Summarised Inspection Findings

Queen Margaret Academy

South Ayrshire Council

SEED No: 8236232

14 March 2017

Transforming lives through learning

School Name	**Queen Margaret Academy**
Council:	**South Ayrshire**
SEED number:	**8236232**
Roll (Sep 2015):	**554**

Attendance is generally below the national average (92 per cent in 2014/15

In February 2016 the percentage of pupils registered for free school meals was in line with the national average.

In September 2015 20-<25 per cent of the pupils lived in the 20 per cent most deprived data zones in Scotland

In September 2015 5–<10 per cent of the pupils were from minority ethnic groups

In September 2015 the percentage of pupils with additional support needs was below the national average.

The school is located in 'Other urban areas' (population>10,000)

Any other relevant contextual information:

Queen Margaret Academy is a Roman Catholic secondary school which serves Ayr and surrounding areas as far as Girvan. Queen Margaret Academy collaborates with five associated primary schools. The headteacher has been in post for four years.

1.3 LEADERSHIP OF CHANGE — weak

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 school has identified the need to refresh its vision, values and aims to ensure that the school community has full ownership of these. Consultation with the school community is underway. Senior leaders are developing an understanding of the social, economic and cultural context of the school and are at an early stage of sharing this understanding more widely with staff of the school, and learning partners. This will support the expression of vision, values and aims which take full account of the unique context of Queen Margaret Academy and the community it serves, in addition to continuing to reflect the importance of the Catholic faith in the school. There is a need for senior leaders to make explicit to the school community the central role of the vision and values as key drivers in the improvement planning process and in the identification of priorities. They should ensure this provides a clear strategic direction which enables leaders at all levels to contribute to improvement planning and to decisions about change, to ensure these are grounded within the unique context of Queen Margaret Academy. The vision for the Supported Learning Centre (SLC) and its values are implicit in the way the centre works, but it would be productive to put this into words through consultation with school staff, young people, parents and carers and other relevant stakeholders.

- The senior leadership team (SLT) consults staff on the implementation of priorities for improvement which the SLT has identified. These include national and local priorities. Although the SLT is receptive towards staff coming forward with improvement suggestions, there are currently no clear mechanisms for staff to engage fully with the selection, direction and implementation of the school improvement priorities. Clear communication across the school has been identified by staff at all levels as a barrier to progress. The SLT now need to realign their remits to the key areas of improvement for the school. Principal teachers and faculty heads are committed to the furtherance of the inclusive nature of Queen Margaret Academy and work well together on an informal basis to support each other. Through wider engagement in planning for improvement, senior leaders need to develop a more strategic role for principal teachers/ faculty heads in the leadership of the curriculum and of learning and teaching.

- Whilst there is some coherence between the school and departmental improvement plans, greater consistency could be applied across the school, so that all staff have a common focus and approach to achieving the school priorities. Not all departments are using *How Good is our School*? (4th Edition) and not all are using the same QIs as in the school improvement plan. Senior and middle leaders need to ensure improvement planning targets are focused on aspects that result in measurable

improvements and not just a focus on action points. These improvement targets need to be based on a robust and coherent cycle of ongoing reflection and review. Improvements in the use of data such as that provided by *Insight* are supporting senior and middle leaders to ensure school improvement planning is better informed and more outcomes focused in the senior phase. The school should consider building on this outcome focused approach to self-evaluation to improve other aspects of the quality of the learning provision. For example, the whole school Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) programme could be tailored more effectively to improve consistency in learning, teaching and assessment by building on the evidence from self-evaluation activities such as classroom observation visits. This would also support regular sharing of good and innovative practice.

- Teacher leaders contribute to school improvement through the leadership of working groups. The senior leadership team has appointed the leaders of the groups. Senior leaders should build leadership capacity by ensuring all staff take responsibility for leading aspects of school improvement either at departmental or at whole school level. This is in line with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) professional standards and will also address a perception across the school that only certain people are selected. In taking forward this whole school approach, senior leaders should ensure that all members of staff have an understanding of the overarching strategic vision which underpins the school improvement priorities and therefore should drive their contributions to this. This will ensure the pace and nature of change is appropriate to ensure maximum and measurable impact.

- The school has improved approaches to Professional Review and Development (PRD) recently. Staff across the school are now all engaging in the local authority PRD process, using the GTCS standards. Teachers value the opportunities to develop their professional learning and leadership skills by leading the newly restructured working groups. The 'Making Thinking Visible' initiative is a positive example of staff starting to see the interconnectedness of their work and the ways in which strategies applied across the school can increase, for example, the independence of learners. This approach to whole school working, which focuses on the impact on learners, needs to become more the norm across the school to maximize impact. Senior leaders therefore need to promote the opportunities for increased collaboration across the school.

- The school is at an early stage in making appropriate use of, and implementing, the Careers Education Standard and Work Placement Standard. There is scope to build on the existing employability focused projects and the positive relationships with partners to take this forward to meet the needs of all young people. The SLC and the wider school could do more to include partners in critical and creative thinking to improve outcomes for all young people.

- There is scope to develop further young people's engagement in the process of change. As planned, the school should take forward the increased role of pupil voice. Young people are contributing towards the refresh of the school values. This approach could be extended to enable more young people to lead change and improvement across the school.

2.3 LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT — satisfactory

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.*

- Young people are being taught in a supportive environment. Overall, they are respected and their views and opinions are being recognised, although to a varying extent across the school. Young people would benefit from an increased focus on current national expectations with regard to children's rights and responsibilities with a view to engaging them more fully in decisions which impact on their learning. In classes, teachers know the young people well. Relationships between teachers and young people are positive across the school and young people express high levels of enjoyment across many aspects of their learning. Teachers are providing learners with clear instructions and explanations to which young people are attentive and responsive.

- In classes where teachers set high expectations for effort and presentation of work, young people took due cognisance of this. Young people work well together in peer activities. They respect the views of others and share ideas willingly. However, as a result of too many overly teacher-led class lessons, young people are often passive learners with insufficient opportunities for collaborative or independent learning. This results in learning experiences which do not meet young people's varying needs. Within the SLC, learning is organised at an appropriate level and differentiation is embedded, with young people having the opportunity to self-assess their understanding.

- Across the school, there are a few strong examples of the use of learning intentions which focus on skills and are underpinned effectively by relevant success criteria. There is scope to look more closely at the underlying skills being developed which will support young people's understanding of the relevance of the activity and, through involving them in the co-constructing of success criteria, encourage greater responsibility for their own learning. Teachers should provide more opportunities for young people to lead their own learning. Activities could be better differentiated to ensure appropriate challenge. In the better lessons, young people are benefitting from the opportunity to evaluate and review their learning and receive feedback on what they need to do to improve. This could be developed further and would be welcomed by learners. Sharpening the discussions to include a greater focus on the skills being developed will also help young people to understand themselves better as learners.

- The school has identified the skills of higher order thinking as an aspect of learning to take forward. In many instances, questioning techniques are being used to test knowledge, understanding and recall. The school is now working to shift the balance and place a greater emphasis on open-ended questioning which will require a more

evaluative response. The recently introduced 'Making Thinking Visible' initiative is one strategy which is being used effectively to encourage a more enquiry based approach to learning.

- In curriculum areas, there are examples of digital technologies being used effectively to promote engagement and increase motivation and skills. However, in the majority of lessons there is scope for more creative use of interactive whiteboards and supporting software to create more stimulating learning with higher levels of interaction by all young people. The school should now look to build on existing practices to develop further the use of technology not only to support learning but also to create a more vibrant teaching environment.

- The school recognises the need to review and develop its approaches to assessment and the moderation of standards. Teachers indicate varying levels of confidence in the robustness of their assessments and the evidence which is being used. Through collegiate discussions, the school is working to develop a clearer understanding of how assessment is supporting learning and teaching across the BGE. All staff are working towards a secure understanding of what it means to achieve a level. Moderation activities and professional discussion, often with colleagues in other schools, are supporting teachers in this regard. The school should ensure that staff understand the distinction between the effective use of assessment to plan learning and using the data also to gauge the needs of all learners.

- The school describes itself as at the early stages of profiling young people's learning and, drawing on the good practices which already exist within some departments, is working to develop a more consistent approach which will support learners in tracking their progress and development over time. Profiling is also being extended to include wider achievements and support a more holistic picture. This will enable the school to recognise young people's involvement and development, and encourage greater participation where appropriate.

- In reporting to parents, levels of study in the BGE and target grades in relation to certificated courses in the senior phase are being shared. Reports would support better young people's progress with more detailed comment on the steps which young people could take to improve learning.

- Assessment information in literacy and numeracy provided by the school's associated primary schools is shared with all departments. As learners move through the school, progress is being tracked across all curriculum areas. Within departments teachers are tracking the progress of learners at an individual level. Peer and self-assessment, which supports young people to identify their own strengths and aspects for development, is a strong feature in a few subjects. There is scope to involve young people more in discussing and mapping out their own progress. Teachers also acknowledge the benefits of placing a greater emphasis on capturing the skills being developed. Taken together, this will help young people to be more involved in planning their learning. Collated updates on progress are compiled by the senior management team at fixed times in the year. This information is shared with all members of staff and is offering an overview of young people's progress. Building on existing practices, the school now needs to ensure that the data being gathered on young people's progress within the BGE is reliable and sufficiently robust to ensure appropriate challenge and support for all learners and to enable staff to plan appropriate interventions. Closer scrutiny by the school's

leadership team in reviewing evidence with departments will support teachers in reliable benchmarking of progress.

- In the senior phase, young people in discussion with their teachers, agree a target grade for their intended course of study. This is reviewed in the course of the academic session to reflect the progress being made. Young people, when reviewing their targets, welcome the advice which they are receiving on the specific steps which they require to take to improve. The quality of this feedback could be improved further to bring about an even clearer understanding of strengths and aspects for development.

- Specialist staff take account of the needs of learners who face additional challenges in their learning through setting appropriate targets for progress. For example, particular targets are identified in literacy and numeracy to improve attainment. Across the school, staff need to take greater account of these targets when planning learning. Young people are becoming increasingly involved in planning learning within individualised educational programmes (IEPs) and they find this useful in helping them improve. As they continue to review how they plan learning for young people with additional support needs, staff should ensure that they plan learning across all areas of the curriculum and that they apply more rigorous approaches to monitoring and tracking to assess the effectiveness of interventions.

- The school should continue with its plans to develop its tracking arrangements to focus on specific groups, for example, tracking gender and those individuals facing additional challenges including socio-economic disadvantage. They should evaluate the impact of any planned interventions.

2.7 PARTNERSHIPS: Theme 3, Impact on learners and families – Parental Engagement

- The school's current approaches to parental engagement do not take sufficient account of national guidance. Senior leaders need to work with staff, parents and other partners to deepen understanding of current national expectations. There is a need to develop a whole school coordinated approach aimed at increasing parental engagement in their children's learning with a particular focus on improving literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

- The majority of parents attend parental information evenings for S1 to S3 however for young people in the senior phase parental attendance falls to less than 50%. Feedback from those who do attend indicates they value these opportunities to discuss their children's progress with teachers. However, there is need for a deeper analysis of attendance at these meetings according to SIMD information, for example and more proactive steps to increase levels of parental engagement.

- Interim and full reports support parents to discuss progress and learning with their children. A few staff include relevant comments about how parents can support children's learning. This could be extended further. Principal teachers need to ensure all class teachers provide high quality reports and that these reports are provided for all subjects including Religious Education.

- The school's strong partnership with the Parent Council is evidenced through the successful campaign to secure a new school building. The Parent Council often provides financial contributions to support young people to participate in a range of opportunities for wider achievement and to subsidise the cost of school blazers.

- The school has taken some recent steps to improve communication with parents through increased use of social media. There is a need to ensure effective analysis of parental feedback to monitor the impact of this new approach over time.

- The school's arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning need to reflect parent's rights to be more fully included in decisions which affect their children's learning. This should include better structured opportunities for parents to engage in activities to evaluate the quality of the school's work.

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	satisfactory

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.*

- Staff have an awareness of and are responsive to the wellbeing needs of young people across the school. The school is at the early stages of being able to identify these needs linked to the context of the school and the young people. For example, staff are beginning to audit and review personal and social education programmes and how they meet the wellbeing needs of young people. The school should continue with its work in improving approaches to wellbeing. Guidance staff are effective in supporting young people. They liaise well with other members of staff to address any issues that young people may face. Young people themselves talk about how they can talk to a member of the guidance team to discuss problems. The school should build on these positive relationships between guidance staff and young people to ensure that there are regular opportunities for discussions about learning, progress and wellbeing. Information from young people should contribute to a wellbeing programme that is tailored to their needs and the context of the school.

- Staff should identify learning that is relevant to young people and ensure they are developing the skills and understanding to keep them safe, healthy and achieving. There is a need for staff to track and monitor health and wellbeing and demonstrate improved outcomes for young people. The school is aware of the need to develop further the knowledge and skills of staff and young people in relation to mental health. This would help to identify approaches to support mental wellbeing and address issues of stigma related to mental health. Young people, particularly senior pupils, are involved in the delivery of aspects of health and wellbeing, for example through a peer education model in PSE, sports coaching at school clubs, sports ambassadors, music groups and representing school through participation in sports competitions. This peer education approach is seen as a positive experience by young people.

- Almost all young people experience positive and good quality relationships across the school with staff and partners who work with the school. Young people feel there are adults they can approach in school to discuss concerns, issues and to seek advice. In the questionnaires before the inspection, 84% of learners feel they are treated fairly and with respect. In almost all learning observations, positive and respectful relationships and interactions between staff and children were evident.

- Staff know pupils well and are alert to any issues that require additional supports to be put in place. Staff and young people are good at sharing information with guidance teachers and this results in the implementation of helpful support strategies. Most young people feel safe and cared for and can identify staff they can talk to if they require support. Almost all young people feel that they are well

supported in their learning. In the pupil questionnaires, 90% of young people feel that they get help when they need it and staff encourage them to do their best. Whilst there are effective processes in place to ensure additional support needs are identified, the school should improve how they both identify and support young people who may be experiencing additional challenges such as those who are young carers or those who feel they are experiencing difficult relationships with their peers. Support staff, together with relevant partners, are using the wellbeing indicators effectively to identify strengths, barriers to learning and support strategies for those young people with additional support needs. The 'Team around the Child' approach facilitates engagement with parents and young people to help identify needs and support. Staff across the school would benefit from further professional learning related to *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC) and the wellbeing indicators in order to support them to meet better the needs of young people.

- A few young people feel that whilst the school does tackle bullying issues it would be timely to revisit the anti-bullying policy, as planned by the school, to take account of revised guidance in a whole school approach to tackling attitudes towards bullying. In discussions with some young people, they identify bullying as an issue. 18% of young people who responded through questionnaires felt that staff were not good at dealing with bullying behaviour.

- The school has effective procedures in place to identify additional support needs of young people. A staged intervention approach provides staff with relevant information related to strengths, barriers to learning and support strategies. The school should review individual support plans (ISPs) to ensure that the content is more streamlined and that class teachers make better use of the information to offer learning opportunities and resources which are better matched to the needs of all young people. Staff should monitor and track more rigorously the progress of young people who face challenges such as, those with additional support needs, looked after children and young carers. This information should be used to identify appropriate interventions and improve outcomes for learners.

- Young people would benefit from being involved in devising their ISPs, similar to how they have been involved in their IEPs. Young people should be given more ownership and responsibility related to their learning and support. In discussions with a focus group of young people, almost all said that they feel that some teachers are good at addressing their needs whilst other teachers are less able to meet their needs. Almost all said that they would not be confident to talk to mainstream class teachers about their own individualised support strategies. Young people should be encouraged to take further responsibility and ownership of their learning. They need to develop more confidence in talking to others about their support needs. The attainment of some young people with additional support needs has improved as a result of the specific review of curriculum choices and this has provided opportunities to gain more National qualifications.

- Attendance in the school is slightly below the national average. There are a few young people who have particular low attendance. The school works well with young people and parents to improve attendance. They should now ensure that they involve relevant partners to provide further support for young people with unacceptably low levels of attendance. The exclusion rate has remained consistently below the national average and there has been a marked decrease in 2014/2015.

- The school should review staff professional learning in relation to legislation and statutory requirements such as Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Young People Act. The school is aware of the need to ensure that staff and pupils are fully aware of their responsibilities. As the school community develops their vision and aims, they should consider how they can better celebrate and promote diversity and equality across the school community. Similarly, as they review the curriculum rationale and programmes, the school should ensure the curriculum helps young people develop an understanding of issues related to equality, diversity and safeguarding issues such as radicalisation and extremism. Whilst some staff have participated in professional learning in relation to GIRFEC, staff and young people across the school community would benefit from gaining a better understanding of aspects of the Children and Young People Act such as recognising, respecting and promoting Children's Rights

- Almost all young people engage well with their learning and there is effective inclusion and partnerships between the school and the learning unit. Some young people do not feel fully included in the life of the school and feel that there is inequity in terms of young people who are selected to attend events or represent the school. Other young people feel that there are good opportunities for all. It would be beneficial for staff to engage more fully with learners and seek their views on this issue to ensure that all young people feel that there is equality of opportunity to participate in wider school life. The school should track participation and skills development and ensure that all young people feel included and fully involved in the life of the school.

- Overall, the school takes appropriate account of current legislation with regard to provision for Religious Education and Religious Observance. Plans to ensure young people in S6 receive the additional recommended period of RE should be developed in line with national guidance for Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools.

- Within the school handbook, the statement on parental right to withdraw their children from RE and/or RO is not in line with current legislation. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

- The school should consider how it can monitor the effectiveness of their approach to promoting the uptake of free school meals by young people.

- Young people in the SLC feel included in the work of the school. Some parents have observed that their children have improved outcomes in terms of engagement, enjoyment and attendance since they started attending the SLC. The needs of each young person are seen as being central to providing them with an appropriate curriculum. These needs are regularly reviewed at 'Team Around The Child' meetings, to which young people and their parents or carers are invited. Every young person in the SLC has an ISP, and an IEP and a GIRFEC Child's Plan. Staff are aware that the bureaucracy of this planning could be reduced and understand that the authority is considering how best to do this. Partners are involved in providing services and experiences which help to meet young people's needs better, including training for teachers and other school staff.

- SLC staff engage with appropriate codes of practice and statutory requirements, including the Additional Support for Learning Code of Practice. They have relevant procedures in place for the administration of medicines, physical intervention and risk

assessment. SLC staff are proactive in promoting the inclusion of SLC pupils in the wider work of the school. For example, all S2 pupils took part in the recent day-long STEM event in the school. SLC pupils are also included in school awards ceremonies and other activities. The SLC pupils feel supported to do their best by the wider school and their parents appreciate this.

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.*

- Overall, the school is making good progress achieving positive outcomes for young people. The attainment of young people in national qualifications is generally in line with young people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. The school can show it is improving attainment in a range of national performance measures for S4, S5 and S6 including in literacy and numeracy (SCQF 5).

Attainment in literacy and numeracy:

- **(BGE):** In the broad general education, the school reports that, by the end of S3, almost all young people have achieved expected levels in literacy and numeracy. In literacy, they report that almost all young people have achieved expected levels in reading with a minority of learners exceeding that level (listening and talking 92% Reading -91% Writing 90%). The school reports an 80% success in numeracy. Senior leaders consider the figures reported in numeracy are less well moderated and thus not yet robust (results in maths and numeracy by S5 support this view). Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) data is showing an improvement of 6% in a four year period in literacy. In numeracy CEM data has increased to the national average. Young people in the SLC are developing their skills in literacy and numeracy in SLC classes. Staff are beginning to use moderation to assist in the assurance of standards. This needs further work to support attainment improvement further.

- **Senior phase**: Attainment in literacy and numeracy has generally been significantly higher or in line with the VC at L5+ L5 +Cr and L6 over the last three years. The majority of young people leave school with L5+ in both literacy and numeracy which is above or significantly higher/much higher than the VC. The three year average shows 75% achieve this level in literacy and 64% achieve it in numeracy, again significantly higher than the VC. In 2015, 95% of young people leaving school had attained literacy at SCQF level 3+, 91% with SCQF level 4+ (89% as part of a course), 81% at SCQF level 5+ (75% as part of a course) and 59% with SCQF level 6. At SCQF level 5 and 6 in 2015 the school is significantly higher than the VC. Attainment in National Qualifications in English sits significantly higher than the national in S4 at SCQF level 5.

- Attainment in numeracy is in line in almost all measures in S4 though this represents a drop in standards over the last five years relative to the VC. In 2015, almost all young people leaving school had attained numeracy at SCQF level 3+, 80% with SCQF level 4+ (79% as part of a course), 62% at SCQF level 5+ (51% as part of a course) and 33% with SCQF level 6. At SCQF level 5 in 2015 the school is above the VC**.** By the end of S4 the school moved from significantly fewer pupils in the school having achieved level 4 numeracy than the VC to in line for the current year. Attainment in National Qualifications in mathematics has headroom for improvement

in National 5 and at Higher. In Nat 5 attainment at A and B is significantly lower than the national. In Higher there has been little improvement over a five year period.

Attainment over time:

- **BGE**: Across all the curricular areas within the broad general education, progress is recorded over time in S1 to S3 by subject teachers and through a tracking system led by the senior leadership team. From teacher judgement in both formative and summative assessment there is strong practice in S3 recorded showing third level secure in for example, art, music, craft and design. Further work needs to be completed to ensure the assessment results reported across all subjects are wholly accurate. Improving the understanding of progress and achievement in the BGE will support staff to further raise attainment at all levels across the school.

- **Senior Phase**: The school has a very high staying on rate from S4 to S5 and from S5 to S6. The overall attainment of young people (as measured by their tariff scores) is in line with the attainment of young people of similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. The attainment of the lowest attaining 20% in S4, S5 and S6 is consistently in line with the attainment of young people of similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. The middle attaining 60% in S4 are often achieving significantly higher/much higher than the attainment of young people of similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland, with those in S5 and S6 in line. Attainment of the highest 20% of learners remain in line with the attainment of young people of similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland in the current year.

- The school's tracking of attainment in the senior phase together with management support and challenge have supported improvement in attainment across S4, S5 and S6. **In S4** there has been steady improvement in the percentage of young people achieving 7+ qualifications at level 4 or above and higher than the VC. There is a dip in 2015-2016. Young people achieving 3+ or 4+ qualifications at 5C+ or at 5A+ is significantly higher than the VC. **By S5** half of young people achieve 5+ awards at SCQF level 5C or above (three year average). The proportion achieving 5+ Level 6C+ is significantly higher than the VC in the latest year. **By S6**, the school's performance at 5C+ for 5+ to 8+ has been significantly higher or much higher than the VC in two of the last three years. At 5A+ the school's performance at 5+ 6+ and 7+ has been significantly higher or in line with the VC over the last three years.

Overall quality of learners achievements:

- Achievement is strong and valued by young people. Learner's success is celebrated at award ceremonies, supporting learners to grow as individuals and develop skills, interests and friendships beyond their year group.

- The school works well with partners to enable young people across the school to engage in activities which build self-confidence, resilience, teamwork and leadership skills. The school is beginning to track achievement but does not yet have robust systems in place to evidence the number of young people and scale of impact in relation to achievement. Doing this would enable all staff and key partners to identify gaps and ensure equitable access for all young people.

- Young people, including learners in the SLC, contribute effectively to the life of the school and wider community using new skills in a wide range of contexts. Young people in high performing music groups and The Duke of Edinburgh's Awards develop performance and citizenship skills, through entertaining and volunteering,

exemplifying their skills in the local community. Young people gain valuable leaderships skills in, for example, the S6 leadership course, STEM ambassador programme, Community Sport Leaders and Columba 1,400 courses which they put into practice supporting the learning of younger pupils in school and in the local primaries. Young people gain skills in communication, leadership and creativity and increase their physical and emotional wellbeing through participation in a wide range partnership work. Employability programmes increase young people's skills for work including reliability, perseverance and teamwork. These programmes also increase the knowledge of post-school options. Going forward the school should ensure that young people understand the skills they gain through these opportunities and support the application of these in other relevant contexts.

Equity for all learners:

- Over the last 5 years, an increasing number of young people have moved to a positive destination. In the latest year as in last year, almost all leavers moved to a positive destination. The number of young people going to further education is generally significantly higher or in line with learners with similar needs and backgrounds in Scotland. Total tariff scores and complementary tariff scores show an improving picture at deciles 1 to 3.

- The school understands its responsibility to develop its monitoring and tracking systems to ensure equity for all learners. SIMD data shows just under 30% of the young people attending Queen Margaret Academy live in SIMD 1 to 3 with 60% in SIMD 1 to 5. 19% per cent of learners on the school roll are identified as having additional support needs. Staff are beginning to work towards having a clearer understanding of the features within the different areas in which their pupils live.

- By S4 in the complementary tariff score, in decile 3, the school has performed significantly much higher than the National. By S6 in decile 3 in the complementary tariff score the school has performed significantly much lower than the national in 2015-2016. Senior managers agree they need to analyse their data more rigorously, putting in place specific support to raise the attainment of those who reside in areas of the highest social and economic disadvantage.

- By the end of S4, S5 and S6, the average complementary tariff scores of the lowest achieving 20% have remained in line with the VC over the five year period. Staff understand the need to ensure learners attend school to be able to improve their attainment. For example, they have improved attendance levels in the last five years from sitting below the national average to nearly in line with the national average (still 1.7 percentage points below national average).

- The school's exclusions are consistently below the national average with a big drop from 2012-2013 to 2014-2015.

- In Queen Margaret Academy, though overall there is an improving picture on attainment too much still can depend on subjects chosen. For example, young people studying maths are less likely to achieve. This needs addressed immediately. Senior leaders understand the need to improve this and are already working on action points to support immediate improvement.

SCHOOL CHOICE OF QI: 2.2 CURRICULUM

- **Rationale and design**
- **Development of the curriculum**
- **Learning pathways**
- **Skills for learning, life and work**

- A strategic overview of the curriculum is needed, to clarify the direction taken thus far in implementing Curriculum for Excellence. This also needs to detail what is to be taken forward next to ensure well-informed and well-paced change. This strategic overview would clarify for staff how their role in planning the curriculum contributes to the totality of young people's learning.

- The school is able to identify some of the purposes of the curriculum. However, an important next step would be to shape these ideas into a shared rationale for the curriculum which is based on national and local advice, while taking account of the school's local context. The school needs to define the local and unique elements needed for their curriculum aims, while ensuring strong and sustained outcomes for all young people. The rationale should be underpinned by the shared values of the school and be reflected in the design of courses and programmes. An important aspect of developing the rationale is that it is taken forward in consultation with all stakeholders. Time needs to be protected for staff to develop a shared and consistent understanding of the key features of Curriculum for Excellence. The school should continue to refresh and review the curriculum by ensuring systemic, rigorous and outward-looking use of an appropriate range of self-evaluation activities.

- Of late, a key driver for developing the curriculum has been staff reviewing programmes and courses based on their experiences of delivering National Qualifications. Most departments are making changes to the broad general education using third and fourth curriculum level experiences and outcomes, with a view to enable learning to be contributing towards the senior phase. Some changes are also being made to increase the effectiveness of delivering the curriculum. Although not yet achieved, senior leaders have been promoting learning which is more challenging, with a brisker pace. To increase the impact of change, self-evaluation needs to be working more effectively in tandem with the school's priorities. On occasions, the lack of differentiation, closed tasks and the over-reliance on all of the class working through workbooks and textbooks is preventing learning pathways being articulated to the needs of young people. As the school continues to develop the curriculum, time needs to be protected for staff to be taking forward planning of all aspects of the curriculum.

- The aim of the S1-S3 curriculum is to provide young people with a broad general education, based on the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence. There is specialisation in S3. Learners' pathways are mostly based on subjects. The school has still to audit that young people's pathways include all of the experiences and outcomes of the third curriculum level. The school is unclear of how interdisciplinary learning (IDL), currently only across S1-S2, is ensuring coverage of third level curriculum experiences and outcomes. In S3, young people learn across all curricular areas. Although not yet consistent, the school is clear that S3 is preparation for the senior phase, with the increasing use of fourth curriculum levels. However, assessment, monitoring and tracking, and curriculum

design is not yet sufficiently robust to confirm that third curriculum levels are being achieved. Middle managers and senior leaders need to be more proactive in addressing gaps in coverage of the third level curriculum experiences and outcomes, including with the use of IDL and electives. A check should be kept on the number of teachers sharing the teaching of the same subject and, in some cases, curricular area. Where staffing constraints require this, the focus should be to plan learning around the young person. Young people are not able to talk about how they will improve their learning and progress. A systematic approach to fulfilling the entitlement to support needs to be put in place. Almost all young people study French until the end of S3. The school has still to look at language 3 as a progressive experience and, for a few, language 2 as part of a 1+2 Approaches to Languages. The school should be clearer on their curriculum rationale and the use of curriculum design, assessment and moderation, before they take action on the results of their recent review of the S3 curriculum.

- The senior phase from S4 to S6 is planned in an integrated way to provide progressive pathways leading to a range of awards and qualifications at the end of S4, S5 and S6. The senior phase is being developed with partners, neighbouring schools, colleges and other education providers. The school has introduced new pathways to motivate young people and encourage them to remain longer in school. Almost all young people study six courses leading to National Qualifications at SCQF level 2 to SCQF level 7, as well as wider qualifications such as National Certificates and Skills for Work. The school has still to explore the use of flexible time frames as a further way of articulating pathways to meet the needs of learners. The school should continue to review that the number of courses offered in the senior phase is addressing the needs of their learners. In doing this, they should be using self-evaluation to analyse their model to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. For example, analysing progression, trends in uptake, requests for particular specialisations, changes being requested by young people midway through pathways, young people's requirements for destinations beyond school, gender balance and that employment-related pathways are available to all young people. The school should ensure that there is sufficient coverage of all elements of the personal social and health education and that all young people are getting their entitlement to physical education.

- Contexts of the curriculum, other than subjects, need to be planned across all stages. Planning should ensure that all contexts are fully supporting learning pathways which result in deep, challenging and applied learning as well as coverage of the curriculum experiences and outcomes. The school is currently at an early stage of tracking young people's participation and the resultant skills and successes in personal achievements and activities connected to the ethos and life of the school. There is a need to review how well the totality of the curriculum is ensuring coherence, connections and progression in young people's learning across both the broad general education and the senior phase. Along with a more strategic use of design features of the curriculum, such as IDL, electives, short courses and master classes, there is scope to be creating pathways which better support the entitlements of the curriculum.

- The school is developing its approaches to promoting the skills of literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and digital learning. A number of review strategies are being used at this time to improve this area of the curriculum. An important next step is to have a clear strategy in taking this forward across the school.

- Young people in the SLC are engaged in learning pathways which generally meet their needs and aspirations. Learning pathways are individualised increasingly according to the needs and abilities of young people as they move through the school, although there could be a greater element of choice for young people between and within subjects.

- Staff and partners work well together to provide a range of opportunities to develop young people's skills for learning, life and work. The use of accreditation ensures that some of young people's skills are built in a progressive way. A strategic next step would be to ensure that all young people are more aware of their skills, and how to develop these across the totality of their learning. The school is planning opportunities for young people to develop an awareness of the world of work. As part of work experience almost all young people in S4 last session completed an Employability Award. A few young people benefitted from extended work placements by following the Work Out programme. Some young people feel that the advice they receive on careers should be earlier and more frequent. The school should continue to work with partners to fully support young people's future aspirations and make full use of profiling.

PARTICULAR STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL

- Relationships between teachers and young people are positive across the school and young people express high levels of enjoyment across many aspects of their learning.

- The continuing improvement in young people's attainment in various National Qualifications, for example in literacy. Young people are achieving better across a number of national measures than learners with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland.

- The improving work of the Supported Learning Centre (SLC) which enables young people facing additional challenges in their learning to achieve success in a range of National Qualifications.

- The skills and attributes which many young people are acquiring as a result of the opportunities for achievement being offered by staff and partners.

AGREED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT FOR THE SCHOOL

- The school needs to improve strategic leadership to ensure that planning for improvement and well-paced development of the curriculum are underpinned by a strong, shared vision and effective self-evaluation.

- To build on the eagerness and enthusiasm of all its young people, the school now needs to improve the consistency of learning and teaching to lead to the best possible outcomes for all learners in all curriculum areas.

- The school should develop further young people's understanding of the effective use of assessment which will enable them to identify clearly what they need to do to improve.

- The school should continue with its work to develop wellbeing programmes that are relevant to the needs of young people. This should include well considered approaches to track and monitor progress in this area to improve the wellbeing outcomes for all learners.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE END OF THE INSPECTION?

We will liaise with South Ayrshire Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school. We will discuss with South Ayrshire council the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school we will write to you as parents/carers informing you of the progress the school has made.