

27 August 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In June 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on St Joseph's College. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Dumfries and Galloway Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the headteacher. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Staff at all levels need to strengthen their contributions to leadership to ensure a better pace of improvement. All stakeholders should be involved in identifying and supporting improvement priorities and evaluating their impact.

Senior leaders are increasing the involvement of young people, parents, staff and partners in shaping the strategic direction and areas for improvement across the school. This is evident in a number of recent initiatives that are helping to improve outcomes and the learning experiences of young people. For example, following consultation with stakeholders, senior leaders and staff have developed the 'We are St Joseph's' expectations of how young people will learn across all areas of their learning. Almost all staff now contribute to or lead on strategic areas of the school improvement priorities and young people's wider learning experiences.

The school's quality assurance activities are now more clearly aligned to school improvement priorities and staff professional learning. As a result, staff now identify more clearly the important links between their professional learning, school improvement and working with partners and stakeholders, to drive forward improvement.

Since the initial inspection, senior leaders and staff have supported young people well to create greater opportunities for them to lead across the school community. These opportunities range from sports and wellbeing ambassadors to leading aspects of the school's faith-based events.

Since the initial inspection, senior leaders and staff, in partnership with the young people and stakeholders, have continued successfully to make important improvements. This is helping to strengthen contributions to leadership at all levels across the school. The headteacher should continue to work closely to develop senior leaders in their roles. This will help to ensure they continue to develop the necessary skills and expertise to support and challenge staff across the school to continue to improve.

Continue to raise the attainment of targeted groups of young people at all stages.

There are features of strong attainment that have continued in S4 to S6. Attainment (by the end of S3) at Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level in literacy and numeracy continues

to be in line or above the national average. Senior leaders and teachers should continue as planned, to improve attainment for young people by the end of S3 in literacy at CfE fourth level.

The recently developed whole school system to monitor learners' progress is now in place, allowing clear identification of individuals and learners requiring targeted support.

Since the initial inspection, more young people are benefiting from accessing wider learning experiences such as clubs and wider achievement opportunities. Senior leaders and staff now track this well using a newly introduced digital platform.

Targeted strategies to support young people are in place for those in the broad general education for literacy and numeracy. Teachers should continue as planned, to develop the quality of targets for individual young people.

Staff should collaborate to share effective approaches to monitoring young people's attainment, wider achievements and skills development.

Senior leaders now ensure that good practice is shared more frequently across the school. This is helping to enhance the quality and consistency of approaches to monitoring young people's progress and attainment. Almost all subject departments have further improved approaches to developing a consistent quality of progress in learning and skills development. Departments across the school analyse well young people's attainment data and teachers meet with senior leaders to discuss their performance. This helps identify areas of strength and next steps and informs future planning for learning, teaching and assessment. Senior leaders should continue to ensure that features of highly effective practice in learning and teaching and monitoring young people's progress, are being shared across every area of the school.

Senior leaders, in collaboration with staff, have developed a useful whole school policy to promote wider achievement and skills development. As a result, staff are ensuring that young people can recognise and articulate their wider achievements and skills development. Staff should continue to incorporate skills development in their planning for learning, teaching and assessment.

Senior leaders have introduced an effective digital platform to monitor young people's wider achievements and skills development. This is supporting well the monitoring of skills progression within the curriculum and through participation in wider achievement activities. Senior leaders and staff should now measure the impact of this tracking system by continuing to analyse data and gathering stakeholders' views. This information should be used to identify areas of good practice worth sharing across the school.

Young people's wellbeing should be given clearer priority. All teachers need to be involved in ensuring young people's specific needs are supported well. Staff should work with young people and parents to agree targets for supporting learning needs. These should be recorded and reviewed regularly.

Young people's wellbeing has a greater focus and higher profile across the school. Wellbeing is at the heart of the 'We are St Joseph's College' statements. Young people are increasing their knowledge of how to identify and address wellbeing concerns through assemblies and the improved social education programme. A few young people are now leading aspects of wellbeing across the school. These initiatives are leading to young people being better supported and demonstrating a greater awareness of wellbeing issues. Key staff should continue with plans to develop a whole school health and wellbeing strategy. They should continue to bring together and accelerate recent developments and best practice across the school.

There has been a significant increase in the number of young people who report feeling safe in school, since the initial inspection. Staff provide nurturing spaces during breaks, they offer a range of clubs and supervised social spaces, supported by senior learners. This is contributing to young people feeling safer around the school. Young people are increasing their knowledge of how to be safe through the social education programme, as well as in a few curricular areas focusing on aspects of online safety. A few young people help to increase peers' knowledge of how to be safe by leading initiatives such as mentors in violence prevention.

Young people now benefit from a well-publicised and discrete range of ways to access support with their wellbeing. Senior leaders have introduced an approach to survey all young people's wellbeing, and they ensure pastoral leads use the data to identify individuals who require support with their wellbeing. Senior leaders have correctly increased time pastoral staff have to meet with learners. Young people value the greater opportunities to receive support from their pastoral care teacher.

Staff have undertaken a range of helpful in-house and local authority professional learning to fulfil their statutory duties. This has helped to strengthen attendance procedures and is helping to identify young people who require further support to maintain attendance in school. Pastoral care staff have strengthened their approaches and clarified their understanding of their roles. As a result, young people benefit from a more consistent approach to targeted support.

Most young people who have identified additional support needs are supported well in their learning. Staff use a range of data to identify and monitor the progress of young people with additional support needs. Almost all teaching staff have undertaken a range of professional learning to meet learners' needs more effectively. Staff use this learning well in the majority of faculties to identify and respond sensitively to young people's needs. There is scope for staff to contribute their strategies to the overview of learners' needs. They should also continue to share their effective practice more widely across the school.

A range of staff now lead helpful initiatives which are increasing the numbers of young people who feel they learn to understand and respect others. A few young people report that peers are not always respectful or inclusive. Staff should continue with plans to cover all aspects of equality so that all young people feel wholly included in the school community, where differences are celebrated.

What happens next?

The school has made good progress since the original 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. Dumfries and Galloway Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

JohnPaul Cassidy
HM Inspector