

Summarised inspection findings

Closeburn House

SEED No: 5980348

20 December 2017

Key contextual information

Closeburn House is an independent special school. At the time of the inspection there were six young people on the school roll, ranging in stage from S1 to S4.

1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement

good

This indicator defines rigorous self-evaluation as a responsibility of all stakeholders. It highlights the importance of partnership approaches to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. It emphasizes the need for strong leadership and robust analysis of a range of intelligence and data as essential features of effective continuous self-improvement. A key factor in this indicator is demonstrating the impact of self-evaluation in relation to outcomes for all learners. Their active participation in self-evaluation is therefore essential. The themes are:

- Collaborative approaches to self-evaluation
- Analysis and evaluation of intelligence and data
- Ensuring impact on learners' successes and achievements

- The headteacher is proactive in seeking and learning from the good practice of others. Her participation in leaders network events is supporting the building of connections with other specialist provisions. This has resulted in opportunities to visit other establishments and share good practice. By taking a more focussed, targeted approach to school improvement, the headteacher has increased the pace and effectiveness of change. The introduction of the new role of principal teacher is strengthening the school's capacity for effective self-evaluation at a strategic level. For example, through the principal teacher's leadership of the development of more effective tracking systems, and the provision of an increased level of curricular support and development across the school. This is all contributing in an increase to the pace and effectiveness of change. Plans to continue to develop the role and functions of the principal teacher's role should enhance this further.
- All staff are regularly involved in both formal and informal opportunities to evaluate the work of the school. These range from daily staff meetings to more formal collegiate events using self-evaluation frameworks such as 'How good is our school? (4th edition)'. The introduction of moderation activities is supporting staff to engage collaboratively with national benchmarks and is beginning to increase their confidence assessing Curriculum for Excellence levels across the broad general education. Plans to develop this further by participating in moderation activities with other schools should now be taken forward.
- A variety of styles of planning formats are currently in use. The effectiveness of whole school quality assurance procedures would be enhanced if a single, standardised planning format is introduced. By so doing, the evaluation of learning and teaching, the curriculum, and learner's progress across the school will be more evident.
- The School Council meets regularly and ensures that all young people contribute to school improvement. The agenda for these meetings is set by the young people themselves. The resulting 'You said, We did' response sheets enables the young people to see the actions taken by staff as a result of their suggestions and the influence they are having on school improvement. These meetings also provide the young people with opportunities to review specific aspects of school improvement. For example, young people were involved in reviewing the contribution made by partners supporting employability skills. This led to

the young people identifying areas for improvement and taking action to address this. As a result, a new service level agreement was drawn up with their provider, leading to an improved experience for learners.

- The use of service questionnaires provides parents and carers with an annual opportunity to share their views on the work of the school. Parents and carers also provide useful feedback in child planning meetings. They value being able to participate in school events, such as the annual awards ceremony. They also speak highly of the quality of communication they have with the school. The school should build on this by providing more opportunities to involve parents and carers in school improvement.
- The development of an Advisory Board over the past two years has provided the school with opportunities to discuss its work with Board members who provide valuable advice, feedback and challenge. This has helped school leaders take a more focussed approach to school improvement and self-evaluation. The school has identified ways to develop the Advisory Group's role further and should continue to implement their plans to take this forward.
- Although there is not yet a formal approach in place to involve partners in shaping school improvement, the development of a range of effective partnerships is supporting taking forward improvement priorities. For example, the school's aim to embed outdoor learning in the curriculum has been developed very successfully through partnership working with the Crawick Multiverse. Curriculum opportunities using the Crawick Multiverse have been developed including the development of appropriate work placement opportunities. Ongoing evaluation of these experiences, involving the young people, teachers and staff from Crawick Multiverse, has supported the success of this work. As a result of being the first special school to develop the use of the Crawick Multiverse facility in this way, other special schools are now able to benefit from accessing these learning opportunities too.
- Daily monitoring of young people's levels of participation, achievement and behaviour is enabling staff to be more responsive to the needs of individual learners. More robust approaches to the monitoring and tracking of attainment and achievement are being developed to support long and short-term planning. The school has identified the need to extend its systems further to ensure it captures all learning across the broad general education and senior phase.
- As part of the school's quality assurance programme, regular observation of learning by the leadership team and subsequent discussion is supporting the development of a shared understanding of effective learning and teaching. The recent introduction of peer observations will support this further and will enable a more focussed approach. Staff make effective use of professional learning opportunities to reflect on existing practice and identify strategies for improvement.

2.1: Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school.

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.

Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy:

- Overall, most young people are making good progress in literacy and numeracy from previous levels of attainment depending on when they started at the school.
- The school has appropriate approaches in place to measure the progress of all young people across the school towards achieving Curriculum for Excellence levels. The school takes good account of the different needs of learners when planning learning and teaching activities. Staff gather data about young people's progress in a variety of ways. In addition to teacher observation and learner self-evaluation, staff have regular learning conversations with young people and make use of standardised assessment where appropriate.
- Teachers are developing a shared understanding of standards through regular professional dialogue and the introduction of moderation work. They should continue to build on this practice to increase their confidence in making sound professional judgements about young people's progress within Curriculum for Excellence. Staff have made a positive start to using national benchmarks.
- The school should further develop its approaches to literacy and numeracy through identifying and planning opportunities where literacy and numeracy skills can be developed across all curriculum areas and in the four contexts of Curriculum for Excellence. This should include shared approaches to developing young people's skills in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across care and education. In doing so, staff should maximise opportunities for developing higher order thinking skills where appropriate.

Attainment in literacy and English language:

- Taking account of their additional support needs, most young people are making good progress in reading, talking and listening and the majority are making good progress in writing.
- **Listening and talking:** Most young people across all stages contribute relevant ideas to class discussions offering their own views on a range of topics. This includes evaluating the success of projects, sharing their achievements through Powerpoint presentations and expressing opinions about children's rights. Most speak confidently to visitors and are proud to share their responsibilities and roles across the school.

- Almost all young people at the Broad General Education use technology well to help them with communication and activities which involve working collaboratively. Activities include project work to raise funds for charity and designing a restaurant and inviting their peers to visit.
- **Reading:** Most young people can read and follow instructions well in, for example science, hospitality, English and computer science. Staff are successfully encouraging young people to read for enjoyment in the school and unit through using digital technology to download their choice of books, through class novels in English and from a range of books in the school library.
- **Writing:** The school is creative in encouraging young people to write at Broad General Education level through digital technology. For example through the use of computer gaming and providing real contexts for writing (such as a letter of complaint). Young people, particularly at the senior stages, are making good progress in writing for a variety of purposes. This includes making notes under suitable headings to plan writing and create short and extended texts for a range of purposes such as reflecting on work experience placements.

The school is mindful of the need to develop a coherent approach to tracking young people's progress across the four modes of reading, writing talking and listening which takes into account the benchmarks.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics:

- Overall, all young people are making good progress from prior levels of attainment in numeracy and mathematics. Planning takes account of the differing learning needs of the young people and a range of strategies are used to engage learners. Staff should maximise opportunities to provide more challenge to young people.
- A whole school approach to tracking numeracy has been implemented and is beginning to support clearer differentiation and the more effective use of assessment data. The introduction of moderation activities using the numeracy benchmarks is at an early stage of development and should continue to be embedded in teacher's practice.
- **Number, money and measurement:** Within the Broad General Education, all learners can identify all coins and notes to £20 and record amounts of money in different ways. They can round numbers to the nearest 10 and 100 and calculate the area of simple shapes. By Senior Phase learners can prepare simple budgets in relation to real-life situations and prepare saving plans. They understand the equivalence of different forms of common fractions, decimal fractions and percentages.
- **Shape, position and movement:** Within the Broad General Education all learners can identify symmetry in patterns, pictures and 2D shapes. By Senior Phase young people can plot coordinates using coordinate notation.
- **Information handling:** By Senior Phase, learners can interpret data in graphs and draw conclusions from it. Opportunities for young people to develop their information handling skills across the curriculum should continue to be developed in order to strengthen learner's understanding of the relevance of this in real life contexts.

Attainment over time:

- The attainment and achievement of almost all young people has improved significantly over the past two years. All young people who moved on from the school in 2017 attained a very good range of SQA National 3 and 4 qualifications across a range of subjects. A small number achieved units at National 5. The school should continue to broaden the range of National Qualifications that young people can attain, including building on the recent introduction of art and design.

Achievement:

- The overall quality of learners achievements is good.
- The school's increasing focus on outdoor learning experiences has supported almost all young people to achieve awards over the past year. Young people at the senior stages were successful in achieving SQA Personal Development and Achievement Awards, the Employability Award and Work Smart Awards. Younger students successfully achieved the Junior Award Scheme Scotland (JASS) Bronze Award and the John Muir Discovery Award for their work on pond development and creating a nature area within the school grounds.
- Individual young people have been particularly successful by winning a medal at the Active Schools triathlon event and by representing care leavers interests on the Champions Board in Dumfries. Through a recent project, young people showed care and concern for vulnerable children and by raising a significant amount of money for children's charities.

Equity for all learners:

- The school has successfully raised the attainment and achievement of young people over the past year in particular. It has done this through encouraging good attendance at school and offering a wider range of relevant and meaningful National Qualifications which are improving young people's life prospects through a clear focus on skills for life and work.
- Almost all young people are motivated to attend school regularly because of the personalised support offered to them. The majority of students who left the school over the past two years moved on to positive destinations including college placements and employment.

QI 2.4 Personalised Support: theme 2 Targeted Support

- The school has well-established and effective arrangements for identifying young people's needs. The headteacher and staff are very knowledgeable about the specific learning needs, anxieties and social and emotional needs of young people through multi-agency assessment and using the GIRFEC wellbeing indicators. Baselines are established on placement at the school through focused observations over time and reflective discussions with partners and care staff.
- The school has a strong focus on supporting young people moving to secondary school through robust transition arrangements. Working closely with its associated primary school, Maben House, the school prepares children to form positive relationships with staff and peers and shares key information about their progress. This ensures that teachers at Closeburn School plan learning which takes account of young people's needs and personal interests. The strong partnership between the schools allow young people to move to the secondary school when they are ready to do so increasing the chances of a successful transition.
- Most young people are making good progress towards personalised learning targets in literacy and numeracy within individualised educational support plans (IEPs). All are involved in decisions about their learning through regular learning conversations with teachers to review their progress towards achieving targets. Young people are beginning to understand more clearly what they need to do to improve in their learning.
- Most parents spoke highly of the school's communication with them. They feel that staff are proactive in alerting them to issues and involving them in school events and reviews of their children's progress. The school should continue to explore ways to involve parents in supporting their children's learning.

QI 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion: theme 1 Wellbeing

- All young people evaluate their personal wellbeing using a recognised approach which focuses on the 'Getting it right for every child' wellbeing indicators. This enables them to identify and work towards personal targets and allows important elements of young people's wellbeing to be monitored and tracked by the school over time. These evaluations provide helpful information for individual review meetings.
- The Active Schools Programme ensures that young people learn about the importance of healthy lifestyles and engage in regular sports such as boxing, swimming, athletics, curling and ice skating within the local community. Opportunities for outdoor learning with Crawick Multiverse are helping learners to make progress in achieving health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes. Successful and customised work placements allow young people to apply their learning about sustainability through groundwork, drainage, gardening and marketing.
- The school is preparing young people well to be more responsible citizens by promoting tolerance and raising awareness of democratic and inclusive values. Visiting partners from Police Scotland, Smoking Matters, Show Racism the Red Card and NSPCC raise young people's awareness of equalities issues and how to keep themselves safe, well and free from harm.
- The school's partnership with the Champion's Board and involvement in the Listen2Us Project has provided young people with a voice in improving the care experience for young people in Dumfries and Galloway. This had led to involvement in providing essential information for those entering care and opportunities to attend social groups locally.
- The school's contribution in the development of NSPCC's 'Speak Out, Stay Safe' programme for special schools raises young people's awareness of the need to speak out about important child protection issues.
- The school offers young people a calendar of educationally focussed community events and trips which are helping them to become responsible citizens by promoting their understanding of local and national culture and other races and religions. These include Robert Burns Day, a visit to a mosque, Remembrance Day, Children in Need and Holocaust Day.

Strengths of the school

- The leadership of the headteacher in developing a successful approach to managing change, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing.
- Strong partnership working, resulting in strengthened outdoor learning opportunities and the development of skills for learning, life and work.
- The skill and sensitivity of staff in supporting young people's needs, helping their readiness to learn.
- Significant improvements in attainment and the provision of a broader range of learning opportunities through which young people can achieve awards.

Areas for improvement for the school

- Continue to develop systematic approaches to support the planning, monitoring and evaluation of school improvement priorities.
- Further develop opportunities for moderation to enable teachers develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations.
- Continue to improve approaches to the tracking and monitoring of young people's progress across the Broad General Education and Senior Phase.

What happens following the end of the inspection?

We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The headteacher, supported by the school's Advisory Board, will inform parents/carers about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of the school.

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.

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