

3 May 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Ardrossan Academy
North Ayrshire Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports young people to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including literacy across learning, developments in science from S1 to S3 and the opportunities for learning and achievement beyond the classroom. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving young people's education.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Young people learn and achieve well at Ardrossan Academy. They are motivated and positive about their learning experiences and proud of their school. They enjoy their learning and feel encouraged and supported to do their best. Across the school, they participate actively, undertaking a wide variety of engaging and interesting learning activities and contributing confidently in lessons. Young people enjoy the collaborative approaches to learning being used in most classes. We have asked staff to work towards ensuring consistently high-quality learning experiences for young people across the school. Young people receive regular feedback from teachers and this is helping them to identify their strengths and next steps in learning. We have asked staff to continue to develop young people's understanding of what they do well and what they need to improve. The school is planning to review the use of the Ardrossan Academy Learning Journals to support this process. Young people and staff are very positive about the improvement in the school ethos in recent years. There is a strong sense of community across the school. Young people show willingness to get involved in a range of activities such as student councils, eco committee or roles such as buddies, peer leaders or sports leaders. S6 house captains enthusiastically plan and lead events such as 'Inter-House Antics' and sports competitions, which are successfully developing house identity. The school values achievement highly and celebrates it through the local media, school newsletters, assembly presentations and its very active Twitter feed. This is contributing to the positive school culture where success is celebrated and used to inspire others. The recently introduced 'Ad Astra' awards are ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to succeed.

Young people benefit from a wide range of opportunities to achieve beyond the classroom. Many young people participate in a range of music, cultural, and sporting activities. They are developing their confidence and performance skills through participating in the school choirs, the ceilidh band, the Young Musician of the Year competition and the Ayrshire Music Festival. Young people experience success in a range of sports such as basketball, rugby, football and athletics. Most young people in S5 and S6 participate in the Youth Philanthropy Initiative. This is developing their confidence and building stronger links with the local community. An increasing number of young people gain awards such as Saltire awards for volunteering, The Duke of Edinburgh's award, John Muir award and sports coaching qualifications. These awards recognise new skills, active citizenship and personal commitment. All young people in S1 have the opportunity to achieve awards such as the CREST award for science and the SQA Wellbeing award through their wider achievement course. These awards are introducing them to the range of knowledge and skills they will develop further as they progress through the school. We have asked the school to develop a clearer overview of young people's achievements. This will ensure all young people benefit from the opportunities on offer to help them develop important skills for learning, life and work. Young people would benefit from more regular opportunities to talk about the skills they are developing through these activities. This will increase their confidence and self-esteem and help them understand how these skills can be applied in their lives beyond school.

Overall, young people are making good progress as they move through the school from S1 to S3. The school recognises the need for more reliable and accurate information about progress and attainment at these stages. It is currently developing a system that has the potential to provide a clearer view of young people's progress from S1 to S3 across all curriculum areas, including their progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The school has improved attainment in National Qualifications in recent years. The attainment of young people is now broadly in line with those with similar needs and backgrounds in schools across Scotland. In some measures, the attainment is higher than young people in other schools with similar needs and backgrounds. The school recognises that attainment can be improved even further, particularly at National 5 and Higher. Attainment in literacy and numeracy has been improving in recent years. There remains scope for improvement in mathematics. The school has improved leaver destinations, with almost all school leavers moving on from school to a positive post-school destination. Over recent years, the number of young people going on to further or higher education has increased.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Most young people feel safe and cared for in school and feel that staff support and encourage them to do well. Across the school, relationships between young people and their teachers are positive, resulting in a purposeful learning environment. In most lessons, young people are appropriately challenged by the learning planned for them. In a minority of lessons, there is scope to provide more challenging work and a brisker pace of learning. We have asked teachers to take further steps to ensure tasks, activities and resources are planned to meet the differing needs of all young people. The needs of young people who require additional support are met well. The school gets to know young people and their families well before they transfer to secondary school. Strong partnership working is ensuring young people receive appropriate and

effective support. We have asked the school to ensure that individualised plans for young people who require additional support with their learning have clearer targets to ensure they make progress.

In designing its curriculum, the school has taken careful account of Curriculum for Excellence guidance, the particular needs of the school community and the views of parents, young people and partners. The school is committed to developing a curriculum which raises standards of achievement and helps young people move on to positive destinations after school. It has already begun to implement this vision which has the potential to provide motivating and relevant learning for all young people. Staff across the school are working well to develop the curriculum further by reviewing and improving courses and programmes such as new courses in S3 that meet the differing needs of young people. They have broadened the range of courses available at the senior stages by developing options such as personal finance, health and food technology and National Progression Awards in web design and digital passport. The school has ensured literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing have a high profile across all learning. It now needs to take forward its plans to ensure learning in these important areas is leading to improved achievement for young people. Good progress has been made in developing relationships with local partners such as Ayrshire College and local employers to provide a wider range of pathways for young people in the senior stages. There are some good examples of school-business partnerships that are resulting in positive outcomes for young people. The school has ambitious plans to develop this work further and now needs time to implement these plans.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The headteacher demonstrates highly effective leadership. She has a strong, aspirational vision for improving the school, with a clear focus on the school values of ambition, respect and excellence. Depute headteachers support the work of the headteacher effectively and together they form a cohesive and united team driving forward improvement. All staff are committed to improving outcomes for young people. They engage well in professional learning with colleagues in their own and other schools and willingly take on leadership roles across the school. The school uses a range of effective approaches to evaluate its work. We have asked staff to ensure that these activities lead to more consistently high-quality learning and teaching. The school takes account of the views of young people and parents. There is scope for young people to have an even stronger voice in improving the school. The student councils could have an increased focus on issues related to learning. The senior leadership team should proceed with its plans to introduce more effective arrangements to assess and track young people's progress and achievements to ensure they achieve as highly as possible. The school has a sound knowledge of its strengths and areas for development and is very well placed to continue to improve.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Motivated, confident young people who are keen to learn and proud of their school.
- The strong culture of recognising and celebrating success in which young people and staff feel valued.
- The highly effective leadership of the headteacher and her senior leadership team.
- The strong, aspirational vision for improving the school which is shared by young people, parents, staff and partners.

We discussed with staff and North Ayrshire Council how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to ensure self-evaluation leads to further improvements in young people's experiences and achievements.
- Continue to improve the consistency of learning and teaching to take account of young people's differing needs, to ensure they all attain as highly as possible.
- Continue to develop young people's understanding of the knowledge and skills they are developing across their learning and through their achievements.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, North Ayrshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress.

Mary Byrne
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/ArdrOSSanAcademyNorthAyrshire.asp>

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