

24 May 2016

Dear Parent/carer

**Peterhead Academy
Aberdeenshire Council**

We are trying out some new approaches to school inspection. You can find more information about these new approaches at the link below¹. Your school was inspected during March 2016 using new quality indicators². You can find these new quality indicators at the link below. We focused our inspection work on aspects of leadership and management across the school, the quality of learning, teaching and assessment and how well the school is supporting all young people to make progress and achieve as highly as possible. We also invited the acting headteacher to identify an additional aspect of the school's work for us to evaluate. The additional area selected was the curriculum. This letter sets out our findings.

Young people's attainment and achievements

Almost all young people are successful in moving on to employment, training or further learning on leaving Peterhead Academy. The percentage of young people leaving school at the end of S4 and going directly into employment is higher than the national and local authority figures. Attainment of young people at the end of S4 is showing signs of improvement in recent years. There are also some recent important improvements in the attainment of young people who stay on at school and leave at the end of S5 or S6. However, the attainment of those leaving school is still currently below that of other young people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. The school recognises that many young people should be achieving more and there is an increasing focus across the school on raising attainment to widen young people's choices about their futures. This focus needs to be supported by a shared understanding across all staff of the agreed strategies to improve outcomes for all young people.

Staff are working to raise aspirations across the school community. This includes through recognising and celebrating a wide range of young people's achievements. At the senior stages, young people are increasing their team-working and leadership skills through Community Sports Leaders Awards and taking on the role of prefects. Young people are active participants in the local community by championing local charities through the Youth Philanthropy Initiative. Participating in the Rock Challenge and school shows increases young people's confidence and improves

¹<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/about/principles/futureapproaches/index.asp>

²http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/HGIOS4_tcm4-870533.pdf

their performance skills. Pupils in the younger year groups would benefit from more opportunities to discuss the skills they are developing through their achievements both in and out of school. This will help them apply these skills across all aspects of their learning.

Learning, teaching and assessment

In most classes, relationships between staff and young people are respectful and support learning. Most young people engage well in lessons and enjoy working together on tasks. They answer questions thoughtfully, but need more opportunities to consider questions which require deeper thinking. There is emerging evidence that young people are encouraged to share their ideas and reflect on their learning. They need more well-planned, independent learning opportunities which provide them with appropriate challenge. In most lessons, teachers provide young people with clear explanations and instructions. They engage effectively with classes and individual learners, providing appropriate levels of encouragement. Not all lessons however have a clear and well-planned structure and the pace of some lessons can be too slow. There is considerable scope for staff to make better use of quality questioning in class to encourage higher order thinking. Staff should continue to engage with the useful work on the “Peterhead Academy Standard” which aims to ensure consistently effective learning and teaching across the school.

Across the school, teachers use a range of approaches to assess young people’s work. This is providing useful information about their learning, particularly in the senior years. Young people from S4 to S6 regularly discuss their progress towards target grades in qualifications with their teachers. However, the school does not yet have reliable enough assessment to provide a clear overview of young people’s progress from S1 to S3. Staff also need to ensure that they have reliable evidence of young people’s progress across learning at all stages. This evidence can then inform work to raise attainment. Teachers should work together to ensure there is a shared understanding across the school community of the most useful approaches to assessment and monitoring of progress.

Curriculum

The curriculum provides all young people with a broad general education from S1 to S3. From S4 to S6, young people have the opportunity to take a range of courses leading to qualifications. Staff have worked well together to develop the curriculum. They have successfully developed and implemented courses and programmes leading to the new National Qualifications. They usefully review programmes and courses to better meet the needs of learners. We have asked staff to continue to evaluate the changes to the curriculum and whether courses and programmes are meeting the diverse needs of the young people of Peterhead Academy. Staff need to develop a shared and planned approach to developing young people’s literacy and numeracy skills, and their learning about health and wellbeing, across all areas of the curriculum.

Young people enjoy increasing levels of challenge as they develop a range of employment-related skills. They enjoy good access to careers information to help them decide about their futures. The school works well with a range of partners

including local employers, community learning and development, North East Scotland College and Theatre Mòdo to provide learning for young people. The college delivers a range of Skills for Work courses, both in and out of school. The college Maritime Academy supports young people to prepare for a career in sea fishing and other maritime areas. Young people have been successful in progressing from the college programme to secure paid employment and a Modern Apprenticeship in sea fishing. The school encourages young people to engage in Robert Gordon University access programmes which assist them in securing university places. There remains scope to increase the range of opportunities for young people in S1 to S3 to develop their employability skills and prepare for the world of work.

Leadership and management

Young people, parents and staff have recently worked together to develop a new vision and set of shared values for Peterhead Academy. Senior leaders in the school encourage teachers to take on leadership roles and initiate improvements. They also encourage them to participate in career-long professional learning. Most staff are very positive about recent changes and the renewed sense of direction for the work of the school provided by the headteacher. They are committed to raising attainment for all young people. Over half of the teaching staff serve on working groups which lead on aspects of school improvement. There remains scope to ensure the shared values of positivity, aspiration, perseverance, equality, responsibility and success are fully embraced across the school, and that young people are consistently supported to understand how values can be embedded in their work.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- The engagement of staff, young people and parents in the work to develop the school's vision and values.
- The positive start made by staff to improving outcomes for young people.
- The range of partnerships to support young people in developing their employability skills.

We discussed with staff and Aberdeenshire Council how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to work at improving the school's ethos, building on the recently-established vision and values.
- Continue to improve learning and teaching in order to raise attainment.
- Improve the use of assessment to monitor and improve young people's progress across their learning.
- Continue to develop literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing skills across all areas of the curriculum.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

As a result of our inspection findings we think that the school would benefit from some additional support and more time to make necessary improvements. We will

work with Aberdeenshire Council to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We will return to carry out a further inspection within 18 months of publication of this letter. We will then issue another letter to parents on the extent to which the school has improved.

Carol McDonald
HM Inspector

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0131 244 4330, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.