

1 October 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In February 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Common Thread Schools. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and the Common Thread Board. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the Head of Education and staff. We heard 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.

The school has not made sufficient progress in this area of its work.

Senior leaders and staff have continued to improve the culture across both schools, ensuring both sites are welcoming and nurturing environments. There is improved collaboration and partnership working between care staff and education staff to meet the needs of young people. As a result, more young people engage purposefully in learning activities.

A key aim of Common Thread Schools is to 'ensure our provision meets the needs of our individuals'. However, this aim is not yet being achieved. Young people are disadvantaged by the length of the school week and a limited curriculum offer. This session, the Head of Education and lead teachers have introduced a single improvement plan. The improvement plan contains a number of priorities focused on improving young people's attainment and wellbeing. While staff have successfully strengthened the health and wellbeing curriculum many school priorities have not been taken forward successfully. Staffing issues remain a barrier to the pace of change. The Head of Education and staff must enhance evaluation arrangements to ensure school improvement activities support improved outcomes for all young people as a result of the school's work. As a matter of urgency, the Head of Education and staff need to prioritise lengthening the school week and improving the quality of learning for all young people across the curriculum. This should include those young people who spend time learning off site or who access their education remotely.

The roles and responsibilities of the Head of Education, lead teachers and staff need to be more clearly defined. Current remits are too vague and do not support staff well enough to improve and monitor school performance.

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 school has made some progress in this area of its work.

The Head of Education, lead teachers and staff continue to recognise the importance of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. Senior leaders have identified worthwhile activities to identify strengths and next steps. However, the school has continued to experience significant changes in leadership and staffing which has impacted negatively on this area of the schools work. Senior leaders and staff need to have a clearer focus on evaluating how well the school is meeting the needs of young people and impacting positively on their learning and wellbeing.

Through the use of improved approaches to recording and monitoring of attendance, the Head of Education is developing a greater understanding of the reasons why young people may not be attending school daily. While this is helpful, across the schools, the attendance and engagement of most young people remains too low.

Senior leaders need to continue to identify ways to seek the views of young people, parents, staff and partners. They should ensure stakeholder views have a direct influence on school improvement.

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

The school has not made sufficient progress in this area of its work.

The school has made limited progress in developing the curriculum to meet the needs of young people attending the school. Across both schools, the length of the school week is too short. As a result, young people are not receiving a broad and balanced curriculum in line with the Common Thread Schools curriculum plan. The curriculum does not motivate young people to attend school or take sufficient account of their interests. The Head of Education and staff need to develop the curriculum at all stages. This should include developing programmes of learning that build on what young people can already do. This will ensure young people can access the correct levels of purposeful and high-quality planned learning across the week and as they progress through the stages of school.

Too many young people spend long periods of time across the week engaging in unplanned activities away from the school. As a matter of urgency, the Head of Education and lead teachers need to review the effectiveness of home based and off-site learning. They need to be clear on how much time young people are engaging in these activities and ensure all activities are well planned and contribute purposefully to young people's learning across the curriculum.

Staff have recently introduced mental health and wellbeing qualifications which are supporting a few young people to develop a greater understanding of their own mental health and wellbeing. As a result, these young people are more confident in identifying and discussing barriers to their wellbeing. They are developing strategies to help overcome periods of anxiety and distress. Teachers should now build on this positive start to improve further the range of qualifications on offer for young people across all subjects and courses.

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

The school has not made sufficient progress in this area of its work.

In the broad general education (BGE) S1 – S3, staff remain at the early stages of planning learning using Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) experiences and outcomes. Current tracking in health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy is not yet reliable. Most learners are capable of achieving more across all curriculum subjects.

The Head of Education, lead teachers and staff need to develop further the schools tracking systems to show more clearly where all young people are in their learning and what next steps they should aim to achieve. Teachers would benefit from more professional learning to support their understanding of the progress young people are making across and through levels of CFE this will support them to better judge the progress all learners are making.

At the senior phase (S4 – S6), most young people are gaining a small number of national qualifications across a limited range of subjects. A few young people should be provided with further challenge to achieve awards at a higher level. This will ensure all young people have improved opportunities to achieve positive destinations post school.

What happens next?

The school has not made sufficient progress since the last visit. We will liaise with the Head of Education and the Common Thread Board regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within six months of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with the Head of Education and the Common Thread Board the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Emma McFarlane
HM Inspector