learning. In a few lessons, teachers use interactive whiteboards creatively to engage young people's interest. Young people regularly use digital devices to research information relevant to their learning. In most lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. This supports young people to know what they are being asked to do. Where young people require additional support, staff are adept at intervening and explaining tasks further to support their understanding. Teachers should continue to explore how young people's learning can be enriched by the use of a range of learning environments, including learning outdoors.

■ When young people from the ESB are in mainstream classes, their needs could be better met. ESB teachers should work with mainstream teachers to share best practice to suit the needs of young people accessing the ESB.

■ Staff use a range of assessments to establish each young person's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. This supports teachers to have a good understanding of each individual young person's skills and abilities. Staff should now develop further how assessment of each young person's abilities informs next steps in their learning. At the end of each day, young people reflect on what they have enjoyed and what they think they could have done better. Teachers should build on this positive start to support young people to reflect more on their learning.

■ Teachers are developing their skills in using a range of documents to track and monitor young people's progress. Teachers use individual education programmes to track young people's progress against a range of individualised targets. Other commercial resources are used to track the development of young people's social and communication skills. Teachers should consider how their use of these resources could be streamlined to support a more coherent assessment of each young person's progress. This has the potential to make tracking and monitoring of young people's progress more manageable and inform further improvements in planning for young people's progress.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

Attainment in literacy and numeracy
- The small number of young people working within the BGE phase of their education means that comparisons with cohorts are not valid. Overall, all young people in the BGE are making good progress against their prior levels of attainment.

Numeracy
- Across the BGE, most young people can tell the time using an analogue clock. Almost all can perform simple additions and subtractions using two-digit numbers. A few can solve problems using measures of capacity. A few young people can convert amounts of money between two currencies. Young people would benefit from increased opportunities to develop their numeracy skills in shape, position and movement and information handling.

Literacy
- Most young people can find facts from stories, which they have read. A minority of young people can use adjectives well to enrich their writing. They can use these particularly well when they are linked to their feelings. A few young people can write extended pieces of writing, appropriate to their additional support needs, which include paragraphs. A few young people can read lists of ingredients when making food. A few young people would benefit from increased opportunities to develop their skills more explicitly in listening and talking.

Attainment over time
- In session 2022/23 a few young people attained national units from National 2 to National 4 in a range of subjects including literacy, numeracy and mathematics and geography. A few young people are currently working towards units at National 5. Teachers should continue to support young people to access as wide a range of curricular areas as possible to support them to attain as best they can. Teachers should review their current practice in presenting young people with national unit awards from S1 to S3.

Overall quality of learners' achievement
- Young people communicate well with each other and their peers across the school. Most are confident They are responsible and show respect for each other. Most young people attend a range of clubs and committees across the school. These help them to develop a range of skills. For example, young people attending the drama club are developing their confidence in presenting to an audience. A few young people are members of leadership groups such as the equalities group. This helps them to develop their skills in leading change across the school.

Equity for all learners
- A majority of young people in the ESB experience equity when learning in mainstream classes across the school. Teachers use PEF funded resources well to ensure all young people can access trips and events.

Practice worth sharing more widely

- Staff worked collaboratively to develop a clear framework for learning, 'Queensferry High School Learns Together'. There is a strong sense of ownership of this framework with staff at the early stages of implementing this strategy.

- The whole school tracking and monitoring system is highly regarded and used effectively by staff. Class teachers are able to track where learners in their curricular area are with learning across the curriculum. This has led to focussed and high-quality professional dialogue with colleagues regarding approaches that best suit the needs of learners. Senior and middle leaders can also monitor progress across all curricular areas, and this ensures that timely and appropriate supports are in place. Senior leaders review the effectiveness of this tool regularly and adapt it to reflect the needs of all users of the tool.

- Parents are made aware of the use of PEF through the school improvement plan. Parents are able to influence the use of PEF through the school's opportunities fund.

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.