

Summarised inspection findings

Mintlaw Academy

Aberdeenshire Council

28 February 2023

Key contextual information

School Name: Mintlaw Academy
Council: Aberdeenshire Council
SEED number: 5222133
Roll: 892

Attendance is generally above the national average.

Exclusions are generally in line with the national average.

In February 2022 14 per cent of pupils were registered for free school meals.
In September 2021 0.8 per cent of pupils live in 20% most deprived datazones in Scotland.
In September 2021 the school reported that 54.4 per cent of pupils had additional support needs.

The school is situated in the village of Mintlaw in the area of Central Buchan, Aberdeenshire in the north east of Scotland. The school serves a number of outlying rural communities in the surrounding locality. The headteacher has been in post for six years and is assisted by six depute headteachers. Some of these posts are currently interim. One depute headteacher shares the post of headteacher on a part-time basis (0.4FTE), reducing to 0.2FTE in January 2023.

Senior leaders and teachers responded promptly to ensure the continued learning and wellbeing monitoring of all young people at the onset of and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

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 a calm and supportive learning environment. Most young people say they enjoy learning at Mintlaw Academy. They appreciate the support they receive from teachers and other staff. Most learners feel that they are encouraged to give of their best.
- In learning situations, young people enjoy positive relations with their teachers and peers. The majority of learners feel that staff welcome their views though are less sure how their views influence decision making. Young people across all stages would welcome further opportunities to play an active role in helping to shape what and how they learn.
- All stakeholders have been involved in the creation of the school's Learning Charter. This sets the context for learning across the school. It is supported well by professional learning, including collaboration with two partner secondary schools. Senior leaders recognise the need to continue to achieve consistency in high quality of learning and teaching.

- Most young people listen respectfully to their teachers. As learners, they would benefit from being more actively involved in their learning. This extends to having greater responsibility for shaping their own learning. In most lessons, young people respond very positively to learning activities. Improving the level of consistency across all faculties will help young people to become more confident as independent learners.
- In most classes, teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. In the majority of lessons, teachers share the purpose of the learning clearly with young people.
- Teachers should continue to place a greater emphasis on improving questioning techniques, to provide learners with additional challenge. This has been an ongoing area of the school's professional learning and improvement activity. Teachers should ensure that activities are set at the right level of difficulty so that young people can work to fulfil their potential in their learning.
- Senior leaders should look to build on existing good practice from across the school, for example in the use of digital technology. This will help to support a stimulating learning environment and develop skills young people will need in future.
- Teachers know young people well and are aware of their learning needs. In most classes, teachers offer individual and group support to young people during a lesson. Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) offer valuable targeted support to individuals. Activities and tasks are adapted as necessary to meet learners' needs. The school's 'boost' programme provides identified learners with additional targeted support. Those supported within the enhanced learning suite use digital technology effectively to engage in and showcase their learning.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers use a range of feedback – written, verbal and digital. The use of feedback is inconsistent and senior leaders should identify and share the most effective practice to provide young people a greater opportunity to understand their progression and next steps in learning.
- Most faculties are at the early stages of incorporating the use of skills in their planning for learning and teaching. As a next step, senior leaders should consider how to embed this into planning across subjects and year groups.
- The learning plaza provides a purposeful study facility for senior learners and is a valued, central resource for subject faculties' and young people's regular use.
- Staff draw on a range of strategies to assess learners' progress. Teachers across the school are confident in their use of assessment to plan learning. Moderation activities within and across curriculum areas are strengthening an understanding of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels. Staff should look to engage with schools beyond the cluster where possible. This will further strengthen professional judgement in assessing progress within and across levels, aligned to national standards and expectations.
- Teachers are developing their approaches to formative assessment and feedback well. Young people would benefit from increased opportunities to self and peer assess across all faculties. This will help learners to have a better understanding of themselves as learners and identify not only their strengths but also next steps to improve. Senior leaders, faculty heads and staff should extend the opportunities for young people to track and reflect on their own learner journey. This will help to empower young people to have greater responsibility for their own learning. In the senior phase, teachers track learning and progress against course requirements. Young people across stages benefit from learning conversations. The quality

and regularity of learning conversations still require greater consistency. In the senior phase, these conversations link learners' initial target grades which reflect prior learning and working grades. It is important that all learners are aware of the actions they need to take to secure targeted, positive outcomes.

- Teacher reports to parents confirm young people's levels across their curriculum and under the headings: behaviour, homework and effort. More detailed information is shared with parents at parent interview meetings to provide a more in-depth overview of their child's progress.
- Senior leaders are currently developing approaches to tracking and monitoring. As planned, senior leaders and faculty heads should build on existing arrangements to develop a more coherent whole school overview of learners' progress and attainment. Young people's progress is systematically gathered at faculty level. In the Broad General Education (BGE), teachers track learners' progress against National Benchmarks and in the senior phase against course requirements. This information is collated centrally and available to all teachers to help monitor interventions to support and challenge young people in their learning.
- Young people facing barriers and challenges to their learning or those at risk of underachieving are identified for additional support. Data is used effectively to inform the nature of an intervention to address the needs of individual learners. At faculty level staff review the progress of groups and individuals to evaluate the support and challenge being offered to learners.

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

good

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

- Young people are attaining well in both literacy and numeracy. Attainment at third CfE level or better has been steady over the past five years. More young people are achieving fourth CfE level, with a clear pattern of improvement over the past five years across in most areas of literacy and numeracy. In 2022, most young people achieved fourth CfE level across literacy and numeracy. There have been strong, sustained improvements in literacy over the past five years. Almost all faculties are engaging in robust moderation activity beyond the school, which is strengthening teachers' professional judgement of achievement of a level.

Senior phase

Leavers

- Almost all young people attain well in literacy and most attain well in numeracy by the time they leave school. Senior leaders and faculties have in place robust systems to track and monitor learners' progress in the senior phase, and these are being refined further. Senior leaders are considering ways of streamlining the wealth of tracking data available to them. This will help to monitor the attainment and progress of individual learners and cohorts in a more systematic way.

Literacy

- Over the last five years, attainment in literacy has been very strong for leavers achieving SCQF level five or better. Almost all young people have consistently achieved literacy at this level or better by the time of leaving school. Over the past five years, attainment for leavers in literacy at SCQF level 5 or better has been consistently significantly higher or much higher than the virtual comparator (VC). Performance at level 6 over the past five years has been consistently in line with the VC.

Numeracy

- In the past five years, attainment in numeracy for leavers at SCQF level 5 or better has been strong. Most young people at the time of leaving school have achieved numeracy at this level. In the past three years from x to y, attainment in numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better has been significantly higher than the VC. Attainment in numeracy at SCQF level 6 has been broadly in line with the VC over the past five years, with the exception of 2017/18 to 2018/19, where it was significantly higher than the VC.

Attainment over time

Broad General Education

- Overall, most young people are attaining well in most curriculum areas. Further improvements are required in a few curriculum areas to prepare young people better to be more successful into and through the senior phase. Senior leaders and staff are correctly

prioritising aspects of learning, teaching and assessment, as well as a clearer focus on skills development and building aspiration to drive some of the improvements required in attainment and achievement. Senior leaders should create more regular opportunities to share the good practice across the school where young people are attaining consistently well.

- Senior leaders and staff at faculty level gather a wealth of data from Primary 7 through S1 to S3, using a variety of assessment tools. This is helping teachers and pastoral staff to forward plan support and interventions for individuals and cohorts as they move into S1 and through the BGE.
- Beyond literacy and numeracy, almost all young people are achieving third CfE level or better by the end of S3 in the other curriculum areas. By the end of S3, most young people are achieving fourth CfE level in most curriculum areas.

Senior phase

- Attainment over the past five years at SCQF level five or better has been strong and has periodically been significantly higher than the VC. As a priority, senior leaders are working with staff across faculties to improve attainment and uptake at SCQF level six or better through S5 and S6.
- Average complementary tariff scores confirm very good progress for the lowest attaining 20% of young people across all stages. In the most recent year 2021/22, attainment for this cohort has improved to being significantly higher and much higher than the VC in S4 and S5. Attainment for the middle attaining 60% has been broadly in line with the VC over the past five years. Attainment for the highest attaining 20% over the past five years is inconsistent. This has been broadly in line with the VC for S4 and S6, and significantly lower or much lower than the VC for the highest attaining 20% of young people in S5, in the past two years. Senior leaders are considering a number of strategic options to help raise attainment through the senior phase, particularly at SCQF levels 6 and 7 in S5 and S6. This includes for example, reviewing timetabling options for young people who may require more time to engage in their learning to be more successful in their chosen courses. This will also help to drive one of the school's key values of 'aspiration' through the senior phase.

Breadth and depth

- Overall, attainment over the past five years at SCQF level 5 or better has been consistently strong and generally is improving.
- In S4 over the past two years, attainment at SCQF level five or better for one or more to seven or more courses, has been significantly higher or much higher than the VC. At SCQF level 5A or better, attainment has been broadly in line with the VC and has been improving.
- By S5, at SCQF 5C or better and 5A, attainment has been broadly in line with the VC. At SCQF level 6C or better and 6A for up to five or more courses, attainment over the past five years has been significantly lower or much lower than the VC with the exception of the most recent year 2021/22, where attainment at levels 6C or better and 6A have improved to in line with the VC. This is an area of the school's work which requires further improvement. The improvement in the most recent year has been helped by a more robust approach to support and encourage more young people to continue with their chosen courses for the duration of the session.
- By S6, for up to five or more courses at levels 6C or better and 6A, attainment has mostly been significantly lower or much lower than the VC. Again, this improved to in line with the VC in the

most recent year. Similar to the improvement in attainment required in S5 at level 6C or better, this is an area of the school's improvement agenda that senior leaders are correctly prioritising.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people's achievements are recognised and celebrated regularly through assemblies, digital platforms, and direct communication with families. That has helped to increase the profile of achievements and aspiration across the school community, linked to the school's values.
- Young people in S5 and S6 are benefiting from Coffee Barista, Charities, Peer Mentoring, Event Planning, and the Therapeutic Garden Project and North East Scotland College (NESCOL) and extensive work experience. Young people talk positively about how their involvement has enhanced their skills including leadership, communication, and teamwork. In the most recent year (2022), most young people in S5, and a few S6 young people, have gained accreditation.
- The Excelerate partnership programme is providing experiences to support young people with future pathways and development of skills for learning, life, and work. The school is in the early stages of recording engagement with partner organisations and are well placed to make further progress to measure success.
- Young people value the wide range of lunchtime and after school activities and the opportunity to form friendships beyond the classroom. These are supporting increased confidence, enjoyment, and strong relationships with staff. As a next step it would be useful for senior leaders to have a manageable overview of participation in wider activities. This will help to identify those young people who are not yet engaging with this aspect of the schools offer. This could also help to inform further areas of wider achievement activities that could capture the interest in young people and identify potential barriers to participation.

Equity for all learners

- Almost all pupils live in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles four to eight. Senior leaders have correctly identified other gaps and barriers to attainment to young people's learning and achievement which exist. Senior leaders should ensure that young people who are identified with gaps are targeted and monitored robustly. The average complimentary tariff scores for leavers are broadly in line with the national figure in deciles four to six, and below the national establishment in deciles seven and eight.
- The Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) provides additional supports to remove barriers and ensure equity for all. This includes the appointment of additional personnel. A wellbeing survey has been used effectively to identify barriers to learners fully engaging in the life of the school. These interventions have been evaluated as having a positive impact on how young people feel about their learning. Staff should continue to make use of more systematic approaches, using data to ensure that all young people are included in these interventions.
- Staff have a very good understanding of the challenges within aspects of the school community. Staff ensure that those who need it are given access to digital equipment and personal items. A wide range of supported study and extra-curricular opportunities takes place, allowing young people to access a wealth of activities that support learning and wellbeing. Senior leaders should seek to formalise arrangements to mitigate against the cost of the school day, as well as encouraging all eligible young people to access their entitlement to free schools meals.

- Almost all young people have moved on to a positive destination in the last five years. Pastoral Staff along with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) have a well-established and effective system of support for learners.

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.