

21 May 2024

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. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in September 2023. 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 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.

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 recently appointed headteacher is highly regarded by staff and young people. He provides clear direction for school improvement, taking full account of the views of stakeholders. He is highly visible, approachable and accessible. As a result, almost all staff feel valued. Senior leaders have improved communication with parents and carers, including regular written communication and well-received drop-in sessions. Parents and carers report that they feel welcomed in the school and that their views are listened to. Faculty leaders feel fully involved in the decision-making process, with their opinions valued and acted upon. This is already leading to significant improvements in the culture of the school. Stakeholders are aware of what the priorities for improvement are, why these have been selected and how well the school is making progress towards achieving these priorities. The school's vision, 'Nurture, Flourish, Achieve', has been welcomed by all members of the school community.

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.

An increasing majority of young people report feeling safe in school. Young people describe how seeing senior leaders around the corridors and social spaces is helping them to feel safer in the school building. The behaviour in corridors of a minority of young people continues to cause concern. This should be addressed. Although most young people know how to report bullying and are confident of a prompt response from key staff, young people and parents continue to have concerns about bullying. Staff need to keep working with young people to ensure incidents of bullying are reduced. Senior leaders should continue to support staff in developing a nurturing and inclusive environment so that all young people feel respected and included.

The school's new model for S1, 'Crew', is an emerging success. Young people involved are highly motivated and feel that this provides a safe experience for them to develop key skills.

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.

In the majority of lessons, there are positive relationships between teachers and young people. Almost all staff have well-established routines around mobile phones and lesson structures so that young people are more ready to learn.

Staff are beginning to develop more effective arrangements to plan, track and monitor young people's progress. Staff should continue with plans to improve analysis of how well young people are making progress and plan extra support that will help learners improve. It is important that senior leaders continue to prioritise these areas to support increased attainment by young people.

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.

Senior leaders are developing staff understanding of nurture through promotion of the new vision of 'nurture, flourish and achieve'. Senior leaders should continue to support staff in developing a nurturing environment so that all young people feel respected and included in class. They are well placed to build on the model of positive and trusting relationships developed through the Crew model in S1.

Senior leaders have restructured the pastoral care team to provide more effective support for young people. Most young people are clear that they would seek support from their guidance teacher should they have any issues or concerns. The new approaches to pastoral care are increasing staff understanding of their roles and responsibilities in getting it right for every child.

Staff are at the early stages of redeveloping the personal and social education (PSE) programme. Young people agree that aspects of the programme are relevant and informative, supporting their wellbeing. They are keen to play a more active role in updating the whole PSE programme and contribute to promoting a shared understanding of wellbeing across the school.

Senior leaders have worked with the pastoral care team to help improve young people's attendance. This includes exploring the reasons why a minority of young people are not attending school and looking for ways to identify and take away any barriers. Senior leaders recognise that further action is required to improve significantly young people's attendance. In addition, there are still too many young people who walk out of class.

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.

All staff recognise that attainment still requires improvement. Teaching staff are working together to measure how successful young people are in their learning across the school. There is now greater rigour and accuracy around literacy and numeracy levels in S1 to S3, especially in S1. Senior leaders are working more closely with faculty heads to look at the information they gather about young people's progress in learning. They are focused on considering how best to improve young people's attainment and support all young people to achieve their maximum potential.

Senior leaders should continue to support staff to monitor and reduce the considerable number of young people on part-time timetables. Staff should keep working with young people in S4 and S5 to encourage more of them to continue learning in school in pathways that suit their future plans and develop their skills.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within nine months of the publication of this letter. When we return to inspect the school we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made. To ensure that the pace of improvement remains appropriate, HM Inspectors will also maintain regular engagement with Aberdeen City Council and visits to the school.

Jacqueline Gallagher
HM Inspector