Summarised inspection findings

Bucksburn Academy

Aberdeen City Council

13 May 2025

Key contextual information

School Name: Buksburn Academy
Council: Aberdeen City Council
SEED number: 5234034
Roll (March 2025):   922

Bucksburn Academy is a non-denominational, comprehensive secondary school serving the communities of Bucksburn, Bankhead, Kingswells, Newhills and Stoneywood, in Aberdeen.

96 young people with a range of additional support needs (ASN) from across Aberdeen City Council attend the school's ASN wing. More recently, this includes young people with severe and complex needs.

The headteacher has been in post for seven years. He is supported by four full-time and one part-time depute headteachers. A few subject areas, such as drama and design and technology, have been strongly impacted by staffing challenges recently.

Attendance is generally above the national average and is rising. Exclusions are generally above the national average and are falling.

In February 2024, 11.7% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2024, 4.6% of pupils live in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2023, the school reported that 56.6% of pupils had additional support needs. This includes young people who attend the ASN wing. The school reported that 47% of young people attending the mainstream school have additional support needs.

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

■ Relationships between almost all members of staff and young people are positive and this leads to a calm, supportive and caring ethos. This is underpinned by the school values of ambition, inclusion and respect. Almost all young people demonstrate a responsible attitude to their learning and respond well to their teachers' high expectations of them. Almost all young people are motivated to learn. Young people are confident and articulate. Staff support young people well to develop further these skills. Young people generally behave well and are respectful of others. Almost all teachers are skilled at responding quietly and effectively to address any incidents of low-level behaviour demonstrated by a few young people.

■ Most teachers create conditions for young people to learn independently and to make informed choices in their learning. In a minority of lessons, young people benefit from high-quality experiences where they lead their own learning. This enables them to be more motivated and to engage more meaningfully in their learning. Young people would appreciate further opportunities for these experiences. Senior leaders should continue to work with teachers to ensure that young people benefit from these experiences more consistently across the school. In a few lessons, activities are overly teacher-directed. This leads to all young people undertaking the same tasks and learning at the same pace, which does not meet all of their needs.

■ Young people are supported well to develop their skills, such as communication and teamwork. Learners use the well-embedded 'SCRIPT for success' skills framework which promotes the use of self-management, communication, resilience, information and communication technology (ICT), digital literacy, problem-solving and teamwork (SCRIPT). This framework is referred to appropriately in almost every lesson. In a minority of lessons, 'SCRIPT' is used very effectively to allow young people to apply their learning confidently in different contexts across the school. Almost all young people in S3 take part in 'Pathway' courses, which allow them to consider their learning and developing skills, through the lens of wider life and work. These courses are in their early stages, but there are already indications that they are supporting young people to develop their skills further. Senior leaders should continue to monitor the effectiveness of these approaches for young people to build and apply their skills.

■ Teachers have developed a well-considered framework for learning and teaching. As a result of its use, young people experience increasing consistency in the structure of most lessons. This helps them to be successful in their learning. The majority of teachers provide professional learning on learning and teaching for their colleagues as part of a wide-ranging programme. This supports staff to improve the quality of their teaching. Staff should continue with plans to involve young people in developing a learner-friendly version of the framework. Senior leaders should continue to ensure that this work is focused on developing further the quality of learners' experiences, to bring greater consistency of expectations across the school.

- In almost all classes, teachers offer clear instructions and explanations. They use a range of questioning techniques to check routinely for understanding and the recall of information. A minority of teachers use skilled questioning techniques to support young people to think more deeply about their learning, particularly in the senior phase. Teachers should now ensure they continue to expand their use of questioning to promote higher-order thinking skills more consistently across the school.

- Almost all teachers share the purpose of learning with young people as part of their lesson framework. They also share with young people what they need to do to be successful. This helps young people to identify better their strengths and next steps in learning. In the few most successful examples, young people are supported well to establish their own, sophisticated understanding of what success looks like and how they can achieve it. In the majority of lessons, young people benefit from plenaries to check what worked well and what gaps in learning still exist. As planned, staff should continue to develop their practice to improve further the quality and consistency plenaries across the school.

- Teachers offer effective verbal and written feedback to young people in almost all classes in the senior phase. This supports learners in S4, S5 and S6 well to set targets, be confident in discussing their progress and identify their next steps for improvement. Teachers should continue to develop further their use of feedback in the broad general education (BGE) to help all young people recognise effectively their strengths and next steps in learning.

- Learners benefit from the use of digital technology as a resource to support their learning. For example, teachers in all subject areas use online platforms to provide materials which young people access at home and in school. A few young people are supported effectively to use assistive technology well in the classroom. Senior leaders should continue to embed digital technologies to enhance learning.

- Teachers use a range of formative and summative assessment strategies such as 'show me boards', self-and-peer assessment as part of their lesson framework. This enables teachers to check for understanding throughout the lesson. In a few highly effective examples, teachers use this assessment evidence well to adjust their planned lesson to meet the needs of young people. This helps ensure that individual young people experience an appropriate level of support and challenge. This practice should continue to be shared more widely across the school to improve the quality of learners' experiences further.

- Teachers in all subject areas have engaged in a range of moderation and verification activities with colleagues in school, with local primary schools and across the local authority. Most staff are developing confidence and understanding of learners' assessment evidence well. This is leading to greater consistency and reliability of teachers' judgements. A minority of teachers across a majority of subject areas undertake Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) duties within their subject area. They share their expertise helpfully with colleagues, which results in a more consistent application of national assessment standards in the senior phase.

- Teachers in all subject areas track and monitor the progress of young people. In a few highly effective examples, teachers use this proactively to inform their classroom practice to plan for and support individual young people. This practice should be shared to support class teachers to more effectively use and consider information about the progression of individual young people across the school and all relevant information associated with them. Teachers should use this to help them plan learning and teaching approaches more effectively for young people.

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 education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	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

- A significant proportion of the school population.- almost 100 young people attend the ASN wing. This proportion varies between a few to a minority of young people within different year groups. Senior leaders provided supplementary attainment data for young people in the mainstream school, including the progress and attainment of those young people with severe and complex needs.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy
Broad General Education (BGE)
- In 2023/24, most young people in the mainstream school achieved Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level or better in literacy by the end of S3. Almost all young people achieved third level or better in numeracy by the end of S3. In 2023/24, the majority of young people in the mainstream school achieved CfE fourth level or better in literacy and in numeracy by the end of S4. Overall, there has been a broad pattern of improvement as young people make good progress in literacy and numeracy in the BGE.

- Young people in the mainstream school who require additional support with their learning are supported well with a range of targeted interventions. This includes working with pupil support assistants and teachers in classes, in small groups and on a one-to-one basis. Senior leaders should now consider how they can maintain overviews of attainment for cohorts of young people with additional support needs (ASN) in the mainstream school. This should be in literacy, numeracy and all other subjects from S1 to S6. This should lead to a more informed overview of these young people's progression as a group and allow staff to consider further interventions throughout a young person's learning journey.

- Senior leaders work well with staff from associated primary schools to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy across the BGE. This includes staff working regularly and directly with children in the primary schools to support their transition to secondary school. Secondary and primary staff have also collaborated to help share assessment standards which have contributed towards raised attainment as young people progress through their BGE. For example, on teaching for understanding in numeracy. Staff should continue to work with colleagues in primary schools to support young people's progress in literacy and numeracy further.

Senior phase
Literacy and numeracy
Leavers

■ Most young people left the mainstream school with Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy in 2023/24. This has been broadly sustained across the last five years. This is in line with the virtual comparator (VC) for leavers who left the whole school for each of the last five years. The majority of young people left the mainstream school with SCQF level 6 or better in literacy in 2023/24. This has been rising for the last four years, however, remains significantly lower than the Virtual Comparator (VC) for leavers who left the whole school for each of the last three years.

■ The majority of young people left the mainstream school with SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in 2023/24. This has been broadly sustained over the last five years and has been rising over the last two years. This is in line with the VC for leavers who left the whole school from 2019/20 to 2023/24. A minority of young people left the mainstream school with SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy in 2023/24. This has been rising for the last four years and is in line with the VC for leavers who left the whole school for each of the last five years.

■ Senior leaders ensure the curriculum supports young people with greater opportunities to attain in literacy and in English and mathematics and numeracy. For example, they introduced further courses relating to literacy which have supported a greater number of young people to gain further English qualifications. The introduction of applications of mathematics has led to an improvement in the quality of passes in this subject and in mathematics.

Cohorts
Literacy and numeracy

■ At S4, almost all young people in the mainstream school achieved SCQF level 4 or better in literacy in 2023/24 and most achieved SCQF level 5 or better. This has been broadly sustained for the last four years. By S5, based on the S4 roll, most young people in the mainstream school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in 2023/24. Performance at this level is inconsistent. By S5, based on the S4 roll, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better in literacy in 2023/24. By S6, based on the S4 roll, almost all young people in the mainstream school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in 2023/24. The majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better in literacy in 2023/24. By S6, the percentage of young people attaining at both SCQF level 5 or better and SCQF level 6 or better has been rising over the last three years.

■ At S4, most young people in the mainstream school achieved SCQF level 5 in numeracy in 2023/24. This has improved over the last four years. By S5, based on the S4 roll, most young people in the mainstream school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in 2023/24. This has been sustained over the last five years. A minority of young people in the mainstream school achieved SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy in 2023/24. By S6, based on the S4 roll, the majority of young people in the mainstream school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in 2023/24. This has been sustained for the last five years. A minority of young people in the mainstream school achieved SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy in 2023/24. This has improved over the last five years.

Attainment over time
BGE

■ By the end of S3, almost all young people in the mainstream school achieve third CfE level or better in almost all curriculum areas out with literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. By the end of S3, the majority of young people in the mainstream school achieve fourth CfE level or better in most curriculum areas.

Improving attainment for all
Senior phase
Leavers
■ Based on average complementary tariff scores, the performance of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of leavers from the whole school has broadly improved between 2019/20 and 2022/23. This declined in 2023/24. The performance of the highest attaining 20% of leavers from the whole school has broadly improved from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

Cohorts
■ At S4, the average complementary tariff scores for the lowest attaining 20% of young people in the whole school is inconsistent and also significantly below VC between 2019/20 and 2023/24. Attainment for the middle attaining 60% of young people in the whole school has been broadly consistent, and in line with the VC over these years. Attainment for this group of young people has improved. Attainment for the highest attaining 20% of young people in the whole school is inconsistent from 2019/20 to 2023/24 but remains in line with VC.

■ By S5, based on the S4 roll, attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of young people in the whole school shows no consistent improvement. For the middle attaining 60% of young people in the whole school, attainment has broadly improved and has been in line in with VC. In the most recent year, 2023/24 performance is significantly lower than the VC. Attainment for the highest performing 20% of young people has also declined in 2023/24, but remains in line with VC for the last five years.

■ By S6, based on the S4 roll, attainment for the lowest attaining 20% and middle 60% of young people in the whole school has been broadly consistent and in line with VC over the last five years. Attainment for the highest attaining 20% of young people in S6 is inconsistent but broadly improved to be in line with the VC between 2019/20 and 2023/24.

■ Senior leaders recognise the need to focus on improving outcomes for the middle attaining 60% of young people, in particular. Senior leaders use tracking data to identify individual young people who would benefit from interventions to improve their attainment. As a result, staff are directed to use specific supports and strategies well to support specific cohorts of young people in their attainment learners. For example, young people who are identified for a mentoring programme or learners who speak English as an additional language (EAL) attain positively. Senior leaders should now consider how more rigorous and consistently applied approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's progress could support more further interventions and improvements in attainment.

Breadth and Depth
■ At S4, the majority of young people in the mainstream school achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better in 2023/24. Attainment has improved in the latest year in 2023/24 following an overall decline since 2019/20. A minority of young people in the mainstream school achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better in 2023/24. This has been sustained for the last five years.

■ By S5, a minority of young people in the mainstream school achieved three or more awards at SCQF level 6C and at level 6A or better in 2023/24. This has declined overall from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

■ By S6, the majority of young people in the mainstream school achieved three or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better in 2023/24. There have been inconsistencies in attainment at this level, but there has been an overall improvement over the last five years. A minority of young people in the mainstream school achieved three or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better in

2023/24. This has been broadly sustained for the last five years. A minority of young people in the mainstream school achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 7C in 2023/24. There has been a pattern of improvement over the last four years.

- Senior leaders have identified the need to improve the quality of passes across young people's National Qualifications (NQs), particularly by S5. They have undertaken a range of actions to address this, including changes to curriculum offers and refreshed positive presentation policies. Senior leaders have also made a successful and explicit focus on improving the attendance of identified young people to support improvements in their attainment. There are indications that these actions have had a positive impact on identified young people's attainment. Senior leaders should be particularly mindful to consider swifter interventions around specific cohorts or year groups of young people who may need specific supports or approaches to improve their attainment as they move through their time in school.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people develop and demonstrate valuable life skills well through the wide range of experiences and activities they complete throughout their time in school.

- In the BGE the well-developed and progressive achievement programme enables young people to demonstrate a wide range of skills. This achievement programme encourages young people to consider how they can use specific skills. The skills that staff refer to, and have begun to track, are based on the SCRIPT framework which is referred to in almost all lessons. This collaborative approach supports young people well to consider how these transferrable skills help them in other aspects of their lives. An increasing number of young people in the senior phase demonstrate further their own skills and support other learners as wellbeing or learning ambassadors.

- Young people in all year groups are encouraged to be included in the life and work of the school through activities such as; table tennis, foreign film club, and computer games. Senior leaders track effectively young people's participation in activities inside and outwith school which lead to achievements in the BGE. An increasing majority of young people in the BGE benefit from taking part in activities offered within school. Young people are increasingly creating and leading activities independently for their peers. For example, young people have developed their own sports clubs, where young people develop important life skills, including leadership and confidence. An increasing number of young people are involved successfully in accredited activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme or the John Muir Award. These support young people effectively to learn and demonstrate skills in teamwork, planning and communication and articulate well the importance of involvement in the local community. Individual interests are also encouraged and enabled. This leads to, for example, young people being members of the Scottish Youth Parliament or representing their school in local and national competitions. Staff should continue to direct young people towards accreditation and recognition of the skills they are demonstrating.

- Young people appreciate their achievements being recognised and celebrated regularly in assemblies, newsletters and ASN leaver certificates. Learners, and their parents, particularly enjoy the celebration evening which celebrates a wide variety of achievements including for merit, resilience and endeavour. Young people are encouraged to showcase their individual and group talents at events throughout the year, for example in dance and music performances. Young people appreciate greatly the praise postcard system and value the healthy competition between the houses. This supports effectively a school culture where increasing numbers of young people further seek achievements and experiences.

Equity for all learners

- Staff track and monitor closely the impact of attendance on attainment and demonstrate clearly the positive link between higher attendance and higher attainment at school. An effective whole school focus on improving attendance, as well as PEF funded supports, have led to increasing numbers of identified young people completing national qualifications, attending school more regularly and re-engaging with the school.

- Senior leaders identify specific differences between groups of young people in the BGE as a result of in-depth data analysis and make appropriate adjustments to resourcing and interventions. This includes staff implementing specific literacy and numeracy groups in S2 which are increasing young people's attainment in these areas.

- Senior leader's appropriate use of PEF enables all young people in S2 to benefit from an outdoor learning experience. Young people recognise the link to developing SCRIPT skills through a wide range of outdoor experiences. They develop cooperation, responsibility and recognise the lasting impact on the relationships they build through this experience. Staff have developed the 'Hub Club' to provide a safe space for young people at unstructured times. This has supported learners to develop social skills and improve relationships.

- In 2022/23, using average complementary tariff scores, the school has performed in line with VC for leavers who live in SIMD deciles 7, 9 and 10, accounting for the majority of leavers.

- Almost all young people in the whole school moved onto an initial positive destination in 2022/23 and for the preceding four years. This is broadly in line with the VC. Most young people leave to enter further or higher education. This has improved over the last five years.

Context
The ASN wing, 'the wing', is a unit within the mainstream school, which supports 96 young people with a range of additional support needs across 10 classes. Young people attend from across Aberdeen City Council. The accommodation, over two floors, includes classrooms, a mock flat for teaching life skills and a hydro-therapy pool.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

■ All staff establish very positive relationships with young people in the wing. The nurturing ethos supports young people to feel valued and cared for. As a result, most young people engage enthusiastically in their learning. Young people clearly enjoy their learning and are motivated in their lessons. When young people do disengage from their learning, staff re-engage them quickly in their learning. This supports the wing to be a calm and purposeful learning environment. Young people's learning experiences are appropriately challenging and matched very well to meet their needs. Young people undertake roles of responsibility, such as being part of the pupil voice group. These roles support them to contribute meaningfully to the life of the school.

■ The school's values underpin teaching well in most lessons in the wing. Teachers use the range of environments available within the wing, the wider school campus including the 'flat' and the local community effectively to enrich young people's learning experiences. Staff use praise regularly to support young people to know when they have done well. Teachers know the young people and their preferred style of learning well. This helps teachers to plan learning, which supports young people well. Most tasks are differentiated well to meet each learner's needs. Teachers should continue to develop approaches to differentiation to ensure each young person can continue to make improved progress in their learning.

■ Teachers use a range of assessments on an ongoing basis to ensure each young person's planned learning meets their needs and supports them to make good progress. Teachers are continuing to develop the variety of assessment approaches to allow learners to demonstrate their skills in different contexts. Teachers report to parents on each young person's progress through learning journals and annual summative reports.

■ Teachers are beginning to engage in moderation activities with colleagues across the local authority. This is helping them to develop their confidence in making professional judgements of young people's attainment. Teachers need to continue to engage with moderation activities to ensure this supports young people to attain as best they can.

■ Teachers' approaches to planning ensure learning is progressive. They use their knowledge of young people well to plan activities, which engage young people's interests. Teachers use the CfE experiences and outcomes well to ensure young people experience learning across literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Teachers should now develop further their approaches to planning to ensure this is of a consistently high standard across all curriculum areas. Teachers are beginning to involve young people in planning through project-based learning and life skills programmes.

■ Teachers recognise the need to develop their use of tracking and monitoring approaches further to evaluate young people's progress. They are aware current approaches do not support them well to evaluate the progress of the changing cohort of young people. Staff are at the early stage of using national Benchmarks and the continuum of engagement to assess learning to ensure progression. Senior leaders need to continue to support teachers to develop

their skills and confidence further in tracking and monitoring young people's progress, particularly for learners with more complex needs.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

■ Young people are developing their communication and literacy skills well at all levels. For example, young people with complex needs working at CfE early level are making good progress. In the BGE young people spell simple three letter words and construct simple sentences using sentence builders. Almost all young people use communication aids well including Makaton to communicate with, and respond to, others. Most young people listen well to staff. They act on instructions and respond appropriately in completing tasks and activities. A few young people should be supported to develop their literacy skills independently.

■ All young people are working between pre-early and second level of CFE in numeracy. Young people are developing their numeracy skills well. A few young people identify two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes and sort objects. A few young people gather and record information and present this in a simple bar graph. A few young people count forwards and backwards using numbers to ten. A few add two figure numbers and perform simple calculations. Teachers should continue to ensure young people experience numeracy in real-life contexts and through their pathways programme.

■ Over the last few years there has been an increase in the number of young people with more complex needs attending the unit. As a result, the school's data shows an overall decrease in young people's attainment in the senior phase, particularly at SCQF level 2. Young people now attain more units at SCQF level 1 than in previous years, increasing between 2021/22 and 2023/24. The number of SCQF level 2 units has dropped from 202 to 83 and SCQF level 2 course awards from 24 to one, over the same period. The number of SCQF level 3 units has increased from 11 in 2021/22 to 15 in 2023/24. This change in attainment reflects the needs and abilities of the current cohort of young people attending the unit accurately. Over the last three years staff have increased the breadth of young people's attainment. Young people have either increased the number or range of qualifications in which they are successful. For example, young people now attain qualifications in health and wellbeing and PE. Young people now attain more qualifications in drama and music, and science.

■ Young people's numerous achievements are celebrated well. Young people achieve awards such as the John Muir Trust and Duke of Edinburgh's Award. A few young people in the senior phase demonstrate their teamwork, confidence and resilience very well when trying out new activities. These include attending residential trips or when sailing on a boat. Young people's personal achievements are celebrated at assemblies and through the school leavers record of achievement. A few young people speak of how these activities and awards help them to demonstrate their confidence and build self-worth. A few young people develop their confidence and sense of duty taking on responsibility such as serving in the breakfast club. Young people in the BGE develop their practical craft skills in activities such as jewellery making. Teachers have recently introduced a programme within the senior phase which supports young people well to develop their skills for life beyond school Young people demonstrate increased confidence and leadership through the use of work experience or from their learning in hospitality. Teachers should now consider how they can track and monitor the skills young people are developing through their wider achievements.

■ Staff ensure that cost is not a barrier to young people being included in an activity. This enables all young people to access the wide range of opportunities that the school offers. This includes the cost of attending residential trips, attending swimming lessons or following a reading scheme. The school is not yet able to identify how well PEF is being used to close the poverty-related attainment gap. Senior leaders should now consider how they evaluate

the effectiveness of how PEF is being used to close the poverty related attainment gap within the wing. Most young people experience learning in the mainstream building throughout each week. This supports young people to feel more included as members of the Bucksburn Academy school community. Young people during the BGE in the wing do not receive their entitlement to two hours of high-quality PE. A few young people from mainstream classes volunteer in the wing. This supports young people in the wing to feel more included in the wider life of the school. Almost all young people move onto a positive destination after leaving school.

Other relevant evidence

■ Almost all staff have a clear understanding of the socio-economic and cultural context in which young people live. Almost all staff are committed to fairness and inclusion. Staff, supported by parents, work to ensure that there are no costs to the school day. They do that in order to create an inclusive learning environment. Young people are able to develop without socio-economic constraints and identified young people can benefit from improved outcomes. The pupil equity fund (PEF) is allocated appropriately to support key staff, cover all curricular costs, and support out-of-school activities and uniform discreetly as required.

■ The librarian works full time in the school and supports the languages faculty with reading periods for young people in the BGE. She also administers the accelerated reader programme several times a year to track progress in reading ages for young people.

■ Young people in the mainstream school receive their entitlement to physical education. Not all young people receive their entitlement to 1+2 modern languages after S2 or to religious education after S4.

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.