

Summarised inspection findings

Falkland House School

Fife

10 December 2019

Key contextual information

Falkland House School is situated in an extensive estate in Falkland, Fife. It is an independent special school which provides care and education for children and young people aged 5-18 with a range of additional support needs including autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactive disorder. The school roll is 29, two children at the primary stages and 27 young people at the secondary stages. All learners are boys.

The Principal and headteacher are new in post following the school being recently acquired by The National Fostering Agency Group (NFAG). Both were internal appointments.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

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

- There is a highly inclusive and child-centred ethos and culture embedded in the school's practice. Positive relationships and sensitive interactions between staff and learners feature prominently across the school. This is supporting children and young people to overcome their anxieties and engage successfully with their learning. In classrooms, most learners engage well during lessons and complete planned tasks and activities. High levels of motivation and enjoyment are present in most classes, notably physical education and the Independence Programme. Learning activities are well matched to children's and young people's needs and help develop their communication and social interpersonal skills. As a result, most learners work well both independently and in collaborative tasks and activities.
- Staff value children's and young people's views on learning and the work of the school. Learners feel and that they are listened to and their views are important. Assemblies held three times a day and attended by both staff and learners help foster a whole school community identity. This strong community ethos helps children and young people to share confidently their views with staff and their peers. The school improvement plan outlines changes in practice informed by the views of learners. In addition, the learning environment and small class sizes promote regular individual and small group conversations about learning and teaching and the curriculum.
- Teachers plan tasks and activities taking good account of curricular pathways and communication skills. Visual timetables, short learning episodes, encouragement and praise supports learners' concentration on planned tasks and activities. Staff use learning outdoors and in the community effectively to provide a breadth of contexts for learners to apply skills in new and unfamiliar contexts. Teachers should implement more approaches to learning and teaching to better promote children's and young people's curiosity.

- Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to signpost learning and visually present information to offer extra stimulus. Individually, learners confidently access “drill and practice” software packages which reinforce their learning. They research information well across subject areas. The school should continue to identify ways to use digital technologies to enhance learning experiences.
- Almost all staff encourage learners to improve their skills in self-regulation, communication and positive learning approaches. They anticipate potential stressful situations well and build learning around children’s and young people’s strengths. Almost all staff consistently reinforce clear routines and promote readiness to learn through “Effort and Attitude to Learning” (EATL), “ready to learn” and “big deal, little deal”. In most lessons, teachers effectively differentiate tasks and activities for most learners. They also use questioning techniques well. There is now a need to continue to develop relevant and meaningful contexts for learning across all curricular areas. In addition, all staff need to ensure they have high expectations of what children and young people are able to achieve.
- On entry to school, staff use effective assessment approaches to identify individual learning needs. Most staff are clear about each learner’s strengths and use ongoing assessment well to enhance children’s and young people’s wellbeing and confidence. In a few classes, the use of self and peer assessment helps young people understand themselves as learners and respond constructively to other’s points of view.
- Standardised data and ongoing formative assessment approaches provide useful information about learners’ progress. Most teachers share the purpose of learning well at the start of lessons and then revisit it at appropriate times. Most teachers also check for learners’ understanding effectively. Written and oral feedback is not yet used consistently across the school. Learning journeys across each curriculum area outline targets for each learner. The ‘What helps me’ sections of the learning journeys specify strategies to support learners to access all areas of the curriculum. National Qualification assessment processes in the senior phase are well understood and implemented. There is a need to develop accessible language which enables learners to understand better what success looks like across all areas the curriculum.
- Moderation at the senior phase centres on verification of required standards to achieve National Qualifications. Using informal networks, almost all teachers link with colleagues in local mainstream schools. There is a need to continue to apply all stages of the moderation cycle including expected standards during the course of teaching. Teachers need to build their confidence in making accurate professional judgements of learner’s progress at the broad general education. As planned, the school should continue to build more formal networks with similar schools to share good practice and offer opportunities for moderation and professional development.
- Staff plan lessons well taking account of learners personalised needs and the curriculum pathways linked to the broad general education. Most staff use learning journeys well to track children’s and young people’s progress. Learners and key teachers regularly revisit and review individual targets. However processes showing added value for learners are at the early stages of development. In addition, existing practices do not show the success children and young people have in overcoming barriers to learning. There is a need to streamline existing systems and paperwork to ensure they are manageable, provide useful information and inform next stages in learning.

- The tracking and monitoring of EATL by class teachers and senior managers provides an informative overview of learners behaviour and attitude to learning across each subject area. Recording learners application of self-regulation strategies through EATL was recently reviewed to improve data accuracy. Information from this monitoring exercise is used well by key teachers and leads to appropriate interventions where necessary.

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 proprietors.

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

Overview

- The outcomes for children and young people placed at Falkland House for education and care are consistently very good. Before beginning their placement at the school, most children and young people have long standing anxiety and mental health issues. The school supports learners very well to eradicate their anxieties and re-engage successfully with education. This leads to learners making very good progress once they enter the senior phase. Overall, children and young people are attaining well, significantly improving their wellbeing and building skills for learning, life and work. Over the last two years, all school leavers have successfully transitioned to and sustained placements in higher and further education, modern apprenticeships or employment.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Based on evidence provided by the school and observations of learning, most children and young people are making good progress in literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics with a few making very good progress.
- Most children have experienced long periods of interrupted learning and staff focus on closing any identified gaps in literacy and numeracy. This is supporting learners well as they move into the senior phase. In recent years, most learners have successfully gained National Qualification course awards in English and mathematics at National 4 or above. As planned, the school needs to develop approaches to more rigorously track and monitor children's and young people's progress at the broad general education. This will improve further children's and young people's attainment in literacy and numeracy.

Listening and talking

- Children and young people across all stages contribute well to discussions, offering their views on a range of topics. This includes opinions about children's rights and demonstrating an understanding of persuasive text. Learners speak confidently to visitors and talk positively about their work and what they are achieving. Children and young people are improving their social interaction through listening to others and taking turns to speak. As the school progresses its listening and talking curriculum pathway, there is a need to develop further learners' listening skills at the broad general education. Young people in the senior phase are very enthusiastic communicators with peers, teachers and visitors.

Reading

- Almost all children and young people can read and follow written instructions well, for example a science experiment or a recipe. Teachers are encouraging children and young people to read for enjoyment. A recently introduced phonic scheme is supporting reluctant readers to engage well. As a result, reluctant readers are gaining confidence in reading texts and stories fluently.

Children and young people are developing confidence in, and giving attention to, grammar when they are reading. There is a need to increase the range of novels on offer for older learners. A few learners use technology well to help to support their reading skills. Senior phase learners identify, read, discuss and debate the range of language used in persuasive texts. They use posters and online tools to read and review the quality of the persuasive language in advertisements.

Writing

- Most children and young people write well across a range of purposes and genres, including factual information and personal experience. Children and young people apply their writing skills appropriately through poetry, imaginative writing and writing for information. With support, children use note taking skills to write informative text. Young people write for different purposes, such as biographies, advertisements and poetry. They use dictionaries and thesauruses well to extend the range of words they use in both fiction and non-fiction writing. Learners now need to write more extended pieces of text. In the senior phase, young people plan and write high quality reviews of books and computer games. They can also research and write biographies of their favourite authors. They learn how to add value to their writing through well designed approaches to structuring their texts.

Numeracy

- As they progress through the broad general education, most children and young people are making good progress in closing any gaps in their mathematical knowledge. They are developing their knowledge and skills with number, measurement, information handling, money, fractions and time. At the primary stages, children apply simple number operations, recognise coins and identify days of the week and months of the year. They tell time on both analogue and digital clocks, converting successfully between them. At the secondary stages, young people are using coordinates well to plan journeys. They are adept at using multiplication and division skills to problem solve multiples and factors. They are able to simplify fractions and decimals, and can name and describe 2D shapes and 3D objects. Learners at all stages need to develop further their problem solving skills.

Literacy and numeracy across the curriculum

- Learners benefit from using literacy and numeracy skills in a variety of real and relevant contexts notably in science, music and independent development. This helps children and young people appreciate how literacy and numeracy offer important skills for life and work. Staff should now continue to provide wider learning experiences which offer sufficient challenge, coherence and progression in literacy and numeracy.

Attainment over time

- According to the school's own data, most young people in the senior phase achieve a very good range of National Qualifications from National 3 to Higher. As they progress through the senior phase, most young people achieve a high number of course and unit awards at National 4 or above. They are successful across an array of curriculum areas including, English, mathematics, science, music, chemistry and administration. In recent years, the school's attainment profile has continued to improve with young people becoming increasingly successful at gaining National 5 and Higher qualifications. Commendably, a few young people are gaining qualifications through Falkland House's successful school college partnership. In recent times, young people have achieved National Certificates at Level 5 and 6 in subject areas such as computing, music and sport and fitness.
- The school has been very successful in supporting children and young people to re-engage with education often after prolonged periods of interrupted learning. Almost all children and young people improve their attendance and are participating well across the curriculum.

Achievements

- Most children and young people achieve very well. Promoting and celebrating achievement is embedded in the life of the school through an extensive number of well-planned activities. Young people are gaining skills for life and work through participating in the Electives Programme and independent development. They are building their skills in teamwork, communication, problem solving and leadership. Learners are trying new things which is building their confidence, resilience and understanding of citizenship. Despite previous high levels of anxiety, young people are engaging well with the local community. They are successfully volunteering, attending college, participating in residential experiences and travelling independently. Within the school itself, children and young people are planning and taking a lead role in organising events, trips and fundraising initiatives. The school needs to develop further children's and young people's record of achievement. This will help to enable learners to build more progressively on the skills and capacities they are developing through their personal achievement experiences.
- Young people successfully gain certification and accreditation for their achievements. Personal development awards, vocational qualifications and in-house certificates are achieved by almost all young people. Young people's achievements are recognised through 'Celebrating Success' days and are displayed across the school. Young people are very proud of their personal achievements. As planned, staff need to introduce more accreditation to enhance further the existing positive profile of achievement across the school.

Equity

- The school has a comprehensive understanding of the needs of children and young people. They are fully aware of any barriers to learning faced by children and their families. The school provides high quality equitable support to children and young people to ensure they are able to access fully their education.
- Aided by the high quality approaches to improve wellbeing and build skills for life and work, young people are successfully moving into positive destinations. The last cohort of school leavers in June 2018 have successfully sustained placements in higher education, modern apprenticeships, further training and employment. Commendably, the school maintains regular contact with school leavers to offer support and encouragement for a year after their leaving date.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion - wellbeing

- The school is improving outcomes for children and young people very well by re-engaging them in learning and deploying interventions to improve their wellbeing. The school's effective key worker approach helps learners to settle into school life and overcome any initial anxieties or concerns. Children and young people respond very well to this approach and are developing a strong bond with their key workers.
- Positive relationships between children and young people and staff underpins the school's culture and ethos. Teachers know children and young people very well and this supports learners to feel safe and valued as individuals. Children and young people know that teachers are caring and approachable. As a result, learners are comfortable to share any concerns that they might have about their education or any other personal matters affecting their wellbeing. This is supporting children and young people to maintain high levels of attendance, engage in learning activities and improve their social and emotional wellbeing.
- As a result of a high quality personal and social education curriculum, children and young people are knowledgeable about internet safety and how best to engage with social media. Almost all learners are able to cope with stressful situations aided by the school's approach of 'big deal, little deal'. Learners can identify what bullying looks like and how prejudicial words and deeds can impact on their own and others wellbeing. This is contributing to almost all children feeling safe in the school.
- The EATL approach to promoting positive behaviour and self-regulation is motivating children and young people to remain engaged in learning for longer. Almost all staff are confident in resolving any incidences of challenging behaviour or distress. This is resulting in learners quickly re-engaging with their learning most of the time. A few staff would benefit from reviewing their approaches to promoting positive behaviour and revisiting the EATL guidelines.
- Care plans identify personalised targets to help children and young people to be safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included. Learners contribute to these plans in a meaningful way. As the school reviews and streamlines its approaches to improving wellbeing, they need to strengthen partnerships further between care and education. This will help all staff to contribute to more positive health and wellbeing experiences for children and young people. Children and young people demonstrate their understanding of their rights and responsibilities through the choices they make throughout the day. This is helping learners to cope positively with change and with their emotional development.
- The school's independent development programme is helping children and young people to become more confident and responsible as learners. Children and young people work as individuals and in teams to solve problems. Residential experiences help children and young people to put into practice important skills for life in unfamiliar contexts. As a result of participating in these experiences, learners improve their social skills and develop resilience and independence.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Young people's success in sustaining placements in higher education, modern apprenticeships or employment when they leave school. This is supported by the high quality approaches in place to build young people's skills for learning, life and work.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

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|-------------------------|---------------|
| 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.