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18 August 2021

Education & Learning Directorate

The Bridge
Glasgow Road
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To:

**All Parents and Carers of Pupils at
Dumfries High School**

Any enquiries please contact:

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Dear Parent / Carer

**LETTER REPORTING ON PROGRESS OF DUMFRIES HIGH SCHOOL SINCE THE
EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT OF 10 DECEMBER 2019**

Dumfries High School was inspected by Education Scotland in October 2019. The inspection focussed on leadership of change; learning, teaching and assessment; raising attainment and achievement; and ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion.

As part of the quality reporting arrangements of the Education and Learning Directorate of Dumfries and Galloway Council, I write to inform you of the progress made in the school since the publication of the inspection report in December 2019. The report highlighted three main aspects for development.

This letter sets out actions taken by the school in addressing these aspects for development.

Parents, young people and staff should work together to agree the next steps in moving the school forward. A shared improvement plan which outlines the changes and what difference these will make should be developed. All of the school community should be kept informed of the progress of improvements.

A structured self-evaluation calendar has been introduced to ensure a more robust approach to assessing and evaluating initiatives. Effective approaches to seeking the views of all stakeholders have been embedded into practice. This includes more extensive use and analysis of stakeholder surveys in addition to learner and parent/carers focus

groups to determine future strategic direction. Middle and senior leaders are analysing the outcomes of these surveys and demonstrating sound judgement in taking appropriate action to address priority concerns. This work informs school improvement planning, in the identification of priorities that can have measurable impact. Quality Assurance calendars have been adopted by all subject and pupil support teams across the school. A more structured approach to undertaking classroom observations using a newly developed observation template has been introduced.

The school's core values of Ambition and Respect will be a major focus of reference with young people in the new term. Revisiting and re-establishing core values and how they permeate throughout daily school life and impact upon all learners will continue to be addressed. Work is under way with all stakeholders to evaluate the relevance and significance of the school's vision, values and aims; this will be completed by the end of the school year.

Focussed staff and learner dialogue has enabled Dumfries High School to further develop the House structure and provide an increased sense of belonging. The extension of House Captains across all year groups will provide further leadership opportunities. A structured programme of inter-house competitions has been developed to increase learner participation across a number of activities. Learners will continue to be consulted and supported to be more involved in school improvements. The introduction of House Councils will be an important aspect of this work. Change and improvement are driven by staff at all levels through participation in a range of working groups.

Teachers should agree a shared understanding of what high quality learning and teaching looks like. They should increase the pace of learning and make sure all young people are appropriately challenged in their learning. Staff should focus on increasing attainment at all stages. Learner attainment should be tracked more clearly.

Staff have been involved in a range of working groups including Literacy, Numeracy, Differentiation, Effective Questioning and Feedback. The findings and outcomes of these groups have been collated into a single Learning and Teaching Policy which all staff follow in planning for better learning. This refreshed policy will be shared with all stakeholders so that parents/carers and learners have clarity on what to expect from lessons at Dumfries High.

Middle and senior leaders are working to ensure that learners' experiences in lessons are more consistent. Staff will consider how the purpose of learning is shared and reviewed with learners to make sure it is clear to all. Lessons give learners the opportunity to demonstrate their resilience and responsibility by taking ownership of their own learning. Courses in the Broad General Education (BGE) have been reviewed to ensure greater pace and challenge. They include more open-ended tasks and allow pupils to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills and be better prepared to tackle complex problem-solving tasks. Staff have benefitted from sharing good practice across the school and will continue to engage in sessions where teachers deliver lesson ideas and resources to colleagues; for example, the use of digital technologies to improve learning, or the effective use of plenaries.

Staff use data to set challenging but achievable targets for pupils at the start of a year, which pupils reflect on at key points throughout the course. The school has moved all senior phase tracking into a consistent format, which ensures early identification of any pupils at-risk of not achieving and identifies appropriate interventions. This system is being adapted for pupils in S1-3 and will roll-out next term. Senior and middle leaders discuss pupil progress at regular attainment meetings at key points throughout the year.

Assessments are being used to better support learners to identify their next steps in learning. In the senior phase, teachers show a good understanding of assessment requirements within courses and use approaches that support young people to make progress towards gaining National Qualifications. Processes have been implemented to ensure effective feedback is offered to young people about their learning. Learners are benefitting from more time to reflect on their learning and to discuss their progress in class.

A number of steps have been taken to improve attainment in Literacy and Numeracy. Evaluation of S1 Literacy and Numeracy classes will ensure that they have the desired impact on learners and that the improvements from targeted Literacy and Numeracy interventions are transferable to other classroom contexts. National 5 Applications of Mathematics has been introduced to the senior phase curriculum, as a more accessible and relevant option for some learners and to improve the percentage of young people leaving school having attained a course award in numeracy at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5.

Staff have continued to review approaches to tracking and monitoring across the Broad General Education curriculum (BGE). Moderation activities have been undertaken to enable all staff to underpin professional judgements with robust evidence based on the National Benchmarks. Middle and senior leaders are developing a systematic approach to the use of this data that supports early interventions for young people in the BGE who are not making expected progress.

BGE courses have been reviewed to ensure the foundations of learning are strong, with the intention of delivering high-level attainment in the senior phase. More reliable tracking in the BGE will enable a smoother transition to the senior phase, supporting appropriate presentations and challenge. The curriculum offer in S4 has been broadened to allow pupils to study for seven (rather than six) course awards from session 2020 / 2021. In addition, the school continues to build on the recent improvements made to the senior phase curriculum and to further widen the curriculum through the introduction of alternative courses such as National Progression Awards (NPAs), Foundation Apprenticeships and Skills for Life courses. Targeted mentoring / parental engagement has been introduced in S5 to support the attainment of learners studying towards five qualifications at SCQF Level 6. A more robust process will ensure that there is added value for all young people who continue at school until the end of S6.

Staff should review the impact of the support given to young people who experience barriers to learning. This should include a whole school approach to meeting learning needs and detailed plans which support this.

A focus on Relationships Education across the whole school community has increased and improved the lesson provision in the Health and Wellbeing programme. These lessons establish what positive and respectful relationships look and feel like, and create a common language and experience of respectful, positive relationships between learners. Anti-Bullying initiatives have been implemented following learner feedback from questionnaires and focus groups. They will ensure that any student who is concerned about bullying is reassured by systems and procedures that keep them safe.

The Health and Wellbeing Programme has been evaluated and revised following collaboration with other schools. Initial feedback has indicated that this is providing more relevant and meaningful learning experiences. Teachers have increased confidence in using the language of wellbeing with learners. Feedback from staff indicates that they feel more confident reporting on students' wellbeing with a modified recording mechanism.

A number of measures have been taken to improve the support offered to learners by the Removing Barriers to Learning Department. Significant work has been undertaken to prepare and produce a policy and procedure for Staged Intervention at Dumfries High School. The policy ensures staff have the ability to accurately identify learner needs and use strategies to support them. Students with identified needs are supported by an Individual Learning Profile. This is reviewed throughout each session by teaching and support staff to ensure that young people are experiencing appropriate support. The Alternative Assessment Arrangements Policy and Procedure has been verified and commended by the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

Post COVID, the number of young people gaining accreditation and certification for wider achievement activities will increase. Plans have been developed to introduce a more sophisticated database to track trends in participation, achievement, and accreditation over time and to have an overall analysis of each young person's participation across the school.

In summary, the COVID 19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the school's capacity to take forward the recommendations from the inspection report in the timescale that might otherwise have been the case. However, the school has made progress in implementing Education Scotland's recommendations and is in a strong position and state of readiness to move the improvement journey on further. I wish to congratulate all within the school community on the progress made at a time of unprecedented additional challenge due to the pandemic.

Yours sincerely

Jim Brown
Head of Education (Quality & Curriculum) and Chief Education Officer