

# Summarised inspection findings

**Forfar Academy – Acadamaidh Farfair**

Angus Council

26 August 2025

## Key contextual information

Forfar Academy is a six-year non-denominational school, serving the community in and around the market town of Forfar. Forfar Academy is part of the Forfar cluster, along with Aberlemno, Inverarity, Langlands, Letham, Strathmartine, Strathmore, Tealing and Whitehills Primary Schools.

Forfar Academy – Acadamaidh Farfair is the designated secondary school for providing continuity with Gàidhlig (Gaelic) Medium Education at Whitehills Primary School.

Forfar Academy is housed within the Forfar Community Campus. The campus, which opened in 2017, is shared with Angus Alive sports facilities. The Hub is a discrete area within Forfar Academy. It currently has provision for 64 young people with moderate to complex additional support needs.

The headteacher has been in post for seven years. He is supported by four full-time equivalent depute headteachers.

The school is impacted by staffing difficulties, mainly in mathematics and craft, design and technology.

The school roll is 1107 young people.

Attendance was in line with the national average in 2022/23.

The exclusion rate was above the national average in 2022/23.

In February 2024, 15.1% of young people were registered for free school meals.

In September 2023, 3.5% of young people live in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2023, the school reported that 50.5% of young people had additional support needs (ASN).

Less than half of the 2021/22 S4 cohort still attended the school for S6.

| 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment   | satisfactory |
|---|--------------|
| <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ learning and engagement</li><li>■ quality of teaching</li><li>■ effective use of assessment</li><li>■ planning, tracking and monitoring</li></ul> |              |

- Staff and young people have strong and supportive relationships. In most lessons, this leads to a calm and respectful atmosphere, which reflects the school values of respect, integrity and perseverance. As a result, most young people feel that teachers support them to do their best and the majority enjoy learning at Forfar Academy. Young people in the Hub are enthusiastic about their learning, both in the Hub and in subject classes.
- In most lessons, teachers use starter activities well to help young people to recall or demonstrate prior learning or knowledge. Almost all teachers share the purpose of learning

and measures of success routinely. Young people articulate clearly the purpose of learning in the minority of lessons where success criteria are used effectively. A minority of teachers encourage young people to reflect on what they have been learning throughout lessons. In a few lessons, success criteria focus on the completion of a task rather than the learning to be achieved. This results in these young people not always understanding how to be successful in their learning. Teachers should continue to develop their use of high-quality plenaries to encourage young people to reflect on their learning.

- In most lessons, young people participate well in their learning. In a minority of lessons, where the pace of learning is brisk, and young people are appropriately challenged, young people engage fully with the lesson content. In these lessons, young people are enthusiastic about their learning. In a few lessons, mainly in the senior phase, young people have well-considered opportunities to lead their own learning. However, the majority of lessons are overly teacher led with all young people undertaking the same tasks. As a result, a minority of young people are too passive in their learning.
- Most teachers provide clear explanations and instructions which help the majority of young people to understand the learning activities. Most teachers use a range of strategies effectively to check young people's understanding during lessons such as questioning, and monitoring classwork. Most teachers encourage young people to recall prior learning through questioning. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to develop higher-order thinking skills and to extend young people's learning. This practice should be shared and embedded more widely. This will support all young people to experience appropriate levels of challenge and to think more deeply about their learning.
- Teachers access helpful information about young people who experience barriers to their learning. A minority of teachers plan lessons effectively to meet the needs of all learners, including providing differentiated tasks and activities. In the majority of lessons, teachers set universal tasks and activities for all young people. Teachers need to better use the information on the whole school pupil spreadsheet to help them plan tasks and activities that are set at the right level of difficulty for all young people. In doing this, teachers should be able to ensure appropriate pace and challenge for all young people.
- Teachers in the Hub are highly skilled. They are well aware of young people's needs and consider them carefully when they plan learning. Teachers in the Hub differentiate lessons effectively so that each young person can access appropriately the learning activity and outcomes. Senior leaders should use the expertise of these staff to improve practice across the school.
- All young people from S3-S6 receive an individual digital device to support their learning. A minority of teachers use digital technology well to enhance young people's learning experiences, through for example, effective use of visualisers. Young people and parents value highly their digital access to lesson materials at home. This enables young people to review and recap aspects of their learning. It is also a helpful resource for young people when absent from school. Teachers recognise the need to continue to develop digital approaches to enhance and extend young people's engagement with learning.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers make explicit reference to the school's "#FORskills framework". This helps young people to recognise the relevance of the skills they develop through their learning. Teachers in a majority of faculties introduced project-based learning approaches to promote learning through real-life contexts. This approach provides rich learning experiences where young people confidently describe the skills they develop. Staff should now embed the school's "#FORskills framework" more fully in learning across the school.

- Almost all young people in the senior phase benefit from supportive learner conversations with teachers. Most teachers use learner conversations following tracking periods in the senior phase to support young people to identify what they need to do next to progress in their learning. An important next step is for teachers to develop this approach further in the broad general education (BGE). Teachers should also develop a culture of higher expectations when setting individual targets with young people.
- A minority of teachers use formative assessment strategies effectively to check the understanding of all young people. These teachers adjust their plans and teaching methods successfully to meet the needs of young people. The majority of teachers should now consider a wider range of assessment approaches, including well-planned activities for self- and peer-assessment, to help young people understand their learning more effectively.
- Teachers, including from the Hub, are beginning to develop their use of moderation within the BGE to inform their planning of learning, teaching and assessments. All teachers would benefit from continuing to engage in moderation activities within and outwith the school, including collaborative approaches to planning. Senior leaders and teachers should continue to work closely with staff from the cluster primary schools and, where available, the local authority subject network groups.
- Principal teachers have developed departmental approaches to tracking and monitoring learners' progress. In a minority of departments, teachers use tracking information effectively to identify young people who are not making sufficient progress towards their expected levels of attainment and plan appropriate learning activities for them. Teachers in the Hub use several similar approaches to the school to track young people's progress in the BGE. This includes using Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) milestones where appropriate. A few teachers are appointees of the Scottish Qualification Authority and have roles within local authority subject network groups. These teachers work well with colleagues to increase teachers' confidence in applying national standards in the senior phase. Senior leaders should work closely with principal teachers to develop consistent approaches to tracking individuals and groups of young people over time, particularly within the BGE.

## 2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

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

### 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

- Senior leaders need to develop a clear strategic plan for raising attainment. Current approaches have important weaknesses that impact on outcomes for young people. This is particularly evident in the attainment of young people in S5 and the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people. There is also a need to improve numeracy outcomes for young people.

#### Attainment in literacy and numeracy

##### BGE

- In 2023/24, by the end of S3, school data indicates that almost all young people achieved CfE third level in literacy. Attainment at this measure has remained high from 2017/18 to 2023/24. Most young people achieved CfE third level in numeracy in 2023/24. This is a decrease from almost all young people in 2021/22.
- Most young people achieved CfE fourth level in literacy in 2023/24. This is an increase from a majority of young people in 2022/23. A majority of young people achieved CfE fourth level in numeracy from 2021/22 to 2023/24, with an increase in the percentage passing in 2023/24. Young people in the Hub generally make good progress in their literacy and numeracy.
- Teachers are developing an understanding of BGE levels in literacy and in numeracy. Staff in the English and mathematics departments are developing their confidence in using a wide range of assessment materials and national Benchmarks to support their teacher professional judgements. However, teachers, particularly in the mathematics department, should continue to improve the robustness and reliability of their professional judgements.
- Staff across the school are at the early stages of recognising their role in delivering literacy and numeracy as a responsibility of all. Staff's whole school focus on oracy is supporting teachers to begin to plan learning that helps young people to improve their listening and talking.

#### Senior phase

##### Leavers

##### Literacy

- Most young people who left school between 2018/19 and 2023/24 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is in line with the VC for four of these years and is significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22. A majority achieved literacy at SCQF level 6 in 2019/20 and in 2022/23. This was significantly higher than the VC in 2022/23. In all measures, the percentage of young people achieving from SCQF level 3 to SCQF level 6 declined in 2023/24.

- Overall, the majority of young people who require additional support who left school from 2019/20 to 2023/24 attained literacy SCQF level 5 or better as a course award, which closely aligns with the VC.

## **Numeracy**

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the majority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. In 2021/22 and in 2023/24, this was significantly lower than the VC. Less than half achieved the course award at SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2019/20 to 2023/24. A minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This was significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22 and 2023/24 and significantly much lower than the VC in 2019/20.
- A minority of young people who require additional support who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in four of the five years from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This is below the VC in three of the four years. The majority attained at this level in 2022/23.

## **Cohorts**

### **Literacy**

- In S4, the majority of young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This improved from being significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22 to in line with the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll, most young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This was in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2022/23 and declined to being significantly lower than the VC in 2023/24. A majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in 2019/20, 2021/22 and 2022/23. In 2022/23 this was significantly above the VC. This declined to a minority in 2023/24, which is significantly lower than the VC.
- By S6, based on the S6 roll, most young people attained SCQF level 6 from 2020/21 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC.

### **Numeracy**

- In S4, the majority of young people attained numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better in 2023/24, in line with the VC. This is an improvement on previous years where attainment at this level was significantly lower or significantly much lower than the VC.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll, the majority of young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2021/22 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC in 2022/23 and was significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22 and 2023/24. A few young people attained SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy, significantly lower than the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24.
- By S6, based on the S6 roll, a minority of young people attained SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy from 2020/21 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC.
- When comparing S4, S5 based on S5 and S6 based on S6, there are notable differences between the percentage of young people attaining the unit award in numeracy at SCQF level 5 and the full course award. The percentage of young people attaining a numeracy course award from 2019/20 to 2023/24 shows an overall decline. These are important weaknesses in young people's attainment in numeracy. Senior leaders now need to work with staff to improve this area as a matter of urgency.



## National Qualifications

- Most young people in S4 are presented for and attain a pass at A-C in National 5 (N5) English, in line with the national average. By S5 and S6, the percentage of young people presented for and attaining a pass at A-C in Higher English is generally in line with the national average.
- The percentage of young people in S4 presented for N5 mathematics is generally in line with the national average. However, the percentage attaining a Grade A–C pass at this level is much less than the national average from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Fewer than half the national average of young people are presented for Higher mathematics in S5 and S6 in 2023/24. Of those young people, fewer than half achieve a grade A–C pass. Staff have only presented young people in S5 and S6 for N5 application of mathematics. In 2023/24, a majority of young people presented did not achieve a Grade A-C pass. Senior leaders need to address this area of weakness by developing a strategic approach to improving the teaching of mathematics. This will support improvements in the attainment in numeracy and mathematics for young people.
- Senior leaders need to review the number of young people that are presented for both National 4 and N5 in mathematics in S4. This will ensure young people are being presented at the appropriate level.

## Attainment in Gàidhlig Medium Education

- Over time, senior leaders are not ensuring that all young people in Gàidhlig Medium Education are rounding off the BGE with a CfE literacy award through the medium of Gàidhlig. Young people's raised attainment through the medium of Gàidhlig is not being encouraged strongly enough in the senior phase.

## Attainment over time

### BGE

- Senior leaders provided current data which indicates that almost all young people achieve CfE third level in all curricular areas outwith literacy and numeracy, by the end of S3 in 2023/24. The majority of young people achieve CfE fourth level in all curricular areas. However, data on young people's progress through the BGE across curricular areas is not consistently reliable. Senior leaders now need to work with staff to improve their approaches to moderation. This includes an improving teacher's understanding of national standards to increase the reliability of their professional judgements.

## Senior Phase

### Improving attainment for all

- There is no clear pattern of raising attainment for leavers or cohorts from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This is an important weakness. Senior leaders now need to work urgently with staff to improve the attainment of young people, particularly in S5 and in S6.

## Leavers

- The attainment of school leavers from 2019/20 to 2023/24 is below the VC, using average complementary tariff points.
- The attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24, except for 2021/22 when it was significantly lower than the VC. The attainment of the middle attaining 20% was in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24, apart from 2021/22 and 2023/24 when it was significantly lower than the VC. The highest attaining 20% of young people who left school between 2019/20 and 2022/23, attained in line with the VC, apart from in 2019/20 when attainment was significantly much lower than the VC, and in the latest year 2023/24, when it was significantly lower than the VC.



- Young people who require additional support have attained below the ASN VC in four of the last five years from 2019/20 to 2023/24 when looking at average complementary tariff scores. In 2022/23 attainment for this group of young people was slightly above the VC.

## Cohorts

- In S4, over the last five years, the complementary tariff scores for the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people is often significantly lower than the VC. For both groups this improved in 2023/24 to being in line with the VC. The highest attaining 20% of young people attained in line with the VC for four of the five years from 2019/20 to 2023/24. The exception was 2022/23 when attainment for this group was significantly lower than the VC.
- By S5 based on the S5 roll, attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people is largely in line with the VC until 2023/24, when it is significantly lower than the VC. The middle attaining 60% and the highest attaining 20% of young people generally attain significantly lower or significantly much lower, than the VC.
- By S6 based on the S6 roll, attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and the middle attaining 60% of young people is largely in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2022/23. In 2023/24, both groups moved to being significantly lower than the VC. The highest attaining 20% of young people attain significantly lower than the VC in 2019/20, 2022/23 and 2023/24.

## Breadth and depth

- Senior leaders recognise the need to raise attainment. There are early signs of attainment improving for young people in S4 from 2024/25. Senior leaders reviewed and amended the course option choices for young people to encourage more young people to study more courses this year. They should continue with their plans to ensure more young people remain fully engaged with learning by attending all their timetable classes. This will maximise their opportunities to achieve while at school from S4 to S6. Teachers need to have higher aspirations and expectations of what young people can achieve to improve attainment. This will help to ensure young people leave school with appropriate qualifications.
- At S4, between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the majority of young people achieved one or more to two or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better. This is significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22 and 2022/23, however improved to being in line with the VC in 2023/24. A minority of young people achieve three or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better. This improved from being significantly much lower than the VC in 2021/22, to significantly lower than the VC in 2022/23 and is now in line with the VC in 2023/24. Around a third of young people at S4 attain five or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better. This is significantly lower, or significantly much lower than the VC in four of the last five years.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll, a majority of young people achieve four or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This was in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2022/23 before declining in 2023/24 to being significantly much lower than the VC. A majority of young people achieve two or more awards at SCQF 5A or better from 2019/20 to 2022/23. This declined to a minority in 2023/24. A majority of young people achieve one or more awards, and a minority attain two or more awards, at SCQF 6C or better from 2020/21 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2022/23 but declined to significantly lower, and significantly much lower, than the VC in 2023/24 respectively. The percentage of young people attaining three or more to five or more awards at SCQF levels 6C or better, is generally significantly lower, or significantly much lower than the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24. A minority of young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF 6A or better from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2022/23 but declined to significantly lower than the VC in 2023/24.

- By S6 based on the S6 roll, the majority of young people achieve three or more awards at SCQF 6C or better. This is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2022/23 but declined to significantly lower than the VC in 2023/24. A minority of young people achieve two or more to three or more awards at SCQF 6A or better. This is in line with the VC in three of the five-year period from 2019/20 to 2023/24. A minority of young people achieved one or more, and a few achieved two or more awards, at SCQF level 7C or better in 2022/23 and 2023/24. This is significantly lower than the VC in 2023/24. A few young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF level 7A from 2021/22 to 2023/24. This is in line with the VC in 2020/21 to 2022/23, but declined to significantly lower than the VC in 2023/24.
- A few young people successfully complete courses other than National Qualifications. For example, teachers deliver an increasing number of National Progression Awards. This has resulted in a few young people continuing to study beyond school and into a positive destination.

### **Overall quality of learners' achievement**

- Young people benefit from a wide range of achievement activities offered across the school. Staff track young people's participation in these activities. Staff support one-off annual experiences such as the battlefields trip and the Paris science, technology, engineering and mathematics trip. These experiences support young people to develop their independence and team-working skills. Over the last three years almost all young people in S2 have taken part in a residential trip which helps them develop stronger friendships, resilience and tolerance. Staff lead a range of ongoing activities to improve young people's self-confidence, teamwork and creativity. A few young people, including those who attend the Hub, achieve awards such as Saltire, Dynamic Youth and John Muir. Young people develop their sense of community through engaging in these valuable experiences. A few young people in the senior phase lead a few sport-based activities. This helps these young people develop their leadership skills.
- A few young people work with key members of staff on specific projects across the school. As a result, the school has achieved a number of nationally recognised awards. The young people involved articulate clearly how they have developed skills in, for example, literacy and leadership and how this helps them develop.
- A majority of young people in S6 undertake leadership roles. They represent their peers as part of the pupil or house leadership teams supporting with mental health awareness, mentoring, junior lunch activities and house events. A few young people in the BGE are involved with the pupil council. However, the majority of young people are unclear how to become involved and what activities they are taking forward. Staff should work with young people to identify how more young people become more involved in influencing the work of the school.
- Staff celebrate the progress and achievement of young people in a variety of ways. These include through the 'Forfar Fourcast', values postcards and faculty pupil of the week noticeboards. Senior leaders introduced a new approach this session to recognise the achievements and successes of young people in S1. As a result, most young people in S1 confidently articulate how they have developed their skills and display school values. Senior leaders should now consider how they use the "#FORskills framework" to support young people to reflect on their developing skills.

### **Equity for all learners**

- Almost all staff have a strong understanding of young people and their families' individual circumstances and the socio-economic profile of the school. This is demonstrated by, for example, teachers offering study support at lunchtime rather than the end of the school day to mitigate travel barriers for young people.

- Senior leaders use Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) for a variety of interventions to support specific groups of young people. Senior leaders track and monitor the progress of young people who are supported through PEF interventions well. Senior leaders use PEF to employ key staff to address gaps in literacy and numeracy, reduce the cost of the school day and improve attendance across the school. Staff support a few young people to make progress with specific literacy and numeracy programmes. A few young people recognise that the breakfast club helps them be ready to learn. Staff discreetly support a few families with uniform and other costs associated with the school.
- A majority of young people who left school in 2023/24 attained significantly lower than those living in similar circumstances across Scotland, when compared using complementary tariff points. There is no clear evidence to demonstrate that the school has accelerated progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap.
- Almost all young people moved to an initial positive destination from 2019/20 to 2020/21. This is in line with the VC. However, the percentage of young people moving to an initial positive destination has decreased over time. Staff have acted this session, working with partners, to support more young people to move to a positive destination. It is too early to see the impact of this work in school data.
- Young people's attendance at school has decreased over the last five sessions. Staff have improved their focus on attendance for young people in S1. Senior leaders report that this is currently showing improvements when compared to other year groups. Staff need to monitor period by period attendance more closely to be able to better identify a few young people who do not regularly attend classes.

## Other relevant evidence

- The school library is well resourced and is well used by a range of young people. Young people read, study and socialise in the library at break and lunchtimes. Young people lead several popular clubs based in the library, including a craft club and a creative writing and comic club. Young people in S1 and S2 use the library fortnightly as part of English lessons to select books for private reading. The library has been central to the school achieving the Reading Schools Gold Award, and data shows that library loans more than doubled over session 2023/24. Young people in the senior phase have been well supported in the library for advanced tasks, such as dissertations. They have benefited from sessions focusing on research skills, evaluating sources and citation styles. Young people in S2 also benefit from weekly sessions in the library focusing on developing their literacy skills.
- Young people experience their entitlement to two periods of high-quality physical education from S1 to S4. Senior leaders should reflect on the delivery of religious and moral education to ensure compliance with the statutory requirement of a coherent programme from S1 to S6. Similarly senior leaders should ensure young people in the BGE access their full entitlement to study modern languages in line with the Scottish Government's 1+2 languages policy.
- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. Several areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.
- There is too little impact from the school's use of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017. Senior leaders should update the school handbook to promote Gàidhlig Medium Education, giving details of the curriculum offer.

## 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.