

21 December 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Buckie Community High School, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to the school. Our engagement helped us learn more about how young people and their families have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support young people's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

The school's handling of challenges brought about by the pandemic reflects national expectations and guidance well. Mitigation routines across the school continue to promote a safe learning environment. The school's arrangements allowed staff to respond flexibly to the changing circumstances of blended and remote learning. Staff and pupil absence, directly or indirectly related to COVID-19, continues to be a challenge that the school are monitoring closely.

Throughout the pandemic, staff have been responsive to the needs of young people. They continue to refine and adapt approaches to learners' experiences due to changing circumstances. Staff built effectively on the challenging experience of the first lockdown to provide improved learning experiences and support for young people through periods of disrupted learning. Young people and their families were regularly consulted on their learning experiences. A range of supports were introduced to ensure that any issues could be addressed promptly. Through the second period of remote learning, identified young people facing barriers to their learning and groups of learners were supported well in school. Pupil support teams provided valuable support to young people and their families at an individual level.

Staff worked well to ensure that all learners had access to digital resources and could access the internet. Staff monitored closely the engagement of young people in on-line learning, with additional resources being made available across the local area. Regular communication and contact with families offered further on-going support.

Throughout lockdown and since young people returned to school, there has been a clear focus on young people's health and wellbeing. In response to issues highlighted by young people, staff have ensured a number of focussed initiatives are available to address these concerns. This includes the breakfast cart, counselling services, a mental health week and a pupil led wellbeing hub.

Almost all young people spoken to as part of the visit felt that they had been supported well during the pandemic and in the school's handling of the necessary changes to blended and remote learning. They found the support offered in the second period of school closures made it easier to keep in touch with classwork while not in school. Learning gaps identified by young people related to skills development and the study of practical courses. Some young people focused on the social and emotional aspects of not being able to interact fully with friends and peers.

School staff are now consolidating and building on the experiences of the pandemic to improve outcomes and experiences for learners. There is a clear focus on effective tracking of progress, using feedback from young people, learning conversations and learning strategies. Staff are building on their successful approach to the alternative certification model by embedding practice on how they assess and moderate young people's work.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

A change to improvement planning has enabled a stronger focus on addressing the challenges presented by remote learning, in addition to points for action arising from the previous Education Scotland inspection. Senior leaders and teachers report increased and improved use of self-evaluation evidence in helping to identify areas for improvement. The smarter use of data is helping to better target specific interventions. For example, the coaching of young people aspiring for certification at SCQF Level 6 and focusing Pupil Equity Funding or recovery funding to support identified groups. Communication with parents has improved. This is now more regular and has a greater focus on sharing positive messages through parent updates and 'Love-it' posts.

There have been increased opportunities for young people to lead aspects of school life, for example, supporting the wellbeing hub, participation in the equalities group and as language learners and sports leaders.

The quality and frequency of dialogue around teaching and learning has improved. Middle leaders were very positive about how they have been empowered to take forward significant improvements. Teaching staff worked collaboratively with each other and the young leaders of learning (YLOL) pupil group to develop the 'Buckie Community High School Learning Strategy'. This ownership is important as it is helping to bring about the joint investment of staff in changing and improving practice.

Staff are continuing to build on the skills and knowledge they gained during lockdown in terms of using digital technologies and incorporating them more often in their daily practice. Young people are comfortable saving their work and sending it electronically to the teacher from class just as they did from home.

Staff across the school are working well to review and update curriculum pathways. The school's curriculum rationale has been updated in line with the refreshed vision, values and aims. There are now clear progression pathways in all subject or curricular areas from S1– S6. These provide helpful support for young people to plan their next steps in learning. There has been a sustained effort to increase the range of courses available to young people. While this aspiration is not yet realised fully in the senior phase due to challenges

with staffing and working with external partners during the pandemic, a number of new courses have been introduced.

A new process for course choice has been introduced for S2 and S3. Positively, part of this process includes young people making a long-term plan for their pathway through the senior phase. As a result of the increased focus on the range of courses and their progression routes, young people are now better informed about their options and are making fewer requests to change course.

Staff across the school are working well to raise attainment for young people. Improvements in learning pathways, tracking progress and the support offered to young people are supporting this successfully. While significant progress has been made in a number of attainment measures, senior leaders acknowledge there are still a number of areas to be addressed to fulfil their aspiration for their young people.

Young people have opportunities to achieve through, for example, leadership awards at SCQF Level 6, the YLOL programme, a peer educator programme, the Youth Philanthropy Initiative, the ethics cup and the Cullen Sea School. There has been a reduction in opportunities for young people to experience some achievement activities, including those that are accredited, due to the impact of the pandemic.

What happens next?

Understandably, Buckie Community High School has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. The Moray Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Gary Johnstone
HM Inspector