

Summarised inspection findings

Wester Hailes High School

The City of Edinburgh Council

2 May 2023

Key contextual information

School Name: Wester Hailes High School
Council: The City of Edinburgh Council
SEED number: 5533937
Roll: 414

Wester Hailes High School is a comprehensive non-denominational secondary school which serves the southwest of the City of Edinburgh. Most of its pupils come from three associated primary schools – Canal View, Clovenstone and Sighthill. The headteacher has been in post for six years and is supported by two deputy headteachers. The senior leadership team has been temporarily extended by 0.5 FTE in order to support the development of the new school building which is planned to open in August 2025. The school roll has increased steadily over the past three years. The school, its community and families, have faced significant additional challenges as a result of COVID-19 and continue to do so in the current economic climate. This includes significant staff absences. At the time of the inspection, teachers were engaged in ongoing industrial action.

Attendance is generally below the national average.

Exclusions are generally above the national average. Exclusions more than doubled in 2021/22 from the previous year following a four-year reducing trend from 2016/17 to 2019/20.

In February 2022 47.3 percent of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2021 81.5 percent of pupils live in 20 percent most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2021 the school reported that 67.8 percent of pupils had additional support needs.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

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

- Young people benefit from positive relationships between their peers and staff in almost all lessons. Teachers have developed supportive learning environments which encourage the majority of young people to seek help as required and be eager to learn. Senior leaders have a strong focus on helping young people be ready to learn.
- Improving the quality of learning and teaching is a priority for senior leaders and staff. Teachers recently developed the 'Wester Hailes high school lesson structure' and the 'Three steps to improved learning' documents, following a whole school self-evaluation exercise. Almost all teachers are beginning to implement these in their practice. This is improving the consistency of young people's experiences across the school. Teachers seek the views of young people in a variety of ways including the use of surveys. Young people enjoy the opportunities to influence what and where they learn and would welcome these views being acted upon, so it improves the quality of their experiences.
- In the majority of lessons young people know the purpose of their learning and how they will be successful in class. In almost all lessons teachers decide what young people will learn and how young people will know if they have succeeded. Teachers should engage young people more in co-constructing what they are learning and how they will know if they have been successful, in order to increase the depth of learning. Young people would benefit from more explicit reference to the skills they are developing for learning, life and work across all curricular areas.
- Almost all teachers provide clear explanations, instructions and demonstrations, which help young people understand the tasks and activities set. In most classes, these tasks and activities are directed at the whole class. All teachers should ensure that all tasks and activities are set at the right level of difficulty for all young people. Young people should experience appropriate support, pace and challenge, and be more aspirational in their learning.
- In a majority of departments, the majority of young people are engaged in active, collaborative learning, with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. In a few areas, where this is most successful, young people make better progress in their learning. A few teachers use questioning well to illicit well-thought-out responses. A few teachers use deeper, open questions to promote higher order thinking skills. Teachers, across the school, should build on this good practice to develop young people's independent learning skills.
- A few teachers use plenary discussions or activities, such as self- and peer assessments, well to help young people reflect on their learning. A few young people recognise how this helps improve their confidence and progress in learning. The majority of young people believe that feedback from teachers helps improve their learning. There is scope for teachers to develop further the quality of this feedback and to share this good practice more widely across the

school. Teachers should ensure they provide more opportunities for all young people to reflect on their learning regularly. Senior leaders provide tablet computers for all young people and continue to support career-long professional learning, focussed on using technology for learning, for staff. As a result, the majority of staff use digital technology creatively to support learning. This helps motivate and engage young people.

- In a few lessons, teachers use a variety of imaginative techniques to check young people's understanding, for example using tablet computers or 'show me' boards. Young people would make better progress in learning if all teachers adopted similar strategies to check for understanding. In a few departments where data is used well, teachers use the information to adapt their planning for learning to meet the needs of young people. All teachers should use assessment evidence more effectively to increase the level of challenge for young people and to inform their planning for subsequent learning.
- Most teachers routinely assess young people's work, from S1 to S6, at the end of topics or when a unit of work is completed. Young people would benefit from more regular, ongoing assessment opportunities. Teachers should continue to engage in moderation activities internally, across the cluster, and with other schools in order to improve their confidence in providing reliable professional judgements of achievement of a level. This should support teachers develop a consistent whole school approach to assessment in the broad general education (BGE), taking into account a wider variety of assessment evidence.
- Young people in the senior phase, appreciate the learning conversations they have with teachers before formal, whole school, tracking and reporting periods. These conversations are based largely on summative assessments. From these conversations, young people set their working and target grades, and discuss with their teacher what steps they need to take to progress their learning. Teachers should use a wider range of assessment evidence to help inform these conversations and set more aspirational, yet realistic, targets. Additionally, senior leaders should develop and promote a more consistent approach to learner conversations in the BGE to ensure all young people know their working levels and next steps.
- Middle leaders track and monitor young people's progress using a variety of different systems and language. Senior leaders, together with middle leaders should develop a whole school tracking and monitoring system in the BGE, based on the strongest practice already in the school. This should ensure that young people have a better understanding of where they are in their learning and what they need to do to improve. This would also help middle and senior leaders track and monitor progress at and through levels across the school more reliably.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- 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.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

Broad general education

- By the end of S3 most young people achieve third Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) level in writing and listening and talking in 2021/22. The majority achieve reading at third CfE level in 2021/22. The majority of young people achieve fourth CfE level in reading, writing and listening and talking in 2021/22. This improved from 2018/19 when less than half attained at this level.
- In numeracy, by the end of the BGE, most young people achieved third CfE level in 2018/19 and 2021/22. Less than half achieved fourth level CfE in 2018/19 and 2021/22.
- Senior leaders allocated additional time for young people in S1 and S2 to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Due to staffing changes this has not been sustained. Across the school, staff increasingly recognise their role in developing literacy and numeracy skills. For example, they teach subject specific language, have helpful displays in classrooms and departments, and take part in focussed weeks.

Senior phase: leavers

Literacy

- The majority of young people who left school in 2019/20 achieved literacy at SCQF level 5 or better. This improved to most young people in 2020/21, which is significantly much higher than the virtual comparator (VC). The percentage of young people attaining at SCQF level 6 or better in literacy by the time they leave school has improved each year from 2018/19 when the percentage was lower than the VC, to 2020/21. This is now in line with the VC.

Numeracy

- The majority of young people leaving school in 2020/21 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This improved from less than half in 2019/20 and is in line with the VC. A minority of young people leaving school from 2016/17 to 2020/21 achieved SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy. This is in line with the VC except for 2018/19 when the percentage was below the VC.
- A few young people left school with no literacy or numeracy award at SCQF level 3 or 4 or better in 2020/21.

Senior phase: cohorts

Literacy

- At S4, by S5 and by S6 attainment is generally in line with the VC at SCQF level 5 or better. At SCQF level 6 or better this is in line with the VC, having been significantly much lower than the VC in 2017/18 and in 2018/19

Numeracy

- At S4, by S5 and S6 attainment in numeracy is generally in line with the VC except for SCQF level 5 or better in S4 where attainment is below the VC. Attainment at SCQF level 6 or better by S6 based on the S6 roll, improved to being in line with the VC from 2018/19 when it was significantly much lower.
- Senior leaders should explore areas other than English and mathematics, where young people can attain literacy and numeracy awards.

Attainment over time

Broad general education

- Young people's progress in literacy and numeracy in S1 and S2 is tracked through the Edinburgh Information and Communications Technology (EDICT) system. This enables teachers to access current assessment information about young people's attainment levels in these areas. A few other curricular areas also contribute to this tracking system, while others use different tools. As a result, young people's progress is not yet tracked and monitored systematically, or consistently across all curricular areas within the BGE. Staff, and young people, would benefit from developing and using the same, consistent approach across the school in order to raise attainment for all young people.
- Teachers, across the school engage in moderation activities. This is leading to increasing confidence in the majority of teachers professional judgements of achievement of a level. Teacher judgements are not yet reliable or robust. Senior leaders should ensure that teachers across the school develop a deeper understanding and application of moderation across the cluster and beyond the school so that these judgements are more reliable.

Senior phase: Improving attainment for all

- Teachers have regular learning conversations with young people in the senior phase which the majority of young people find helpful. This, coupled with class teacher attainment analysis, helps inform the regular attainment discussions between curriculum and senior leaders. Senior leaders should continue to use this information, and that derived from tracking and monitoring processes, to ensure appropriate rigour is applied to coursing and presenting young people for different levels of attainment.
- Curricular leaders should continue to focus on individual components of courses to identify areas where improvements to teaching, learning and attainment will help young people achieve better outcomes. For example, at SCQF level 5, more young people attain units than course awards. Additionally, teachers should develop the curricular offer more widely to offer a broader range of courses leading to accredited qualifications.

Leavers

- The lowest attaining 20 percent of young people attained in line with the VC from 2017/18 to 2021/22. However there was a reduction in complementary tariff scores in from 2019/20 to 2020/21. The middle attaining 60 percent and highest attaining 20 percent of all leavers attained in line with VC in 2020/21 and 2021/22. Complementary tariff scores improved for these groups from being below, and significantly below, the VC in 2017/18 and 2018/19 to being in line in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Cohorts

- The lowest attaining 20 percent of young people attain largely in line with the VC in S4 and by S6. By S5, the lowest attaining 20 percent of young people attained significantly higher than the VC in 2019/20 and 2021/22.
- The middle attaining 60 percent of young people at S4 and by S6 also attain largely in line with the VC. By S5, this group of young people attained in line with VC from 2018/19 to 2020/21 but declined to significantly lower than the VC in 2021/22.
- The highest attaining 20 percent of young people generally attain below the VC.

Senior phase: Breadth and depth

- At S4, the majority of young people attained five or more qualifications at SCQF level 4 or better from 2018/19 to 2021/22, in line with the VC.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll, less than half of young people attained five or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better from 2018/19 to 2021/22. This is in line with the VC. Only a few young people attain four or more qualifications at 5A or better which was significantly much lower than the VC in 2021/22. A few young people attain two or more qualifications at 6C or better or 6A or better which is significantly much lower, or significantly lower respectively than the VC, in 2021/22.
- By S6, based on the S6 roll, less than half of young people attained five or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better from 2019/20 to 2021/22. This was in line with the VC. A few young people attained five or more qualifications at SCQF level 6A or better from 2019/20 to 2021/22, in line with the VC.
- Senior leaders should continue to review the curriculum offer at all stages, to ensure that young people have sufficient opportunity to experience as broad a curriculum as possible. This includes extending both breadth and challenge as appropriate. Curriculum leaders should work towards improving the range of qualifications for young people at both SCQF level 5 or better and SCQF level 6 or better.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Increasing numbers of young people, particularly in the senior phase, gain confidence and valuable life skills by participating in a broad range of activities in school and across the community. These include daily planned sporting activities after school and musical and creative activities, supported by partners. A minority of young people develop physical and coaching skills by taking part in a 'Passion for Fusion' dance programme, and in 'Outward Bound' residential courses. Staff successfully increased physical activity for almost all girls through partnership with Hearts Football Club Innovation Centre. Staff should now extend the range of such opportunities within the BGE.
- School leaders successfully developed the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) initiative, particularly at the senior phase. This helps young people develop employability skills and be ready for the workplace. Young people benefit from a wide range of activities with local colleges and businesses. As a result, they develop well skills such as teamwork, timekeeping, and have an increased awareness of the range of employment opportunities available to them. Young people report that work-related learning helps them be more aspirational for their futures. Staff need to ensure that DYW is embedded further across all curricular areas and in the BGE.

- A majority of young people talk about the skills they gain through taking part in activities outside the classroom. A few young people feel they have developed leadership skills through roles such as prefects, sports ambassadors, as members of the pupil council, and the 'Enterprise Club'. A few young people are taking part in consultations on aspects of the planned new school-building. Senior pupils gain confidence through their valued role as mentors to younger peers. Staff should implement their plans to track how young people's skills progress throughout their time at school.
- Staff have positive relationships with an increasing range of partners. This includes effective liaison with mentors for young people, increasing awareness and understanding of a range of health and wellbeing issues and enhancing young peoples' sense of responsibility to their local community. As a result, young people in the senior phase engage in programmes such as 'Pitching In', directed at the prevention of potential offending' and the 'Light Up Learning' project which helps motivate young people and develop aspirational attitudes. Additionally, an outdoor learning in the community programme helps a few young people demonstrate increasing responsibility by enhancing their local environment.
- Almost all young people feel that their achievements are recognised and celebrated. Their successes are heralded through the school newsletter, at school assemblies and via displays in the school corridors. School leaders are at the early stages of formally accrediting young peoples' achievements. As a result, a range of National Progression Awards, Saltire Awards and first-aid awards are achieved by a few young people. Staff need to develop a strategic approach for how achievements are planned and evaluated. This should include a system for tracking and monitoring achievements that identifies those young people at risk of missing out.

Equity for all learners

- All staff are aware of financial barriers for some families. As a result, they ensure that there is no additional cost to any mainstream school activities. All young people have a digital device which they use both at school and home to access their learning. The majority of teachers continue to upload tasks, activities and resources related to class work. This is particularly helpful for young people who miss school and want to catch up with lessons and resources provided by their teachers.
- Leavers in SIMD 1 and 2 attained significantly less complementary tariff scores in 2019/20 and in 2020/21 than other young people living in similar circumstances in other parts of Scotland. Senior leaders introduced a 'Closing the Gap' period where young people in S3-6 choose to attend an additional weekly lesson, in a subject of their choice, to support their learning. This is designed to redress the attainment gap. There is limited evidence of the benefits of this period. Senior leaders should review this programme and consider, along with other interventions, their added value for young people.
- The Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) is currently used effectively to support transition from primary school. This helps young people become familiar with the secondary school environment and settle well into learning. Additionally, the PEF supports additional staffing, activities aimed at increasing teamwork and confidence, and uniform both for school and physical activities. As a result, more young people, particularly in S1, actively participate in sporting activities they may not otherwise experience.

Other relevant evidence

- The local authority submitted self-evaluation information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties, as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff. The HNI also examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school health promotion duties as far as they relate to food and nutrition. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

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.