

19 March 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

In January 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Queen Margaret Academy. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and South Ayrshire Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in March 2018. 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.

**The school needs to improve strategic leadership to ensure that planning for improvement and well-paced development of the curriculum are underpinned by a strong, shared vision and effective self-evaluation.**

In her short time in post, the new headteacher and her newly formed team have already established a very clear vision to take the school forward. The headteacher and depute heads are now leading the school as a cohesive and effective group. There is now a focused and shared vision. This much more consistent approach to leadership in place is appreciated by almost all staff. Senior leaders are building a clear and shared understanding of their collective leadership goals and how they will achieve these together as a team. Parents and young people speak well of the early and significant impact of the new headteacher, and the recently established leadership team. Young people speak of how visible she is around the school, a positive and welcoming presence, conversing warmly and encouragingly with them.

Senior leaders and staff have worked very well over the last session to embed the school's vision and values with all learners across the whole school community. This continues to be a main feature of the school's work to support improvement. Reflection of the Catholic faith is now more visible in the school. The new vision, values and aims are linked closely to Gospel values. Local parishes welcome the opportunity to share in the spiritual wellbeing of young people. The local authority has remained pro-active in offering continued support and challenge to the school and this has been appreciated and valued by the headteacher and staff. This, together with senior leaders and staff's keenness to improve the school, is delivering many positive improvements since the last inspection visit. Young people note an increase in the range of opportunities for them to take on leadership roles.

The headteacher and senior leaders recognise that much more work is needed to develop the curriculum to reflect the needs, skills and interests of all learners. Work to improve the curriculum continues and is an important part of the school's planning for improvement over the next three years. The headteacher has plans for improvements to how the school communicates with parents. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is moving immediately to implement this. There are also important plans in place to provide opportunities for parents to contribute to and take a more active role in school improvement. A few learners report that they would like to play a bigger part in school leadership and this should be encouraged.

Leadership for staff can be developed further through increased opportunities to learn from the best practice beyond the school and the local authority.

**To build on the eagerness and enthusiasm of all its young people, the school now needs to improve the consistency of learning and teaching to lead to the best possible outcomes for all learners in all curriculum areas.**

Learning and teaching continues to improve since the last inspection visit. Across the school, there is a calm, purposeful atmosphere, characterised by positive relationships between peers and with staff. This is sustaining a supportive climate for learning. Young people are respectful, motivated and keen to do well. The majority of young people comment that the school is helping them to become more confident. They feel that they are being listened to more and that their views are being taken into account.

In most lessons, teachers continue to provide clear instructions and explanations. All staff should keep under review the balance between teacher-led learning and providing opportunities for young people to lead their own learning. Young people are articulate and work well with their peers in group situations. When given the opportunity, they are assuming responsibility for their own learning with confidence and willingness. Digital technology is being used effectively to support learning in a variety of contexts.

**The school should develop further young people's understanding of the effective use of assessment which will enable them to identify clearly what they need to do to improve.**

Senior staff are introducing and refining approaches to assessment and the tracking of young people's progress. Staff still need to continue to build their skills further in the use of assessment procedures to support learner progress. Staff should evaluate how well they involve young people in discussing their progress and attainment, to equip them to take more responsibility for their own learning and development.

**The school should continue with its work to develop wellbeing programmes that are relevant to the needs of young people. This should include well-considered approaches to track and monitor progress in this area to improve the wellbeing outcomes for all learners.**

Progress continues to be made in taking forward a more strategic approach to ensuring wellbeing of all young people. The newly introduced House system has supported a strengthened sense of community, with young people also valuing the opportunity to form supportive relationships with both younger and older peers through the buddy system.

Parents are positive about the approaches taken by staff, to prioritise young people's wellbeing as part of the life and work of the school. Staff are seen as caring and nurturing, with a clear commitment to providing a safe and positive environment for learning.

Further development work is needed to ensure young people have enough opportunities to discuss their wellbeing, learning and achievement. Staff recognise that the role of the key adult is still not yet developed to the extent that all young people are receiving their full support entitlement. A mentoring programme is being piloted for S4 learners. This involves a considerable number of staff who have volunteered to provide time to support young people

through one-to-one conversations about their learning and wellbeing. Young people in the Supported Learning Centre (SLC), have a designated key teacher with a clear overview of their individual progress. This inclusive approach makes explicit that all young people are equally valued members of the Queen Margaret Academy community. The school has now a more robust system in place to improve attendance which includes both monitoring and tracking interventions for individual learners.

#### **Additional analysis/observations to support further improvement in attainment:**

Overall, the school is continuing to make progress in achieving positive outcomes for young people in the Broad General Education (BGE) and in the senior phase. The attainment of young people in National Qualifications is still generally in line with young people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. The headteacher is leading important work to improve the curriculum provision. The strong focus on offering a much wider set of course choices and improved subject timetabling will help to support improvement in young people's attainment and achievement going forward.

Young people continue to achieve a wide range of skills and attributes across sport, culture citizenship and through work to support charities. Learners demonstrate their leadership and citizenship skills through leading clubs and a variety of charity initiatives which enable them to raise significant funds to support worthwhile causes.

#### **What happens next?**

The school has made good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. South Ayrshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Aileen Monaghan  
HM Inspector