

Summarised inspection findings

Gorgie Mills School

The City of Edinburgh Council

26 March 2019

Key contextual information

Gorgie Mills School is a non-denominational special school for secondary-aged young people with social, emotional and behavioural needs. The school is based in the Gorgie area of Edinburgh and caters for young people from across the City of Edinburgh. At the time of inspection, the school roll was 42.

1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher is highly visible and approachable, and is well respected by the school community. She is passionate about the work of Gorgie Mills School and has an unswerving personal commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for all young people in the school. She is very well supported by her deputies, and together they set a positive example in creating a caring and welcoming ethos in the school.
- Collectively, all staff have a sound understanding of the social, economic and cultural context of the school, and a good awareness of the needs of young people and their families. Based on this understanding, staff have recently revisited the school's vision, values and aims. We have discussed with senior leaders the need to further develop this work to ensure that the vision, values and aims are more meaningful and relevant to all stakeholders. Young people, parents and partners should be directly involved in this process.
- A review of remits has provided greater clarity around strategic leadership of key improvement priorities. Increasing the analysis of evidence and data, and developing leadership at all levels are central features of the school's recent approaches to school improvement. Each teacher now has a learning partner in the school. Shared classroom experiences are beginning to encourage better reflection on practice to improve learning and teaching. Although in the early stages, teachers are positive about these changes. Annual professional review meetings, linked to the standards of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), also support teachers to reflect on their work. Regular staff meetings, and a well-planned calendar of professional learning is in place. As senior leaders develop these collaborative, reflective approaches, they should encourage staff to consider practitioner enquiry as part of their development, to support the school's ongoing journey of school improvement.
- Senior leaders are developing their approaches to self-evaluation across the school. The school's recently reviewed self-evaluation calendar includes the gathering of a range of evidence, including stakeholder views, direct observation of practice, and analysis of quantitative data. There are a few good examples of data being analysed to identify areas of strength and development needs. For example, the strong example of data and analysis on senior phase attainment, considering trends and comparisons. We have discussed with senior leaders the need to ensure that all evidence is consistently analysed in a systematic fashion and used to measure impact of change, and to inform future school improvements. This will

help ensure that the correct immediate priorities for improvement are clearly identified such as developing the curriculum and improving pupil participation. More frequent strategic meetings of the senior leadership team would help to do this more systematically. Looking outwards to learn from what happens elsewhere would also support the school to improve its work.

- The school improvement plan follows national guidance with a few priorities, identified actions and outcomes, and links to the National Improvement Framework. All staff were involved in identifying this session's three priorities to raise attainment in numeracy, to support more young people at Gorgie Mills, and to improve attendance. Commendably, there is a learner friendly, and parent and partner friendly version of the plan. However, the improvement priorities have been identified based on limited self-evaluation activities. Development groups, based on ideas from staff about how to improve the school, are being led by teachers. However, it is not always clear how these development groups are linked to the priorities in the improvement plan. Evidence of progress of each group is shared on a board in the school and in the staffroom. There is little evidence as yet of how these developments are impacting positively upon outcomes for young people.
- Staff are responding well to the new opportunities available to undertake leadership roles. They feel more empowered and involved in the process of school improvement this session. Senior leaders should continue to consider ways to involve all staff to have leadership opportunities and be more meaningfully involved in self-evaluative activities and improvement planning. As recognised by the school, further work is needed to improve pupil participation across the school, including opportunities for leadership. Senior leaders should build on the positive start made with learning conversations this session in support of this. There is a need to involve young people, parents and partners more fully in identifying and agreeing priorities for future school improvement.
- Senior leaders recognise that more needs to be done to improve attendance. This year's Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) allocation is being used to appoint a family and pupil support officer to support this. In order to potentially help improve young people's attendance, the school should also review the curriculum, linked to the revised vision and values. There is a need to ensure more individualised, flexible pathways in the senior phase, and increased personalisation and choice. Senior leaders should work with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) staff and use local labour market intelligence to identify more businesses and partners to support the development of the curriculum, including learning about the world of work. At present the career education standards and work placement standards are not yet embedded across the work of the school.

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

- Most teaching staff are adopting a range of creative learning and teaching approaches to help motivate and engage young people in their learning. In most lessons, young people respond positively to organised, structured activities. They participate well and work conscientiously through tasks and activities. In the best lessons, teachers incorporate a variety of learning approaches including independent tasks, collaborative working and a mix of practical and desk-based activities. A few activities can be overly reliant on textbook and worksheet activities.
- Across the school, almost all teachers and PSAs have caring and nurturing relationships with young people. They help young people to feel safe, comfortable and confident in seeking support when required. Young people speak particularly highly of the two 'trusted persons' they have in school. This supportive approach helps young people to overcome any anxieties they may have with their learning and be able to discuss any personal issues they may be experiencing. Most young people are keen to share their learning and achievements and are proud of their school.
- The school has recently re-introduced the pupil council and, in a few classes, young people influence future learning activities based on their own needs and interests. However, overall, young people need to be provided with more opportunities to take responsibility, express their views and influence decision making across the whole school. In taking this forward, at classroom level, teachers should introduce more ways for young people to lead their learning and take decisions to determine future learning.
- Most staff use a variety of strategies effectively to promote positive behaviour. They are skilled at adopting preventative strategies to support young people where necessary. This supports young people to consistently make positive behaviour choices. On the occasions young people engage in disruptive behaviour, this is handled well by most staff. Young people and staff use the 'nurture base' well as a calm, safe environment. As planned, the school should continue to review and evaluate their approaches to promoting positive behaviour with the aim of reducing the number of days lost to exclusion and time spent out of class.
- Overall, the quality of teaching across the school is good. Teachers and PSAs work hard to provide bright and stimulating learning environments within each classroom. Classroom spaces and resources are well organised and are conducive to positive learning and teaching. Teachers know the young people well. In most lessons, they offer young people interesting, stimulating learning activities which provide sufficient challenge and take account of prior learning. However, there are a few occasions where the pace of learning is too slow and staff do not have sufficiently high expectations of what young people can learn and achieve. This can result in young people becoming disengaged from learning unnecessarily which often leads to conflict and challenging behaviour.

- Teachers' instructions and explanations are clear and most young people are aware of the purpose of learning. In most lessons, teachers make effective use of questioning to encourage young people to think and build on prior learning. Praise is used well throughout the school including the use of 'wow' certificates which help motivate young people to succeed. There are a few examples of young people developing skills for life and work by relating their learning to real life contexts. There is now a need to further develop opportunities for young people to apply their skills and understanding more in this area.
- In a few classes, teachers use digital technology and outdoor spaces well to enhance learning. The school is also developing effective partnerships with the local community to improve the quality of young people's learning experiences and deliver learning in real and relevant contexts. As recognised by the school, there is scope to develop further the use of digital technology and outdoor and community learning.
- Almost all teachers use a variety of formative assessment approaches well to let young people know how they are doing in their tasks in class. They also use a number of standardised, and periodic, assessments to provide evidence of young people's ongoing progress in their learning. Teachers are assured in measuring progress at the senior phase across the curriculum and are becoming increasingly confident in providing accurate professional judgements of young people's progress in literacy and numeracy at the broad general education (BGE). Teachers recognise the need to continue to develop their confidence in using national benchmarks. The school is aware of the need to participate in more moderation activities both within the school and with neighbouring special and mainstream school. This will help support teachers to make accurate professional judgements about when young people have achieved a Curriculum for Excellence level across the curriculum.
- There are effective systems in place at both classroom and whole school level to track and monitor young people's progress with their learning particularly in literacy, numeracy and working towards National Qualifications. The school is becoming particularly successful in measuring the 'value added' for young people attending the school in comparison to their previous placement. This 'value added' analysis includes attainment and achievement, attendance and days lost through exclusion. As planned, the school should develop tracking at the BGE to include all areas of the curriculum. This will be supported by the new tracking initiative being produced by the education authority.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The rationale for the school's curriculum reflects the context of the school and the profile of its young people. It takes account of the design principles and, in line with the vision and values of the school, places great emphasis on developing the four capacities and the health and wellbeing of young people.
- The school needs to revisit its approaches to supporting young people to move from the BGE into the senior phase. In particular, in line with national guidance, staff should develop progressive, coherent programmes for young people at the BGE which includes increased breadth, challenge and application notably for S3 learners. This will help ensure that young people receive their full entitlement to a high quality BGE.
- Staff are committed to developing more flexible pathways to provide opportunities for all young people to engage with class activities and develop skills for learning, life and work. They recognise the need for more choice in the senior phase and are planning to offer a wider range of qualifications and accredited courses both in school and with partners notably local colleges. However, the current school timetable is too static and does not offer sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of all young people at the senior phase. There is a need to offer more bespoke programmes for each young person based on their individual needs, interests and aspirations. Increased focus should be placed on offering increased personalisation and choice particularly for those young people with prolonged periods of poor attendance.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The senior leadership team is held in high regard by parents and carers who comment that they are supportive and approachable. Their calm, reassuring manner is valued, and parents find the school welcoming. Parents and carers feel that they are consulted on issues relating directly to the education of their child, and that they have frequent communication with the school regarding individual progress. However, they are unclear about whole school initiatives and planning. As a result, the school should take steps to consider how to improve consultation with parents and carers and involve them more fully in planning future improvement priorities.
- Gorgie Mills School has recently appointed a family and pupil support officer from their PEF allocation. The family and pupil support officer aims to provide holistic support to parents and carers and young people. They are focused on improving young people's wellbeing and attendance, and supporting them to re-engage with education.
- Young people who attend Gorgie Mills School come from across the City of Edinburgh and this presents an additional challenge with regard to parental involvement in community events. The school should continue to build on events such as the recent successful Christmas Fair as a means of further strengthening its links with the school community.

2.1 Safeguarding

- 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.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Under the leadership of the headteacher, staff at Gorgie Mills are welcoming, and positive relationships are evident across the school community. Almost all young people feel safe in school, and have at least one person in school to speak to if they have a concern or worry. The principles of Getting it Right for Every Child are understood by staff and are integral to planning and review meetings. Further work is now needed to embed the wellbeing indicators in the day to day work of the school. This will support young people to better understand their relevance and to take more responsibility for their own wellbeing.
- The introduction of a well-planned tutorial time at the start and finish of the school day, based on the school's nurturing approach, is supporting young people to engage in learning. The school's use of 'learning pods' creates nurturing environments which are safe, welcoming and flexible. As a result of these approaches, almost all young people feel well supported, and the majority enjoy coming to school. Senior leaders recognise that they need to continue to embed nurturing approaches more fully across the school.
- Good quality personal health and social education (PHSE) lessons, in which young people have a say in what they learn, is helping young people to develop the knowledge and skills to help them to make healthy and safe choices. For example, young people are developing emotional intelligence and are learning how to keep themselves safe online. They are also planning for choices and changes when they move on from school. In home economics, young people are learning about healthy eating and enjoy preparing food. We have discussed with senior leaders the need to do more work on smoking cessation. Building on the recent health and wellbeing audit, senior leaders should now review the health and wellbeing curriculum, including responsibility for all, to ensure breadth, progression and relevance for all young people.
- Young people benefit from quality physical education each week, and 'Friday Fitness' sessions where there is a fitness circuit for staff and young people to do together. Alternative activities, including running or walking a mile around the school grounds are available. Plans to introduce yoga and mindfulness to these sessions will support young people to develop relaxation techniques to help regulate emotions and behaviour. Senior leaders should consider how developing the outdoor areas of the school could contribute to more active learning opportunities for young people.
- Most staff model positive behaviour and are calm and patient in their interactions with young people. Almost all young people feel that staff treat them with respect and as an individual. Staff know the young people's needs well and intervene quickly when learners are showing signs of distress, or challenging behaviour is becoming apparent. Young people understand and appreciate the use of restorative approaches, which is a big focus of the school's work. They say it helps them to resolve difficulties, move on from any conflict and successfully re-engage in

learning. As a result of these approaches, there has been a reduction in the number of violent or bullying incidents in the school over the past three years. Whilst exclusions for individuals reduce on admission to Gorgie Mills, overall exclusion rates in the school are too high. We have discussed with senior leaders how they could develop policies and procedures in relation to promoting positive behaviour, linked to the school's values and Children's Rights.

- Senior leaders have a good understanding of statutory requirements. They ensure that young people and parents are fully involved in all review meetings to discuss progress, and future support needs. Taking greater account of latest Scottish Government guidance and codes of practice will further support young people's wellbeing, inclusion and equality. For example, senior leaders should have a bullying log in place which is monitored regularly, taking into account patterns, such as those related to protected characteristics. As recognised by the school, action also needs to be taken to improve young people's attendance.
- Teachers have a good understanding of the need to support young people to understand and value diversity. Young people are gaining confidence in their ability to recognise and challenge discrimination through religious and moral education, and interdisciplinary learning. The school organises a religious festival once a year where learners from each pod present their learning about a different world religion to other young people and their parents. The 'Big Freeze' project, where young people volunteered to cook for a homeless shelter, is a good example of young people developing as responsible citizens and demonstrating compassion for others. As the curriculum develops, staff should consider how learning about equality and diversity is planned in a progressive and coherent way, including learning about all protected characteristics. This will continue to support young people to learn about equality and diversity in 21st Century Scotland, and the wider global context.
- The recent work on developing learning conversations is supporting young people to have a greater say about their learning. All children set their own targets, including for their own wellbeing. Young people also participate in, and influence decisions about, levels of personalised support and planning for their own future. As recognised, the school should continue to develop approaches to learner participation, linked with the plan to develop approaches to rights. Young people feel that they are treated fairly. However, with the support of the education authority, the school needs to work with the local community, including mainstream schools, to ensure that young people have equal opportunities to their entitlements to learn in all curricular areas. For example, young people would like to learn about science, and have better access to expressive arts subjects such as drama.
- Overall, the school has good processes in place to identify additional support needs, including consideration of the needs of care experienced learners. Appropriate plans are in place and there are low levels of complaints. Whilst most young people's needs are being met well, a few parents expressed concerns about approaches to supporting their child.

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, the majority of young people are making good progress in literacy and most young people are making good progress in numeracy.

Literacy

Listening and talking

- Most learners are making good progress in listening and talking and can express their views with some confidence within a supportive environment. In some classes, this is being developed by giving learners choice and the opportunity to personalise their learning by selecting video clips and music as the stimulus for discussion. This helps learners to stay engaged, motivated and involved in their learning. The school is beginning to reflect on how learners can improve their talking and listening skills by applying their knowledge in different contexts, for example at events such as at the Christmas Fair. This helps learners to become more confident and Gorgie Mills School should continue to consider further opportunities for learners to do so.

Reading

- Overall, the majority of learners are making good progress in reading. Most young people show understanding of a range of texts. Gorgie Mills School is currently developing further strategies to improve the reading skills of learners and staff are piloting a morning reading scheme which aims to develop reading skills while broadening young people's knowledge of current affairs. Staff should continue to reflect on methods to support the development of reading skills in those young people who are reluctant readers or who have difficulty reading due to gaps in their learning.

Writing

- As staff in Gorgie Mills School have correctly identified, most young people's progress in writing is satisfactory and an area for further development. School based data and class-based observations show that progress is slower than in reading and listening and talking. While some young people can independently write at length for a variety of purposes, most learners require additional support and encouragement to produce extended responses. Staff should now consider how young people can receive individualised targeted supported to develop writing skills across the curriculum while paying particular focus to those young people who may require specialist input.

Literacy across learning

- Links to using literacy across the curriculum are embedded across the school. Staff should continue to plan and work collaboratively to create stimulating opportunities for young people to improve their skills across the curriculum and in a range of contexts.

Numeracy

Number, money and measure

- Overall, young people can demonstrate the strategies they use to solve number problems and are able to use alternative methods to solve the same problem. Most learners working at the second level show confidence in estimation and rounding and working with money. The majority of learners at the second level were multiplying/dividing by 10,20,30 and with help, 50. There is a focus on learners developing their knowledge of analogue time; staff should continue to support this learning.

Shape, position and movement

- At second level most learners are developing their mathematical knowledge using textbook based learning and personalised learning and teaching. Across the school young people are using concrete materials to enhance their understanding of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. Less than half are successfully using tablets and on-line resources.

Information Handling

- At second level most learners are able to interpret different types of graphs appropriate to the levels they are working at. Young people show gaps in their learning, for example in interpreting data. This is being addressed by teachers in appropriate and sensitive ways. Overall there is scope to expand information handling across the curriculum to ensure learners are confident in a variety of contexts.

Attainment over time

- In recent years, according to the school's own data, most young people gained a good number of National Qualifications units and course awards predominantly at National 3 and National 4 and a small number of personal achievement awards. The school has been particularly successful in supporting young people who were projected to have great difficulty in gaining qualifications to achieve well at National 3 or above. According to the school's data, attainment over time is improving in terms of National Qualifications particularly the increased range and number of National 4 course and unit awards achieved by young people. Young people consistently perform best in English, mathematics and modern studies. Some young people also succeed in other curricular areas notably physical education and art and design. The school recognises there is scope to continue to improve young people's attainment and achievement both in terms of National Qualifications and personal achievement awards. In particular, the school needs to support young people to succeed across a wider spectrum of curricular areas.
- According to their own figures, the school has been successful in improving levels of attendance for most young people, many of whom have well-established patterns of non-attendance at previous educational placements. The school has also been successful in lowering young people's exclusion figures in comparison to their previous placement. As recognised by the school, there is still a need to further improve school attendance and to continue to lower their exclusion figures.

Achievements

- The school celebrates success by awarding 'wow' certificates at assembly. Most young people value these certificates and can talk about why they have been awarded. There is also a positive referral system of 'pink slips' which can be collected in exchange for a gift voucher.

Almost all learners are motivated to collect as many as possible and seem proud of this. This incentive encourages positive interactions around the school.

- Young people are learning about the world of work through the offer to all fourth year learners of a week's work placement. They can also take part in the job, education and training programme (JET). Teachers should make use of the career education standards to support young people to understand the knowledge and skills they are developing as a result of these experiences.
- Learners benefit from a partnership with Scottish Ballet where they can display confidence through dance performances. A partnership with a local football club also allows for learners to work with members of the local community. Learners can access residential trips with the school to encourage them to work with others, apply skills in new settings and gain confidence.
- Learners can participate in a few accredited awards through activities such as cycling awards, Junior Award Scheme for Schools (JASS) awards and Prince's Trust 'Achieve' award. Building on the recently introduced learning conversations, teachers should encourage young people to talk about their achievements and the skills being developed as a result of their involvement in these activities. In line with their focus on skills development, teachers should monitor the progress of learners' achievements. Tracking will allow learners to understand how they are developing key skills such as working with others, resilience and citizenship. Learners would also benefit from more of their activities being matched to accredited awards.

Equity

- The school has an outstanding initiative in place to support young people to sustain positive destinations over time. Staff remain in close contact with young people when they leave school and provide ongoing support and advice to help young people to continue to achieve in work, training or further education. This is proving highly successful in supporting young people to be in a positive destination years after leaving school. This includes young people who did not manage to sustain their original post-school positive destination.
- Staff are highly knowledgeable of young people's personal circumstances and ensure that young people are treated equitably at all times.

Choice of QI: 2.4 Personalised Support

- Universal support
- Targeted support
- Overcome barriers to learning

- The school has effective systems for collating educational and background information about young people. This ensures that staff gain a clear understanding of the holistic needs of each young person, plan appropriate learning tasks and adopt effective strategies and interventions to support young people's education and wellbeing needs.
- Staff at the school have a good understanding of the legislative framework and requirements. They work in close partnership with each other and with young people and their families, together with partner agencies, to plan and deliver targeted support. Barriers to learning are identified and useful support strategies are shared with staff. All young people have pupil support plans which have been dictated by learners. Alongside learning conversations, this enables young people to provide valuable information which helps them to engage purposefully with their learning.
- During tutor time, staff work with young people to plan for next steps in individual learning and to identify clear targets around literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, based on prior learning. Young people's progress is planned regularly, and is reviewed and evaluated in consultation with young people through learning conversations. These discussions focus on skills development, and identify effective classroom strategies and de-escalation approaches. This helps young people to be included in their personal planning at an individual level and engage more fully in their learning. The school should now consider how to further develop pupil voice at a whole school level as a means of promoting leadership and responsibility in young people and further developing their ownership of their school.
- Relationships within the school are strong. Staff and learners speak positively about this and most staff have high expectations of young people. This ensures that young people feel valued and included. Learners benefit from a nurturing start to the day and this helps to strengthen existing relationships and prepare young people for the start of the school day. Learners have the opportunities to discuss learning and concerns with two trusted persons, both nominated by the young person themselves. Trusted persons help to support young people when they experience stress, anxiety or challenge and this helps to ensure that young people remain engaged in learning.
- Most young people are well supported during transitions and, for most, this is reflected in improved attendance at the school in comparison to previous schools attended and an improving picture of sustained long-term, positive post-school destinations. Learners benefit from support from partner agencies, such as Skills Development Scotland and colleges, and this helps young people to access education, training or employment after they leave the school. However, a few parents have expressed concern regarding transition and, specifically, around awareness of individual needs and supporting application for post-school college courses.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Outstanding approaches to supporting young people with post-school positive destinations.

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.