

17 June 2025

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 May 2024. 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.**

Strong progress has been made in this area for improvement.

The highly regarded headteacher continues to provide inspirational leadership and clear direction for school improvement. They are fostering a whole school focus on the widely shared vision of 'nurture, flourish, achieve'. Staff and senior leaders work together effectively to make sure that all school policies are grounded in these values and stay focused on making things better for young people. Senior leaders and the Parent Council meet every six weeks to discuss key issues. The headteacher also communicates regularly with the Parent Forum through update letters and by hosting optional 'drop-ins'. There is an increased focus on communication to parents about how well young people are progressing in their learning. As a result, an increasing number of parents report satisfaction with communication and their children's school experiences. Parents speak positively of the 'Crew' model in S1 and S2, as this has developed young people's confidence and more positive attitudes to school.

**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.**

Some progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Teachers have focused on creating welcoming classrooms. They routinely meet and greet young people at the start of lessons. Staff recently established a mobile phone strategy. This asks young people to keep phones out of sight or hand them in to teachers at the start of learning. This approach is helping to remove distractions during learning. Most young people report feeling safe in school. An increasing number of staff supervise corridors and social spaces during transition periods and breaks from lessons. A few young people continue to

engage in disruptive and disrespectful behaviours. All staff need to continue to work with these young people in order to engage them in learning and support them through having high expectations, in line with the school values. One successful approach is the merit system which rewards young people who demonstrate school values. Another successful approach is through 'Crew'. Young people in S1 and S2 demonstrate respect and care for others during weekly Crew community meetings where young people offer 'Appreciations, Apologies and Stands'. The school has also created 'See it, Say it, Sorted' matrix barcodes which allows young people experiencing bullying to report this confidentially. Senior leaders should continue to involve young people, parents and staff in further developing the policies for anti-bullying and promoting positive relationships, building on successful approaches.

Groups of young people access helpful quiet spaces at breaks and lunch times. They really value having these areas, which are less busy, to allow them to meet their classmates and teachers in a relaxed atmosphere. Most young people appreciate the increasing range of clubs and activities, many of which are offered during lunch times and after lessons. These activities, including interhouse competitions, sports groups and chess club, all help young people feel a sense of belonging. Staff celebrate young people's successes through house assemblies and 'celebration of success' events.

**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.**

Positive progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Senior leaders and teachers worked together to develop the helpful 'Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework' to support teachers. A majority of teachers are now using more consistent lesson routines which help young people to understand what is expected of them. Staff have continued to develop the S1 and S2 'Crew' experience. Young people remain positive about their learning experiences in Crew and describe how it is helping them to develop important skills, including in literacy and numeracy.

Staff have recently introduced effective arrangements to plan, track and monitor young people's progress. Staff analyse how well young people are making progress and plan extra support that will help learners improve. Senior leaders have planned the school calendar to support increased reporting for each stage, so that young people and their families know when assessments are taking place. They have shared the tracking and reporting schedule for the school year with all parents and carefully plan dates to coincide with parents' evenings and planning for choices and change processes.

**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.**

Some progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Staff now promote widely and celebrate the school's vision. In line with this, senior leaders maintain a focus on ensuring all staff understand and establish a nurturing and inclusive learning environment across the school. Young people feel increasingly respected and have a sense of belonging to their school community. Senior leaders and guidance staff are

making more use of information gathered through surveys and wellbeing profiles. These are informing staff approaches to promoting the wellbeing of all young people. Staff work well with partners who offer a range of interventions to help young people make progress in their learning or improve their wellbeing outcomes. Guidance staff need to continue to focus on identifying young people's strengths as well as development needs.

Senior leaders and staff have introduced specific strategies to target and promote school attendance, particularly for young people in S1 and S2. These approaches help young people in S1 and S2 to reflect on their attendance and merits gained for positive interactions. Staff should extend these types of approaches to young people at other stages of the school to ensure a consistent approach to promoting school attendance. Senior leaders recognise that further action is still required to improve significantly young people's attendance. In addition, there are still too many young people who wander the school building to avoid lessons.

**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.**

Limited progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Crew is a valuable source of support for young people that is leading to improvements in attainment in literacy and numeracy as young people progress from S1 to S2. Most young people in S2 are now achieving at Curriculum for Excellence third level. However, young people in S3 to S6 are not attaining as well as other young people from similar backgrounds across Scotland. Teaching staff have worked together to start measuring how successful young people are in their learning across the school. Senior leaders need to continue to work closely with faculty leaders to check on the robustness of this information about young people's progress in learning. They also need to make sure that all steps are being taken to help all young people achieve success. Staff across the school acknowledge that attainment still requires significant improvement.

A high number of young people continue to leave school in S4 and S5, with a minority continuing on to S6. Staff have taken a range of steps to support young people to achieve a positive destination, including remaining at school in S5 and S6. These steps include offering a greater choice of subjects through ABZ Campus and through a dedicated website which helps parents and young people find out about pathways that meet young people's needs. Senior leaders recognise that further action is required to significantly improve young people's attendance overall and reduce the number of young people on flexible timetables. Partnership working with a range of very supportive local and national organisations is helping to reduce the number of young people on flexible timetables, but further action is still needed.

### What happens next?

The school has made progress since the original inspection, particularly in leadership, culture and safeguarding of young people. The curriculum is also being improved. However, some staffing challenges remain and we have not yet seen sufficient improvements in attainment for older pupils. The school needs more time and continued support from Aberdeen City Council to improve these aspects. HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and work closely with Aberdeen City Council to monitor and review ongoing improvement. We will carry out another inspection within 18 months. When we return to inspect the school, we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Jacqueline Gallagher  
HM Inspector