

21 February 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

**Tain Royal Academy
The Highland Council**

In November 2013, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and The Highland Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it has continued to improve its work, and published another letter in June 2015. 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 also met with the Parent Council. 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. 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.

Increase the involvement of young people in their own learning and the life of the school.

Opportunities for young people to contribute to school improvement have increased. Young people are more able to express their views on school improvement. They were fully engaged in reviewing the school's vision and values. Across the school, many staff have engaged in professional learning to introduce more co-operative learning approaches into lessons. In a few lessons, these approaches are used well. As a result, young people take ownership of their learning and achieve positive outcomes. Senior leaders and Faculty Heads should continue to monitor the impact of these developments in learning and teaching to increase consistency and ensure all young people benefit. Learning conversations between teachers and young people are increasingly supporting learners to understand their strengths and next steps. Through these, young people often receive good quality feedback which supports them to increase their successes and achievements. All staff should ensure they do this. Young people have opportunities to review their progress and discuss their aspirations during PLUStime. Leadership opportunities for young people are increasing through, for example, the restructuring of the House system.

Increase the level of expectation and challenge in young people's learning.

The headteacher has set out his vision for increased expectations of effective learning and teaching across the school. Staff engagement in professional learning and sharing practice is starting to bring higher levels of challenge in young people's learning in a few curriculum areas. This is not yet consistently strong enough across

the school. In almost all lessons observed, tasks and activities were planned and delivered in the same way to the whole class. Staff should further develop approaches to ensure learning is differentiated to meet young people's varying needs and abilities. Young people need more support to develop and demonstrate skills in tackling challenging learning such as problem solving. They would benefit from greater encouragement to show resilience through continuing to engage with learning that extends their thinking and creativity.

Improve the quality of provision of Gaelic within the curriculum.

Gaelic for learners is now part of the curriculum for all young people in S1 and S2, with an option to continue with this in S3. Links with associated local primary schools are being developed. There are a few examples of positive partnership working which is enhancing young people's learning experiences in Gaelic. There remains a need to further strengthen Gaelic Medium Education within the school. An important next step would be to embed Gaelic within the school's vision, values and aims. The school recognises the need to extend opportunities for young people to learn through the medium of Gaelic. Plans to include geography in the Gaelic Medium curriculum are in place. However, there is a need for a clearer strategic plan to ensure improvements in this area continue.

Continue to develop the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners.

A staff working group has reviewed provision and introduced a number of improvements across S1 to S6. Young people are experiencing better progression into the senior phase. The revised S3 curriculum offers young people a good degree of choice, whilst protecting their entitlements and the potential to follow a range of different pathways. Partnership working to enhance the curriculum has improved, including stronger links with colleges and enhancements through online programmes. Several improvements relate to developing young people's skills for learning, life and work and include, for example, a greater commitment to workplace visits, work placements and improved careers information advice and guidance. The school does not yet meet national expectations in terms of quality physical education and religious and moral education through the senior phase. Its approach to religious observance also requires a clearer rationale so that it supports all members of the school community to engage in shared reflection on their values and beliefs.

Improve approaches to self-evaluation to raise young people's attainment.

Robust arrangements for self-evaluation are now established and becoming embedded in practice across the school. Most staff have a better understanding of their individual and collective responsibilities for reflecting on their work and contributing to school improvement. The senior leadership team have a sound grasp of the school's strengths and aspects still requiring improvement. The headteacher has used this information effectively to create an appropriate improvement plan which gives a clear sense of direction for the school community. Arrangements for tracking and monitoring young people's progress are much improved. Staff now need to further develop how they take account of data when planning learning to ensure young people's varying needs are met. The school benefits from strong partnership with the Parent Council which has been actively engaged in supporting

self-evaluation and school improvement. Young people feel that senior leaders and most staff listen to and respond appropriately to their concerns and value their ideas. The school has begun to raise young people's attainment in literacy and numeracy in S4 and by S5 and S6. In 2015-16, young people's performance in numeracy in S4 at SCQF level 5 or above has improved against the previous year. Performance in literacy in S4, and by S5 and S6 is broadly in line with that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds in other schools. There is improvement across a few curriculum areas. Overall, attainment of the highest performing young people has improved over the most recent three years. The percentage of young people achieving awards at SCQF level 5 and SCQF level 6 has increased. As new self-evaluation arrangements become embedded in the work and life of the school, senior leaders should increasingly challenge all staff to ensure consistent improvements in learning and teaching and subsequent improvements in attainment for all young people.

What happens next?

The school has continued to make progress since the original inspection. We are now confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve. We will work with The Highland Council to support on-going improvements and collaborate with the authority at their next review in 12 months' time to share in the gathering of findings about how the school is improving. We will, along with the authority, provide a report to ensure parents are informed about the school's further progress with increasing levels of expectation and challenge and in raising attainment for all young people.

Patricia Watson
HM Inspector

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