

# Summarised inspection findings

**Dunedin School**

Independent

18 March 2025

## Key contextual information

School Name: Dunedin School  
Council: Independent  
SEED number: 5583233

Dunedin School is a small independent special school in Edinburgh. It specialises in re-engaging young people in education. It has a capacity of 21. There are currently 21 young people on the school roll. The majority of these are placements from The City of Edinburgh Council. Dunedin School has a flat management structure with no headteacher or senior management team. Staff work co-operatively to manage all aspects of running the school and delivering the curriculum. Dunedin School employs ten part-time teachers, two classroom assistants, a transition coordinator and a full-time administrator.

### 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very 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

- All staff use a nurturing and person-centred teaching approach extremely well within lessons and activities. Staff have a strong focus on young people's emotional regulation and take effective steps to ensure that young people are ready to learn. Staff have a kind and compassionate approach to settling pupils into class, providing familiar routines and tasks. All staff are supporting learners to have positive relationships within school, and this is underpinned by the 'code of etiquette' for staff and pupils. All young people have significantly improved their attendance compared to their levels at previous schools.
- In all lessons, staff provide a safe and stable environment which helps young people to engage in their learning. Teachers take care to be sensitive to the needs of all learners, including matching learning with areas of interest or strength. Young people have the opportunity to engage with topics of interest to them. Young people understand the purpose of their learning and have opportunities to lead their learning. They are fully engaged, highly motivated and interact well with staff during lessons. The high quality of learning and teaching and the clear expectations lead to very good behaviour across the school.
- Pupils have the opportunity to join the pupil council, which meets monthly. The council makes decisions about whole school events and the day-to-day running of the school. These include appropriate use of mobile phones providing a sense of ownership and encouraging decision making skills. All young people also have the opportunity to attend a residential outing once a year, developing their social and communication skills. Staff encourage pupils twice a week to engage with the wider community and participate in activities such as walking, horse riding and badminton. Pupils have visited the local library and learned about how a library works. This is widening their reading materials and helping to provide a sense of community with their peers.

Young people enjoy this opportunity to interact with each other informally, further developing their social skills.

- In all lessons, teachers provide young people with learning tasks matched fully to their particular interests. This includes learning to play the piano. All young people respond positively to well-organised structured lessons. Teachers introduce the lessons well and support young people to understand how they can be successful in their learning. Young people find the lessons enjoyable, interesting and relevant. Teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. They use questioning skilfully to ensure that young people are understanding the concepts they are teaching.
- Teachers' planning reflects well the individual needs of young people across the curriculum. The personalised approach to learning and teaching is helping most young people overcome their barriers to learning. Young people have ownership of their learning folders in each subject and can talk about what they have been learning and what they have to do next. Support for learning staff complete assessments where specific barriers to learning may exist such as dyslexia. Support for learning staff provide an overview of specific needs and strategies to support the young people both in their learning and any other needs. They also work closely with young people and their families to identify areas of strength and areas which require further support. This supports teachers to develop a personalised curriculum for each pupil which reflects the young person's strengths and areas of interest. The school uses online resources well to centralise information on young people which informs planning for learning.
- Most teachers support a small number of young people as their tutor. Tutors support the young person and their family from the point of entry to the school. An agreed, negotiated timetable supports tutors to learn quickly about the young person and to plan an appropriate curriculum with other staff. Tutors work with other professional agencies to support learning in the classroom. For example, speech and language therapy, educational psychology and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Across the school, there is very consistent high-quality learning and teaching. Staff work collectively to ensure the young people receive well-structured lessons with appropriate pace and challenge. Learners benefit from established routines. Staff are skilled at engaging all young people in learning tasks related to their subject and offering learning activities to suit their interest and ability level.
- Staff understand very well young people's individual learning needs, and this reflects in their planning. They have detailed knowledge of the young people they teach. Staff tailor learning to meet the needs of the individual. Teachers encourage young people to choose activities in a lesson to personalise their learning. Some young people use this choice of activity to help to regulate themselves.
- In each subject, teachers use assessments from a wide variety of sources including information which the tutor gathers. They then plan effectively learning activities within their subject to engage the learner at the appropriate level. All teachers have a very good understanding of the progress young people are making, identifying well young people's strengths and next steps in learning. Teachers make very good use of formative assessment to improve attainment. Teachers have started to undertake moderation activities within the school. They engage in professional dialogue about what constitutes achievement of a level within Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Teachers are moderating their assessment results in trios to help ensure confidence in teacher judgement. This process should now be formalised to develop teacher confidence further in making valid, professional judgements.

- In the senior phase, young people are clear about what they are working towards and what they need to do to improve. Young people can articulate which qualifications they are working towards in all subjects and what they need to learn next. Staff share very clear plans for individual young people to support them to attain qualifications.
- Staff help to develop learner profiles and use these to support effective teaching. Young people complete a simple learning plan with tutors at the beginning of each session. This sets out what they are working on, what they want to achieve and targets they set for themselves. It also records any wider achievement. For example, participation in activities, increasing attendance, travelling independently, or eating lunch with others. It can also be used to record when young people are managing something they have not previously managed, such as attending a planning meeting.
- Teachers' planning reflects well the individual needs of the young people within their own subject. Plans are flexible to meet the needs of the young people. Staff prepare two reports during the session for each young person, and this supports the young people, their families and tutors to track attainment. Each young person meets with appropriate staff each year and has at least three meetings in their final year prior to leaving school. This supports the young people to prepare for life after school in a safe and trusted environment.

## 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 Board of Governors.

### 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

#### Attendance

- All young people who attend Dunedin School have had challenges engaging with education. The majority of these young people have not attended school for several years. Most young people enrol with extremely low or no attendance from previous education placements. Following their trial period in Dunedin, almost all young people demonstrate significantly improved attendance from previous levels. This may begin with an agreed part-time timetable before increasing time in school. The average agreed attendance in 2022/23, according to information provided by the school, was 83%. In 2023/24 it was 88%. In 2024/25 it is currently 85%. Staff plan to deal with attendance issues on an individual basis.

#### Attainment in literacy

- All young people are making very good progress from prior levels of attainment in literacy. Staff have raised attainment in literacy for all learners.

#### Listening and talking

- Young people across the broad general education (BGE) are engaged in lessons. They are developing their skills in turn-taking during conversations. In the senior phase, young people are working to improve their listening skills. Those working towards Higher English have been doing critical listening tasks, for example focusing on television conference presentations and answering questions. Young people in the senior phase also prepare and deliver talks, which the teacher has evaluated highly using grade-related criteria.

#### Reading

- Most young people in the BGE can read unfamiliar text well. At first level, they understand the difference between fiction and non-fiction. They are aware of different genres of writing. At second level, they understand and can identify examples of alliteration, onomatopoeia and oxymoron. At third level, they have also studied novels such as *Animal Farm*, understanding and identifying the allusions to communist politicians. In the senior phase, young people are developing their skills in close reading. They can identify and use appropriately figures of speech such as metaphor, imagery and tone. They are reading and studying a selection of novels, poems and plays. They are developing their understanding of these genres and demonstrating this through writing in these styles.
- The school has its own small library which is located in one of the teaching areas. Teachers encourage young people to borrow books and set a short time aside each day for personal reading. This is enabling young people to develop further their reading skills and extend their experience of different genres. Staff also take groups of young people to a local community library to experience a wider selection of texts and to work with the librarian.

## Writing

- Young people in the BGE have been researching the internet to help them write articles about authors they are studying. At second level, they can use mind maps to structure their thoughts before drafting pieces of extended writing. They have been writing imaginatively and also to convey information. At third level, they have also created electronic presentations on topics to share with their peers in class. Young people in the senior phase have been developing their skills in extended writing. This has included creative writing, discursive writing and critical essays. Young people's writing is detailed, and they include references where they have sourced information from the internet, including research papers. They have also been encouraged by their teacher to record their use of past exam papers and to evaluate their performance.

## Attainment in numeracy

- Young people are making very strong progress in numeracy and mathematics. Almost all young people at Dunedin School are attaining appropriate Curriculum for Excellence numeracy levels when compared with their prior levels of attainment at their previous school. Learners are benefitting from opportunities to develop numeracy in different contexts, for example budgeting and setting up bank accounts. Staff should now reflect on how they can capture more effectively the positive progress that young people are making in numeracy across the curriculum and wider learning context.

## Number, money and measure

- Young people in the BGE are developing number processes appropriate to their level. At first level, young people can use a calendar to highlight upcoming events. Young people working at second level can add and subtract decimal fractions to two decimal places. At third level, learners can convert fractions and decimal fractions into percentages and solve linear equations. Young people at first level should be supported to develop skills to solve two-step problems.

## Shape, position and movement

- At second level, young people are using mathematical language to describe and classify a range of angles. Learners working at third level can use the properties of triangles to find missing angles.

## Information handling

- Young people in the BGE are handling information using a range of sources. At second level, this includes the use of frequency tables. Learners working at third level can interpret data from a range of sources and describe trends in data using appropriate language. They now need to develop further their ability to record and display data making effective use of technology, for example, using line graphs, pie charts, bar graphs and Venn diagrams.

## Senior Phase

- At the senior phase, most young people are working towards gaining National Qualifications in mathematics. Those young people not currently studying mathematics have attained qualifications previously. Young people are attaining appropriately challenging qualifications from level 3 to level 6 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and most are making very strong progress on prior levels of attainment.

## Attainment over time

- In the BGE stage, young people make very strong progress on prior levels of attainment. Staff effectively use initial assessments to gain an understanding of the individual needs of learners and plan appropriate learning activities. As a result, young people benefit from individualised programmes which enable them to re-engage in learning and has a positive impact on their



attainment. Teachers monitor young people's progress in the BGE termly by using a shared tracking document. This provides all staff with useful information on the levels which young people are working at across the curriculum. Information sharing and effective teaching and learning ensure the curriculum is bespoke to the young person resulting in accelerated attainment.

- In the senior phase, young people are attaining very well across the curriculum at appropriate levels from SCQF level 2 to 6. Teachers are keen to maximise attainment and adopt a flexible approach to course setting with learning plans which are appropriately challenging and sensitive to the needs of individual learners. Staff should continue to build on the positive arrangements already in place and consider how to gain further accreditation to broaden the number of qualifications available to learners.
- Teachers have established internal procedures to ensure that their professional judgements are valid. Teachers have identified correctly the need to build links further with teachers in other settings. This collaboration will strengthen their understanding of standards and share effective practice in approaches to raising attainment. The school has developed tracking systems to monitor the progress of learners at different stages. Staff should now strengthen existing tracking systems to capture young people's learning journey more appropriately over time. They should also draw together prior attainment and current learning plans.

### **Overall quality of learners' achievement**

- Young people are becoming more confident and successful as they re-engage with education. For example, they demonstrate transferable life skills and knowledge as they budget, shop and cook. Parents report that young people are demonstrating these skills well at home.
- Young people demonstrate leadership skills by being members of the pupil council. For example, they have suggested and implemented a breakfast and snack area for those young people who may not have eaten before they come to school. They also demonstrate their interest in being global citizens by suggesting that the school celebrates events such as International Woman's Day, Pride Month and Black History Month.
- The school has strong links with community groups such as the local Green Team. This initiative has been set up to connect young people to nature. Young people have been involved fortnightly in a range of woodland conservation projects in the park. They are learning about conservation and sustainability. They are also developing woodcraft skills such as how to safely light fires and cook on them, and how to safely use a range of tools. These sessions contribute to young people successfully achieving wider achievement awards such as Duke of Edinburgh, John Muir Award and volunteering awards. Pupils are engaging with local businesses in litter picks and tidying up the local environment providing further opportunities to interact with each other and the extended community.
- Staff record young people's involvement in achievement activities. The next step for staff is to record and track the skills and knowledge achieved.

### **Equity for all learners**

- The cohort of young people who attend the school is constantly changing. Teachers assess and track young people's needs to ensure that these are being met. They are aware of different groups of young people in the school, such as those who are care experienced and those who have a more challenging background. They do not track these groups as a cohort, but work together to monitor and improve individual progress in learning.



- Each teacher is tutor to a caseload of young people. Tutors engage with the young person and their family and are the first point of contact for them. They also understand their needs well and can judge what support may be necessary for young people and their family. Parents are extremely grateful for this interaction and for teacher flexibility in accessing training to understand and meet better the needs of their child.
- The school supports young people and their families with helpful materials and other free activities. This is especially helpful for those who face socio-economic hardship.
- All young people move into positive destinations when they leave school. They are supported very effectively through this process by the school's transition officer, working with their tutor and Skills Development Scotland. The majority of young people move into a college placement, but others go straight into employment. The transition officer continues to offer valuable support for several months after the young person leaves school.

## Other relevant evidence

- Young people do not have access to modern language lessons in the school at present. Staff should work now to ensure that all young people can access modern language learning as part of their entitlements within CfE.
- Young people do not receive two hours' quality physical education each week. They have 90 minutes of physical exercise each week through planned walks, attending a local gym and running and playing badminton. Staff now need to provide learners with a high-quality physical education programme as suggested in national guidance.
- There is no planned religious observance. Religious and moral education (RME) is delivered occasionally through personal and social education (PSE). Senior leaders and staff now need to develop the RME provision across the school, providing young people with opportunities to explore the world's major religions and to learn about beliefs and values.
- Young people successfully engage the local community by holding regular coffee mornings. Staff engage successfully young people in planning, budgeting and running the events. Young people also develop their social skills and skills for work as a result of their involvement.

## 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.