

30 October 2018

Dear Parent/Carer

**Belmont House School  
East Renfrewshire**

HM Inspectors recently visited Belmont House School. The visit was part of our quality improvement and professional engagement visits with independent schools which complement the general programme of inspections. The approach allows us to maintain our knowledge of schools in the independent sector throughout Scotland, and provides assurance to parents on the school's capacity for evaluating its own work and making improvements which have a direct impact on the quality of experiences for its young people. Our visit was based on the school's self-evaluation and priorities identified for school improvement. During our visit inspectors talked to staff and young people and worked together with the principal and senior staff about the planned developments to ensure outcomes for children and young people continue to improve.

**How well does the school ensure outcomes for children/young people continue to improve?**

Over the past eighteen months, led by the principal and Board of Governors, very good progress has been made in improving approaches to self-evaluation. In doing so, the senior leadership team has embraced change and have set out a focused agenda for improvement. They proactively increased the participation of all staff in planning and implementing priorities for improvement. Leadership and governance arrangements are well-defined and the principal has effectively progressed systems for financial stewardship and management. As a result, improvements in learning and teaching have a focus on ensuring best value. Senior leaders direct the curricular improvements and have put in place strategies for children and young people to become more involved in their learning. Commendably, the work undertaken to develop the role of middle leaders is making a positive difference to the life and work of the school and nursery class. In addition, the breadth of skills and expertise across the whole staff team and young people with leadership roles make effective changes. For example, the recent improvements to health and wellbeing are well-considered and suitably responsive to young people's needs. It includes effective engagement with partners' inputs on staying safe online, substance misuse and social and mental wellbeing. Young people are encouraged to develop a positive sense of identity in an inclusive environment. They report that most feel safe and that they have a strong feeling of being listened to within the school. Across the school, most children and young people have a good understanding of the wellbeing indicators and what they mean to them.

Professional learning for staff features throughout the school's agenda for change. It is embedded into the school improvement planning process. For example, in the nursery class, all practitioners undertake a high level of professional learning. This impacts positively on their understanding of how children learn and develop. It has improved their skills as reflective practitioners and developed their confidence as curricular leaders. Across the junior and senior school, the staff team value and recognise the strengths of working across stages. Sharing their curricular expertise leads to examples of highly motivating and challenging

contexts for learning. Of note, is the way that staff take into account the views of children when reflecting on their work. They value this information and use it effectively to change their practice.

In the nursery, strong relationships between adults and children are evident and staff develop children's sense of wellbeing very well. There has been significant improvements to the nursery's participation in eco activities. Learning about sustainability in line with children's 'Green Ambassador' award improved children's knowledge and understanding about their role in looking after the environment. It led to them raising funds for a local wildlife rescue centre. Practitioners support children well to take forward their ideas and find out more about topics that interest them using, for example, digital technology as a tool for research. Through assessments and observations, information is gathered over time about children's development and progress. Overall, children observed in the nursery make very positive progress in their learning across the curriculum. In the junior school and senior school, almost all children and young people are engaged in their learning. They work well as individuals and in small groups to complete the tasks. There are examples of effective questioning techniques and challenging contexts that deepen thinking and help children and young people make very good progress in their learning. In the junior school, children benefit from specialist teaching in music, art, physical education and French. Lessons are planned in consultation with junior school and subject specialist teachers; and, access to the senior school facilities enhances children's learning. In the senior school, clear explanations and instructions support young people's learning very well. They engage regularly in target setting which helps them to know their strengths and identify their next steps in learning.

Improvements over the past session in approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy raised the attainment of children in the junior school. Observations of learning show that overall children make good progress in literacy and numeracy. There are examples of children's written work of a very high quality. The school is well-placed to build on the positive improvements to ensure that there is progression in learning for all children and young people. In doing so, continue as planned to share more widely the many examples of effective practice across the school. For example, teachers' expectations of all children's attainment in the Transitus class problem-solving activity are appropriately challenging. Children use advanced mathematical language with confidence and discuss algorithms and networks with enthusiasm. In the upper senior school, young people's progress is carefully tracked. Senior leaders make very sound use of data from national qualifications to plan improvements. Overall, the pass rates of those presented for national qualifications are high.

Across the school, teachers have an appropriate knowledge of each individual learner's progress. They are developing the curriculum further to ensure that young people, parents and all staff understand the required standards across each of the curricular areas. At department level in the senior phase, faculty staff have a very good understanding of the attainment and progress of young people. Professional judgements are reliable and based on a wide range of sources. However, the current systems for tracking progress in the nursery, junior school and lower senior school do not yet provide senior leaders with a whole school overview of progress and attainment across all areas of learning. There is an opportunity to build on the good practice, to gathering and analysing data at the senior phase, and apply the same rigor across the school.

Children and young people are proud of the school and describe the ‘family feel’ of the whole school community as a key feature that helps them to feel safe and learn. Planned learning reflects the core values of: commitment; cooperation; identity; reliability; respect; and, responsibility. Children and young people have very positive attitudes to learning and share their views and knowledge with enthusiasm. The school actively promotes opportunities to develop the wider achievements of children and young people. The annual school show is very popular with children, young people, parents and staff. Participation in the production develops a wide range of skills and talents in a motivating context. Young people take part in The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award which promotes personal development and achievement. Debating and public speaking competitions, drama club, choir, orchestra and jazz band are a few of the many and varied clubs that are available. Pupil-led committees are a positive feature in the school and importantly children and young people feel that their voice is listened to in these forums. Of note, is the involvement of nursery children in whole school committees. Participation in masterclasses and national competitions are valued by the children and young people. In addition, sporting activities and cultural trips are well attended. These opportunities provide worthwhile experiences for the application of skills and knowledge.

The principal, senior leaders and Board of Governors set out the school’s vision for the next three years. They are reviewing practice to ensure that the whole school community has high expectations of learners. The principal works effectively with the Board of Governors who support and challenge the school. Their recent involvement in reviewing approaches to safeguarding and child protection takes account of national guidance.

We are confident the school has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and Board of Governors will inform parents about the school’s progress as part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the progress of the school.

Elizabeth C Montgomery  
HM Inspector