

Summarised inspection findings

Whitburn Academy

West Lothian Council

21 January 2020

Key contextual information

Attendance is generally in line with the national average (90%). Levels of exclusions have halved since 2016/17 and are now much closer to national averages. In February 2019, 24% of pupils were registered for free school meals. In September 2019, 28% of pupils live in 20% most deprived datazones in Scotland. In September 2019, the school reported that 38% 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

- The school values of compassion, integrity and respect are significant influences on the climate for learning across the school. They are frequently referenced in classrooms and help to shape a positive ethos in which young people are keen to learn. Within a purposeful learning environment young people engage strongly with their learning. When working in groups and working independently, levels of engagement are heightened. In a few lessons, learning is overly teacher-led and is too passive. Most young people enjoy and participate well in their learning.
- Young people are increasingly given opportunities to engage in the wider life of the school. Such engagement raises their levels of motivation to learn. Through, for example, their input into the school's position paper on learning and teaching and their role as subject ambassadors, young people are helping to improve experiences and outcomes for other learners. Similarly, in a range of contexts across curriculum areas they engage effectively in peer-supported learning. A daily paired-reading event is hosted in the library. This is supporting learners who face challenges with literacy. Young people often take a leading role in house assemblies.
- The school is beginning to increase the range of ways in which the opinions of young people are sought. The Pupil Leadership Group supports young people to participate in aspects of school improvement. This has included influencing the schools' revised values. In a few curriculum areas, feedback from learners has led to improvements in how learning happens. Extending this approach further should enhance levels of engagement shown by young people.
- Almost all teachers feel that the school vision and values underpin their work. They plan lessons thoroughly and support learners through designing tasks and activities that are appropriate in meeting the needs of most learners. Senior leaders are aware of the need to continue to extend approaches to learning that take full account of the school profile. Teachers need to develop further their approaches to differentiation to ensure that tasks and activities are well-matched to the needs of all learners.
- When teachers share the purpose of learning in creative ways young people respond positively and understand the expectations of them. In a few lessons, young people are encouraged to

participate in jointly planning learning. This deepens their engagement and understanding. Young people are increasingly encouraged to engage in their learning in this way.

- Young people's learning is made more relevant through teachers' application of a well-designed skills framework. Young people are able to reference the skills they are developing. In a few lessons, this includes young people being able to identify relevant employment-related skills.
- The school has strong examples that illustrate how learning in a digital context is effectively supporting young people. In almost all classes, technologies are used that extend the range of teaching resources. Increasingly, software packages are being used that allow for high levels of inter-active learning. Teachers across the school should now look to exploit further the potential of learning in this way. The school provides technological hardware that supports equity of access to this context for learning.
- Very effective strategic planning has been a significant influence in ensuring that young people at Whitburn Academy benefit from an increasingly high quality of learning experience. For example, improvements in practice have been steered by a programme of teacher-led validated self-evaluation activities. Staff also have access to an extensive and well-focused programme of professional learning. This has been collaborative in nature and has been supportive of empowering staff to lead change.
- Staff show significant commitment to professional learning and they are becoming well-skilled in providing motivational learning experiences for young people. For example, the needs of young people receiving additional support are being met with greater consistency across the school. Practitioner enquiry and peer-led staff development have become ongoing features within the school's approach to professional learning. A high number of teachers have assumed roles in assessing SQA courses and this greater in-depth knowledge of expectations is having a positive impact on raising attainment. Staff at Whitburn Academy identify themselves as being very much a part of a learning community.
- A wide range of formative and summative assessment strategies inform reliable teacher judgements. These include discussion and debate, group work, digital assessments and presentations. Teachers interact very well with young people and make effective use of assessment to inform well-timed interventions and agree next steps in learning. This is leading to good progress in learning and young people feeling well supported.
- In most lessons, teachers support progression in learning through providing young people with feedback that indicates their next steps in learning. School leaders have successfully increased consistency in this area with regard to both the frequency and quality of feedback. Teachers now employ a wide range of strategies that support learners in knowing how they can further improve. These include feedback in jotters, verbal feedback, peer to peer feedback and through digital platforms. Strong examples of feedback being used across the school should be shared more widely across the school. Additionally, staff should continue to seek new and innovative ways in feeding back in order to further develop a culture where feedback is an integral feature of all lessons.
- Teachers are becoming increasingly confident in using the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) National Benchmarks as part of the moderation process in the Broad General Education at both school and cluster level. Looking outwards to work with networks of staff from other schools is improving the accuracy and robustness of teacher judgements. This is also helping staff to plan learning and adapt and adjust courses where necessary. In the senior phase, teachers engage in a range of moderation activities and data analysis to enhance pupil

experiences. This supports young people to make informed decisions about appropriate career and curricular pathways.

- Feedback from assessments are regularly communicated to parents to support them in helping their child with motivation and engagement in their school work. The school should continue to work closely in partnership with parents to offer a range of opportunities to encourage engagement about the timing, purpose and relevance of assessment. This will develop a culture of learning at home and foster ambition and aspiration in what young people can achieve.
- The school has a comprehensive, robust tracking and monitoring system which is used consistently across departments and faculties. This enables senior leaders and staff to clearly identify where young people are in their learning and the progress they are making over time. Through tracking and monitoring discussions, young people provide information about their career aspirations, wider achievement, skills and attributes. They are supported in their decision making about appropriate curriculum choices and opportunities to develop key skills through learner participation. This enhances their future career prospects and employability.
- The tracking system enables staff to understand what supports are being offered to young people, their level of learner participation and assessment information. This valuable information supports teachers to plan for learning which meet the needs of young people. A wide range of factors, including poverty related barriers to learning, are recognised by staff and addressed at the early planning stage. This allows well-timed interventions to be put in place to support learners. Staff regularly track, review and evaluate the effectiveness of planned interventions which are intended to improve outcomes for young people.

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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very 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

Broad general education (BGE)

- The school provided BGE data, including data for 2019, which shows a variable picture of attainment in literacy and numeracy by the end of the BGE. The figures took a dip in 2018 but have recovered in 2019. In 2019 by the end of S3, almost all young people achieved CfE third level in reading, writing, listening and talking. Most young people achieved third level in numeracy. Senior leaders are aware that in previous years, data linked to professional judgement of a CfE level needed to be more robust and reliable. As a result, increased planned opportunities for staff to be involved in moderation activity within the local cluster is now a higher priority. Senior leaders believe that this is helping improve teacher professional judgement across the cluster.
- Data supplied by the school shows that, by the end of S3 in 2019, the majority of young people achieved fourth level in literacy and numeracy. The data suggests improvement in reading, writing, talking and listening as well as numeracy since 2016. The school has deployed a range of additional support, resources and interventions to improve literacy in the last session, including additional staffing to provide more intensive support to groups of learners. The school has been successful in helping a group of learners who previously had been reluctant readers. These young people have become reading ambassadors successfully winning the First Ministers' Reading Challenge Inspiration Award. In their literacy period, all S1 young people read for 10 minutes in class. This initiative has had a positive impact on young people including those in targeted groups. It also has the potential to raise reading levels more widely.
- The headteacher and her staff, as a school community, are increasingly aspirational for all young people. Teachers have been engaging more with moderation of achievement of a level for literacy, to help bring about improvements in achievement and attainment. The school should continue to develop further courses and planning at fourth level in order to raise attainment further and prepare young people for the senior phase.
- Teachers use their professional judgement, Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs), other standardised assessments and a range of other information, to monitor improvement in young people's attainment. The school has very effective approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's attainment and achievements across the BGE and senior phase. Senior leaders have worked closely to support staff and improve teachers' interpretation of attainment and progress data. This is helping to lead to better understanding of the improvements required to raise the attainment and achievement of young people.

- The school has clear policies with high expectations of all teachers to have responsibility for literacy and numeracy. Moderation is becoming well embedded and staff are increasingly taking responsibility for literacy and numeracy beyond the mathematics and English departments.

Senior phase

Literacy and numeracy

- All or almost all young people leaving school in the past five years, have achieved literacy at SCQF level 3 or better and level 4 or better and most leavers achieved literacy at SCQF level 5 or better in the last three years. All or almost all young people leaving school in the past five years, have achieved numeracy at SCQF level 3 or better and 4 or better and almost all leavers achieved literacy at SCQF level 5 or better in the last four years.
- There are improving trends in the last five years in the percentages of young people leaving school with literacy or numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better. Since 2014/15, performance in SCQF level 4 numeracy has been much higher than the virtual comparator (VC). The trend, for young people leaving with additional support needs, attaining SCQF level 4 or better in literacy and numeracy has been an improving one for the last five years.
- Between 2013/14 and 2017/18 in S4, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 3 and level 4 or better in literacy has been higher or much higher than the VC in three out of five years. By S5 in the latest five years, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 5 and 6 or better in literacy has remained at a high level or increased. In the latest year, this is significantly higher than the VC at level 5 and level 6 or better. By S6, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 6 or better, improved between 2014/15 and 2017/18 but had a slight dip in the latest year.
- Between 2014/15 and 2018/19 in S4, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 3 and level 4 or better in numeracy has been higher or much higher than the VC in all five years. At SCQF level 5 or better, the percentage of young people attaining has improved and been higher or much higher in three of the last five years. By S5 in the latest five years, the percentage of young people attaining numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better has often been higher or much higher than the VC. At SCQF level 5 or better, the percentage of young people attaining was much significantly lower than the VC in 2014/15 and 2015/16 and since then has been in line with or significantly much higher than the VC. By S6, the percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 4 and 5 or better is much higher than the VC. At SCQF level 6 or better, performance is in line with the VC in three of the last five years but significantly lower in the other two.

Attainment over time

BGE

- Senior leaders have a systematic strategic overview of progress over time in the BGE. Staff are increasingly making good use of data from primary schools. Teachers are using this information from primary colleagues with more confidence. This is helping increase teachers' knowledge of young people's prior learning to improve progression and have a clearer view of how young people are achieving across the curriculum. Senior leaders believe that staff have improved their judgement of young people's progress through and achievement of a CfE levels. Teachers are able to show the progress of learners through the BGE, regularly refreshing the tracking system with updates. The system allows teachers, as well as senior leaders, to benchmark over time. It also allows staff to compare the attainment of individual young people across all curriculum areas. Increasingly, young people are discussing with their teachers and support staff how to progress their learning and setting targets for improvement.

Teachers work collaboratively with other colleagues within the school and across the cluster and local hub of neighbouring secondary schools, to improve their judgement of young people's progress through and achievement of a CfE level. Teachers have a greater focus on National Benchmarks, particularly at fourth level, to ensure an appropriate gradient of learning.

- The school's robust approaches to tracking young people's progress has allowed it to respond better to young people's needs and interests with regard to curriculum pathways within the BGE and senior phase.

Senior phase

- Young people study on average seven courses in S4, six courses in S5 and five courses in S6 in the senior phase. Staff have refreshed the curriculum to widen the range of courses and programmes available. As a result, there has been an improvement in a number of outcomes for young people. The school is using local market intelligence to refresh the curriculum offer with courses in creative industries, retail and first aid helping with employability.
- The performance of the young people leaving the school with the lowest 20% and middle 60% tariff points (complementary) has improved over the period 2013/14 to 2017/18. There is scope for improvement for the highest attaining 20% of young people as this has remained around the same level but always in line with the VC. For the lowest attaining 20% this was significantly higher than the VC in 2017/18.
- The performance of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people in S4 and S5 has increased and is often higher than the VC.

Breadth and depth

- In S4, the percentage of young people achieving six or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better is in line with the VC over the past five years. The percentage attaining one to three qualifications at this level has been significantly higher than the VC in the past two years. In 2019, the percentage of S4 obtaining qualifications at 5C or better has improved to the highest in the past five years. At SCQF level 5A or better there is headroom for improvement and the school is aware that securing greater numbers of passes at 'A' and 'B' is a next step. By S5, there are improvements in some measures over time for 6 or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better and these are broadly in line with the VC. However at 5+ SCQF level 6A or better there is scope for improvement.
- The number of learners with additional needs gaining qualifications at SCQF level 3 has increased and the school is now more aspirational in also presenting young people, where appropriate, at SCQF level 4.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Almost all young people participate in a very impressive range of opportunities for achievement. The school has developed wider achievement pathways to support the achievement and attainment of all young people. Many of the recognised and accredited wider achievement such as CREST the nationally recognised scheme for student-led project work in the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths), an international car company challenge, Employability and Youth Achievement Awards are supported by the school's approach to timetable such programmes within the BGE and the senior phase. All young people over 16 years train for and are presented for a first aid qualification. This wide range of provision is enabling almost all young people to experience additional opportunities, acquire new skills and gain further accreditation.

- The school has well-developed systems that enable staff to very effectively track young people's achievements. Young people are encouraged to engage in a range of opportunities to ensure breadth of participation both in and out of school. Young people enjoy having access to a wide range of before and after school activities which are enhancing their physical, social and emotional wellbeing.
- Through the many planned programmes, young people across the school are given the opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills and develop further their social skills. All departments, through the school's skills framework, support young people in the development of skills for life. This is ensuring that young people are gaining greater confidence in team working, problem solving and communication.
- The school's work around the development of literacy achieved national recognition in the First Minister's Reading challenge. This along with other initiatives, for example, S6 reading buddies for children in a local primary school, paired reading and the production of a "building a reading culture" video are leading to a literacy-rich and reading strong culture.
- Many young people contribute to the life and work of the community for example through the S3 Youth Philanthropy Initiative which is supporting many local charities within the area. The school actively fosters a culture of volunteering encouraging many young people to participate in various leadership roles. These include mentoring, buddying, reading ambassadors and pupil leadership roles such as the pupil leadership group. Within the senior phase, young people are involved in the mental health initiatives and programmes such as Mentors in Violence Project which are making a significant contribution to the personal and social development of peers.

Equity for all learners

- Teachers are well aware of the context of the school and the gaps in attainment, including poverty-related gaps. Senior leaders and teachers view the wider context as important factor but not as an issue which defines individuals or the school community. The school has developed a range of stretch aims which set targets for narrowing the gap between groups of learners.
- The school has a well-developed and robust system to monitor the progress young people are making in their learning. This enables staff to identify those factors that may act as barriers to learning and design interventions that are bespoke to meet the needs of individual learners. A considered, strategic approach to the use of Pupil Equity Funding is effective in promoting equity and success for all learners. As a result, attainment in literacy and numeracy has improved for targeted young people. A whole-school approach to health and wellbeing has led to significant improvements across the school. In particular, the 'Be Herd' initiative, contributed to the school winning the CoSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) award for 'tackling inequality and improving health'. This initiative has enabled honest and open dialogue around raising awareness and reducing the stigma of mental health issues. This is empowering young people to participate more effectively in their learning and in the life of the school and community. Staff should continue to explore ways to develop a proactive pupil participation across the school and embed the rights of young people more explicitly in the school's vision, values and aims.
- The school's cost of the school day initiative enables young people from families facing financial hardship to attend, participate and engage in a range of activities. In 2019, 93% of young people left school for a positive destination. This included young people from all SIMD deciles, including deciles one and two.

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.