

14 February 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Common Thread School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Common Thread Schools. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in February 2020. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. 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. 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.

Provide a purposeful sense of direction for continuous improvement.

Able supported by staff across both hubs, the acting headteacher has continued to provide the school with a clearer sense of direction. This session, alongside the whole school improvement plan, each hub has their own improvement plan which focuses on priorities relevant to their own setting. Although staffing issues continue to delay the pace of change, the school is progressing well in ensuring young people receive their Curriculum for Excellence learning entitlements. Teachers are offering young people more structured and purposeful learning activities. Led by senior leaders, staff have worked hard to continue to improve the culture in the school and foster positive relationships.

Learners' attendance continues to be a major area of concern. The majority of young people struggle to sustain high rates of school attendance. Although it is recognised that many young people have had periods of interrupted learning, they need to be supported better to engage with their learning. Young people should be encouraged to access their learning programmes by all Common Thread Group staff. In doing so, all education staff and care staff must ensure they maintain high expectations of what young people can achieve and the importance of attending school.

Introduce more rigorous and robust self-evaluation approaches. In particular, the service should identify ways to better seek the views of young people, parents, and partners.

The acting headteacher and staff recognise the importance of evaluating the work of the school. They have introduced a range of worthwhile approaches to support staff to identify what is working well and what needs to improve. Senior leaders regularly seek the views of young people, parents and staff and these impact on school improvement. Senior leaders' now have systems in place to monitor better attainment and approaches to keep young people safe. Senior leaders now need to introduce closer monitoring of learning and teaching, and the impact of new curriculum initiatives.

The service needs to review the length of the school week across each education site and continue to develop the curriculum.

Both school hubs offer young people an appropriate length of school week. Young people are receiving their entitlement to full-time education across the broad general education (BGE) and senior phase.

Increased partnership working between the two hubs is supporting teachers to develop the curriculum in both sites. Young people now have a wider range of subjects and courses to choose from. As a result, they can gain a larger number of National Qualifications and wider awards. Young people are benefitting from improved personalised learning programmes which meet better their needs and aspirations. Senior leaders should now work with teachers to increase the pace of the BGE curriculum development.

Improve approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's progress with their learning.

Teachers from across the two hubs are developing a shared understanding of assessment and tracking. As a result, teachers are building their confidence and beginning to plan learning more effectively using Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes. Teachers are tracking better what young people can do and determining the next steps in their learning. Teachers now need to develop further their approaches to assessing young people's progress. The increased use of moderation activities will support teachers in making accurate professional judgements.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will ask for a report on progress within one year of the inspection. This report will inform any decision made by Education Scotland regarding further engagement. This may include another inspection visit. When such a decision is made, we will write to you again detailing the improvements the school has made and outlining any further action, agreed with Common Thread Schools that we intend to take.

Steven McPherson
HM Inspector