

12 December 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

In March 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Northfield Academy. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeen City Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again in September 2023. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the headteacher. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Identified Areas for Improvement from previous inspection.

Senior and middle leaders should work to improve the strategic leadership of all areas of the school. Review and update the school's vision and values. There should be a clear and shared understanding of the expectations, direction and identity of Northfield Academy. Ensure plans for improvement are agreed with young people, teachers and parents.

The headteacher needs to provide greater strategic direction to improve the school. Staff are beginning to work together but they need to continue to build positive relationships. Staff need to ensure they fully involve parents and young people in helping the school to improve.

A few small improvements have been made since the last inspection. Staff, young people and parents worked on a new set of school values, Nurture, Flourish, Achieve, and these are now displayed across the school. Staff now need to listen and talk to young people to help to build clear expectations and better relationships using the new values.

Faculty leaders are keen to help to move the school forward. They need to be more involved in making decisions about what to change.

A number of areas still require urgent attention. The headteacher needs to involve young people, staff and parents to agree a simple and well understood school improvement plan. The headteacher needs to improve communication with parents.

The new S1 crew area is providing a safe experience for young people. However, its purpose needs to be made clearer for young people and parents. Staff should create a clear plan to support young people to move from S1 into S2 at the start of the new session. Young people, parents and teachers across the school should be more involved in these discussions.

Develop a calm, safe and purposeful learning environment. Build positive relationships across the school. Young people should be central to discussions about behaviour expectations and feeling safe in school.

Staff have started to help young people to feel safe in school and pupil behaviour in corridors and social areas is calmer at times. A significant minority of young people say they do not feel safe or do not know if they feel safe in school. Young people and parents continue to have concerns about bullying. Staff need to work with young people to ensure incidents of bullying are reduced and are properly recorded and managed. Too many young people continue to leave class without permission. This is affecting their learning and needs to be addressed urgently. The safety of young people must be ensured at all times.

Agree with staff a shared understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment. Develop effective processes to plan, track and monitor young people's progress.

Teachers are beginning to work together to improve learning and teaching. They recognise that young people now need to be more involved in discussions about what works for them to help support their learning. Staff and young people need to agree a set of expectations for good behaviour and positive relationships. This should be shared widely and must be the basis for readiness to learn. All staff need to apply the same standards and expectations to classroom relationships and behaviour. Senior leaders need to support staff and young people across the whole school.

The S1 experience provides a positive learning environment. Relationships are friendly and supportive and have helped S1 to settle into the new school. Staff now need to review the pace of learning to make sure young people are challenged appropriately in S1 and beyond.

Staff should continue to develop a system to track young people's progress in learning. This will help ensure young people understand the progress they are making and what they need to improve. Parents should have a clearer understanding of their child's attainment at all stages.

Ensure the wellbeing needs of all young people are a key part of all school activities. Clarify procedures relating to pupil attendance and time keeping.

Staff have been working on a plan to improve pupil wellbeing. They should now involve young people in developing a shared understanding of how their wellbeing will be improved. Guidance staff are aware they need to improve the Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme but are struggling to balance daily demands with making these important changes. All staff need to be involved in supporting wellbeing across the school. This is the responsibility of all staff.

Pupil attendance and timekeeping are not yet sufficiently well monitored. Too many young people are missing from class and are therefore at risk of poor attainment. All staff need to be part of the solution to support young people to come to school. Parents and young people should also be involved in this discussion. This is an area requiring urgent attention.

Urgently improve attainment from S1 to S6. Review the number of young people who leave school in S4 and S5, and those who do not go to a positive destination. Make plans to support broader achievements for all young people. The school should demonstrate how young people on reduced timetables are included, educated and safe.

Staff recognise that attainment at all stages needs to improve. Senior leaders need to work closely with faculty heads to look at the data they gather about young people's progress in learning. They need to ensure all data is valid and they need to identify where young people may need support in learning. Teachers need to work together to make sure young people are supported to achieve their maximum potential.

Too many young people still leave school after S4 and S5 and the numbers of young people entering a positive destination after school is reducing. As a matter of urgency, staff should focus on targeted groups of young people who have not attended regularly. Staff need to work closely with this group to provide extra help to support another year in school or a positive destination. All young people in the senior phase should have appropriate support, including a careers interview, before making course choices.

What happens next?

The school has made insufficient progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Aberdeen City Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We are maintaining contact with the school and will carry out a progress visit within 3 months of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Aberdeen City Council the details of this visit. Following the visit, we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Ann Floyd
HM Inspector