

23 April 2024

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 The Moray Council. 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.

In August 2023, reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) was identified in the Forres Academy structure. Senior leaders have had to devote much time to ensure that effective mitigation measures have been in place. As a result, they acknowledge that they have not made the progress they would like to have made with the identified areas for improvement.

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.

This area for improvement has not yet been overtaken successfully. Senior leaders have created a detailed school improvement plan that sets out a large number of actions to address areas for improvements identified in the original inspection. Senior leaders should now streamline these actions to those that will have the greatest impact on improving young people's outcomes. This then needs to be shared with stakeholders to ensure that all members of the school community understand the future direction of the school.

Senior leaders have engaged successfully with parents, staff and young people to refresh the school values. Young people are not yet clear that the new values are making any significant difference. Senior leaders, as planned, should work with stakeholders to develop a clearer vision statement for the school that sets out the school's purpose.

Senior leaders need to strengthen their strategic leadership to lead areas of the school's work more effectively. In doing so, they need to develop clear strategies that are well communicated to stakeholders. Middle leaders also need to strengthen their approaches to monitoring and evaluating the performance of their departments so that they can demonstrate improvements more effectively. This includes strengthened analysis of attainment data.

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.

The quality of learning, teaching and assessment remains an area for continuing improvement. In most lessons, young people's learning needs are not well planned for.

Teachers need to plan tasks and activities set at the right level of difficulty for young people. Teachers are not checking for understanding on a regular basis and therefore do not know how well learners are progressing.

Young people's engagement is highly variable. Teachers need to plan and deliver more engaging activities to support young people's motivation. The majority of young people need to be better engaged and more motivated by their learning activities. When young people are off task, this needs to be managed more effectively by teachers. A few learners have disengaged and do not attend classes, which has a negative impact on the learning environment for all. There is need to increase expectations of behaviour, standards and conduct across the school by all staff. This remains an important next step. Almost all lessons are teacher led, with few opportunities for young people to lead learning. A greater variety of teaching approaches are required to motivate and engage young people more.

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.

The school is at an early stage of introducing changes to how it supports young people's learning and wellbeing. The increased middle leadership team responsible for supporting young people's learning and wellbeing is beginning to have a positive impact. Young people speak positively about the new House Structure and the House Assemblies which celebrate success.

Senior leaders have plans in place to track the wellbeing of young people across the school. This tracker is being developed in consultation with staff and pupils. There is a continued need for teachers to plan and review supports for learning. Young people and parents should be involved fully in decisions that affect them.

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 leaders have very recently introduced revised approaches to monitor and track how well young people are progressing and attaining. It is important that information about progress is reliable and robust based on assessment evidence. Most young people are not aware of their current levels of attainment, progress or next steps in their learning.

There are a few areas where attainment has shown early signs of improvement. This includes improvements in literacy and numeracy attainment. At S4, there are improvements in young people attaining national qualifications although young people's performance remains lower than their peers from similar schools. Standards of attainment remain low in several areas assessed. There are also some declines evident. Senior leaders acknowledge that attainment still requires significant improvement and they should continue to work with staff to improve attainment as an immediate priority across the school, especially in S4, by S5 and by S6.

Senior leaders have introduced greater levels of accountability for middle leaders by introducing new approaches to departmental attainment review meetings. This practice

should be built upon by strengthening rigour across all levels of the school. It is important that the strategies deployed by classroom teachers are monitored and evaluated for effectiveness.

What happens next?

The school has made insufficient progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with The Moray Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year 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.

Guch Dhillon
HM Inspector