Summarised inspection findings

Peebles High School

Scottish Borders Council

23 January 2024

Key contextual information

School Name: Peebles High School
Council: Scottish Borders Council
SEED number: 5601932
Roll: 1387

Attendance is generally in line with the national average. This was 91.2% in 2020/21.

Exclusions are significantly below the national average.

In September 2022, 6.9% of young people were registered for free school meals. This is significantly below the national average of 17.8%.

In September 2022, a few young people lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2022, the school reported that 35% of young people had additional support needs.

The school serves the large Tweeddale area of the Scottish Borders which includes the town of Peebles and a rural locale. In recent years, the school has faced significant challenges. Following a lengthy period of instability within the senior leadership team, the school building was severely damaged as a result of a substantial fire in November 2019. This continues to impact on learning provision. Space is restricted because many areas of the current building remain unsafe to use. The school community is working within a campus where a new school is currently being built, due to open in 2025.

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

- Positive relationships between staff and young people are evident in almost all classes. This results in a calm learning environment. Almost all young people are polite and respectful, demonstrating a willingness to learn and succeed.

- The majority of young people participate and interact well during lessons. However, the majority of lessons are overly teacher-led, lacking appropriate pace and challenge to meet the needs of individual learners. This results in a minority of young people being passive in their learning. At times, the low-level behaviour of a minority of young people is impacting on learners' experiences. Young people would benefit from more opportunities to engage actively in leading their own learning.

- In almost all lessons, teachers use the Peebles High School 'Learning Structure'. This is beginning to ensure that young people experience a consistent approach to learning and teaching. The "daily review" is leading to regular routines in lessons which is helping young people to settle quickly and be ready to learn.

- In most lessons, teachers deliver clear explanations and instructions which help most young people to understand how to complete the planned activities. In most lessons, teachers share the purpose of new learning and the measures of success effectively. Staff should consider how they can support young people to understand the relevance of their learning. They should develop approaches to help learners apply their knowledge and skills to other contexts across the curriculum. In most lessons, young people are able to reflect on what they have learned and identify success in completing set tasks.

- In the majority of lessons, teachers use questioning well to help young people to recall prior learning and to check understanding. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to promote deeper thinking and to extend young people's learning. Most young people demonstrate confidence in volunteering answers. As a next step, staff should continue their focus on improving questioning, building on the best examples. This will ensure all young people experience greater levels of challenge in their learning.

- Staff use digital technology well in most lessons to enhance young people's learning. In most subject areas, there are a few examples of highly effective practice. Young people speak positively about the impact of using digital platforms to support their learning in class and at home.

- Most young people in the senior phase understand their progress in learning through helpful feedback from teachers in class. A key next step is for teachers to improve the quality of feedback. This will ensure that all young people understand their strengths and next steps in

their learning, especially in the Broad General Education (BGE). Staff should continue to review approaches to sharing information to parents so that they understand better their child's progress in learning.

■ Teachers use a range of summative assessment strategies to determine young people's levels of attainment, progression routes in the senior phase and to report progress to parents. In a few subject areas, teachers use a range of assessment information effectively to plan learning and interventions for young people. This is helping learners who are not on track to achieve at the appropriate level in the senior phase. In a majority of subject areas, teachers are over-reliant on summative assessments. Staff need to use assessment evidence more effectively to support young people to understand clearly their progress and next steps in learning.

■ Teachers have a well-developed understanding of standards in the senior phase. This has resulted from collaborating with colleagues in school and across the local authority to verify their assessment judgments. Senior leaders need to support middle leaders and teachers to develop robust practices in the BGE to ensure the reliability of assessment data. They should use this information to plan and support young people's attainment across and throughout all stages.

■ Almost all subject departments have individual approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's progress. These systems are variable in quality and are used inconsistently to inform the planning of learning. A few departments use tracking information well to support young people's learning in class. Senior leaders are beginning to develop approaches to ensure a greater consistency in how departments track young people's progress. They recognise the need to develop an overview of young people's progress so that staff can work together to support all young people to make appropriate progress in their learning.

■ Teachers plan courses and learning appropriately in the senior phase. Middle leaders have revisited their BGE course design and are beginning to plan courses using national benchmarks. A clear next step is for staff to develop planning approaches to learning, teaching and assessment more closely aligned to all aspects of the moderation cycle. Building on the few examples of strong practice, senior leaders should now support teachers to plan learning activities and experiences matched to the individual needs of all learners. This is required particularly for those young people who have additional support needs.

■ Staff are improving the quality and consistency of learning, teaching and assessment. Senior leaders and key staff who lead in this area are at an early stage of developing a shared understanding of high-quality provision. Staff engage in regular opportunities to share effective practice including learning visits, feedback sessions, and planning for further improvement. Senior leaders should support staff to build on aspects where practice is strong to ensure that all young people experience high quality learning, teaching and assessment.

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 that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

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

Senior leaders report that recent declines in young people's attendance as well as the school's current operational context are impacting negatively on attainment.

Senior leaders have introduced very recently a whole school system to measure young people's progress and attainment over time. They plan to use this data to identify gaps in attainment, determine interventions and measure the impact of actions in improving outcomes for young people. Senior leaders and staff need to work together to understand better their attainment data so that they can identify and understand gaps in young people's attainment. They recognise the need to ensure that data to measure young people's progress and attainment is used systematically to inform the whole school raising attainment strategy.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy
- ■ Senior leaders recognise that literacy and numeracy require greater focus as an improvement priority. Staff who lead on literacy and numeracy require support to understand their role in developing a clear strategy. They need to ensure all young people leave school with the highest level of literacy and numeracy qualifications.

BGE
- ■ Most young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3 in 2022/23. The majority of young people achieved CfE fourth level in literacy and most achieved fourth level in numeracy by the end of S3 in 2022/23. Achievement of these levels has declined over the latest five year period. Senior leaders shared data that shows the number of young people who achieved CfE fourth level in numeracy by the end of S3 has increased in the latest year.

- ■ Teachers now need to consider approaches to moderation to improve the quality and reliability of their assessment judgements regarding literacy and numeracy. They should work with colleagues in other secondary schools and in cluster primary schools to moderate their work and to promote consistency of approach. It is important that this work is guided by senior leaders with a strong understanding of the purpose of moderation activities. They need to ensure activities are focused on the improvement of reliability of judgements to support young people in progressing in their learning. Staff need to use more reliable assessment information to identify and plan for all young people to attain the highest level of literacy and numeracy qualifications in the senior phase. This includes identifying as early as possible in the BGE those young people who are at risk of leaving school without the appropriate level of literacy and numeracy qualification. Senior leaders are aware that curriculum areas other than English and mathematics should also contribute to improvement in these areas.

Senior phase
Leavers

■ Almost all young people who left school from 2017/18 to 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is in line with the virtual comparator (VC). Since 2017/18, the majority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy, in line with the VC.

■ Most young people who left school between 2017/18 and 2021/22 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy. This is in line with the VC. A minority of young people achieve SCQF level 6 numeracy. Apart from 2019/20 when performance at this level was significantly higher than the VC, this measure has been showing a pattern of decline since 2017/18, although it remains in line with the VC.

Cohorts

■ At S4, between 2018/19 and 2021/22, almost all young people achieved SCQF level 3 or better or level 4 or better in literacy. In the latest year, 2022/23, this has declined to most young people achieving this level. Since 2018/19, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy, in line with the VC. Young people's performance at SCQF level 3 or better to SCQF level 5 or better shows no consistent pattern of improvement and has declined in the latest year, 2022/23. By S5, based on the S4 roll, most young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better. Although this is in line with the VC, almost all young people achieved this level from 2018/19 until 2021/22, with the exception of 2020/21. The majority of young people by S5 achieved SCQF level 6 between 2018/19 to 2022/23. Since 2018/19, performance at this level is showing a pattern of decline. By S6, based on the S4 roll, almost all young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy and this is improving across the latest five year period. The majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy since 2018/19. This has been in line with the VC since 2019/20.

■ At S4, most young people achieved SCQF level 4 or better in numeracy in 2022/23. Although this is in line with the VC, this has declined from almost all young people achieving this level from 2019/20 to 2021/22. Most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy since 2018/19. This is in line with the VC for 2022/23 having been significantly higher than the VC in 2020/21 and 2021/22. By S5, based on the S4 roll, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy over the last five years. This is in line with the VC. A minority of young people achieve SCQF level 6 in numeracy. Although this is in line with the VC, the percentage of young people achieving this measure has been declining since 2018/19 when it was significantly higher than the VC. By S6, based on the S4 roll, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better since 2019/20. A minority of young people have achieved SCQF level 6 in the latest five years, in line with the VC. Although performance for S6 is in line with the VC, there is no identifiable pattern of improvement for SCQF levels 5 and 6.

■ Young people's attainment in National Qualifications (NQs) in English is very strong. At both SCQF levels 5 and 6, entries and young people's attainment is significantly above national data.

■ Young people's attainment in NQs in mathematics is very strong. At SCQF level 5, for both mathematics and applications of mathematics, entries and young people's attainment is significantly above the national average. At SCQF levels 6 and 7, entries have been above the national average since 2019 and attainment is generally in line with national data.

Attainment over time
BGE

■ Senior leaders do not have an overview of young people's progress and attainment over time in the BGE. A variety of individual tracking and monitoring systems are in place in almost all

subject areas. At present, the quality of these systems is variable and subject areas are inconsistent in their approaches to ensuring the reliability of the data they currently use to measure young people's progress. Senior leaders acknowledge that this is an urgent area for improvement. They have implemented processes recently to improve attainment outcomes for young people. This includes recently employing additional middle leaders to take forward improvements in this area. It is important that this work happens at pace.

Senior phase

■ In some areas of the senior phase, staff have maintained high levels of attainment. In a number of areas, aspects of attainment have declined, particularly in the latest year. Senior leaders highlight that the different approaches to certification in response to COVID-19 have presented challenges in terms of sustaining previous patterns of increased attainment. Although many measures are in line with the VC, these are not showing consistent signs of improvement. Senior leaders need to analyse more rigorously the reasons for declines in attainment. They need to support staff to use data more effectively to plan appropriate interventions to prevent further declines.

Improving attainment for all
Leavers

■ Attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of leavers was in line with the VC between 2018/19 and 2021/22, when using complementary tariff points. Since 2017/18, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% of leavers has been significantly higher than the VC for the latest two years, 2020/21 and 2021/22. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of leavers has been significantly much higher than the VC since 2019/20 and significantly higher than the VC since 2017/18. Although there is no consistent pattern of improvement for the lowest attaining leavers, attainment for the highest 20% of leavers has shown a pattern of improvement since 2018/19.

■ Attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of leavers with additional support needs has generally improved since 2017/18 and is broadly in line with the VC. Attainment for the middle attaining 60% of leavers with additional support needs has improved significantly and consistently since 2017/18 and was broadly in line with the VC from 2017/18 to 2020/21 and above the VC for the latest year. Attainment for the highest attaining 20% of leavers with additional support needs has also consistently improved and is above the VC in the latest year, 2021/22, having been in line with the VC since 2017/18.

Cohorts

■ At S4, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people has been in line with the VC from 2018/19 until the latest year, 2022/23 where it is significantly much lower than the VC. By S5, based on the S4 roll, and by S6 based on the S4 roll, the attainment of these learners is in line with the VC.

■ At S4, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% of young people has been in line with the VC since 2020/21. Prior to this, attainment for these young people was significantly higher than the VC since 2018/19. By S5, based on the S4 roll, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% of young people has been in line with the VC since 2021/22, having been significantly higher than the VC in 2019/20 and 2020/21. By S6, based on the S4 roll, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% of young people for the latest year, 2022/23 is in line with the VC, having been significantly higher than the VC since 2020/21.

■ In S4, and by S5, based on the S4 roll, the attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC. By S6, based on the S4 roll, the attainment of the highest

attaining 20% of young people in the latest year, 2022/23, is significantly higher than the VC, having been significantly much higher than the VC for the previous three years.

■ There is no identifiable pattern of improvement for the lowest attaining 20%, the middle attaining 60% and the highest attaining 20% of learners.

Breadth and depth
■ Senior leaders should review their curriculum offer to young people. They should continue to explore approaches to ensure aspirational coursing for all young people in the senior phase to maximise their time and potential.

■ At S4, a majority of young people achieved seven or more awards at SCQF level 4 or better from 2018/19 to 2022/23, in line with the VC. The number of young people gaining one or more to six or more qualifications at SCQF level 4 or better has declined in the latest year, 2022/23 and does not show a consistent pattern of improvement. The number of young people gaining one or more qualifications has declined in the latest year and is significantly below the VC. Apart from 2019/20, the number of young people gaining four or more awards to six or more awards at SCQF level 4 or better has been declining since 2018/19. Since 2021/22, the majority of young people achieved six or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better which is in line with the VC, having been significantly higher than the VC the previous session. A minority of young people achieved seven or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better since 2019/20. This is in line with the VC in the latest year, 2022/23, having been significantly higher than the VC in 2019/20 and 2021/22. A minority of young people achieved six or more qualifications at SCQF level 5A or better since 2019/20. This is generally significantly higher than the VC.

■ By S5, a majority of young people achieved seven or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better in 2022/23. This has increased from being a minority of young people achieving at this level in 2021/22. Performance at this level shows patterns of improvement and was significantly higher than the VC in 2020/21 and in the latest year, 2022/23. Performance of young people attaining top quality passes at A grade is strong and generally significantly higher than the VC. Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, a minority of young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 6C or above. This has been in line with the VC since 2021/22, having been significantly higher than the VC since 2018/19. The percentages of young people attaining SCQF level 6A or better is strong although in the last two years is in line with the VC having previously been significantly higher.

■ By S6, and since 2019/20, the percentage of young people gaining one or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better is showing a pattern of improvement. Performance at SCQF level 6A or better is in line with the VC for the latest year, however in 2020/21 and 2021/22, performance at this level was significantly higher than the VC for young people attaining three or more to six at more awards at SCQF level 6A. Since 2018/19, young people's achievement at SCQF level 7C or better remains strong. Although performance is generally in line or higher than the VC, performance at this level has declined in the latest year, 2022/23.

Overall quality of learners' achievement
■ Young people participate in a variety of highly promoted activities designed to support young people's achievement beyond the classroom. At present, staff do not track young people's participation in activities to sufficiently inform the quality and quantity of all young people's achievements. Senior leaders have very recently implemented a system to capture young people's participation in activities. They need to consider further these approaches to ensure that they are able to measure the quality of all young people's achievements. Staff also need to use this information to ensure all young people are supported to achieve well.

- Young people can influence the offer of achievement activities. A few young people take part in activities which support them to develop leadership skills. This includes a few young people from all year groups participating in the Model United Nations and in the school parliament. A minority of young people in the senior phase are developing confidence, interpersonal and organisational skills through their roles as members of the senior school council, as prefects and as sports leaders. Young people enjoy the responsibility of these roles. They feel that they are able to share their views with staff regarding changes that could be made to improve young people's experiences at school. Young people would like greater opportunities to enhance their leadership skills through greater involvement in school improvement actions. A few of the young people undertaking leadership roles are working towards NQ leadership qualifications at SCQF levels 5 and 6. There is scope to explore accreditation of achievements for a greater number of young people.

- In a few examples, staff leading achievement activities are at the early stages of helping young people to identify the skills they are developing though participation in clubs. Senior leaders are beginning to consider approaches to measure the skills that young people develop through their achievements. A helpful next step in this process will be for staff to help young people to understand the skills they are developing through their achievements. They should consider how to support young people to apply these in a range of contexts across the curriculum.

- Staff celebrate young people's achievements effectively in a number of ways. They share achievements through whole school communications such as regular newsletters and through assemblies and awards ceremonies.

Equity for all learners
- Staff use their knowledge of young people's socio-economic circumstances to support their participation in experiences such as excursions.

- Senior leaders are at the early stages of using the recently introduced whole school tracking and monitoring system to identify young people who require interventions to ensure equity of provision in learning. Staff are increasing their awareness of young people who face additional challenges as a result of poverty, such as those entitled to free school meals. Senior leaders recognise that these learners require greater focus and interventions to close the poverty related attainment gap.

- Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is used to improve attendance of young people who are at risk of underachieving. This targeted support has led to improved attendance for a few learners. PEF has also been used to employ staff who have been very recently appointed to their post. These staff plan to improve the attendance and attainment of identified cohorts of young people.

- Senior leaders are at the early stages of considering the cost of the school day and how they can support all young people to benefit from their learning experiences. They should consider how to involve stakeholders to have a greater role in contributing to and leading aspects of this development.

- Almost all young people progress to a positive destination on leaving school. This is in line with the VC. The majority of young people go to higher or further education, with a minority going to employment. These destinations are broadly in line with the VC.

Context

Peebles High School hosts an enhanced provision. This is a local authority service for secondary-aged young people with additional learning needs. The provision offers full-time education with dedicated small group support. There are three dedicated teaching areas which include a recently added sensory room. There are currently ten young people who access this provision. They also benefit from a few learning opportunities within the mainstream provision.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

■ Staff create a nurturing, supportive environment for all young people who access this resource. Teachers and Additional Needs Assistants (ANAs) are caring and sensitive. This enables young people to engage well in their learning and access the curriculum with appropriate support. Young people are highly engaged in learning activities which are well designed and matched to their needs and interests. Teachers structure lessons well and create appropriate opportunities for young people to experience a choice of activities within the planned learning context. Staff focus on developing life skills for these learners well. Young people work well independently. They collaborate successfully with others under the direction of staff in a number of subjects in the mainstream provision, including Drama, Music and Art.

■ Staff and ANAs have developed a caring, learner-centred ethos which is resulting in a positive learning environment for young people. Staff respond sensitively to young people's needs and ensure effective progress in their learning. Staff are proactive and skilled in identifying and responding to distressed behaviours. This ensures all young people remain on task and that learning and teaching time is used effectively. Staff have established procedures to monitor, record and reflect on distressed behaviour and use this to inform future practice.

■ Young people benefit from a few opportunities to learn within the broader context of the school. A particularly successful example is the introduction of the 'Sunflower café'. This develops young people's communication skills and they experience learning in unfamiliar contexts. This is developing their independence as well as their organisational skills. Senior leaders and key staff should now consider how to develop these opportunities further. They should take steps to broaden the current curriculum for learners.

■ The recently appointed Principal Teacher of Enhanced Provision has introduced appropriate plans with individualised targets which are accessible for learners. Staff are beginning to track the progress of learners and the newly developed planning framework provides a clearer focus on their individual needs and next steps. Staff who lead the provision should now consider how to develop systems to record and monitor the progress of young people over time. Staff should use this information to set robust personalised targets, identify gaps in learning and develop personalised planning. This will ensure progression in planning young people's learning. Senior leaders should begin to develop structures to enable them to have an overview of the progress being made by learners who access the enhanced provision.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

Attainment in literacy and numeracy
■ Young people are working at an appropriate level and are learning through practical activities in line with development milestones. Learners are supported to develop their attainment in literacy and numeracy through visual and concrete materials, experiential play and appropriate communication approaches.

- Young people are developing numeracy skills in a range of different contexts. They can collect and organise objects for a specific purpose, use schedules to navigate the day and for specific purposes within the lesson.

- Learners develop literacy skills through active learning. They enhance these skills by participating in social games, responding to songs and rhymes and by communicating with both familiar and less familiar supportive adults.

Attainment over time
- Key staff who lead the provision have recently created a framework to record progress. This is at a very early stage of development. Staff and senior leaders recognise the need to implement this at pace to record the progress that young people have made over time, particularly in the BGE. An important next step is for young people in the senior phase to be considered for presentation in national qualifications, in line with their abilities and needs. Staff who lead the provision should now focus on developing curricular and course structures. These should broaden learners' experiences and maximise opportunities in as wide a range of accreditation opportunities as appropriate.

Overall quality of learners' achievement
- Young people benefit from a few experiences in a broader context, such as work experience with partners agencies. Staff are well-placed to expand outdoor learning experiences. Staff who lead the provision should continue to build on these positive developments to ensure young people experience a greater range and quality of achievements.

Equity for all learners
- Young people who access the provision have been supported effectively to move on to positive post-school destinations. Young people learn well in the wider community as a result of participation in work-based learning opportunities. Staff deliver carefully considered enhanced transition programmes to support young people to move successfully on to their individual pathway when leaving school.

- S6 mentors from the mainstream setting are being used to support the staff and peers who work in the enhanced provision. This is developing a more inclusive environment and senior leaders should continue to build on this effective practice.

Other relevant evidence

■ The school community continues to operate within a challenging context. The school building suffered significant fire damage in November 2019. Senior leaders and staff continue to manage this situation well. In particular, there is limited provision in terms of space and the ongoing building work for the new school causes additional restrictions and challenges.

■ Senior leaders need to review their approaches to communication at all levels. They need to ensure that communication is regular, clear and effective.

■ The strategic leadership of the school requires improvement. There needs to be clear direction of school priorities, identified through rigorous self-evaluation. Senior leaders need to develop effective processes to monitor the impact of improvement actions so that this results in improved outcomes for all learners.

■ Young people experience their entitlement to study all curricular areas to the end of the BGE. Young people benefit from quality PE in line with national expectations. Senior leaders need to ensure all young people experience their full curricular entitlements in line with national expectations. This includes modern languages in the BGE and religious education in the senior phase.

■ The school submitted 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 and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole-school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. Several areas for improvement 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.