

10 March 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Galashiels Academy  
Scottish Borders Council**

In June 2013, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the new headteacher, depute headteachers and staff. We heard from the new headteacher, depute headteachers and other staff how the school has continued 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 how well young people are now learning and achieving and how the school is continuing to support them to do their best. This letter sets out what we found.

**How well do young people learn and achieve?**

Overall, the quality of young people's learning experiences has improved since the original inspection. There has been a positive shift in the culture and ethos of the school. Most young people continue to enjoy school and are keen to learn. Teachers share the purpose of learning more regularly with young people. They also provide more regular feedback to help young people make better progress in their learning. There is a greater consistency in approaches to encourage young people to think for themselves and be active in their own learning. Staff have engaged more regularly in professional discussions to share effective practice. The 'consistency' poster, displayed in all classrooms, outlines the features of learning and teaching that are expected in all lessons. Staff are starting to use this poster to promote positive behaviour and high expectations. We have asked the school to continue to build on this improving practice to ensure all young people experience high-quality learning experiences across the school. Young people at all stages are benefitting from improved opportunities for leadership. They are developing their confidence as they take part in groups such as the learning ambassadors, house groups and the senior team. They would now welcome more opportunities to have a say in making the way they learn in school better.

Young people continue to achieve well in a range of sporting and cultural activities. The school has made a positive start to gaining an overview of young people's progress across their learning from S1 to S3. At these stages, the school has effective approaches to developing young people's literacy skills across their

learning. This is helping young people to talk about their strengths and identify their next steps in learning. The school needs to continue with work on developing learners' numeracy skills. Following the last inspection, staff implemented a number of strategies to raise attainment. These approaches are beginning to have a positive impact. The school needs to monitor carefully the number and level of qualifications that young people are presented for, to ensure they attain as well as possible.

### **How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?**

Teachers are now providing tasks and activities which are better matched to the needs of young people. The Support for Learning team offer valuable advice and guidance across the school. Most staff now have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in supporting young people, including those requiring additional support. Overall, teachers now have higher expectations of young people and what they can achieve. The school is continuing to work to further improve attendance. The majority of young people requiring additional support have individualised educational programmes (IEPs). We have asked the school to improve the quality of the targets in these programmes and how they are reviewed. This will ensure that the young people involved achieve as highly as possible.

Staff have continued to improve the curriculum to better meet the needs of young people. There is now a clear and shared vision which is providing direction to the work of the school, including the development of the curriculum. Young people requiring additional support are now benefitting from a wider range of learning opportunities. From S1 to S3, the curriculum provides a broad general education for young people across the school. Staff need to keep arrangements at these stages under review to ensure that all young people can achieve well when they progress into S4. The S3 Baccalaureate is motivating young people to achieve and the school has plans to include employability skills in the award as well as attainment. From S4 to S6, the curriculum continues to provide young people with a variety of opportunities for gaining qualifications. A range of partners such as Borders College, Queen Margaret University and local youth groups work with the school to offer young people learning opportunities. There remains scope for further integration of the secondary support centre with the school and wider community. This would allow learners in the centre to further broaden their curriculum and opportunities for achievement.

### **How well does the school improve the quality of its work?**

The school has been through changes in leadership since the original inspection and the new headteacher took up his post in January 2015. The previous acting headteacher, supported by depute headteachers, has effectively led work on school improvement. Staff across the school have a greater understanding of their shared responsibilities for improving outcomes for all young people. The school's approaches to self-evaluation and planning for improvement are now better and there is a clearer sense of direction. The school is aware that approaches to monitoring young people's progress in their learning need further improvement in order to raise attainment.

## **What happens next?**

Overall, the school has taken important steps to address the points for action identified in the original inspection. Young people, parents and staff are positive about these steps. The school has successfully made improvements in its approaches to self-evaluation, inclusion and to learning and teaching. With the arrival of the new headteacher, the school is ready to build further on this work and to secure further improvements in young people's experiences and achievements. Our Area Lead Officer will work with Scottish Borders Council to continue to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We shall ask Scottish Borders Council to provide us with a progress report within 18 months and decide at that point whether continuing engagement is required. Parents will be informed of the extent to which the school has improved.

Carol McDonald  
HM Inspector

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If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0141 282 5000, or e-mail: [complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk) or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.