

Report of continuing engagement visit by Education Authority officers and ES inspectors during November 2016

The City of Edinburgh Council Castlebrae Community High School

1 Background

- 1.1 In March 2011, HM Inspectors published a report on the quality of education at Castlebrae Community High School. They returned to the school the following year to look at how it had improved its work and published a letter to parents in April 2012. They subsequently visited the school again in May 2013 and published a further letter to parents on progress in August 2013.
- 1.2 A lead inspector from Education Scotland, together with officers from the City of Edinburgh Council's Quality Improvement Team, first visited the school in October 2014 to observe learning and teaching and discuss how the school was continuing to improve with staff. A further visit by this team took place in November 2015. The team visited the school again in November 2016 to find out how well young people are now learning and achieving, and how the school is continuing to support them to do their best.

2 How well do young people learn and achieve?

Areas for improvement from original report:
Improve attainment and achievement.

- 2.1 In the Senior Phase, there was evidence of continued improvement in young people's attainment in national qualifications. In the 2015-16 session, S4 attainment was greater than in schools with young people with similar needs and backgrounds for most areas; some measures of attainment were the highest in five years. There was an improving trend of attainment in S6, particularly at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5. There remains room for improvement in the attainment of S5 pupils at all levels.
- 2.2 The levels of literacy and numeracy achieved by young people in S4 had improved over the last three school sessions. S4 attainment in numeracy was greater than in schools with young people with similar needs and backgrounds for SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5 and showed improvement; there remains room for improvement in attainment in literacy at SCQF levels 4 and 5.
- 2.3 In the Broad General Education (BGE), the most recent Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels attained by young people in S3 indicated improvement in literacy, with 50% achieving Third Level or better in the areas of reading, writing, and talking and listening; this was higher than the corresponding numeracy figure of 43%. The school should ensure that improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for young people remains a priority and that all staff are fully aware of and supported to carry out their role in this. Staff were clear that raising attainment remained a priority for the school. The school should continue to encourage high expectations, both of staff and young people.

- 2.4 The attendance at the school increased last session, and the number of pupil exclusions fell. The percentage of young people leaving school and moving into a positive destination improved and was in line with figures for similar schools. The school should continue to build on these improvements in outcomes for young people.
- 2.5 Young people continued to benefit from a variety of opportunities for wider achievement, including through the school's work with business and other partners. There was evidence that partnership working had helped to raise attainment by allowing young people to access a wider range of courses. Young people commented positively on the range of opportunities open to them. The school was piloting a system for tracking and monitoring wider achievement which allowed them to identify young people at risk of missing out on participation in these activities.

3 How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Areas for improvement from the original report:

Provide more coherent and consistent learning and teaching to meet better the needs of all young people.

Improve arrangements for religious observance.

- 3.1 The BGE in S1-S3 had been further developed, to deliver high quality learning experiences and meet the needs of all young people, with particular progress made with the S3 curriculum. There was a strong focus on skills development across this phase of the curriculum. Nine key skills had been identified for whole school reinforcement. Subject-specific key skills rubrics were used in a range of lessons across the school. Young people recognised which skills they were developing and in some cases were able to identify their own strengths and areas for further improvement. For example, young people in History demonstrated how they used the rubrics to improve their learning independently at home. The school should now ensure that this effective practice is implemented consistently across faculties so that all young people can benefit from engagement with the rubrics and high quality dialogue about their learning with staff.
- 3.2 The school was aware that there remained work to be done to fully develop the Senior Phase. Young people in S3 were not sure what the structure of their curriculum in S4 would be. The school should clarify and share plans for the Senior Phase with all stakeholders.
- 3.3 Effective partnerships had been established with a range of organisations. Partners valued the support and effort the school put into working with them to offer young people a wide variety of additional opportunities and experiences. The school was now considering ways to ensure young people achieved certification for these activities. It should also continue to look for opportunities to benefit from further collaboration with partners.
- 3.4 In June 2016, in order to provide consistent approaches to support for all young people, the school introduced a programme where young people meet regularly in small groups with an identified member of staff. Each group focuses on an area for

whole-school improvement, eg. Health and Wellbeing (HWB) or Eco-schools, with young people contributing ideas and making presentations about their chosen themes. The time was also used for one-to-one conversations about a young person's best work and to track key skills and progress in literacy, numeracy and HWB against national standards. Initial feedback from young people indicated that they appreciated having a voice in whole-school improvement. Further evaluation is required to ensure that all young people across the school are benefiting from the same high quality opportunities to discuss their learning and progress.

- 3.5 The school had also set up a number of small groups to provide additional support for young people in S1 to S3 who would benefit from more targeted provision. Young people were clear about the benefits of this support.
- 3.6 There was a calm, purposeful atmosphere in the school. Almost all young people were polite and well behaved, showing respect for staff and for each other. Young people engaged well in their learning. Most were on task throughout lessons. They appreciated the personalised support offered by staff in lessons, including the work of the school's Pupil Support Assistants. They also appreciated the commitment of staff: for example, the provision of after-school supported study. Young people felt respected by their teachers and other staff, and their working relationships with them were positive. Young people were motivated by the reward system and house competitions, which encouraged participation and effort.
- 3.7 In most classes, teachers shared the purpose of the learning and took time at the end of lessons to recap and consolidate learning. Where learning was best, teachers had high expectations and young people were challenged. Steps should be taken to ensure expectations are consistently high across the school and that work is appropriately challenging and meets the needs of all young people.
- 3.8 In many lessons, digital technology was used very effectively by young people to access resources for learning both within and outwith the classroom. Young people responded well to opportunities to use digital technology during lessons.
- 3.9 The school was committed to professional learning and development for staff with a key focus on learning and teaching. Good practice in this area was regularly shared in staff meetings; staff also benefited from learning visits to each other's classrooms to share and develop their practice. The school had put professional learning opportunities in place to further develop staff's understanding of high quality learning and to adopt consistent approaches to delivering this. Staff responded well to these opportunities, both within school and beyond.
- 3.10 Appropriate arrangements had been put in place to address the requirements for Time for Reflection. Speakers from a variety of faiths and no faith contributed to the programme, which was offered to the whole school. Young people had recently engaged thoughtfully in an assembly on the theme of Remembrance, which included poems written and read out by S2 pupils.

4 How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Areas for improvement from the original report:

More effective use of self evaluation, together with partners, to improve the school.

- 4.1 The school had adopted a wide range of approaches to self-evaluation. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) knew the school well and used pupil focus groups to gather opinions which were shared with staff in order to support self-evaluation and plan for improvement.
- 4.2 Approaches to the analysis of data were rigorous and promoted improvement. The school had developed a tracking and monitoring system for the BGE and into the Senior Phase which allowed for early interventions to support all young people to make appropriate progress. These data were regularly shared and discussed with Faculty Heads and Guidance staff in order to plan support and to identify areas for improvement. The school now needs to ensure that each person's role in using data to promote improvement is clear.
- 4.3 Leadership at all levels across the school had been strengthened. The SLT was now well-established and worked very well together, sharing their vision for school improvement very effectively. Both staff and young people commented favourably on the progress the school had made and felt that the school's capacity to improve had continued to grow. Across the school, there was a clear vision and commitment for sustained improvements in attainment with high quality of learning and teaching central to success in this.
- 4.4 The Head Teacher had successfully built an ethos of collegiality, collaboration and partnership working to improve outcomes for learners. The school offered many opportunities for Faculty Heads and other staff to develop their leadership skills, for example by taking on the coordination of school partnerships, by leading on the development of skills rubrics, or by leading a support group for staff new to teaching. Staff felt encouraged to take the initiative in developing links with partners or suggesting new initiatives.

5 What happens next?

- 5.1 Overall, the school had taken steps to address the areas for improvement from the original inspection and had progressed well. Young people, parents and staff were positive about these steps and showed pride and confidence in their school.
- 5.2 We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and will publish no further reports in relation to the 2011 Education Scotland HMIE report.