

# Summarised inspection findings

Ellon Academy

Aberdeenshire Council

21 January 2020

School name: Ellon Academy  
Council: Aberdeenshire Council  
SEED number: 5231132  
Roll (Sept 2018): 1079

Attendance is generally in line with or above the national average.

In 2016-2017, the most recent year of data, the school's exclusion rate was in line with the national average.

In September 2018, 0.1% of pupils lived in the 20% most deprived datazones in Scotland.

In September 2018, the school reported that 40% of pupils had additional support needs.

In February 2019, 5.7% of pupils were registered for free school meals. This is significantly below the national average.

## Key contextual information

Ellon Academy is a non-denominational secondary school situated in the town of Ellon in Aberdeenshire. The senior leadership team has undergone significant changes over the past five years. The headteacher has been in post since November 2016. There are four depute headteachers. One of these posts is shared between two depute headteachers. One of the depute headteachers started in August 2019.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher has a caring and inclusive leadership style. She is supported well by the depute headteachers. They are improving practice and are promoting positive and collaborative relationships among all at Ellon Academy. The headteacher, in consultation with key stakeholders, has successfully launched a set of core values relevant to the school and community. These underpin the school vision of 'Personal Best'. The core values are becoming more apparent in the everyday life of the school. The headteacher is aware that the number of core values need to be streamlined. This will help provide clarity on how the core values can be more consistently demonstrated across the school and drive change.
- The headteacher has clearly established the vision and direction for the school. The school improvement plan (SIP) is based on seven key priorities, which are linked with How good is our school? (4th edition). Staff across the school play a key role on impact teams, which take forward the agreed actions and provide leadership opportunities. Clear timelines for implementing agreed priorities and monitoring that progress is brisk would be useful. Senior leaders should review the role of impact teams, streamline planning and focus on fewer priorities. This would help them have a manageable number of priorities and achieve more impact. Senior leaders should ensure that their approaches to improving the school are based on rigorous self-evaluation.
- Currently, the majority of faculty improvement plans align with the SIP. Faculty principal teachers should continue to develop further their self-evaluation approaches. Faculty principal teachers should gather information to provide an accurate overview of the progress made in delivering whole-school objectives. Senior leaders' analysis of this information should inform future improvement priorities. Faculty principal teachers and senior leaders need to evaluate regularly improvement plans, and critical reflection should take place.
- The majority of faculty principal teachers are empowered to lead curriculum areas, while having high expectations of staff. Teachers' leadership skills, including faculty principal teachers, should continue to be developed and used more effectively to improve the school. Staff need to be clearer of their roles and responsibilities in delivering school improvement. For this, senior leaders need to provide stronger guidance in taking forward key initiatives across the school in a more structured and consistent way.
- The headteacher requires to promote further a culture of consultation and shared decision making. Staff would benefit from engaging more often in reflection and self-evaluation activities to develop their understanding of current national issues. Commendably, the headteacher encourages staff to look outwards and to develop their practice by sharing approaches with other schools and with subject-network colleagues.

- The professional review and development process for teachers within the school is linked clearly to the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) standards. They are positive about the opportunities provided, for example, as leaders of learning and associate senior leaders. These opportunities are supporting staff well in developing their career-long professional learning. Senior leaders need to ensure that time allocated to whole-school professional learning is used effectively to inform improvement.
- The majority of young people feel that their views are taken into account during school consultations. They benefit from a wide range of leadership roles both within school and in their communities. These include their participation as sports leaders, pupil representatives and a values-based steering group. In addition, all young people in S6 participate in at least one committee. There is potential to develop further opportunities for young people to take responsibility for leading their learning in classes.
- A clear rationale informs the allocation of the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). Stakeholders have been consulted. Senior leaders use PEF appropriately for a targeted group of young people. This has resulted in improving young people's wellbeing and increasing parental engagement. Senior leaders are aware of the need to develop further processes to determine the impact from the use of PEF.
- Senior leaders are yet to develop a clear strategy for Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). Consequently, staff and learners require more support to understand and develop career management skills. The SIP identifies the development of employability skills in a number of priorities. Senior leaders need to measure progress on SIP agreed actions. Senior leaders and partners should develop a strategy to implement fully the entitlements of the Career Education Standards (CES) for all learners. The Work Placement Standards (WPS) should be implemented across the school. Collectively, these should enable staff to support more effectively young people's understanding and development of skills required for learning, life and work.
- Staff and partners have open discussions, varying from annual to weekly planning. Senior leaders involve some partners in school improvement planning, for example, staff in the library service. Building on this, senior leaders should ensure that all partners have the opportunity to contribute to school improvement planning, and monitoring and evaluation of programmes. This would strengthen the school's approach to self-evaluation. In addition, it would support staff in understanding partners' roles in improving outcomes for young people and their families.

## 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

- Across the school, staff and young people enjoy positive relationships. Young people are respectful, responsible and confident. They are proud of their school and keen to learn. There is a calm and purposeful climate for learning. Young people's learning is supported by a caring and inclusive environment. Young people engage enthusiastically with learning activities and respond positively to active learning opportunities. They enjoy learning independently. In a majority of lessons, young people's needs are met through well-structured activities. This allows them to make suitable progress. In a few lessons, young people would benefit from more pace and challenge in their learning. Young people enjoy learning with digital technology. Staff should take forward their plans to develop further the use of digital technology to support high-quality learning and teaching.
- In most lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning and what young people need to do to be successful. This motivates learners and helps them to understand what success looks like. Teachers' greater use of plenaries would support young people recognise their own success and next steps. Young people would benefit from closer involvement in planning their learning. Learners are highly motivated when they receive high-quality feedback, orally or in writing. This helps young people understand how they are progressing in their learning and the levels at which they are working. Most young people demonstrate a broad understanding of the steps they can take to make further progress.
- Most teachers have high expectations of themselves and young people. They plan well to meet learners' needs. A majority of teachers use questioning to support young people's learning and develop their critical thinking skills. Higher-order thinking skills could be developed further through more challenging learning activities.
- Many learners benefit from contributing to the life of the school, including by taking part in the lunchtime and after-school clubs and activities. They value opportunities to be leaders as class representatives, prefects, in Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) activities and supporting peers in junior classes. Young people would welcome increased opportunities to be active participants in making decisions which affect them.
- A long-standing impact team is leading improvements in learning and teaching. Senior leaders need to review the impact this is having on the development of learning and teaching across the school. Recent professional learning activities have led to an increased variety of formative assessment techniques being utilised by those teachers involved. This group of teachers is sharing good practice with colleagues across the school. Plans are now in place for whole-staff professional learning and review of the whole-school approach to learning and teaching. The aim is to create a template for an 'Ellon lesson', to support consistently high-quality learning and teaching.

- Across the school, teachers are continuing to develop effective approaches to assessment to meet learners' needs. Teachers are using a wide range of evidence to inform their professional judgements and their confidence is developing. Teachers should share these approaches through professional learning activities across the school.
- In the broad general education (BGE), teachers use the National Benchmarks to assess progress. Faculties are working to build teacher confidence in their professional judgements in the BGE. Senior leaders recognise the need to develop further moderation activities across and beyond the school to improve the reliability of assessment data. In the senior phase, teachers share their knowledge and expertise well to support high-quality dialogue, which ensures a keen understanding of standards.
- Teachers are tracking and monitoring young people's progress through the BGE in their own faculties. Senior leaders have identified the need for a more robust whole-school approach to tracking and monitoring in the BGE to ensure young people progress to appropriate learning pathways in the senior phase. This will allow staff across the school to track and monitor cohorts and groups of learners more effectively, and improve their progress. There is effective whole-school tracking and monitoring of young people's progress within the senior phase.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Ellon Academy's curriculum is based on the shared vision of achieving 'Personal Best' for all of its young people.
- Young people moving to Ellon Academy from P7 benefit from a transition programme that involves specialist input from teachers of English and mathematics. Towards the end of P7, they benefit from a three-day experience of the secondary school. Senior leaders correctly identify the need for staff to continue to improve transition to achieve continuity and progression in learning for young people entering S1.
- In the BGE, young people learn across all four contexts for learning. In S1 and S2, young people learn across all curriculum areas. Most learning is organised as whole-class activities. This is limiting opportunities for more individualised pathways. The school has some strong examples of personalised learning planned for young people in the BGE. This type of learning could be extended across the school. All curriculum areas experienced in S1 and S2 are planned mainly around third and fourth level experiences and outcomes (Es and Os).
- Staffing difficulties have resulted in young people not having provision of home economics in S1 in recent years. This has also had an impact on senior phase options this session. A new teacher has recently been appointed. In S1 and S2, young people have opportunities to reflect and develop their attributes and skills through religious and moral education (RME), physical education (PE) and personal and social education (PSE). At S1, young people receive a period of 'SEEDs', and at S2, a period of 'TEAMs'. Staff have developed these programmes, in partnership with psychological services, to support the development of soft skills and growth mindset. Staff need to evaluate the added value and impact of these inserts to the curriculum. At S1, young people experience interdisciplinary learning through creative projects in expressive arts, enabling them to deepen their learning. At S1 and S2, young people experience a variety of enrichment activities, which are designed to reinforce and deepen learning, and develop skills. It would be beneficial to evaluate the impact of these curriculum inserts. Young people continue with studies in either French or German, depending on the language they experienced in their primary school. In addition, they can choose an enrichment experience of Spanish, Mandarin or British Sign Language in S2.
- Young people make choices towards the end of S2 for specialisation in S3. They take forward courses which will lead to qualifications in S4. The school ensures that pathways remain open for the few learners who wish to change subject choices when moving to S4. However, senior leaders need to ensure that these young people are supported to address gaps in knowledge and skills. The S3 offer ensures that young people continue to experience breadth in their learning. In S3, young people personalise their curriculum with five course choices in addition to English, mathematics, modern language, PE, PSE and RME. Young people experience learning planned mostly around fourth level Es and Os during specialisation. Commendably, a few faculties are ensuring personalised learning pathways for a few young people who require consolidation of third level Es and Os at S3.
- By the end of S3, young people complete a learning profile capturing their academic attainment, wider achievement and personal qualities. In addition, they are encouraged to reflect on their plans for the future. Young people are not yet making connections between achievements, attributes and future learning pathways. This results in missed opportunities to work more closely with the DYW agenda.

- The school has plans to embed literacy across the curriculum. Strong examples of young people developing literacy skills in, for example, science and humanities exist. Building on this success, the focus is now on reading for enjoyment and effective use of the library by all faculties to encourage a culture of reading amongst all young people. The school librarian plays a lead role in offering a range of exciting opportunities such as author visits, Burns lunches and local authority wide Advanced Higher English conferences. The librarian is also at the forefront of the community Doric project, which recently brought together current and former pupils, school staff and members of the wider community to celebrate the Doric language.
- The school has had a number of staff changes in recent years resulting in an inconsistent approach to developing numeracy across the school. Senior leaders and the leader of numeracy recognise the importance of identifying areas of the curriculum where young people could potentially develop their numeracy skills in meaningful and unfamiliar contexts. This includes liaising with science, humanities and technologies faculties to identify key numeracy skills that young people need to be successful.
- The senior phase offer has expanded in recent years. This offer includes National Progression Awards (NPA), Skills for Work courses, Highers and Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs). Young people are offered progression pathways in all curriculum areas. Young people may personalise their curriculum through additional awards and qualifications. Young people are offered a wide range of National Qualifications, from National 3 to Advanced Higher. This is increasing the flexibility of the senior phase learning pathways. Senior leaders recognise that there is scope to increase further awareness of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to widen the range of qualifications and other learning experiences for a few young people. Senior leaders need to ensure consistently high-quality learning to support greater coherence in the learning of some young people. All learners should experience appropriate challenge and progression in the activities and level of courses experienced in the senior phase.
- The school engages with local partners such as North East Scotland College to provide alternative pathways for young people. Options are limited and could be better promoted at the point of choice. Many young people report that they have to find out about alternative pathways for themselves. The school offers a good range of FAs and college programmes, including Highers, to support learners to personalise their own curriculum. Young people's attainment on college programmes could be much better.
- At present, the offer of vocational courses is limited. The school delivers a well-considered and fully inclusive work-related learning programme. A NPA in Enterprise and Employment or a credit of work experience allows for accreditation. Other young people participate in 'Work Lite', which involves weekly work experience suited to their needs. Senior leaders recognise that vocational learning is an area that needs development, particularly for those who may leave at the end of S4 or S5 to move to employment.
- In S4, young people have the opportunity to study up to seven courses leading to National Qualifications, two of which are English and mathematics. For most of the young people at this stage, their courses are at SCQF level 5. A few young people study at SCQF level 6 in S4. This has mainly been in English, mathematics, music and PE. In English and mathematics, this has met with mixed success for young people. Senior leaders should keep this learning pathway under review to ensure that it is the most appropriate option for each young person. In S4, young people are accredited with an appropriate unit award in RME.



- In S5 and S6, young people have the opportunity to study up to six courses. In S5, the majority of young people study five courses, with a few studying six. Approximately 40 young people in the senior phase are following one of two FAs, which gives work-based learning opportunities. Young people at S5 have three periods of supervised self-study each week. Senior leaders should review the use of these periods when considering how the curriculum design can raise attainment.
- Almost all young people in S4 undertake work placements, with almost all taking responsibility for organising their placements. Local authority workplace coordinators carry out risk assessments to support the school. Young people in S5 and S6 participate in extended work placements to support their preparation for the world of work, alongside FAs and internships. Local businesses support this well.
- Staff have a positive approach to working with partners. Partners contribute well to a range of programmes across the curriculum, which enrich young people's learning. For example, Community Learning and Development (CLD) officers work closely with staff to identify those young people who would benefit from their support. They develop bespoke learning programmes to meet these needs. These include the lunchtime groups Transform, Chill Out Zone and the Com Group. The school garden is used well and jointly maintained by both community and school groups. This benefits learners of all ages, including those with additional support needs.
- School staff need to increase their use of the entitlements of CES and career management skills. This would help young people be better informed prior to making subject choices.
- The school has a range of multi-level classes across the school. The impact is dependent on the subject taught. Some teachers report that they are not able to give groups of young people the required attention as their time is divided. This is due to courses having different content and/or assessment requirements.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The active Parent Council (PC) is highly supportive of the work of the school. The PC sees its role as supporting parental participation and maintaining effective communications. Senior leaders share the improvement plan with the PC and seek its views on school improvement. The PC is keen to extend its reach and involve more parents in its work. Parents are positive about the headteacher's leadership and her commitment to ensuring that all young people achieve their full potential through the wide range of opportunities on offer. Parents report that their children like being pupils at Ellon Academy.
- The school has a range of ways it communicates with parents. These include the school website, social media platforms, regular bulletins and an app. A high proportion of parents actively engage with the PC social media area. As planned, senior leaders should consult with key stakeholders on the development of a communications strategy. Parents would like to work closely with the school to develop a simpler approach to parental communications. This proposal would result in young people, parents and partners accessing information in a single location. The PC engages regularly with young people about their contribution to the life of the school, for example, the work of the pupil executive team.
- Parents are kept informed of their child's progress in school through ongoing tracking reports, parents' evenings and a full annual written report. Most parents feel that their child is making good progress at school. However, parents would like to receive more regular and helpful feedback about how their child is learning and developing.
- Parents appreciate the transition arrangements for young people as they move from primary school to Ellon Academy. Parents value the ongoing support as young people progress through school. Overall, most parents express confidence in the school's handling of issues relating to their child's sense of wellbeing and development.
- A recent practical workshop session on what it is like to be a pupil in Ellon Academy, and an information session on family learning, supported parents in understanding the work of the school. Staff work closely with partners to establish an extensive calendar of family learning sessions across the year. This builds on previous family learning programmes delivered with the CLD team. One of these sessions, 'STEM for families', was well attended and evaluated positively by parents.

## 2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- The school's approach to wellbeing and inclusion is firmly based on the school's core value of respect and reinforced in the steps taken to secure values-based recognition. The revised core values are being strengthened through year and house assemblies and the promoting of positive expectations. Staff across the school display a shared understanding of the importance of the wellbeing indicators and their respective responsibilities. The wellbeing and development of young people is assuming a higher profile. Staff need to build on this work and to continue to raise the profile of wellbeing across the school, reaffirm the school's core values and contribute to an ongoing evaluation of provision.
- Senior leaders and staff speak positively about the impact of the recently launched Promoting Positive Relationships policy and the increasing focus on meeting learners' needs. As the school reviews its policies, ensuring an explicit connection with the core values will help to reinforce the school's commitment to young people. This should emphasise a more positive approach to resolving issues.
- Steps taken in redesigning aspects of the curriculum, for example, in developing alternatives to exclusion, are addressing better the needs of identified learners. While senior leaders have yet to see a sustained decline in exclusions, they indicate a reduction in behavioural concerns as a result of the work undertaken to date.
- Visuals displayed around the school promote health and wellbeing (HWB) across the curriculum. Currently, a personal, social and health programme is in place from S1-S6, with additional growth mindset programmes launched in the BGE. Senior leaders have signalled their intention to update the programme. Young people would welcome the opportunity to be involved in reviewing and planning this programme to ensure that it is fully reflective of, and relevant to, learners' needs at all stages. They have indicated a greater emphasis placed on emotional wellbeing and mental health is required.
- At present, young people's understanding of the wellbeing indicators is variable. Young people would benefit from opportunities to self-assess and reflect on their own sense of wellbeing over time. Gathering this information would support staff in reviewing the progress and emotional wellbeing of potentially vulnerable young people. Staff should draw on a whole-school collation of wellbeing when determining development priorities. This should also assist in evaluating the impact of whole-school initiatives and targeted interventions.
- The majority of young people enjoy school and, overall, relationships across the school are positive. Most young people feel safe. They confirm that there is someone with whom they can discuss a concern. However, for a significant number of young people bullying is a concern. Their view is that issues on bullying could be handled better. The majority of young people feel that within school they are treated fairly and with respect. Young people speak positively of the

support which they receive from a number of their teachers and other staff. Further targeted support is offered by school staff through, for example, Seasons for Growth. Young people appreciate the support of CLD, including the opportunity to self-refer and the drop-in facility. In partnership with CLD, young people have access to a wide range of clubs and groups.

- The majority of learners describe becoming more confident as a result of their experiences in school. Most young people express appreciation for the opportunities which they have to engage in activities beyond the classroom.
- Across the school, young people have opportunities to participate and express their views including, for example, through the pupil senate. However, less than half of the young people feel that their views are taken into account. Staff should increase the opportunities to engage young people meaningfully in the decision-making processes.
- Procedures are in place to ensure the safety of young people and the school complies with its statutory responsibilities with respect to child protection. Building on existing practice, senior leaders should maintain a comprehensive overview of complaints, allegations of bullying and any other significant incidents. This should include reference to the outcomes of decisions made and steps taken. This should enable staff to monitor any emerging patterns and evaluate the impact of actions taken to resolve a matter.
- Senior leaders need to review the delivery of RME across the senior phase to ensure young people can access a programme from S1-S6. While not a statutory requirement, the school has no provision at present for core physical education in S5 and S6. Senior leaders need to review the arrangements surrounding child support plans, individualised educational programmes (IEPs) and personal records to meet national guidance. Further work is required to ensure full compliance with the nutritional requirements of the Health Promotion and Nutrition (Scotland) Act.
- Learners are receiving their entitlement to universal support. Young people speak positively of the support and encouragement which they receive from a number of their teachers. Within the HWB programme, planned events are supporting young people in managing the stress of examinations. In terms of wellbeing, a well-planned transition programme is in place and, where necessary, enhanced arrangements support identified young people, in their transfer to secondary school and beyond.
- Support for learning specialists and guidance liaise closely with staff and faculties. All relevant staff receive detailed information on the needs of young people requiring additional support, and suggested strategies. House progress teams meet weekly to review support for learners. A staged intervention approach informs the deployment of pupil support staff and the planning of targeted support. Personal support assistants (PSAs) are fully aware of their roles and offer valuable support to young people in a variety of contexts. Flexible timetabling is in place to support some young people in addressing identified issues.
- Within the school, young people requiring particular support receive more tailored provision. For some learners, provision is made through the Hub. Where possible, learners access classes in a mainstream setting. Young people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) are supported well through an enhanced provision. Similarly, for young people with emotional and behavioural challenges.
- Young people feel supported to do their best, with their individual learners' needs met well. Staff and young people are aware of the range of processes in place to support inclusion throughout the school.

- Staff know young people well and the factors likely to impact on their wellbeing and development. Staff are alert to potential barriers to participation. Arrangements in place are sensitive to personal issues and respect the rights of young people. Young people are supported well at a personal level. New initiatives are being introduced to promote inclusion and support young people's wellbeing and development. Staff are proactive in ensuring young people can access essential personal items as required, for example, school uniform, toiletries and stationery items. The school's allocation of PEF is providing financial assistance to enable identified young people's access to wider aspects of school life. A recently introduced mentoring programme is supporting learners likely to underachieve in National Qualifications. Widening this support would be beneficial to include, for example, young carers and care experienced learners. Building on existing arrangements, staff could be even more proactive in identifying and addressing young people's needs.
- Within the school's calendar, young people have planned opportunities to explore different cultures. Drawing on the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child, highlighting a Right of the Week is promoting a greater understanding of equality, global issues and respect for others. Young people openly explore issues surrounding diversity, discrimination and equality through assemblies, discussions in class and in conjunction with partners. This is generating a greater understanding of equality.
- Personal challenges to engagement, participation and achievement are handled sensitively. Staff are flexible in their response and make appropriate adjustments that are leading to positive outcomes for identified young people.
- Staff are at an early stage of measuring the impact of interventions. Senior leaders intend evaluating the impact against agreed measures including attendance, engagement, confidence, self-esteem and independence. Once gathered, staff should be able to track the wellbeing and development of young people over time. This should help to ensure that interventions are meeting young people's needs and inform future priorities.

## 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 (BGE)

- Attainment information provided by the school shows that by the end of S3, almost all young people are achieving third Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) level or better in literacy and in numeracy. This level of achievement has been sustained between 2017 and 2019. The data on the percentage of young people achieving fourth CfE level in literacy and numeracy has varied considerably over the last three years, due partly to the changing confidence of staff in assessing the 'achievement of a level'.
- The school is in the early stages of using moderation activities to develop a shared understanding of standards and support teachers' professional judgements. Teachers should participate more extensively in these activities in the school, with associated primaries and more widely in the local authority. This should develop teachers' confidence in assessing young people's progress and help teachers understand more clearly what it means to 'achieve a level'. This should lead to greater reliability in the school's attainment data.

#### Literacy

- In 2017 to 2019, by the end of S3, almost all young people achieved third CfE level or better in literacy. In 2019, the majority of young people achieved fourth CfE level in literacy.

#### Numeracy

- In 2017 to 2019, by the end of S3, almost all young people achieved third CfE level or better in numeracy. In 2019, the majority of young people achieved fourth CfE level in numeracy.

### Senior phase

#### Literacy

- Almost all young people leaving Ellon Academy between 2014 and 2018 attained literacy at SCQF level 4 or better. The percentage of leavers attaining SCQF level 5 or better in literacy has improved in the same five-year period. In the three-year period from 2016 to 2018, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 5 or better in literacy is significantly higher or much higher than the virtual comparator (VC). In the same three-year period, the majority of young people leaving attained SCQF level 6 literacy.

#### Numeracy

- Almost all young people leaving Ellon Academy between 2014 and 2018 attained numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better. The percentage of leavers attaining SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy has improved in the same five-year period. In the three-year period from 2016 to 2018, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy is

significantly higher or much higher than the virtual comparator (VC). In the same three-year period, less than half of young people leaving attained SCQF level 6 numeracy.

- School leaders have identified improving attainment in numeracy as a priority.

### **Attainment over time**

- Principal teachers of guidance, additional support for learning and depute headteachers meet weekly to review the progress and support of young people in their Houses. Interventions are used to support under achievement of identified young people. Further work is needed to determine the success of these interventions.
- The school has a tracking and monitoring calendar for both the BGE and the senior phase. Senior leaders meet with principal teachers to review attainment in the senior phase twice each year. Senior leaders monitor agreed action points to ensure they are leading to improved outcomes.
- Across the school, most faculties have tracking systems for monitoring the progress of young people. These are at different stages of development and vary in their effectiveness. Senior leaders are planning to develop a consistent whole-school approach to tracking and monitoring young people's progress in the BGE. This should include collated information from across the school to track the progress towards achievement of a level in all curriculum areas, as well as literacy and numeracy. The development of a tracking and monitoring system is needed to support best use of data to inform strategic decisions such as the planning of learning pathways. It will also help staff make the most effective use of data to plan appropriate interventions.
- In the BGE, staff are continuing to work with the National Benchmarks as part of their approaches to improving attainment. Teachers are reporting to parents on young people achieving CfE levels in all curriculum areas.

### **Senior phase**

- The average complementary tariff scores for all leavers have improved over the five-year period between 2014 and 2018. Tariff scores for the school are usually in line with the VC.
- In S4, the complementary tariff scores for all learners are in line with the VC over the past five years. By S5, based on the S5 roll, the complementary tariff scores for all learners were significantly much lower than the VC in 2017-18. By S6, based on the S6 roll, the complementary tariff scores for all learners and the lowest 20% were significantly much lower than the VC in 2018-19.
- Senior leaders have identified S5 learners as the focus of this session's 'Raising Attainment Plan' and the school has constructed a '4-lens approach'. As part of this approach, young people's progress is tracked and monitored following learner conversations and the setting of target grades at the start of session. In addition, following a successful pilot programme last session, a few young people are receiving academic mentoring which is supporting them to progress in their learning.
- Senior leaders have revised the school's presentation policy to be more aspirational to ensure outcomes that are more positive for young people.



## Breadth and depth

- In S4, whilst most young people in the last three years were presented for seven qualifications, only the majority of young people obtained seven or more qualifications at SCQF level 4 or better. Most young people attained six or more qualifications at SCQF level 4 or better. In 2019, the majority of young people attained six or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better. This is in line with the VC. In 2019, the percentage of young people attaining six or more or seven or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better is the highest in five years.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll, in 2019, the majority of young people attained seven or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better. This is significantly higher than the VC. Over the past five years, the majority of young people attained two or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better. Less than half of young people attained three or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better. The school has been significantly lower or much lower than the VC for two of the last five years for this measure. Raising the attainment of young people at this stage is a significant focus for staff as there is considerable headroom for improvement.
- By S6, based on the S6 roll, in 2019, most young people attained one or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better. This is in line with the VC. In 2019, the majority of young people attained three or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better. The school has been significantly lower than the VC for two of the last five years for this measure. Too few young people in Ellon Academy are attaining well at Higher by S6. In all of the last five years, the percentage of young people who gained qualifications at SCQF level 7C or better is in line with the VC.

## Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Young people pursue their interests, build positive relationships and develop their skills through the wide range of achievement opportunities. For example, over one-third of pupils take part in sports activities organised by Active Schools and Ellon Academy. Other young people are involved in sports through community sports clubs and organisations across the north east. However, staff need to strengthen the shared strategic planning of achievement opportunities with partners. Currently, there is a risk of duplication of provision and learning, and of some priority needs not being identified or met.
- Large numbers of young people develop their creative and communication skills through achievement activities. Around 200 young people deliver the annual school show and seasonal performances through the very popular Drama Club. Young people appreciate the nurturing and positive atmosphere within the club. The club enables them to develop performing arts skills as well as building their confidence and ability to work with others. Young people gain confidence, increase their capacity to interview people of all ages, and develop their writing and research skills in the Ellon News Group.
- Young people value their achievements through gaining national and local awards, both within and beyond the school. Achievements are recognised and celebrated within the school. Effective use is made of social media, assemblies, bulletins and the school's magazine, 'Elevate', to both promote activities and recognise success. In 2018-19, young people gained 85 Creative Arts Awards, 48 Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, 60 John Muir Awards and 40 Cadet Awards. Young people recognise the value of their contributions to school and community life. Young people have gained approximately 100 Saltire Awards in the last year. Staff and partners should continue to extend opportunities for young people to gain awards that will best recognise their achievements and support their post-school ambitions. There would be benefit in reviewing how well current systems, such as the invite only annual prize giving ceremony, is supporting the school and its partners to develop a culture of achievement for all.

- Young people's achievements are regularly gathered and discussed on an individual basis. Staff and partners are proactive in signposting individuals to activities that will support their interests and learning needs. However, there is a need to undertake more analysis of which cohorts of young people are and are not participating to gain a clear overall picture of achievement. Developing a skills and achievement tracking system with partners would support staff to do this. It would also enable staff to assess more effectively equity of participation in wider achievement over time. This would support the identification of barriers to participation such as hidden poverty and would allow these to be addressed. It would also contribute to staff understanding where young people are gaining transferrable skills.
- Young people participate well in programmes which enable them to support others' learning whilst developing their own leadership and communication skills. Young people promote children's rights with their peers, leading to well embedded understanding of rights across the school. Young people are effective in leading intergenerational learning in the 'Cool Computing' sessions. Young people's skills and confidence are developing well through training delivered by partners. Their work enables adults, including those with early onset dementia, to gain confidence in using digital technologies. This is reducing these learners' social isolation.
- Young people are aware that they are gaining skills that will support their post-school careers through achievement activities. However, they would welcome more opportunities to build their knowledge of potential careers related to the achievement activities they undertake. Staff and partners should now consider how they could better link the skills and expertise young people are gaining through such programmes to a range of potential careers they could pursue.

### **Equity for all learners**

- Staff have a good knowledge of young people and their personal circumstances. They work well to ensure that these personal circumstances are not obstacles to achieving positive outcomes. Equity of access is provided to aspects of school life such as Ellon Academy Sports Association. Almost all young people leaving school in 2017 and 2018, including those requiring additional support, attained literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better.
- In September 2018, the SIMD distribution showed 77.6% of young people on the school roll living in SIMD deciles 8 to 10, with 35% living in decile 10. Over the past five years, the average complementary tariff scores of leavers living in decile 9 is often significantly lower than those living in the same decile across Scotland. In deciles 8 and 10, the average complementary tariff score of leavers is often in line with those living in these same deciles across Scotland.
- Only a very small percentage of young people attending the school live in SIMD deciles one and two, and there are often no leavers living in these deciles.
- The weekly House meetings provide a useful forum for discussing any young people causing concern in terms of their learning progress or their wellbeing. These discussions lead to the planning of appropriate support for individual learners. A small group of young people receive support, funded from PEF, which is encouraging better attendance at school. This includes provision of a short course in health and beauty.

## Positive destinations

- Over the five-year period between 2014 and 2018, almost all young people leaving Ellon Academy moved to an initial positive destination. Around half of young people stay at school until S6. The majority of leavers move to Higher Education or Further Education with a minority leaving to enter employment.

## Choice of QI: 3.3 Creativity and Employability

- Creativity skills
- Digital innovation
- Digital literacy
- Employability skills

- Across the school, young people have a wide range of opportunities to develop their creativity skills, both within school and through wider achievement. Young people are motivated to learn and are confident in demonstrating the skills they are developing. This is leading to almost all young people being inquisitive, able to explore a range of creative solutions to problems and seeing issues from new perspectives.
- All staff support young people to extend their creative skills. Examples include investigations in science, design challenges in technologies and using their imagination to explore a range of possibilities within creative arts. Teachers should support young people more consistently to articulate the skills they are developing through the curriculum. This should be linked to possible future employment pathways and to young people's personal development. Teachers across all faculties should consider how best to develop further their own creative practice to ensure learning which stimulates and motivates all young people.
- Teachers use interactive whiteboards to deliver the curriculum, and use a variety of specific subject related software, video and presentation tools. This is helping to engage young people in their learning. Young people welcome opportunities, when presented with them, to use digital technologies in innovative and creative ways. For example, young people have full access to digital cameras and lenses for photoshoots for the recently introduced Higher Photography course. Young people use video editing software in creative arts to present a final product as part of the 'Creative Experience'. Young people access both laptop and desktop computers to undertake research and develop their own ideas and presentations to enhance learning.
- The digital and information and communications technology (ICT) impact team supports staff across the school to develop their digital skills. They consider innovative ways to use technology to deliver the curriculum. Young people act as digital leaders and support peers within their classes. The work of the impact team and digital leaders will be valuable for both staff and learners, as digital technology becomes more sophisticated and integral to the delivery of the curriculum.
- Digital literacy is a feature of all areas of the curriculum and the school has successfully gained a Digital Schools Award. Some of the available hardware within the school is constraining both staff and young people to embed fully the use of digital technology as a consistent and effective part of learning and teaching. Staff overcome some of these challenges through, for example, increasing the availability of key resources on Glow. This supports learning at home.
- Online safety is a feature of the PSE programme in Ellon Academy, supported by a community police officer. This supports young people to access the internet safely. It assists them to understand the importance of personal responsibility related to the use of digital technology both within school and at home. Young people are encouraged to both enrich and personalise their learning by using digital technology.
- Staff appreciate the importance of developing young people's employability skills, including the preparation of CVs, mock interviews and presentation skills through the PSE curriculum. Young people are gaining skills, which they value, through a range of courses and

programmes offered at school. These skills will support young people to make informed choices.

- Work placements allow young people to experience areas of employment that are of interest to them. This develops further their employability skills. These inclusive opportunities are open to all learners in the senior phase. Young people gain experience of working in a context outwith the school environment and receive accreditation.

## Quality of provision of Special Unit

### Context

Ellon Academy's community learning and resource hub (Hub) and enhanced provision (EP) is a local authority resource which was established in 2015. Young people attend the Hub and EP for aspects of their learning and attend mainstream classes for other activities. At the time of the inspection, 43 children were registered within the Hub and EP.

The Hub supports young people in the Ellon, Meldrum, and Turriff networks who have complex additional support needs. Places within the Hub are allocated through a referral process.

The EP supports young people from within the Ellon catchment who have identified HWB needs. These include mental health needs as well as young people identified as having autistic spectrum disorder.

### Leadership of change

- The Hub and the EP sit within the additional support for learning (ASL) faculty, led by the principal teacher and depute headteacher. Young people's needs are well supported by committed ASL teachers and support staff who work across the Hub and EP. Senior leaders and staff share the local authority's vision to support young people to be educated alongside their peers and included in mainstream classes where possible. This shared vision and commitment results in young people feeling more confident and supported across the ASL faculty and wider school community.
- Almost all staff within the Hub and EP are involved in making positive contributions to the school's development of its vision, values and aims. They contribute to the whole school improvement plan through the ASL improvement plan. A few staff are involved in the impact teams. The ASL improvement plan correctly identifies important priorities for the Hub and EP. Moving forward, the school needs to ensure that each of the improvement priorities are progressed appropriately and evaluated. This will allow progress to be tracked effectively and the impact on improving outcomes for young people to be measured.

### Learning, teaching and assessment

- Teachers and support staff work effectively together to support young people's learning and provide high-quality individualised support. Teachers' instructions and explanations of learning tasks are clear and supported by visual supports and resources. They use simple clear language and appropriate questioning with young people. This helps young people to feel safe, included and to overcome anxieties with their learning. As a result, this leads to more positive engagements, improved confidence and greater understanding of their learning.
- Positive relationships between staff and young people contribute to a calm environment for learning. Young people feel able to talk, express themselves and make choices. This is supporting young people to shape their learning and assess their progress. In a few classes, staff provide too much support for young people leading to disengagement and a reduction in independence.
- Children engage particularly well when learning in real-life contexts, such as the kitchen and outdoor garden areas. As a result, there is an increased level of participation and young people are developing skills for learning, life and work.
- A range of assessments by teachers and other professionals identify each young person's strengths and barriers to learning. Across the Hub and EP, staff do not always plan tasks,

learning activities and resources to take account of learners' differing needs and stages. This leads to a slower pace of learning for some young people and insufficient challenge for others.

- Staff in the Hub and EP would benefit from support to help them to plan, assess and track more effectively young people's progress within the BGE and senior phase. The school is not yet using curriculum frameworks to ensure that there are appropriate progression pathways to support young people's entitlement to a BGE and senior phase.
- The school has a number of useful assessments and reports with important key information on how best to support each young person and deliver bespoke learning. Staff should review the key information and develop a more effective profile of each learner. This should support young people's learning within the Hub, EP and mainstream classes.

### **Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion**

- Committed staff underpin the positive relationships in the Hub and EP. They ensure each young person feels valued and cared for, and are attentive to their emotional needs. This supports young people to engage in their learning and provides opportunities for deeper learning.
- The school has an established programme with the associated primary schools, which identifies young people who may require extended transitions. Young people and their families are supported by flexible programmes. As a result, young people feel more confident in transferring to Ellon Academy.
- The school has established effective partnerships with a range of specialist services including health, social work and third sector agencies. These partnerships provide young people and their families with access to additional specialist resources to support their holistic development. Young people's needs are met by providing staff with information to provide more effective personalised support.

### **Raising attainment and achievement**

- The school does not yet have reliable data on the progress of young people across the BGE. Staff know individual pupils well and use IEP targets to support young people to make good progress in the areas of literacy and English, numeracy and mathematics, and HWB. Learning is set predominantly within the early and first levels of CfE. Overall, the quality of young people's attainment is too variable. Greater understanding of national standards will support staff across the school to make robust judgements on young people's progress and achievement of a level. This will allow better planning of progressive learning programmes, which will promote higher expectations for young people.
- Young people are able to recognise and identify numbers and apply this information to find solutions to numeracy problems. Young people are able to apply numeracy and literacy skills across the curriculum. Examples of this include collecting and sharing resources when cooking, gathering materials and organising learning in creative arts, and when working in the garden.
- Within the EP, more reliable data is available in the senior phase to demonstrate that young people are making good progress and attaining a range of SCQF awards at levels 3 to 5 in a range of subjects.

- Staff have identified the review of the range of awards available for young people as a next step to raise attainment and achievement. This should ensure there are more opportunities for accreditation and greater equity for all learners.



## 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.