

Summarised inspection findings

Westhill Academy

Aberdeenshire Council

10 December 2024

Key contextual information

School Name: Westhill Academy
Council: Aberdeenshire
SEED number: 5232937
Roll: 900

Attendance is generally above the national average.

Exclusions are generally below the national average.

In September 2022, 5.1 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2022, 0.1 per cent of pupils live in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2022, the school reported that 56 per cent of pupils had additional support needs.

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

- Across the school, there is a calm learning environment which supports young people to settle. Young people organise themselves efficiently through well-established class routines and they demonstrate a willingness to learn. At times, a few young people demonstrate low level behavioural issues by talking over the teacher or distracting others when tasks and activities are not sufficiently motivating. Senior leaders should proceed as planned, to develop a nurturing climate for learning where all young people feel valued. Teachers should make more effective use of praise to build young people's confidence.
- Almost all young people are willing learners and apply themselves diligently to the tasks they are set however, they are too often passive in their learning. Young people are actively engaged in their tasks and respond well to thoughtful questioning when given the opportunity, such as in Music and Drama. This highly effective practice should be shared more widely across the school. In too many lessons, activities lacked variety and stimulation. Teachers should consider how to motivate young people by offering opportunities for them to be actively involved in learning activities. Young people should have a much greater say in what and how they learn, and activities should be more relevant to real life contexts.
- Most lessons are overly teacher led and lack creativity. Teachers should consider a wider range of approaches such as collaborative learning to support young people to participate more actively in their learning. When given opportunities to lead and direct aspects of their learning, young people respond well and often demonstrate high levels of capability.

- Almost all staff are aware of the individual needs of learners using information from the additional support for learning database. In most lessons teachers set tasks for the whole class. A majority of teachers rely too heavily on low level tasks such as completing worksheets and copying text. These do not provide an appropriate level of challenge for learners. Staff should develop their approaches to meeting the needs of all young people, particularly those who require additional support in their learning. This is an important next step.
- In the majority of lessons teacher instructions and explanations are clear, and they use questioning to check for understanding. There is scope to develop young people's higher order thinking skills through more effective questioning.
- In most lessons, teachers share expected learning with young people, and this helps them to understand the purpose of learning. In a minority of lessons, young people understand what they need to do to be successful in their learning. Where young people evaluate their progress against set success criteria, such as in PE, Drama and Music, this supports their understanding. This practice should be shared more widely across the school.
- Digital technology is used well to support young people's learning and help consolidate learning where appropriate. Teachers upload a range of resources to an online platform to enhance young people's learning. They also use this platform effectively to provide feedback to young people.
- Approaches to assessment vary across faculties. In a few subject areas, approaches to assessment are not based on a clear understanding of progression in learning. An important first step is to create a whole school assessment policy to ensure a clear, shared understanding of the principles, purposes and aims of assessment.
- Most teachers use a range of strategies to check young people's understanding during lessons such as questioning, and scanning learners' work. A few teachers use formative assessment strategies effectively to check the understanding of all learners and adjust their teaching to meet learner needs. There is an over-reliance on summative assessment such as tests to gauge learners' progress. Teachers should now consider a wider range of assessment approaches, including well-planned activities for self and peer assessment in order to help young people understand their learning more effectively. Across the school, a minority of staff use assessment well to inform their planning of learning and teaching.
- In the minority of departments, teachers take a holistic approach when reaching judgments on achievement of a level, taking account of a range of assessment evidence based on breadth, challenge and application of learning. These departments also make reference to the national benchmarks as part of their assessment approaches. Across the school, there needs to be more consistent use of the national benchmarks to support assessment of learning in the broad general education (BGE). This will build teacher confidence in relation to national expectations and standards. This should remove the need to rely on evidence derived from single brief learning experiences or end of unit tests.
- Almost all staff engage in BGE moderation activities with departmental colleagues to ensure a common understanding of expectations. The majority of departments also engage with subject colleagues across the local area network. This is facilitating agreement on valid and reliable assessment approaches and building confidence in meeting national standards.
- Most teachers engage with a variety of departmental approaches to record, monitor and track young people's progress. These vary in quality and comprehensiveness. Most teachers use the tracking system to monitor the progress of young people and alert parents through concern

slips where young people are under-achieving. A few teachers use monitoring and tracking data effectively along with formative assessments to adjust their planning of learning, teaching and assessment.

- Young people do not yet know themselves well enough as learners. Teachers do not yet consistently involve young people in discussing and reviewing their learning. Most young people in the BGE are unaware of their learning or attainment targets and find it difficult to identify their strengths and next steps. Across subjects, young people do not receive enough high-quality feedback on their learning. There is scope to involve parents further in how to support their child with their next steps in learning.
- The Westhill Academy Learning, Teaching and Assessment Standard (WALTAS) provides teachers with the principles and expectations for learning and teaching in the classroom. Senior leaders should proceed with reviewing this standard, involving young people and parents, in order to provide a succinct set of expectations that is understood by all. As part of this process, senior leaders need to develop a strategic and consistent approach to evaluating the quality of learning, teaching and assessment, benchmarked against the national standards and expectations.

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Young people are attaining well in literacy and numeracy and sustaining high standards over time. By the end of S3, almost all young people achieve third CfE level or better in literacy and numeracy. This high level of achievement has been sustained between 2020/21 to 2023/24. In 2023/2024, by the end of S3, most young people achieved fourth CfE level in all literacy measures and in numeracy. School attainment remains consistently above the local authority and national average. Senior leaders should review the achievement of a level for those young people who require additional support.

Senior Phase Leavers

Literacy

- Performance for leavers in literacy is strong. Almost all young people, including those with additional support needs, leaving school between 2018/19 to 2022/23 attained literacy at SCQF level 5 or better with the majority achieving SCQF level 6 or better. At SCQF level 5 or better the school generally performs significantly higher than the virtual comparator (VC). Staff should review the effectiveness of the dedicated reading time for all young people in order to determine its impact on attainment.

Numeracy

- Performance for leavers in numeracy is strong. Most young people, including those with additional support needs, leaving school between 2019/20 to 2022/23 attained numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better with a minority achieving SCQF level 6. In the latest year, 2022/23, the school performed significantly higher than the VC. Senior leaders and middle leaders should continue to address the notable difference between the success young people have in achieving numeracy through units when compared to the percentage who achieve this through a course award at SCQF level 5 or better.

Cohorts

- As young people move through the senior phase, they are sustaining high standards in literacy and numeracy. By S6 based on the S4 roll, there is a decline in attainment at SCQF level 6, between 2021/22 to 2023/24, in both literacy and numeracy.

Attainment over time

BGE

- By the end of S3, senior leaders are not yet able to show improvements in attainment over time consistently for curricular areas outwith English and Mathematics. According to school data, for the latest year 2023/24, most young people attain third level and very few young people attain fourth level. Senior leaders need to adopt a rigorous and robust strategic approach to monitoring and tracking progress through the BGE across the school, as a matter of urgency. This includes the need to identify trends and patterns. This will better support progression into the senior phase, including curriculum choices and learning pathways.

Senior Phase

- Based on average complementary tariff scores, the school is maintaining levels of performance for the lowest attaining 20%, middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% as they leave the school. Broadly between 2018/19 to 2022/23 for all these attainment groups, the school performs in line with the VC.
- As young people move through S4-S6, based on complementary tariff scores, school performance remains consistent and generally in line with the VC. By S6 based on the S4 roll, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% shows a decline over the last three years, between 2021/22 to 2023/24.

Breadth and depth

- At S4, there are sustained high standards of attainment at SCQF level 5C or better over time. The percentage of young people attaining National Qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better for one or more to three or more courses is significantly higher than the VC in the past three years from 2021/22 to 2023/24. For one or more to four or more courses, attainment at SCQF level 5A or better shows a decline over a three year period, 2021/22 to 2023/24.
- By S5, the school is maintaining good levels of performance at SCQF level 6C or better. The school has moved from performing significantly lower to being in line with the VC over the last two years. For one or more to five or more courses, attainment at SCQF level 6A or better shows a decline.
- By S6, although the school performs in line with the VC, attainment at SCQF level 6C or better and level 6A or better shows a decline over the last three years, 2021/22 to 2023/24. In identified years, the school at SCQF level 6A or better performs significantly lower or much lower than the VC.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Most young people are gaining skills and attributes through participation in clubs at lunchtime and after school. This includes a wide range of sporting and performing arts activities. A few young people are developing leadership and communication skills by taking part in leadership roles including House Captains and Sports Ambassadors.
- All young people in S3 participate in the Youth Philanthropy award. A few young people gain the Saltire Award for volunteering and the Prince's Trust Award. Young people recognise that these awards help them develop skills whilst taking responsibility for their own learning. There is scope for the school to explore the introduction of additional youth awards to fully recognise young peoples' achievements.
- The school has a system for recording the number of young people who participate in school clubs and activities. Senior leaders should now develop an approach to collecting data relating to achievements for all young people. They should use this data to target those young people

not participating and offer appropriate programmes. The school should support young people to understand better the progress they are making in skills development.

- Young people's achievements in and out of school are acknowledged within the school through the praise slip system and social media. This is helping to motivate young people to maintain their engagement in learning. Senior leaders could support young people and their parents better to recognise and celebrate all their achievements. This has the potential to contribute to a more positive school ethos where all young people's successes are acknowledged, shared and celebrated.

Equity for all learners

- Staff successfully address attendance issues and have measures in place to support the few young people who have persistent absence problems. Senior leaders effectively monitor and track the attendance for specific cohorts of young people, including those young people who are care experienced.
- Almost young people reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 8, 9 and 10. As these young people leave the school, they perform in line with young people living in the same deciles across Scotland.
- The percentage of young people in S4 and S5 who stay on at school is high. Between 2018/19 to 2022/23, almost all young people entered a positive destination on leaving school. The majority go to higher education on leaving school with a minority leaving to go to further education and employment.

Other relevant evidence

- 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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the local authority that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

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.