

21 December 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Golspie High School, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to Golspie High School. Our engagement helped us learn more about how young people and their families have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support young people's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

School leaders, teachers and all support staff responded well to providing support for young people and their families. As a result of COVID-19 lockdowns, regular mental health check-ins for all young people were established. Pastoral care staff contacted all families weekly. Well-planned tasks and activities were provided by teachers to support young people's learning. Parents and young people are appreciative of the efforts of teaching and support staff during both periods of school closures. A stronger sense of community has been developed, with stakeholders working well together to overcome the challenges of lockdown.

The school introduced wellbeing days which allowed young people to take part in a variety of fun activities. Young people had opportunities to build bug hotels, take and collate photos of the local area, and participate in baking and walking. The focus of these activities was to encourage time away from digital devices. Young people were awarded certificates for taking part and completing tasks. There was a focus on supporting young people with a range of different interventions, depending on their individual situations. One example of this involved subject and pastoral support staff providing early interventions to group of young people who were identified as having limited engagement in their school work.

In August 2021, there were a high number of COVID-19 cases within the school community. Consequently, there have been a number of challenges relating to staff and young people's attendance. For example, there challenges in providing continuity of teaching when staff were unwell or waiting for the outcome of PCR tests. Likewise, for more than a few young people, the experience of learning has been interrupted through illness or self-isolation due to family members testing positive or waiting on their own results.

Courses and programmes of work have been reviewed and amended since August to take account of gaps identified for individuals and groups of pupils. For example, in mathematics, gaps in learning and skills were identified. These are being addressed across the department

through a focus on algebra, basic skills such as times tables and strategies including how to identify your own errors.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Staff are providing meaningful opportunities for young people to develop their skills. There has been a considerable focus on the school values and young people in classes share a common understanding of the meaning of trust and respect. Further work to extend young people's voice and to help them discuss the skills they continue to develop will build further on this positive progress.

There are many positive examples of young people achieving well despite the challenges of lockdowns and restrictions. Nineteen young people are building their skills and developing aspects of their leadership through participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Four have already achieved bronze awards. Their achievements included supporting their local community by making face masks and delivering meals. Young people also achieved well in a wide range of sports including horse riding, rowing, soccer and rugby. Young people developed their performance skills through successfully playing pipes at the opening of the National Mod in Eden Court and at local fundraisers.

Online learning has been welcomed and is increasing in use with staff and young people. For example, they are making more effective use of the Scholar and Highland Virtual Academy learning offers. The careers advisor has set up a helpful online space, where information about all course choices and future pathways can be found.

Parents, staff and young people are now better informed about the life and work of the school. The headteacher and staff have worked well in recent years to improve communication and to let parents know more about what is happening in the school. Parents have valued the more regular and bespoke communication necessary as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns. Home-school partnerships are strengthened as a result. The school should continue to develop learner and parental voice to influence school policy and practice more fully.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. The Highland Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Gary Johnstone
HM Inspector