

Summarised inspection findings

Forres Academy

Moray Council

25 April 2023

Key contextual information

School name: Forres Academy
Council: Moray Council
SEED number: 5203031
Roll: 851

Forres Academy is a non-denominational secondary school situated in the town of Forres in Moray. The school serves a community of eight associated primary schools. There are around 150 pupils from military serving families. The headteacher took up post in 2018. There has been a number of staffing challenges in a few faculties and also in the senior leadership team.

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

There has been a notable reduction in exclusions from well above the national average in 2018/19 to now being well below.

In February 2022 13 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals. This is higher than other LA secondary schools.

In September 2021 1.1 per cent of pupils lived in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland. In September 2021 the school reported that 43 % of pupils had additional support needs.

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

- Staffing issues have been exacerbated over the period of the pandemic. This has placed increased demands on the senior and middle leaders. The senior leadership team has taken forward a number of priorities to initiate improvement. As yet, there is no clear evidence of the impact of these priorities on young people. The lack of strategic leadership across the school is impacting on improving outcomes for young people. Key policy statements on the curriculum, learning and teaching and wellbeing remain in draft form. Staff feel overwhelmed by the scale of the priorities contained within the school improvement plan (SIP).
- Senior and middle leaders need to apply more robust and co-ordinated approaches to self-evaluation. This will support staff in understanding the reasons behind the improvement priorities. School leaders should use the unique context of their school to identify areas for improvement. This will ensure a more relevant approach to moving the school forward. Robust self-evaluation involving all stakeholders will allow senior and middle leaders to set more focused, measurable outcomes within the SIP and department improvement plans (DIPs). As a result, the extended leadership team (ELT) will be able to evaluate the progress of improvement activities. Further work is required on developing an employability strategy in line with national expectations regarding Developing the Young Workforce (DYW).
- Staff used survey responses to create the school's vision statement of 'Being happy and ambitious to achieve our best' and a set of core values - 'happy, ambitious, achieving.' There was a virtual consultation during COVID-19 closures. As a result, young people and parents do not yet feel a sense of ownership of the vision and values.
- The vision and values are separate from the school expectations of 'Ready, Respectful and Safe'. As a result, young people are confused by the two different sets of 'expectations'. The senior leadership team acknowledges that the existing school vision and values are not well understood and are not driving school improvement. Senior leaders are committed to undertaking an extensive review of the vision, values and expectations with full stakeholder engagement. This will help to ensure that all of the school community have a greater sense of ownership of these.
- The school's approach to gathering evidence to identify key improvement priorities requires improvement. Senior leaders are beginning to make greater use of feedback from young people. In a few departments, middle leaders are seeking pupil views on the learning experience and using the evidence gathered to shape curriculum development work. Senior leaders meet with middle leaders to discuss senior phase attainment data. Middle leaders use actions agreed at these meetings to shape the priorities within their DIPs. The range of data used to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning needs to be broader. As a result, the identified priorities are too broad and lack explicit and measurable outcomes. Senior leaders

recently started to include more evaluative activities across the school year with two planned learning focus weeks. They should develop this work further to inform planning more effectively.

- Staff recognise the need to accelerate efforts in progressing important strategic areas such as monitoring and tracking; curriculum development; wellbeing; and learning, teaching and assessment. A well-planned and coordinated strategic approach across all priorities is required. This includes narrowing the focus within identified priorities.
- Staff work in school improvement groups (SIGs) but because of the scale of the identified priorities there is not enough collegiate time for each SIG to drive improvement. Staff agree that too many priorities are started and not finished. The Learning and Teaching SIG, for example, would like the opportunity to work through the learning and teaching framework to support consistency and sharing of good practice. The SIGs would benefit from greater clarity and closer monitoring by senior leaders.
- A minority of young people contribute to school improvement priorities as leaders of learning. Other examples of young people leading change are the eco schools group and SCQF ambassadors. However, most young people feel that they do not play an active role in school decision making and would value the opportunity to shape and lead change in their school. The Student Network Collaboration (SNC) used 'How good is OUR school' to evaluate the learning experience for young people recently. There is scope to build on the self-evaluation carried out by the SNC along with wider staff leadership and empowerment to drive forward change.
- A few young people are beginning to influence the Forres locality plan. Community learning and development (CLD) staff consulted with a group of young people at Forres and one young person is now a member of the Community Council. There is potential for the school and CLD to build on this work, ensuring that all young people are consulted on issues impacting on their lives.
- The headteacher shares the SIP priorities with the Parent Partnership group. There is scope for parents to be involved at an earlier stage in shaping school improvement priorities. Senior leaders plan to hold conversation cafes with parents to seek parent views and inputs into a range of new initiatives for the session. Moving forward, it is important to involve parents in the reviews which are still in development, such as the curriculum review. The Parent Partnership has signposted parents to financial supports as part of the school's effective work on the cost of the school day.
- The school has established a range of partners to support wellbeing and skills for work. Partners attend pathway planning meetings to formalise plans to support the entitlements of the senior phase. Partners are keen to be involved in evaluative activities which would support early intervention strategies and make best use of resources.

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

- Most young people are eager and enthusiastic learners. In the majority of classrooms, positive relationships are evident. Most young people feel encouraged by their teachers to do the best they can. Staff now need to develop a more nurturing ethos in classrooms to ensure a positive and enjoyable learning experience for all.
- Young people's engagement in learning is variable across the school. The majority of young people work in a calm and purposeful way, remaining on task during lessons. Most lessons are overly teacher led and not suited to the learning needs of individuals. Too often, young people are required to carry out low-level tasks such as copying from the board. As a result, young people are passive in their learning and become disengaged. They are not yet empowered to lead aspects of their own learning. Teachers need to plan and differentiate tasks and activities more effectively to meet the range of young people's needs better. In a minority of lessons, young people are engaged actively in a range of stimulating and enjoyable learning activities, and work at a pace and level that meets their needs. The senior and extended leadership teams now need to identify and share this good practice widely across the school. This should help all staff to develop a shared understanding of high-quality learning and teaching.
- Teachers' explanations and instructions are clear in most lessons. In the majority of lessons, teachers use questioning to check young people's knowledge. Their checking of understanding during lessons is much less frequent. Teachers should now develop and extend the use of questioning to engage all young people in their learning and use open-ended questions to develop higher order thinking skills.
- Most teachers share the purpose of learning with young people. In a minority of lessons, teachers also share how young people can be successful. In a few classes, where this is linked clearly to peer, self and teacher assessment, young people have a much better understanding of their strengths and next steps in learning. This enables young people to take increasing responsibility for planning and improving their own learning. Staff have identified correctly the need to ensure that this practice is developed and used consistently across the school. Teachers' understanding and use of a range of assessment strategies could be improved to support learners to understand their ongoing progress.
- Young people receive verbal feedback and, less frequently, written feedback, which is often provided after summative assessments. The quality of written feedback is too variable across the school. Young people feel more able to take ownership of their own learning when they receive high-quality feedback on their strengths and next steps in learning. Most young people in the senior phase know their target grades and the progress they are making towards achieving those grades. Young people in the S1-S3 broad general education (BGE) are less aware of their progress through the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels.

- Teachers should continue to improve how they use assessment in the BGE. Teachers in a few departments are using a wider range of assessment evidence to make holistic judgements about the progress of young people. The school has identified the need for all staff to undertake moderation activities in the BGE to ensure a shared understanding of standards. A small team of staff is being trained currently to lead this work. In the meantime, the school should benchmark their BGE assessment judgements against other data to test that it is valid and reliable.
- A number of departments are currently undertaking a review of their BGE courses. Staff would benefit from additional support and guidance in the holistic planning of learning, teaching and assessment. This would provide a valuable moderation opportunity for staff to revisit the moderation cycle.
- In the senior phase, teachers' understanding of assessment standards have been enhanced through the support of trained markers in school, and by moderating with other schools across the authority during the pandemic. Staff and young people would benefit from these moderation opportunities continuing and extending to the BGE.
- Staff have developed a tool very recently to track, monitor and evaluate the progress of young people in the senior phase. This has the potential to enable staff to intervene at the earliest stage where the underachievement of individuals or groups is detected. Senior leaders have appropriately identified the urgent need to prioritise the development of a tracking and monitoring system in the BGE to raise attainment.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Staff have developed a transition programme to support all children as they move from primary to secondary school. The programme includes targeted and enhanced transition for young people with additional support needs. Staff should consider starting the enhanced transition activities earlier to ensure children develop confidence and feel well prepared for the change.
- In S3, young people personalise their learning by selecting courses from within the curriculum areas. Senior leaders should continue to monitor that all young people receive their entitlements to breadth across all curriculum and subjects. The school successfully delivers the entitlement to 1 plus 2 modern languages across the BGE. This allows young people with an interest in languages to follow an appropriate pathway through the BGE and into the senior phase. As staff develop senior phase pathways further, they should increase the options available to learners in S6. This will help to ensure that young people at this stage have choices that allow them to make appropriate progress in their chosen pathways.
- Staff have introduced a new elective option in S2, which includes courses in creative writing, robotics and conservation in the environment. Similarly, in the senior phase, young people can choose from a variety of accredited options which are designed to enhance young people's skills for work. These include, Scottish Studies, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Award and a national progression award in Music Performing. It is important that senior leaders monitor the impact of these additions to the curriculum carefully. This will ensure that the courses provide the most suitable pathways for young people going on to further education, higher education or employment.
- A pathways evening, attended by a small number of parents, was held to support understanding about young people's course choices. Plans are in place to continue the process of sharing information with parents about learning pathways through conversation cafés.
- Literacy and numeracy coordinators are responsible for developing these aspects of the curriculum as the responsibility of all teachers across the BGE. Staff should now make faster progress with developing literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing as the responsibilities of all staff. This will support young people and continue to raise attainment in these areas.
- Staff agree that the current skills framework requires revision. A more streamlined framework would support a clearer understanding of the link between skills young people develop in school and the skills they will need for employment. It is important that the whole school community is involved in planning the new skills framework, and that young people are clear about how they can track their own skills development. Teaching staff in a few departments link teaching with employment and careers. This good practice could be shared more widely across the school. The career education standard could be used to underpin discussions with young people about their career pathways and ensure all young people receive their entitlements in this regard.
- A few young people in S5 participate in mock interviews and CV writing. These opportunities are helpful in preparing them for the workplace. Most pupils are aware of the careers advisor through their personal and social education class and during subject choice activities in S3. Young people in S5 and S6 would welcome more input around the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service application process.

- A few pupils undertake employability awards and this introduces them to the world of work. To support young people more effectively as they move through the school and beyond, staff should consider employment sectors that are particularly important in the school's local context.
- The local college offers a choice of vocational programmes at appropriate levels which link well with intended careers. Most young people are satisfied with the range of options and the guidance and advice to support their choices. Outcomes at college are positive and young people benefit from this experience.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The Parent Partnership engages positively with the headteacher, who keeps it informed about some of the planned changes to the school. Fewer than half of parents feel encouraged to be part of the group or report being kept informed about its work. The group has begun to evaluate how to engage more parents. Parental surveys are issued regarding school improvement. However, the majority of parents are unclear of how the school takes their views into account.
- The school has recently reintroduced in-person events for parents to support learners in the senior phase. These events were evaluated positively but not well attended. Parents would like earlier notice of events and activities for their calendars.
- Senior leaders are aware that they should continue to evaluate approaches to parental engagement. They should plan how they communicate with parents about opportunities for involvement in school improvement and to support and contribute to their child's learning. Senior leaders should consider the timing, streamlining and quality of communications. A few parents note that they feel communication is currently too complex and lengthy.
- The majority of parents are comfortable approaching the school with questions, suggestions or problems. A few parents report concerns regarding their ability to access staff to discuss issues affecting their child. They say that there is a lack of communication from school regarding their child's learning. Parents whose children have additional support needs feel they are not well included or involved in planning for supporting these needs. A few parents report examples of the school working in partnership with them to support young people facing barriers to learning.

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 that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

weak

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

- A majority of young people feel safe in school. Most young people say that staff treat them with respect and a majority believe peers treat each other with respect. Young people learn in a calm environment. A few young people experience bullying which is impacting on their feelings of safety in school. A minority of young people say the school does not deal with bullying well. Senior leaders should continue with plans to develop the approaches used to address bullying. This should help to ensure young people feel safe and their rights are fully respected.
- The majority of young people are confident in making healthy lifestyle choices. Young people develop the skills to be healthy and lead an active life through the home economics and PE curriculum. They are supported to be healthy through for example, the S2 health period delivered by PE staff and through achievement clubs and activities. Staff recognise the need to promote positive mental health to young people. A few young people benefit from support offered by partners, including counselling and mental health support services. These young people are developing the skills, knowledge and tools to address their mental wellbeing. Staff should ensure all young people are appropriately signposted to supports when required.
- Senior leaders and principal teachers of guidance (PTG) use wellbeing wheels and a Motivation and Wellbeing Profile to gather information on young people's wellbeing. It is not yet clear how this data is being used to support improvements in young people's wellbeing. Staff and young people do not yet have a shared understanding of wellbeing, which is limiting the potential value these sources of data. All staff should continue to explore the meaning and purpose of the wellbeing indicators with young people. Staff would benefit from further professional learning about wellbeing. This has the potential to offer staff useful information, understanding and skills to help them support the wellbeing needs of young people.
- Staff are at an early stage of applying nurturing principles across the school. Staff in the wellbeing support team offer targeted nurture to young people within the inclusion room. Young people participate in individual or small group work. This is leading to these young people feeling nurtured and included. Staff in the wellbeing team also offer well-planned, targeted interventions and peer support to young people from military families. The work has positive outcomes for these young people, such as increased feelings of inclusion and confidence. Senior leaders should consider how to build on good practice to ensure continued positive outcomes for other groups of learners, such as young people who are care experienced.
- A minority of young people believe the poor condition of the school building is detrimental to creating a positive school environment. In particular, the toilet provision across the school is not supporting a safe, inclusive or respectful ethos. Senior leaders and the local authority

should review the current provision and consider how to make improvements that ensure the dignity of all young people.

- Staff continue to develop their understanding of statutory duties in relation to wellbeing, equality and inclusion. All staff understand their responsibilities in relation to child protection and safeguarding. Senior leaders need to develop approaches to ensuring young people who are care experienced are considered for a coordinated support plan.
- A majority of young people recognise they have a trusted adult they can speak to if they need support. A few young people benefit from appropriate targeted interventions to help address their wellbeing needs. Senior leaders should consider further opportunities for staff and partners to collaborate on planning and identifying support for young people.
- Staff recognise the need to improve the personal and social education (PSE) curriculum. Young people are not currently experiencing consistently high-quality learning experiences. Courses should be planned with young people to provide learning which is relevant and progressive for them. This will help them to feel empowered and support them in developing skills for life and work.
- The school has important weaknesses in its approaches to meeting the needs of young people who require additional support with their learning. This includes young people accessing the supported provisions and those who require additional support across the school. There are two provisions for young people who require additional support in the school. These are the 'Enhanced Provision' (EP) and the 'Autism Friendly Classroom' (AFC). Young people with severe and complex needs access their learning on a full-time basis in the EP. A few mainstream teachers also deliver subject lessons in the EP. The AFC provides support to young people who are on the autism spectrum. A few of these young people access this provision on a full-time basis, while the majority access mainstream classes with support from the AFC.
- The staff working in the provisions demonstrate commitment, care and compassion when working with young people. However, senior staff recognise the provisions are not yet meeting the needs of all young people appropriately. Staff from the local authority and senior leaders need to review and develop the provisions further as a matter of urgency. This includes establishing a clear rationale for young people's placement into the provisions. They should consider how staff can be supported to meet the range of learners' needs better, including through ongoing professional learning.
- Senior leaders need to review their approaches across the school to meeting the needs of young people who require additional support with their learning. Pupil support staff share information about young people's needs with staff. However, they do not have a strategic overview of young people's support needs. Staff should ensure young people and parents are more involved in decisions about learning needs. Staff across the school should be supported to better meet the wide range of learner's needs, including through professional learning.
- Young people who attend the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans plus (LGBT+) group benefit from opportunities to raise awareness of diversity and the importance of tackling discrimination. There are a few examples of departments teaching young people about equity issues, such as religious education, modern studies and PSE. However, this is not yet supporting young people to develop their understanding, confidence and skills to challenge discrimination, prejudice and intolerance. Staff should continue to develop learning opportunities across the curriculum

which enhance young people’s understanding of the protected characteristics and issues relating to equality.

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

BGE

- Attainment information provided by the school shows that by the end of S3 in 2021/22 the majority of young people achieved third CfE level or better in literacy and most did so in numeracy. The percentage of young people achieving fourth CfE level in literacy dropped in 2021/22 but increased for numeracy in 2021/22. Staff are aware that they need to do further work on the moderation of standards in the BGE. Senior staff agree that further processes need to be developed to ensure increased reliability of achievement of a level data.

Senior Phase

Leavers

- Between 2016/17 and 2020/21 the majority of young people left school achieving literacy at SCQF level 5 or better and SCQF level 6. This is line with the Virtual Comparator (VC) over this time period.
- At SCQF level 5, there is a notable difference between the success young people have in achieving literacy through units when compared to the percentage who achieve this through a course award. This is particularly evident at S4.
- Performance in numeracy for leavers requires improvement. Performance at SCQF level 3 or better, 4 or better, and SCQF level 6 is often significantly lower or much lower than the VC over the last five years from 2016/17 to 2020/21. The percentage of leavers attaining SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy has improved steadily from 2016/17 to 2020/21, with 2021/21 being the highest in the five-year period. At S4, only a few leavers achieve SCQF level 5 or better as a course award and this has been the case over the last 5 years. In 2017/18 and 2018/19, no S4 leavers achieved SCQF level 5 numeracy as a course award. The proportion of young people presented for National 5 mathematics in the latest year in S4 is significantly lower than the national average. The proportion of learners achieving an A pass in National 5 mathematics is significantly lower than the national average. There have been ongoing staff absences in mathematics. Staff now need to review their approaches to ensure senior phase learners achieve consistently strong outcomes.

Cohorts

- In S4, performance in literacy is generally in line with the VC over the five-year period. By S5 and by S6, in the last two years 2020/21 and 2021/22 most young people attained SCQF level 5 and the majority attained SCQF level 6.

- Performance in numeracy requires improvement in S4, by S5 and S6. Generally across SCQF levels the school performs significantly lower or much lower than the VC.

Attainment over time

- The school is committed to developing whole school systems for tracking BGE attainment. There is no whole school system for tracking BGE attainment. In the BGE teachers use various types of assessment for reporting to parents. They now need to track cohorts, groups and individuals to ensure needs are being met well and to help plan interventions and support.
- The senior leadership team needs to have a stronger overview of how each teacher and each department supports raising attainment. The newly devised senior phase tracking system has the potential to enable staff to track cohorts and groups.

Senior Phase

- The average complementary tariff scores for all leavers have remained consistently in line with the VC over the period between 2016/17 and 2021/21. The school needs to improve the tariff scores for the lowest attaining 20% of learners. In three out of the last five years up to 2020/21, the tariff scores for this group were significantly lower than the VC.
- At S4 the complementary tariff scores are often significantly lower than the VC for the lowest attaining and middle attaining groups. There have been no steady improvements in attainment over the last five years up to 2021 for the lowest attaining 20% and the middle attaining 60% of learners.

Breadth and Depth

- At S4 A minority of young people were presented for six or more level 5 qualifications in 2021/22. A few were presented for seven qualifications. There has been a consistently low percentage of young people achieving five or more qualifications at SCQF at level 3 or better, level 4 or better and level 5 or better over the last five years. The percentage who achieved six or more SCQF level 5A or better in 2020/21 was in line with the VC. This was an exception to the attainment in all previous years. There is significant room for improvement in attainment at S4.
- By S5 the percentage of young people achieving one or more to four or more qualifications at SCQF level 5 C or better was in line with the VC in 2021/22. In the previous four years it was lower or significantly lower than the VC. The percentages achieving one or more qualifications at SCQF level 6 or better is in line with the VC in 2021/22. Overall, attainment in S5 needs to be improved.
- By S6, the percentages of young people achieving one or more to five or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better have been much lower or significantly much lower than the VC for five years, from 2017/18 until 2021/22. A minority of young people achieved four or five or more qualifications at SCQF level 6A or better over the last five years, from 2017/18 to 2021/22.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Senior leaders have identified correctly that the school could do more to identify, recognise and celebrate the achievements of young people. Currently there is no strategic overview of the totality of young people's achievements in or out of school. A more robust approach to working with partners would assist senior leaders to capture and celebrate achievement more effectively. At the moment, young people are not clear about the relationship between skills learnt through involvement in activities out of school and in their school-based activities.

- Across the senior school, young people are achieving through volunteering and Saltire awards. A few young people in S6 provide a successful 'elite tutoring' support for younger pupils, assisting them with their preparation for examinations.
- Active Schools staff in partnership with the PE department deliver a range of leadership opportunities that help a few young people achieve. These young people take on leadership roles through basketball, football, rugby and volleyball. They are gaining life skills and acting as role models for children in local primary schools.
- There has been a notable increase in the number of young people participating in the the Duke of Edinburgh's award. Young people talk positively about the skills and experiences they gain. The recent increase in the number of teachers delivering the award should help build capacity and ensure ongoing achievement through Silver to Gold level awards. A few young people benefit from a targeted outdoor learning programme provided by Outfit Moray. As well as developing life skills and confidence, a few young people are achieving mountain biking and paddle sports awards.
- Staff offer a variety of lunchtime and after school clubs including sports, philosophy and science. A few young people in the Mandarin Club are working with P7 pupils from the local primaries on the lunchtime Chinese New Year transition events. Young people engage in a range of sporting and community activities in Forres and beyond. These include football, swimming, boxing and supporting Forres in Bloom.

Equity for all learners

- Over the five-year period between 2016/17 and 2021/22, almost all young people moved into an initial positive destination, although this was significantly much lower than the VC for S5 leavers in three out of the five years. The percentage of leavers at S5 is much higher than the national figure. In 2020/21 the highest number of leavers for five years moved into employment.

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.