

17 June 2025

Dear Parent/Carer

In April 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Forres Academy. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Moray Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in April 2024. 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 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 and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the headteacher. 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.

Improve the strategic leadership of change and improvement across all areas of the school. Leadership at all levels needs to be focussed on improving outcomes for learners.

Senior and middle leaders have made some progress with improvements in this area but with important aspects requiring further development. Senior leaders have developed their improvement planning processes. The school improvement plan now focuses well on the areas that matter most. Senior leaders ensure progress is reviewed regularly and systematically. Positively, improvement plans now have a clear focus on the outcomes sought for young people. Senior and middle leaders should now review their progress towards improving outcomes for young people more regularly.

Senior and middle leaders have improved their approaches to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. There have been changes to the Parent Council who are eager to be more involved in school improvements. However, senior and middle leaders need to continue to show all young people and parents how they influence change positively.

The headteacher concluded the review of the school vision and values, with a positive new vision statement incorporated. It will be important that this vision is now used to provide the school community with a unified sense of purpose and direction. A minority of parents still have concerns about aspects of the school, including the behaviour of a few pupils and staffing challenges. The headteacher, senior leaders and staff need to work with parents and demonstrate further progress in these areas. Senior leaders should continue to work with the local authority to find solutions to staffing issues.

Overall, senior leaders have developed systems and processes well to help improve leadership at all levels. Senior leaders now need to set out their strategic direction for the school. Middle leaders need to play a stronger role in the leadership of change, particularly in improving learner experiences to support raising attainment. Teachers should be empowered further to be leaders of learning, sharing and learning from the best practice across the school.

Improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. Teachers should focus on meeting the needs of individual learners. Class lessons need to be more engaging and young people should be involved in leading their learning.

Staff have made improvements in the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. There remains a need for further improvements. All teachers were involved in developing and introducing the 'Forres Academy Learning and Teaching Essentials'. This guidance for teachers outlines expectations of classroom routines and approaches. It is supporting greater consistency and routines for learning for a majority of young people. Staff need to work with young people and parents to develop this further.

Teachers are positive about professional learning offered relating to learning and teaching. They want more opportunities to work together and share teaching practice regularly. This will help teachers to learn from each other.

Teachers are provided with detailed information about the individual learning needs of young people. A few teachers provide tasks and activities which are well-matched to the needs of learners. However, this needs to happen more often as, in a majority of lessons, young people complete the same task and at the same pace, directed by the teacher. A few young people struggle to engage in learning and this leads to low-level disruptive behaviours.

Staff focus appropriately on improving young people's engagement in learning. A majority of teachers use starter activities, share the purpose of learning and measures of success, and review learning at the end of activities more consistently. A few teachers have stronger practice across these areas. This practice should be shared widely and adopted by other teachers. Senior and middle leaders should continue to work with teachers to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment across the school.

Improve approaches to supporting young people's learning and wellbeing. This includes the planning and review of supports for learning. Young people and their parents should be fully involved in decisions that affect them.

Staff have made some progress in improving aspects of this area for improvement. A staff and pupil wellbeing group now use systems to gather helpful information about young people's wellbeing. Guidance staff use this information well to offer targeted support to young people. Young people like discussing their wellbeing and have developed a better understanding of how wellbeing impacts on all aspects of their lives. Staff now need to ensure this information is used across the whole school to support planning for young people.

A few young people have important leadership roles relating to wellbeing, for example, as wellbeing ambassadors. They are helping to reduce the stigma associated with mental health. Staff benefit from professional learning about wellbeing. This learning helps teachers to use relationships with young people to address issues in school. Staff now need to use learning about developing an inclusive classroom environment to support improvements. Senior leaders should continue with plans to create and implement a whole-school health and wellbeing strategy.

Young people benefit from nurturing spaces during breaks and a range of clubs and activities. A few young people access support in the nurture provision which helps them to

manage their emotions. However, a few young people highlight that they do not consistently feel safe in school. They report issues with bullying and a lack of respect shown by some of their peers. Senior leaders should continue with plans to review and strengthen their anti-bullying policy and procedures.

Senior leaders and staff have made improvements to their attendance policy and promote the importance of regular attendance at school to young people and families. This has supported improvements in the whole school attendance data in the last year. New support staff work with young people and families to provide appropriate support. A few young people's attendance and engagement is improving as a result. Senior leaders and staff recognise the need to continue to work with a few young people who attend school but do not always attend class.

Improve attainment for young people from S1 to S6. Teachers should track progress at all stages and make sure learner's progress is understood by young people and their parents.

Senior and middle leaders have made progress in relation to their approaches to raising the attainment of young people. It is important that senior and middle leaders ensure these approaches result in improved attainment outcomes for young people. Young people's attainment in 2023/24 is largely consistent with 2022/23. There are aspects where improvements can be noted, but there are also declines in certain areas. Senior leaders need to support further improvements in attainment, with a focus on young people in S5 and S6.

Senior leaders have improved their approaches for checking the progress of young people in the broad general education and senior phase. There is a need for teachers in most curriculum areas to develop their confidence applying national standards in the broad general education. This will ensure information on young people's progress is robust.

Senior leaders have developed policies to support attainment across the school. These clearly outline the responsibility of all staff in raising attainment. A majority of middle leaders now use information about young people's progress well to plan improvements. A range of support staff work with targeted young people to maximise their attainment. Young people and parents valued the careers event that promoted the range of learner pathways available. Staff now track young people's achievements in and beyond school, allowing those requiring more opportunities for achievement to be identified. Overall, staff should continue to develop higher expectations of young people's learning, behaviour and standards of attainment.

What happens next?

The school has made progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Moray Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within 18 months of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Moray Council the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Graham Parry
HM Inspector