

# Summarised inspection findings

**Dornoch Academy**

The Highland Council

23 May 2023

## Key contextual information

School Name	Dornoch Academy
Council:	The Highland Council
SEED number:	5109434
Roll:	197 young people

Dornoch Academy is a six-year non-denominational school situated in the county of Sutherland, Northern Scotland.

Dornoch Academy is part of the Dornoch Firth 3 – 18 Campus which also comprises Dornoch Primary and Nursery school and Bonar Bridge Primary and Nursery school. The school provides progression from Gaelic Medium Primary Education, with Gaelic (Learners) taught throughout the broad general education (BGE).

The headteacher has been in post for a few months as a substantive headteacher, having led the primary and secondary schools in an acting capacity for approximately three years. The Senior Learning Team comprises the headteacher and three depute headteachers (DHT). One DHT with responsibility in the secondary school was appointed in November 2021. The other two DHTs have responsibilities in the primary and nursery schools.

There have been significant changes to staffing across the school over the last two years. This has led to a few temporary solutions to maintain as broad a curriculum as possible.

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

Exclusions are consistently below the national average.

In February 2022 12.5 percent of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2021 no pupils live in 20% most deprived datazones in Scotland.

In September 2021 the school reported that 41.7 percent of pupils had additional support needs.

## 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

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

- Staff have created a positive ethos at Dornoch Academy based on their commitment to the school values of 'achieving, belonging and caring'. Young people enjoy a very calm and engaging learning environment in which they feel valued and well-supported. Strong, trusting relationships between staff and young people result in young people being very keen to learn and proud of their school. Staff are aspirational for young people, and this motivates young people to do well in their learning.
- Almost all young people engage well in their learning. In most lessons, young people experience appropriate levels of challenge. Young people particularly enjoy learning when engaged in pair and group work. In a few instances, when given the opportunity to lead aspects of their learning, young people's motivation and learning are enhanced. This helps to maintain their interest and focus. In a few curricular areas the learning experience is too passive, opportunities for young people to be active and lead their learning are too limited.
- Overall, the quality of teaching at Dornoch Academy is good. In a minority of lessons, teachers demonstrate highly effective practice. In most lessons, teachers use thoughtful and creative approaches that support learning effectively. In most lessons the pace of learning is well-matched to learners' abilities and aptitudes. Most teachers design tasks and activities that are set at the right level of difficulty. This includes, in a minority of lessons, well-structured questioning that engages young people and challenges their thinking. Teachers should consider how they can incorporate higher order thinking skills into more learning opportunities for young people.
- Senior leaders are aware of the need to ensure that learning experiences across the school, for all young people, are consistently of a high quality. Teachers worked together to develop a suggested lesson format to encourage greater consistency of practice. As a result, most lessons are well-structured and thoughtfully planned. In most cases, teachers explain what young people are learning and how they will know if they have been successful. In the most effective lessons, these aspects are revisited in plenaries that support young people to reflect on their learning. There is scope to share this practice more widely across the school.
- Senior leaders implemented robust quality assurance processes that focus on improving learners' experiences. This includes classroom visits by senior leaders, teacher research projects and staff focus groups. As a result, young people are experiencing greater consistency in the structure of lessons and staff are better informed about priorities for improvement. Senior leaders have also begun to engage young people in evaluation activities to hear their views of their experiences in classrooms.

- All young people have been issued with a digital device. Young people use a range of learning platforms and benefit from being able to access learning at home. There is scope for staff to develop further approaches that use digital contexts imaginatively to maximise learners' engagement and progress. For example, providing discrete support in class.
- In the BGE teachers have a sound understanding of National Benchmarks and use appropriate approaches to assess young people's progress. In a majority of curricular areas, young people's learning is enhanced through their participation in self- and peer-assessment activities. Teachers use moderation activities effectively to enhance the reliability of their professional judgement of achievement of a Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) level. Teachers should extend their approaches to moderation to include a focus on transitions. This will ensure a shared understanding of standards and expectations across the 3-18 campus and support progression in learning as young people progress from primary school.
- Teachers understand and apply relevant criteria within assessment activities in the senior phase. As a result, teachers identify effectively the progress learners are making and respond appropriately to instances of under-achievement. A significant number of teachers are engaged as Scottish Qualification Authority appointees. Overall, teachers are confident when making judgements regarding young people's progress within certificated courses.
- Teachers provide high quality feedback to young people through regular learning conversations. In a minority of curricular areas, young people benefit from teachers using digital channels to support ongoing dialogue about young people's progress. Teachers use attainment data to inform young people of their progress in learning. Most young people feel that the feedback they receive improves their learning. In most curricular areas young people are aware of the level they are working at and what they need to do to ensure they make further progress. Young people increasingly reflect on their progress in learning through well-structured activities. In the most effective cases young people develop personal learning plans or use learning logs to record areas of strength and aspects for further development.
- Almost all teachers track young people's progress effectively and identify young people who are at risk of not achieving their potential. Tracking systems at classroom and faculty level help teachers plan universal and targeted interventions for young people including for those facing additional challenges. For example, young people living in financial hardship or with English as an Additional Language.
- Almost all teachers monitor the progress of young people in lessons well and plan learning to meet the needs of almost all young people. Most teachers analyse data well to ensure they respond to young people's learning needs flexibly. This includes for example; changing topics in the BGE to better enhance the learning needs of a class; differentiating learning for young people with additional support needs in a particular area; or being flexible with pathways in the senior phase. This creativity helps ensure young people achieve at the appropriate level.

## 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

Senior leaders, together with staff developed a policy for raising attainment across the campus in 2019. This includes ensuring a focus on increasing ambition and aspirations, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and improving literacy and numeracy across the school. This has led to some key improvements in literacy. Alongside this policy teachers are improving their use of data to identify priorities for improving attainment of young people. All staff should now work together to review this policy to ensure that it leads to improved attainment for young people across all curricular areas. It would be helpful to include specific detail and actions to enable progress to be monitored more effectively and to continue to develop staff's use of data to improve outcomes for young people.

### Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Almost all teachers track young people's progress over time using a range of data such as standardised testing, CfE levels and senior phase attainment. This leads to appropriate planning and interventions to improve attainment. This is particularly evident in tracking literacy levels from 3-18 leading to improvements in literacy at all levels.

### BGE

- By the end of S3 almost all young people attained third CfE level in reading, writing and listening and talking in 2018/19 and in 2021/22. Less than half of young people attained fourth CfE level in reading, writing and listening and talking in 2021/22.
- For numeracy, by the end of the BGE, almost all young people attained third CfE level in 2018/19 and most in 2021/22. The majority of young people attained fourth CfE level in 2018/19 and 2021/22.
- Teachers across the primary and secondary schools work together in groups to improve literacy for young people. As a result of this work, young people are encouraged to track their literacy skills development through the use of helpful skills trackers in English. In a few other subject areas young people complete learning logs or personal planning documents. These strategies help young people recognise the progress they are making across a range of subjects and what they need to do to improve in their learning. All teachers now need to recognise their role in improving the literacy and numeracy of young people.

### Senior phase – leavers

#### Literacy

- Almost all young people leaving school in 2019/20 and in 2021/22 achieved Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy. In 2020/21 most young people left with SCQF level 5 or better. The percentage of young people attaining SCQF level 6 or better

in literacy by the time they leave school has improved from 2018/19 to 2021/22. Performance at this level is in line with the virtual comparator (VC).

## **Numeracy**

- Most young people leaving school in 2020/21 and the majority of young people in 2021/22 attained SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. Less than half of young people leaving school from 2017/18 and 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy. This is in line with the VC.

## **Senior phase – cohorts**

### **Literacy and numeracy**

- Overall, young people in S4, by S5 and by S6 attain in line with the VC at SCQF level 5 and SCQF level 6 for both literacy and numeracy. By S5, attainment in literacy at SCQF level 5 and level 6 is at its highest level in the latest year 2021/22.
- Senior leaders recognise that attainment in maths and numeracy, particularly in the BGE, has been impacted by staffing difficulties. They have been creative in finding solutions. This has ensured that attainment in maths and numeracy in the senior phase has remained largely in line with the VC.

## **Attainment over time**

### **BGE**

- Teachers track and monitor progress of young people in all curricular areas in the BGE using a variety of different systems and assessments. This affords them the opportunity to have focussed conversations with young people about their learning. Senior leaders have an overview of progress of young people across the school. They are working to develop a bespoke system which is more consistent across all areas of the school.

## **Senior phase**

### **Improving attainment for all**

#### **Leavers:**

- When compared using complementary tariff points, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20%, the middle attaining 60% and the highest attaining 20% of leavers is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2021/22. There have been improvements in the attainment of these groups of leavers.

#### **Cohorts**

- Overall attainment for all young people is in line with the VC, using complementary tariff points. At S4 and by S5, based on the S4 roll, the complementary tariff scores for the middle attaining 60% of young people has improved in 2021/22. The complementary tariff scores for the lowest attaining 20% of young people by S5 improved each year from 2018/19 to 2021/22. By S6 based on the S4 roll, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20%, middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people declined in 2021/22.

## **Senior phase**

### **Breadth and depth**

- The majority of young people currently study six courses in S4. Senior leaders altered the curriculum model for session 2022/23 to enable young people to study up to eight courses in S4 from 2023/24. Senior leaders should keep changes to the curriculum under close review. By S5 the number of young people taking five courses improved in 2021/22 to the majority, from 2020/21 when less than half studied this number. A quarter of young people study four courses in S6 in 2021/22.

- In S4, the majority of young people attain four or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better from 2018/19 to 2021/22, in line with the VC. Less than half of young people attain six or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better which is in line with the VC from 2017/18 to 2021/22.
- By S5, less than half of young people attain five or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better, and a few attain five or more awards at 6A or better, from 2017/18 to 2021/22, in line with the VC.
- By S6, the percentage of young people attaining one or more to six or more awards at SCQF levels 6C or better is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2021/22. This improved from being significantly below the VC in 2018/19 to in line with the VC. The percentage of young people attaining three or more to five or more awards at SCQF levels 6A or better is in line with the VC from 2019/20 to 2021/22. This improved from being significantly below the VC in 2018/19 to in line with the VC. The percentage of young people attaining one or more, to three or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better, or 7A, is in line with the VC from 2018/19 to 2021/22.

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

- Young people engage in a broad range of sporting, musical and creative activities. These help prepare young people to be successful both in and post school and to broaden their cultural horizons. For example, teachers provide educational excursions linked to a range of curricular areas. These include a French exchange, a visit to the Battlefields in France and Belgium, and excursions to London and Edinburgh. All planned outings from the school help develop knowledge and understanding, self-confidence and awareness of others in the young people who participate in them. Staff plan to develop further the Youth Philanthropy Initiative and re-establish the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award for all young people in S3.
- A few young people gain accreditation for personal achievements, particularly in the senior phase. For example, in furniture making and horse care. as Activities such as mentoring in the primary school are beginning to be recognised through the SQA Volunteering award. Young people benefit from leadership roles in the Pupil Council and have used the 'How Good is OUR School?' evaluative framework to identify areas for improvement. These roles help young people develop organisational and team working skills, improve their self-esteem and recognise their role in a democracy. Young people's achievements are recognised and celebrated well across the school, for example through house points, achievement certificates, end of year awards ceremonies and in assemblies.
- There are strong examples of how senior leaders ensure all young people benefit from achievements. For example, young people with additional support needs volunteer in a local care home and compete in the Disability Highland Games. This improves their confidence and social skills. For those for whom rurality is a barrier to accessing opportunities staff provide innovative solutions such as specialist careers coaching on-line or seeking funding for work placements further afield. Senior leaders should build on this strong practice by systematically tracking young people's achievements and the skills young people develop. This will support young people recognise the skills they are developing as a result of these learning experiences.

### **Equity for all learners:**

- The majority of young people remain at school to S6. The school have very effective links with local businesses and the college that is extending the range of learning pathways for young people. For example, the provision of rural skills and construction are encouraging higher stay on rates at school. The percentage of young people entering an initial positive destination after school is in line with the VC over the last five years from 2017/18 to 2021/22. Senior leaders

reported that all young people moved into an initial positive destination when they left school in 2022/23. From 2019/20 to 2021/22 the majority of young people leave school for further or higher education. Just over a quarter move into employment on leaving school.

## Other relevant evidence

- The school provides progression from Gaelic Medium Primary Education, with Gaelic (Learners) taught throughout the BGE. A few young people in S1, S2 and in S3 study Gaelic as their second language throughout the BGE. Senior leaders should consider how this will be continued and developed as these young people progress into the senior phase.
- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to compliance with the Nutritional Regulations and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007(the Act). The Health and Nutrition Inspector discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of 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 catering service.

## 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.