

## Summary of visit to Inverurie Academy

### About this summary document

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) have prepared this document following a recent visit to Inverurie Academy that they carried out along with officers from Aberdeenshire Council. It contains more detail than the letter we sent to parents/carers. We hope that schools will find this document helpful to continue to support recovery, renewal and improvement work.

### About our visit

We made the commitment some time ago to revisit Inverurie Academy following a previous inspection, and our recent visit was arranged to fit in with the school's individual circumstances.

All of the activities undertaken by HM Inspectors during the visit were discussed in advance with the headteacher and with local authority officers. Taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic, some activities have been carried out remotely.

The visit included discussions to consider the progress made by the school since the original inspection. HM Inspectors also explored the impact of the pandemic on the school as well as the actions being taken to support recovery. HM Inspectors recognise that some priorities may have been paused or overtaken as the school responded to the pandemic.

#### **Current context of the school – impact of COVID-19**

The school has dealt with the challenges of the pandemic successfully, alongside moving to the new community campus, after an initial delay. The new building provides modern facilities for learning and these are much appreciated by staff and young people. They report a stronger sense of community and purpose, with a clear focus on learning. The school roll has increased to 1150.

Following the period of school closure between March and June 2020, Inverurie Academy redeveloped its improvement plan to reflect the changed capacity and priorities. This resulted in a new two-year plan. This was adapted slightly during the summer of 2021 to reflect the changing context. The school has also created a recovery plan to bring together aspects of work to support the return to a more normal experience of school following the pandemic.

The school has experienced significant impact from the pandemic, with periods of staff and pupil absence, with large numbers of young people testing positive for COVID-19 tests. Inevitably, this has hindered progress in improving attainment.

Young people have been well-supported by staff throughout this challenging period, though staff report that young people's motivation to learn was negatively impacted during periods of remote learning, when they were not in personal contact with teachers and their peers.

Staff have responded well to this period of disruption, and have taken the opportunity to make significant progress in the areas for improvement identified during the previous school inspection. Staff have 'recalibrated' successfully and developed a richer, evidence-based

approach to self-evaluation and school improvement. As a result, the school is now very well placed to continue its improvement journey.

### **Steps the establishment is taking in relation to COVID-19 recovery**

Principal teachers of guidance played a key role in supporting young people by monitoring participation in online learning and taking action to address barriers to participation. Teachers reflected on their practice during the first school closure and as a result, made revisions during the second school closure. They evaluated the quality of remote learning by undertaking surveys of young people to identify the most appropriate balance of live learning and independent learning.

Senior leaders scrutinise attendance levels regularly, providing a strategic overview of absence attributable to COVID-19. The introduction of an attendance officer is developing more positive home school relationships. Attendance rates are now in line with the national average as a result.

Senior leaders introduced a range of targeted personalised support arrangements to assist individual learners and their families experiencing hardship. For example, they were able, together with partners, to meet the basic needs of families within the local community by providing food parcels and free meals.

Staff recognise the impact of the pandemic across all year groups, particularly those in S2 who have a lower level of in-school experience than other year groups. As a result, there is a dedicated programme in place linked with Aberdeen Football Academy to promote mental health and positive choices.

A suite of resources are available locally to support young people to access mental health provision. School captains are also undertaking research-led work to understand better the relationship between wellbeing and social intelligence. They have conducted focus groups of learners and designed and distributed surveys to provide them with useful data on wellbeing.

### **Safeguarding**

There are no safeguarding or child protection concerns from our last inspection that need to be resolved.

**Coordinate strategic priorities to focus on ensuring continuing improvements in outcomes for all young people. In order to raise attainment and achievement for all, develop a more rigorous system for monitoring and tracking the progress of young people which is based on reliable evidence.**

**Working together, local authority officers, senior leaders and HM Inspectors identified strengths, progress and areas for further consideration during the visit.**

Across the school community, staff and stakeholders report a sense of shared strategic purpose and collaborative working. Teachers describe an empowered approach to school improvement that is now embedded in the culture of the school. Their approach to school improvement is clearly evidence-based. Improvement planning has a coherent focus on ensuring that all young people are able to make the best progress possible in their learning.

Senior and middle school leaders have developed a rigorous system to monitor and track the progress of young people in their learning from S1 to S6. The system supports staff to analyse progress data more closely. This includes wellbeing data based on young people's self-evaluation.

School leaders are developing their data analysis skills confidently. They should continue with plans to develop further the data analysis skills of all teachers to enable them to make best use of the system. School leaders also have plans to develop further the system to include aspects of wider achievement. This should better support building a more holistic, skills-based profile for all young people as they progress through school.

Monitoring and tracking data is now used more effectively. This is supporting staff to identify and support young people at risk of not making sufficient progress in learning at all stages. Teachers are supported to make well-timed interventions to ensure that young people, parents and carers are informed about appropriate steps to get learning back on track. Young people's performance is now more closely aligned to the performance of the school's virtual comparator in a significant number of key attainment measures. In a few measures, performance now exceeds that of the virtual comparator.

As the system develops, teachers should continue to explore how it can be used to inform and evaluate the curriculum and learning and teaching. School leaders should continue to provide regular opportunities for teachers to engage in moderation activities to ensure that the monitoring and tracking system is informed with robust and reliable evidence.

**Improve learning, teaching and assessment to ensure better motivation and engagement of young people. Ensure appropriate pace and challenge for all young people to maximise progress in their learning.**

**Working together, local authority officers, senior leaders and HM Inspectors identified strengths, progress and areas for further consideration during the visit.**

The school is successfully developing a strong culture of learning, which is based on high-quality, supportive relationships and collaborative working. Across the school, teachers feel empowered and are positively engaged in continuing to improve their professional practice. Their collegiate approach to professional learning is supporting improvements in learning, teaching and assessment.

Teachers are increasingly using more interactive approaches in the classroom. This is supporting young people to learn more actively and take a lead role in their learning. They have a particular focus on improving differentiation across the school in order to better meet the needs of all learners.

Young people are becoming more engaged and motivated in their learning as a result of the enhanced curriculum offer. They take increasing responsibility for their own progress. The skills

framework is becoming embedded through more regular dialogue between staff and young people.

Teachers report that learning conversations with young people are becoming rich and well-informed by evidence. As a result, they feel that they are better able to understand and meet the learning needs of all young people. This is particularly evident in the senior phase and staff should continue to ensure they build a similar depth of knowledge about young people as they progress through the Broad General Education. Teachers should, as planned, continue to focus on extending the range of differentiation across learning. This will help to ensure that young people experience appropriate pace and challenge in their learning more consistently across the school.

**Review proposals for curriculum development, taking account of national advice, to provide appropriately flexible and progressive pathways for all learners. In designing learning pathways ensure all young people's entitlements are being met in line with national expectations.**

**Working together, local authority officers, senior leaders and HM Inspectors identified strengths, progress and areas for further consideration during the visit.**

Senior leaders evaluate the curriculum, based on the extent to which entitlements are delivered effectively and through standards of attainment. There is evidence that the design of the curriculum is resulting in improved attainment and achievement. The curriculum continues to evolve to meet the needs of learners. Staff ensure that all entitlements are met in line with national expectations.

The S1 to S3 curriculum framework is designed to enable young people to work across the third and fourth levels within curriculum areas throughout S2 and S3. They progress to the fourth level when they are ready, with specialisation in S3. A consultation is planned to introduce a range of specialist subject 'schools'. It is important that, as the school continues to develop its curriculum, learning pathways remain broad and accessible to all young people, particularly for those who may specialise in a particular route.

Teachers, in planning for appropriate progression, have developed a broader range of flexible learning pathways in the senior phase. This is supporting all young people to achieve the best possible level of qualification and accreditation. There is a wide range of courses available to young people which lead to accredited qualifications. For example, Pathway Plus includes accreditation such as John Muir Award and The Princes Trust. Young people speak positively about the difference this is making, for example, in improving their communication skills and confidence. Senior leaders should continue to give consideration to parity of esteem between vocational and academic career pathways to challenge any perception that certain courses are more suited to particular cohorts.

The senior phase allocation of teaching time has also been adjusted for courses at the upper stages. The school has moved from a six column structure to a five column structure to provide greater opportunity for depth of learning. This is providing greater opportunity for young people to succeed and is working well for young people.

Young people's course choice arrangements between stages are better informed and underpinned through greater interrogation of monitoring and tracking data. Young people are now routinely placed at the right course level as they enter the senior phase. As a result, fewer young people drop courses midway through the year.

### What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, we will make no more visits to Inverurie Academy in connection with the original inspection. Aberdeenshire Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.