

# Summarised inspection findings

**Beeslack Community High School**

Midlothian Council

23 April 2024

## Key contextual information

School Name: Beeslack Community High School  
Council: Midlothian Council  
SEED number: 5547938  
Roll: In 2023 the school roll was 746 young people

Beeslack Community High School serves the northern part of Penicuik and its surrounding areas, which includes three associated primary schools. The school includes specialist provision known as the Annex, which is located on a separate campus near the school. Young people across the local authority attend the Annex. The headteacher has been in post since October 2022. She is supported by three depute headteachers in the school and a further depute headteacher who oversees the work of the Annex. The school also has a business manager.

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

Exclusions are generally in line with the national average. The number of young people being excluded from school is reducing.

In September 2022, 9.1% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2022, 3.7% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland. 28.4% of pupils live in the 20% least deprived data zones.

In September 2022, the school reported that 50.5% of pupils had additional support needs. The school provided updated information that showed that at present 40.1% of pupils have additional support needs.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

good

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher, working with senior leaders, has improved the school ethos with a determined focus on young people's wellbeing and improving the school's sense of community. This includes fostering an enhanced sense of collegiality with staff working together well to support improvements. The headteacher is very highly regarded by young people, staff, parents and partners. The school is well placed to improve further as a result of the headteacher's sharp focus on increased expectations and higher aspirations for all young people. For example, the headteacher's prompt and decisive action to improve provision at the Annex has driven changes leading to better learning experiences for young people.
- The headteacher recognises that the current school vision, values and aims (VVA), which were reviewed with stakeholders in 2018, do not have a high enough profile. Senior leaders identified appropriately the need to review them during the current session to ensure they reflect the current school context. The headteacher is leading a consultation with staff to develop the new VVA. Almost all staff feel empowered through their involvement in this work and understand its importance in underpinning current and future school improvement. They identify appropriately promoting high expectations, ambition and developing young people's confidence as aspects to be reflected in the VVA. Staff should continue as planned to consult more widely with young people, parents and partners to ensure there is a shared sense of ownership in this work. This should build on existing consultation processes, such as parent surveys, engagement with the Parent Council and the clear improvement focus of the pupil parliament.
- Senior leaders recently reviewed the school's approaches to self-evaluation. They developed a streamlined quality assurance calendar which clarifies expectations for teachers. Teachers are benefitting from clear direction from the headteacher about improvement planning and are now more systematically gathering appropriate evidence to inform their plans. A majority of principal teachers of curriculum (PTC) demonstrate effective strategic leadership of departments. All middle leaders should continue to work together to develop their approaches to self-evaluation. This will help them to provide clear evidence of progress. Senior leaders should work with middle leaders to ensure that the strongest practice in the school in robust self-evaluation processes is in place across all faculties. This will support senior leaders' confidence in the evidence base underpinning faculty and whole-school improvements.
- The headteacher has ensured all staff have an increased involvement in identifying current improvement priorities through consultation. This has led to the school improvement plan (SIP) having a clear focus on the agreed key priorities for improvement. While this has focused staff on key aspects for improvement, there is a need to ensure all staff continue to develop areas of national priority such as Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). Senior leaders should now ensure the SIP has a sharper focus on improving outcomes for all young people. This will

enable staff to show more clearly how progress towards the SIP's aims will be measured and achieved successfully.

- Senior leaders share the SIP, including Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) plan, with the Parent Council. This allows these parents to offer meaningful feedback and comments. Senior leaders use questionnaires regularly to seek the views of young people, parents and staff to inform improvement planning. They should continue to develop their approaches to engaging all stakeholders, particularly the wider parent forum, to support self-evaluation and planning for continuous improvement.
- The SIP identifies appropriate improvement priorities, such as improving learning, teaching and assessment and developing staff confidence in using data to inform their planning for learning. Staff come together regularly for collegiate time and to engage in extensive professional learning activities to support improvements in these areas. They have focused on the new 'Ignite and Learn' learning and teaching policy to develop pedagogy and best practice. Staff speak positively about these opportunities to work and learn together. Senior and middle leaders should continue to develop their approaches to evaluating the impact of collegiate time activities to ensure they lead to tangible improvements in provision and outcomes. Senior and middle leaders should continue to develop their use of 'Ignite and Learn' to support robust quality assurance, clearly identifying teachers' strengths and development needs. This will help school leaders to recognise existing effective practice in the school and ensure that staff across the school continue to improve the consistency and quality of learners' experiences.
- Faculty improvement plans (FIPs) align with the SIP and demonstrate successfully how a majority of faculties support whole school priorities. Senior leaders need to support middle leaders further to ensure all FIPs also reflect agreed faculty priorities and offer clear direction to staff as to how they can support change and improvements.
- Senior leaders encourage staff to develop their leadership capacities. A minority of staff are engaged in leading change and developing how they share and embed strong practice across the school. Staff are eager to adopt leadership roles. As a result, the school is well placed to increase the pace of change. Senior leaders should now, as planned, reintroduce working groups to distribute leadership more widely. A few staff participated in a meaningful 'aspiring middle leaders' course, enhancing their confidence in leading change. Senior leaders and middle leaders should ensure professional review and development plans capture how all staff are developing their leadership skills. A few staff have been appointed to principal teacher posts leading on specific areas. These roles are contributing successfully to the ongoing development of learning and teaching, digital technology and learning for sustainability.
- Opportunities for young people to adopt leadership roles to support the school include the recently introduced year councils and pupil parliament. These roles challenge young people to gather the views of their peers and ensure opinions and ideas are acted upon. Young people do this skilfully, showing great care and respect for their peers. At present a minority of young people adopt leadership roles. However, there are early signs that pupil participation is improving and young people are having more influence on school improvement. It helps young people to see how staff act on their views and is beginning to support young people to reflect and act on how they can lead improvements. Staff appropriately plan to use the pupil parliament to support increased involvement of young people in quality assurance and school improvement. A few young people benefit from their involvement in pupil groups, such as children's rights and eco school. These young people are supporting an improved understanding of children's rights and learning for sustainability. Staff should extend and promote leadership opportunities to all young people, particularly those in the broad general

education (BGE), to ensure all young people can develop important leadership skills and knowledge.

- Senior leaders are beginning to use local labour market intelligence effectively to inform curriculum planning. A local authority DYW coordinator works well with staff to improve links with employers. A school improvement group previously developed a comprehensive action plan to support a range of DYW initiatives. Staff in a minority of departments have effective partnership links with employers and conducted a helpful audit to identify the DYW opportunities offered to young people. Senior leaders should now develop their strategic overview of DYW and employer engagement. All staff should continue to reflect on the development of DYW and refine the school's existing skills framework, in line with local authority plans. The framework should reflect better a focus on helping young people develop their ability to learn and build new skills to support them in learning, life and work.

## 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

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

- Young people benefit from respectful relationships between each other and with staff in almost all lessons. This fosters a calm and orderly learning environment where young people behave well and participate in their learning. Almost all departments offer regular lunchtime drop-ins and supported study to help young people review aspects of their learning. Young people value this additional support.
- Senior leaders are developing more opportunities for young people to be involved in self-evaluation of their own learning. For example, feedback on learning, teaching and assessment from a few young people is beginning to lead to changes in teachers' practice. In a few faculties, this is working well, and contributes to increased learner engagement. As a next step, teachers should widen the range of young people whose voices influence learning and teaching. They should consider how learners' views can be used in the classroom to inform discussions between young people and their teachers about how to improve classroom experiences.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers plan learning activities which promote independent thinking and active engagement. When this occurs, young people engage eagerly in tasks and activities. Young people would benefit from greater opportunities for this kind of stimulating learning across the school, particularly in the BGE.
- Staff have good knowledge about the needs of individual young people, which is shared with them by pastoral staff. In most lessons, teachers adjust their practice in the classroom to meet individual young people's needs. This includes, for example, the use of assistive technology to support young people with literacy challenges. A few teachers are skilfully using digital devices to provide discreet and appropriate differentiation and support for identified young people. When this occurs, it leads to more meaningful and engaging learning experiences for young people. However, in the majority of lessons, learning is not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. As a result, not all young people experience appropriate pace and challenge in their learning. For example, in a minority of lessons, young people engage at times in lower challenge activities such as copying from the board or the screen as part of their class work. Teachers should give more consideration to the individual needs of young people in their advance planning of learning activities. There is scope for middle leaders, as part of their self-evaluation and quality assurance processes, to work with staff to ensure that planned learning meets the needs of all young people.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified the need to ensure that young people's learning experiences are of a consistently high quality. At present, understanding and practice of this is not consistent across all curricular areas. A group of senior and middle leaders have developed the "Ignite and Learn" strategy to help to address this. This is beginning to lead to young

people more successfully making connections between their prior and new learning. These approaches are in their early stages and are not yet fully embedded across the school. School leaders should now consider how best to support a deeper understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment. This should include developing a shared language about high quality provision across all members of the school community.

- In the majority of lessons, the purpose of learning is shared by the teacher. Teachers should continue to make sure that young people understand the purpose of each lesson. In a few lessons, teachers effectively help young people to reflect on their learning. They do this by using a range of activities such as effective plenary discussions and through self and peer assessments. In these lessons, most young people are confident in understanding their progress in their learning and how they can further improve.
- Most teachers provide clear explanations and instructions which help the majority of young people to understand and proceed with learning activities. In a few lessons, teachers use a variety of techniques effectively to check young people's understanding and adjust teaching and learning accordingly. Staff should now work together to reduce the current variability between subject areas in how teachers check young people's understanding throughout each lesson. They should explore the most effective use of a range of formative assessment approaches. For example, teachers should consider how to gather evidence quickly at the end of lessons to check young people's understanding and how this informs planning for future learning.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers use questioning to help young people recall prior learning and to check understanding. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning skilfully to encourage and develop higher order thinking skills and to extend young people's learning. Teachers should continue to develop the effective use of questioning, building on the strongest practice in the school. This will help to ensure that all young people experience appropriate levels of challenge in their learning.
- Most young people in the senior phase are supported to understand their progress in learning through encouraging feedback from teachers. Teachers should now improve the quality of feedback so that all young people, especially those in the BGE, understand better their strengths and next steps in learning.
- All young people have been issued with their own digital device to support their learning. In most lessons, digital tools are used as a resource to support learning. In a majority of lessons, teachers use digital resources to enhance young people's learning experiences through a range of interactive activities. This allows teachers to plan a more diverse range of activities for young people to interact with their learning. Staff should now explore how best to use digital resources to enhance young people's learning across all subject areas, building on the strongest examples of the creative use of digital technology.
- Teachers have increased their focus on improving the quality of assessment judgements in the BGE and this is beginning to lead to more reliability and consistent judgements. The majority of subject areas use a range of assessment evidence to inform their judgements, although a minority of subject areas rely too much on summative assessments. The majority of parents and carers report that they understand how their child's progress is assessed. However, a minority would benefit from further information from the school about assessment of their children's progress. All teachers should ensure that they consider a wide range of evidence to support valid and reliable assessment judgements.

- All teachers engage in moderation activities in both the BGE and the senior phase. This includes work with colleagues across the local authority. A minority of teachers are involved in work nationally with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and contribute to discussions at a subject level. As a result, teachers have a clear understanding of national assessment standards for learners in the senior phase. In the majority of subject areas this is mainly focused on cross-marking and verification. An important next step is to ensure there is an increased emphasis on the quality and regularity of moderation activities, particularly in the BGE, covering the whole learning, teaching and assessment cycle. This will increase the robustness of assessment judgements about achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels.
  
- All subject departments have systems in place to allow them to track and monitor the progress of learners in the senior phase. A majority of departments use consistent tracking and monitoring approaches for young people in the BGE. A few subjects do not effectively track the progress of young people in their learning in the BGE. The use of tracking information to intervene and accelerate the progress of young people is stronger in the senior phase. A next step for senior and middle leaders is to build on the most effective examples of tracking to reduce variability in tracking and monitoring across the school. For example, subject-specific target setting in the BGE is not yet used consistently to monitor young people's progress in their learning. This should be used to inform planning of learning and to support interventions to accelerate the attainment of young people.



## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Staff are appropriately refreshing the curriculum rationale to provide a more effective framework for meeting the needs and aspirations of all young people. School leaders take good account of the needs of a range of internal and external partners when designing the curriculum. Constructive partnerships with businesses are contributing well to providing a strong focus on employability within a few departments.
- Young people experience learning across eight curricular areas in the BGE. They have appropriate opportunities to exercise choice and to personalise their curriculum pathway as they progress into the senior phase. However, senior leaders should review the curriculum to ensure that all young people experience their entitlement to a broad general education, including well planned experiences and outcomes, across all the curriculum areas, through to S3. For example, young people are not all receiving their entitlement in line with the policy Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach. Young people in the BGE currently receive their entitlement to physical education, personal and social education (PSE) and religious and moral education (RME).
- Young people choose six courses in S4. Senior leaders plan to increase this choice to seven courses in S4. All young people in S4 will also have the opportunity to study for an additional qualification in physical education. This has the potential to increase the range of appropriate learning pathways, leading to a curriculum that better meets the needs of young people. Senior leaders should consider how to adjust the senior phase timetable to ensure that all young people receive their entitlement to RME that builds upon and extends previous learning in the BGE.
- In the senior phase, most young people progress to study five or more courses in S5 including, for example, skills for life courses at the local college. These courses provide helpful pathways for young people as they consider their future careers. In S6, the majority of young people pursue four or more courses, including a school leadership award and other skills for life options. Consortia arrangements with local secondaries for young people to study Advanced Highers enhance learner pathways.
- Senior leaders should now work with school staff to develop further teachers' understanding of the responsibility of all in the areas of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. There is scope to accelerate progress in work being done in these areas.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The Parent Council works well with the school's senior leaders, for example in discussions about school improvement priorities. Parent Council members appreciate the way in which the headteacher has engaged with them about matters such as educational reform, school transport and the role of homework in the school. Parent Council members would appreciate further opportunities to be involved in school self-evaluation and discussions about improvement strategies in the school. Senior leaders should now, as planned, engage more fully with the Parent Council and the wider parent forum to ensure that the voices of parents and carers are more represented in improvement planning activity. At present, a minority of parents feel that the school takes their views into account when they are making changes.
- Most parents appreciate the helpful, regular feedback they receive about how their child is learning and developing. An information evening about how parents can support their children's learning was well received. A few parents of young people in S1-S3 feel that the school's reports do not make clear what progress their children are making in their learning. They would appreciate further clarity on the language used in report cards and more detail on their child's next steps in learning. This would enable them to provide further support for their child's learning at home.
- A minority of parents expressed the view that communication from the school could be improved. For example, a few parents are not clear about how their children are supported to overcome barriers to their learning. Senior leaders should continue with their current approaches to improving communication with parents, including through the school website. Parents appreciated the Open Day and Summer fair which provided opportunities for school staff to engage with a wider group of parents and carers. Parents spoke positively about the subject-based newsletters they receive from some faculties.
- Parents appreciate the way that school staff support opportunities for achievements and a range of sporting, musical and other events in the school. As planned, senior leaders should work more closely with parents in gathering information about young people's achievements beyond school.

## 2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Staff take time to get to know young people as individuals. This results in strong relationships between young people and staff across the school community. As a result of these respectful relationships, and a range of other supports such as safe spaces and breakfast club, most young people feel safe in school. Most young people feel they have at least one adult they trust and with whom they can share any worries and concerns. This is often, but not always, their pastoral support teacher (PST). Young people are encouraged to develop good relationships with their PST through the planned approach to teaching PSE by PSTs, weekly from S1 to S3.
- The PSE programme is responsive, progressive and informed by local issues, covering topics such as substance misuse, keeping safe online and career education. PSTs seek young people's views on this programme and use them to inform future topics. However, staff should consider how this useful programme can be more creatively delivered and extended fully throughout the senior phase. This includes providing better information and advice for young people to help them make choices about taking the subjects that are right for them. Currently young people from S4 to S6 do not have enough regular, planned opportunities to consider and discuss meaningfully topics relevant to their stage in life.
- Staff offer a wide range of activities throughout the school day and beyond which help young people understand the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle. This includes numerous physical activities as well as recognition of the impact of positive mental health. Young people from S1 to S3 take part in a wellbeing survey which helps them understand how they feel about, for example, their resilience, self-esteem and confidence. They are then supported individually by staff, to consider how they can improve their own wellbeing. Additionally, all staff have become more aware of a few young people's anxieties about assessments and provide a range of supports to mitigate these worries. This includes in class support, additional study time and one-to-one mentoring. As a result of these supports, and of the access to confidential counselling, more young people achieve at school, especially those at most risk of under-attaining or disengaging from their school work.
- The majority of staff have a good awareness of their roles and responsibilities relating to inclusion and meeting the needs of young people. A series of professional learning events for all staff has developed staff knowledge in this area. As a result of sessions such as 'strategies to support a more inclusive learning environment' and 'encouraging staff to experience additional support needs' most staff have reviewed and improved their learning environments. For example, staff recognise the impact of over-stimulating some young people by having too much information on walls. Staff make greater use of assistive technologies, provide equipment, and offer safe spaces to support the needs of young people. Staff support care experienced young people well, providing them with opportunities to share their feelings. All

care experienced young people are considered for coordinated support plans to ensure that their needs are met by school staff, working with partners where appropriate.

- Teachers recognise the benefits of having specific information about young people which is appropriately shared with them by pastoral staff through individual pupil profiles. This helps teachers better meet young people's learning needs in class, for example by making available supports such as document overlays and assistive technology. Pastoral support staff should now review young people's profiles to ensure that they provide information of a consistently high quality to make a positive difference for learners. Support assistants would be better able to provide more effective support if they were able to access digital technologies alongside the class teacher and young people. Interventions planned for young people are monitored regularly by pastoral staff and senior leaders. However, pastoral staff need to review systems and processes to ensure that the impact of interventions is easily tracked and monitored. This will help to make sure that all young people receive the most effective, appropriate and timely support. Staff should now include young people in setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based targets which are regularly reviewed. This includes targets for specific groups and cohorts, such as interrupted learners, young carers and care experienced young people. This will allow senior leaders to monitor the impact of interventions more readily and ensure an appropriate balance of in-class, and out-of-class support. This should help senior leaders to clarify their strategic overview of the effectiveness of all supports, interventions and plans to ensure that young people make good progress.
- Senior leaders have in place effective procedures to monitor the daily attendance of young people. These procedures are enhanced by additional staff who maintain a focus on a few young people for whom attendance at school is more challenging. As a result of creative and effective supports, supported well by partners, a few young people have improved their attendance at school. Senior leaders should keep under review the range of pathways and interventions offered to ensure they are leading to improved outcomes for all young people.
- Staff promote equality, diversity and tackling discrimination through the whole school PSE programme and through lessons in a few curricular areas. Rights Respecting young ambassadors help promote a range of topical issues that benefit all young people. Diversity is recognised and celebrated both within departments and across the whole school through initiatives such as decolonising the curriculum, refugee awareness and LGBTQ rights. These programmes and events support young people to feel valued, cared for and included.
- Young people appreciate the opportunities provided to them to become involved in the pupil parliament. This helps them feel valued, empowered and genuinely able to shape their future. They talk well, for example, of the increasing use of digital devices reducing the amount of paper used in lessons as a result of their concerns for the environment. While in its early stages, the pupil parliament is supporting an increasing number of young people to recognise how their voice can influence decisions that affect them in the school.
- Most young people enjoy being part of a school community which offers a calm, caring environment. The behaviour of young people in and around the school is generally polite and respectful, as is the behaviour of young people to each other. A few young people are concerned about bullying by others. Staff should continue, along with young people and their parents, to review the equalities, anti-bullying and positive relationships policy to ensure they reflect current priorities. As part of this review, staff should continue to develop the whole school nurturing approach to ensure that all young people benefit from a supportive school environment.

- Strong links between staff in the associated primary schools and the secondary school have helped develop an effective transition programme for young people as they move into S1. This includes staff from the secondary school spending time in the primaries, day visits by young people, a summer festival and an associated schools group summer camp. Together with the successful enhanced transition programme, these activities help young people settle quickly and happily into secondary school. Staff should continue to develop this programme to include more opportunities to build seamlessly on prior learning across all curriculum areas.

## 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

### Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Levels of attainment in literacy are consistently strong. School staff have introduced a range of initiatives to support young people's literacy. These include using digital resources to support targeted young people's reading development and a library-based programme that very effectively engages young people in reading for pleasure. An effective literacy initiative enables staff across the faculties to make good use 'literacy mats'. These support young people to develop subject-specific literacy skills that will help them to overcome potential literacy barriers to attaining well. A minority of young people do not make appropriate progress in numeracy, especially in the senior phase. School staff should, as planned, consider a range of interventions to support young people who are not making sufficient progress in numeracy.

### Broad General Education

- In 2022/23, most young people achieved CfE third level or better in all literacy measures and in numeracy and the majority achieved CfE fourth level. These levels of attainment have generally been maintained over recent years in literacy. In numeracy, attainment at CfE third level or better has been maintained over recent years, but at CfE fourth level is below pre-pandemic levels. Teachers in the English and mathematics departments engage in moderation activities with colleagues in their own departments and in other secondary schools in the local authority. As a result, judgements about achievement of a level are reliable. Teachers work with primary school colleagues effectively to moderate assessment in literacy and this supports young people in their transition to S1.
- In the most recent year, 2022/23, most young people with additional support needs achieved CfE third level by the end of S3 in all aspects of literacy and in numeracy. A minority achieved CfE fourth level.

### Senior Phase Leavers

#### Literacy

- Over the last five years 2017/18 to 2021/22, most young people who left school achieved Scottish Curriculum and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5 or better in literacy. This has been generally in line with the virtual comparator (VC) with the exception of two years when it was significantly higher. The majority of leavers achieved SCQF Level 6 in literacy. In the most recent year, 2021/22 this was significantly higher than the VC, having previously been in line. Attainment in this measure has generally improved over the past five years.

- The majority of young people who have additional support needs achieved SCQF Level 5 in literacy in the past five years, with the exception of 2019/20 when it was most young people. A minority achieved SCQF Level 6. The proportion of leavers who have additional support needs achieving the SCQF Level 5 course award has generally improved over the past five years.
- As young people move through the senior phase, they make good progress in literacy. Most young people at S4, by S5 and by S6 over the last five years attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. The majority of young people by S5 attained SCQF level 6 in literacy for the past three years, having previously been the minority. Literacy attainment at S4 and by S5 is generally in line with the VC. By S6, for four of the past five years, the majority attained SCQF level 6. This has improved to being in line with the VC for the most recent three years, having previously been significantly lower.
- The proportion of leavers with additional support needs attaining SCQF Level 5 or better and level 6 in literacy has been generally above the VC in the past three years.

## Numeracy

- Over the last five years, 2017/18 to 2021/22, the majority of leavers achieved SCQF Level 5 or better in numeracy, with the exception of 2019/20, when it was most young people. A minority of leavers achieved SCQF Level 6. Attainment in numeracy at SCQF Level 5 or better and at Level 6 has been in line with the VC for the past five years.
- Generally, a minority of leavers who have additional support needs achieved SCQF Level 5 or better in numeracy in the past five years. Generally, a few achieved SCQF Level 6 in the past five years.
- In the most recent year, 2022/23, the minority of young people by S4 attained SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This has been significantly lower than the VC for two out of the past five years, including the most recent year, 2022/23. The majority by S5 and by S6 attained SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This has been in line with or significantly lower than the VC over the past five years. In the most recent year, 2022/23, a few young people attained SCQF level 6 in numeracy by S5 and by S6. This is significantly lower than the VC for S5 and significantly much lower than the VC for S6. There is headroom for improvement at SCQF level 6 as young people move from S5 to S6.
- The proportion of leavers with additional support needs attaining SCQF Levels 5 and 6 in numeracy has been generally in line with the VC in the past three years.
- A minority of young people at S4 are presented for the National Qualification at SCQF Level 5 in Mathematics and the majority achieved a pass at C or better in the most recent three years. A few young people at S4 are presented for the National Qualification at SCQF Level 5 in Applications of Mathematics. In the most recent year, 2022/23, a minority of these young people achieved a pass at C, and none achieved a pass at B or better. In S5 and S6 a few young people are presented for the national qualification at SCQF Level 6 in Mathematics and a minority of these in the most recent two years achieved a C or better. In the most recent year, 2022/23, more than a third of young people who sat the National Qualification at SCQF Level 6 in Mathematics achieved no award. This proportion has increased in the past two years and is significantly higher than the national average. Senior leaders should continue to work with teachers to address attainment in mathematics.



- Staff in the mathematics department should continue to explore the differences between those achieving numeracy through units compared to course awards to ensure all young people are attaining as highly as possible.
- A few young people leave school without awards at SCQF Level 3 or above in numeracy. Teachers have taken appropriate steps to ensure that this will not be the case in future years.

## **Attainment over time**

### **Improving attainment for all**

#### **BGE**

- School leaders were unable to present information that reliably shows patterns of improved attainment at CfE third and fourth levels over recent years. Staff should ensure that assessment judgements in the BGE are based on the national Benchmarks and reflect a body of evidence. At present there is too much variability in the rigour of BGE assessment judgements. As a result, the school's data about attainment in the BGE is insufficiently robust.

#### **Senior Phase**

- Based on average complementary tariff points, the attainment of leavers has improved over the past five years and is now above the VC. The lowest attaining 20% of leavers attained in line with the VC or significantly higher than the VC, including in the most recent year, 2021/22. The attainment of the middle 60% of leavers has improved over the past five years and is in line with the VC. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of leavers has generally improved over the past five years and is in line with the VC.
- Based on complementary tariff scores, over the past five years the lowest attaining 20% of young people at S4 and by S5 based on the S4 cohort attained in line with or significantly higher than the VC. By S6, based on the S4 cohort, the lowest attaining 20% of young people have attained in line with or significantly higher than the VC for the past three years, 2021 to 2023, having previously been significantly lower. The middle 60% of young people attain in line with VC at S4 and by S5. By S6 the middle 60% generally attained in line with the VC for the past three years, 2021 to 2023, having previously been significantly lower. At S4 and by S5 the highest attaining 20% of young people attained generally in line with the VC for the past five years, with the exception of 2020/21, when it was significantly much higher. By S6, the highest attaining 20% of young people performed in line with the VC for four of the past five years and significantly higher in 2021/22.

#### **Breadth and depth**

- Senior leaders have recently worked with staff to improve the way they use data to track young people's attainment in the senior phase. This helps senior leaders to be confident that young people achieve passes at C or better in as many SCQF Level 5 and 6 courses as possible. A few young people at risk of not achieving passes at C or better are identified and are well supported by mentoring. This helped to improve attainment for young people in S4 in the most recent year, 2022/23. It is too early to identify a sustained pattern of improvement as a result of the school's new approach to using data to help young people stay on track.
- At S4, the minority of young people achieve five or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better. This has improved over the past three years and is now in line with the VC, having been significantly lower and much lower than the VC in the previous two years. A minority of young people in S4 achieve six or more qualifications at SCQF Level 5C or better. This has improved over the past three years. In 2022/23 this was significantly lower than the VC, having previously been significantly much lower. A minority of young people achieve five or more

qualifications at SCQF Level 5A. This has been in line with the VC for the past two years having been significantly much lower in the previous year.

- By S5, a minority of young people achieve three or more qualifications at SCQF Level 6C or better. This has declined over the past two years but has been in line the VC for the past five years. A few young people achieved five or more qualifications at SCQF Level 6C or better in the past two years, having previously been a minority. This is significantly lower than the VC for 2022/23, having previously been in line. The proportion of young people achieving three or more qualifications at SCQF Level 6A has been in line with the VC for the past five years, with the exception of 2020/21, when it was significantly higher. A few young people achieved five or more qualifications at SCQF Level 6A in each of the past five years. This is in line with the VC but has declined over the past two years. Overall, there is room for improvement by S5 in young people achieving the highest quality passes.
- By S6, there is no consistent pattern of improvement in young people achieving SCQF level 6C or better for one or more to five or more courses. The school's performance is generally in line with or significantly lower than the VC. The proportion of young people achieving three or more to five or more courses at SCQF Level 6A has been in line with the VC for the past five years. The percentage of young people achieving one or more SCQF Level 7 qualifications at C or better also shows no consistent pattern of improvement but has been in line with the VC for each of the past five years.
- In recent years staff have introduced a range of courses aimed at providing more appropriate pathways for young people as they pass through the senior phase. In addition, senior leaders are undertaking a review of the curriculum with the aim of ensuring that all young people have a range of options that best meet their needs as they move through the senior phase. This has the potential to improve outcomes for young people, but it is too early to identify patterns of improved outcomes arising from these changes.

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

- Young people appreciate the wide range of clubs and sporting activities on offer across the school and most take part in one or more. These include sports clubs, choir, film, scripture union and clubs relating to a range of curriculum areas. All young people involved in these activities talk positively about how this is developing their confidence and organisational skills, allowing them to engage positively with their peers. Activities include participation in leadership roles such as the Rights Respecting group, Youth Philanthropy Initiative and the pupil parliament. A minority of older young people develop employability skills through supporting younger peers through sports coaching, transitions and in classes. A few young people volunteer with local organisations providing activities for children with additional support needs and with the intergenerational group that meets in the community lounge. This work develops young people's awareness of local community needs, including social isolation.
- Specific achievement and employability pathways are well planned for particular groups of identified pupils. For example, a few pupils work towards SQA personal development awards that help prepare them for the world of work. The young people involved show increased levels of attendance, confidence and improved engagement with the school.
- School leaders should now develop a whole-school approach to monitoring and tracking wider achievement. While young people are accessing a range of accredited awards, there is no strategic overview of all achievements. Senior leaders should move forward plans to develop the school's skills framework, linking it to the planned refresh of VVA. This has the potential to provide a platform for a more focused approach to tracking participation, skills and

achievement over time. It should allow staff to identify and support young people who are not benefiting from the opportunities available to them to build their skills profile.

- Young people's achievements are recognised through the bulletin, praise postcards and on social media. This relies on young people sharing their achievements outwith school with staff. A new digital tool is at an early stage in enabling young people in the BGE to capture and share their progress and achievements. There is scope to develop young people's self-esteem through a systematic and planned approach to celebrating the achievements of all young people.

### **Equity for all Learners**

- Staff have a clear understanding of the context of their local community and the socio-economic circumstances of young people and their families. The school's PEF allocation has been deployed to minimise the cost of the school day, enabling all pupils to access the curriculum. This includes supporting young people by ensuring they have access to a free breakfast, "take what you need trolleys", "grab and go lunches", a uniform bank and school trips.
- Senior leaders have used PEF to support a few young people who find it difficult to attend school. Individualised programmes incorporating volunteering, accredited achievement awards and employability pathways are planned to meet pupil needs. There are encouraging signs of progress in improving attendance and achievement for young people and families supported in this way. Staff are not yet able to evidence fully the impact of this work in accelerating the reduction of the poverty-related attainment gap. Senior leaders should continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of PEF on improved outcomes for young people.
- Almost all young people leaving school between 2019 and 2022 move on to a positive destination. This has consistently been above the virtual comparator, local authority and national averages.

## Quality of provision of Special Unit

### Context

The Annex is a unit for young people with a range of significant additional support needs. Twenty-six young people from across Midlothian Council attend the unit. The Annex was established in 2021. During the last three years, there have been a number of changes in staffing, including the roles of principal teacher and depute headteacher. At the time of the inspection the acting depute headteacher with responsibility for the Annex had been in post for 12 weeks. The Annex is situated in a former primary school building approximately half a mile away from the mainstream school building.

### Leadership of change

- On appointment, the headteacher quickly recognised the need for a range of improvements in the Annex. She worked promptly with local authority officers to evaluate the provision for young people in the Annex. As a result of the headteacher's strong leadership, provision for young people in the Annex has been significantly improved. The recently appointed acting depute headteacher is leading this improvement very well. All staff in the Annex have high aspirations for young people. They are dedicated to supporting each young person to achieve the best they possibly can. All staff understand the headteacher's focus on reviewing the unit's vision, values and aims, in partnership with young people and families. This work is aligned with the focus on vision, values and aims at Beeslack Community High School.
- Senior leaders have developed very positive relationships with the Annex staff team and have created a culture where staff are now confident to engage in discussions regarding future improvements. Staff are developing their confidence in undertaking leadership roles to bring about improvement.
- Senior leaders recently reviewed the Annex's previously agreed priorities for improvement. They reflected that these did not accurately reflect the unit's current context. In consultation with staff, they have recently developed a new, more appropriate, five point plan. This correctly details the most pressing priorities for improvement. Collectively, senior leaders and staff have a good understanding of the Annex's strengths and areas needing improvement. For example, strengths include the improvements in outdoor learning. Staff have identified the need for further improvement in tracking and monitoring young people's outcomes.
- Senior leaders support staff well to undertake changes and improvements. As a result, staff are making important changes that have improved provision at the Annex. For example, the amended structure of the school day is resulting in young people being calmer and less dysregulated throughout the day. Moving forward, senior leaders should consider how young people, parents and partners can be more fully involved in identifying and supporting priorities for improvement.

### Learning, teaching and assessment

- All staff develop and maintain caring and supportive relationships with young people. They show consideration for each young person's particular additional support needs. This supports all young people to engage appropriately in their learning. Learners' experiences build well on individual young people's interests. In a few lessons, young people can choose the context of their learning. A majority of lessons offer young people sufficient challenge. Teachers should now develop their practice to ensure all young people experience learning with appropriate levels of challenge. This development should have a clear focus on improving young people's progress and attainment.

- Teachers, support staff, and partners use a wide range of learning environments to enrich young people's learning. Visits to the local community are regular features of each young person's week. This is supporting all young people to develop their social skills in real life contexts. Senior leaders are engaging partners' support to provide young people with bespoke individualised learning experiences. For example, a few young people enjoy opportunities to volunteer in a local children's nursery, a boarding kennel or to participate in sports which are unavailable at the school.
- Staff intervene well in instances where young people become disengaged from their learning. This helps young people to maintain their focus. In a minority of lessons staff spend too much time on activities without a clear learning purpose, such as soft starts. Teachers should now develop their practice to maximise the time young people are engaged in purposeful learning.
- Teachers are beginning to use a range of assessments, including observations of learning, to develop their understanding of each young person's capabilities. Teachers are not yet using assessment evidence effectively to inform next steps in young people's learning. Teachers now need to develop their approaches to assessment further to support their understanding of where each young person is in their learning. They need to use this information more effectively to plan learning which is more clearly built on young people's previous successes and helps them to understand their next steps.
- Teachers plan most lessons based around young people's interests. They are aware of the need to develop learning pathways which will support young people to build progressively on what they can already do.
- Senior leaders have recently introduced new approaches to help teachers track and monitor young people's progress more effectively. Teachers are starting to gather clearer information on how well each young person is progressing with their learning. Teachers need to continue to develop their understanding of how to gather and analyse data on young people's progress. Senior leaders should continue to support teachers to develop their moderation skills and understanding of standards.

### **Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion**

- The approach by staff in the Annex to wellbeing ensures all young people know they are safe and feel cared for. All staff model caring and supportive relationships. They treat each young person with dignity and respect. Staff are developing a sense of community across the unit. This supports young people to feel a sense of belonging at the school. Almost all young people say they trust staff and would speak to them if they had any concerns or personal matters they wanted to discuss.
- Plans detailing each young person's additional support, health and other needs are in place. Where necessary, risk assessments are carried out and recorded properly. Staff ensure they are fully informed regarding each young person's needs, and any risks which they need to be aware of. This helps their understanding of how best they can support each young person, including what actions they need to take to keep them safe. Senior leaders should now review and streamline these plans. They should consider reviewing targets in young people's individualised educational programmes to ensure targets take greater account of national guidance.
- Staff should consider how to develop further young people's understanding of different cultures and faiths, for example, through celebrations at assemblies.

- Around half of young people are included in the life of the mainstream school, for example through attending classes or visiting the school library. This is helping these young people to develop their confidence in new and unfamiliar settings. As a result, they feel more included as valued members of Beeslack Community High School. Teachers should now explore how all young people can be included more fully in the life of the Annex and the wider Beeslack High School community. For example, young people could be supported to join the pupil parliament.

## **Raising attainment and achievement**

### **Attainment in literacy and numeracy**

- A minority of young people are making appropriate progress in literacy and numeracy. Teachers need to raise their expectations of what young people can achieve. They should ensure that they plan lessons which provide young people with increased levels of challenge.

### **Attainment over time**

- Over the last three years, a minority of young people have attained National Qualifications up to National 3 level. At present, only a few young people join their peers in the mainstream building to study for a National 4 qualification. Senior leaders need to ensure that young people can access a wider curriculum to enable them to attain as highly as they possibly can.

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

- The majority of young people's achievements are accredited using a range of nationally recognised awards. Young people's personal achievements are celebrated through school awards and at assemblies held in the Annex. Senior leaders should now explore how to ensure young people's achievements are accredited as widely as possible. Moving forward, they should consider how to track and monitor the skills young people are developing through their personal achievements.

### **Equity for all learners**

- Staff have a good understanding of each young person, their family's personal circumstances and potential barriers to their success. As a result, staff work well with parents and partner agencies to provide individualised interventions to help young people overcome these barriers, such as those caused by socio-economic factors. Senior leaders have used a portion of the Pupil Equity Fund allocation to support the wellbeing of young people in the Annex. For example, a breakfast provision and swimming lessons have been introduced. Senior leaders are not yet able to measure how effectively these interventions are helping to close the poverty related attainment gap.

### **Other information**

- Senior leaders should continue to work with staff in the Annex and in the mainstream school to increase opportunities for young people who mainly work in the Annex to access a wider range of courses. At present, staff deliver a curriculum to young people in the Annex that is limited in terms of courses leading to National Qualifications. Young people should have appropriate opportunities to achieve passes in National Qualifications at SCQF level 4 and above where possible.

## 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.