

Summarised inspection findings

Closeburn House

8 September 2026

Key contextual information

Closeburn House is an independent special school located in rural Thornhill, Dumfries and Galloway. The school is operated by Outcomes First Group who provide governance and leadership through a Board of Directors. The school leadership team comprises an acting executive headteacher and an acting headteacher who have both been at the school since 2021. There are also two acting principal teachers.

The school's current roll is 13 young people, organised across three classes with a few young people on bespoke individual programmes. The majority of the young people reside in Outcome First Group care houses. Young people range in age from S1 to S6. All young people have been assessed as having significant additional support needs. Young people are placed from four Scottish local authorities and English councils. Young people can be placed at the school for a short or long term placement.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Senior leaders and staff have developed positive relationships with young people. They know young people as individuals and are caring and responsive to their needs. In most lessons, teachers adapt approaches to help reduce anxiety, support regulation and meet individual learning needs appropriately. As a result, most young people engage productively in learning activities and remain on task for extended periods of time. A few young people occasionally display dysregulated behaviours resulting in them spending prolonged periods out of class. Senior leaders and staff should continue to review their approaches to responding to these behaviours. They should continue to build on the schools trauma informed and needs led approach to ensure that these young people promptly re-engage with targeted wellbeing interventions and or return to learning or other relevant activities more quickly.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers suitably differentiate resources to meet young people's needs. In these lessons, young people benefit from activities which align with their interests and are appropriately challenging. In a minority of lessons, teachers need to provide a greater level of challenge and increase the pace of learning. This will help ensure all young people make the best possible progress.
- In most lessons, teachers make the purpose of learning clear and ensure that young people can connect between prior and current learning. In most lessons, teachers use learning intentions and success criteria well to support young people to understand what they will learn. In a few lessons, learning intentions are too focussed on completing a task and are less clear about what

young people will be able to do. Most teachers use a small range of questioning techniques well. Their questioning dialogue promotes engagement, checks for understanding and encourages young people to think more deeply.

- Teachers meet with senior leaders to discuss learning and teaching regularly. This is beginning to help teachers review the impact of their classroom practice and how it promotes young people's learning in the class. They should now work to develop a learning and teaching policy to more clearly define shared principles and expectations to make clear what high quality learning and teaching should look like across the school. This will further build on the positive steps taken so far and increase consistency.
- In most lessons, teachers use digital resources effectively to support learning. For example, digital boards are used to help learners demonstrate their thinking and help model ways they can structure answers. This supports some young people, particularly those who experience anxiety and are reluctant to record their ideas on paper. Senior leaders and staff should continue to explore ways to help all young people develop their digital skills, increasing their independence and reducing reliance on adult support for reading and scribing. This will further enhance their participation in learning.
- Most young people have benefitted from a range of outdoor learning programmes where they have learned valuable skills, for example through the forest school programme. Teachers need to ensure outdoor learning programmes are progressive and continue to develop young people's skills as they move through the school. Senior leaders and staff have correctly identified the need to develop further young people's communication, social and regulation skills out with the immediate school environment. Senior leaders should strengthen community-based partnerships and provide further opportunities for young people to engage in planned and accredited learning opportunities beyond the school.
- Senior leaders undertake effective observations of learning and teaching. This helps them to identify strengths and areas for development in teaching practice. Teachers undertake annual peer observations to support each other to evaluate their learning and teaching approaches and identify next steps. Staff regularly share practice as part of this approach. Senior leaders should increase the level of support and challenge offered to teachers by providing a more robust, rigorous quality assurance framework. This quality assurance framework could include strengthening partnerships with other schools to enable teachers to observe learning and teaching in different contexts.
- Staff work collaboratively with relevant partners to create increasingly detailed individualised education plans (IEPs) for each young person. This is supporting staff to profile increasingly accurately young people's wellbeing and academic needs, and helping them plan more personalised targets to better meet the needs of young people. Senior leaders and staff should continue to develop IEP's to help them record more fully how they are reducing the barriers young people face in their learning, including details of the supports and adjustments required to show more clearly the holistic progress young people are making during their time at the school.
- Most teachers use a suitable range of summative assessment approaches to help measure the progress that young people make. Teachers should continue to develop a broader range of

assessment strategies, including more formative assessment, to support young people to more clearly identify their next steps. In doing so, teachers should continue to make feedback more explicit and use a wider range of self- and peer-assessment approaches. Senior leaders should work with teachers to develop an assessment policy. This would provide a shared understanding of the purposes and aims of assessment and make clearer the link between assessment and planning.

- In the Broad General Education (BGE), teachers are making increasingly effective use of national Benchmarks to assess young people's progress. However, professional judgements remain inconsistent and approaches to moderation need to be strengthened. Staff need greater confidence in identifying the standards required to achieve a Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) level. This would help ensure a clearer understanding of the progress young people are making within and across a level. Senior leaders and staff are improving moderation processes, for example through closer collaboration with their sister school. Teachers would benefit from further engagement in moderation activities with colleagues from other schools.
- Teachers are more confident in their professional judgements in the senior phase. Senior leaders and staff have established contacts with partner schools to support the verification of national standards. In the senior phase, there are positive examples of teachers using learning conversations with young people. Teachers use these conversations to help young people reflect on progress, recognise their success, and identify appropriate next steps.
- A few young people in the senior phase are assessed against CfE levels. Senior leaders need to make a clear distinction in how they plan, assess and record progress for young people in the BGE and those in the senior phase. Senior leaders and staff need to use progression pathways to help them develop a better understanding of young people's expected learning journey as they transition from the BGE into the senior phase.
- Senior leaders have introduced new approaches to planning and tracking across the BGE. All teachers use termly planners. They also use a digital platform and school-based systems to record young people's progress and develop appropriate targets. In the senior phase, teachers gather key pieces of work to produce a portfolio which reflects young people's progress effectively. Senior leaders have recently developed a system to record attainment of National Qualifications (NQ) units accurately. This captures more fully the wider range of qualifications that young people are attaining. This is helping staff to see more clearly the awards that young people are gaining over time.
- Senior leaders have rightly identified the need to streamline planning systems. Senior leaders also recognise the need to develop a more sensitive whole school tracking system to support them to monitor young people's progress across the school. They should include closer monitoring of the progress of those young people making smaller steps in their learning. This will help staff to capture knowledge and skill progression more effectively and make clearer the level of support that young people need to be successful. It will also enable them to identify any underachievement and provide targeted intervention strategies to accelerate progress.
- Key teachers provide parents with helpful monthly updates on how young people are doing in school. Parents view this positively. Senior leaders and staff should now provide parents with

more frequent access to important plans such as IEPs. This will help parents more fully understand the progress their young person is making in their learning.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- 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 and the Board of Directors.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

Attainment information is provided in overall statements, due to the small numbers of young people at each stage.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, young people in the BGE are making better progress in literacy and English than in numeracy and mathematics. Most young people in the BGE make appropriate progress in literacy from beginning their placement at the school. A few young people make more accelerated progress. Most young people make appropriate progress in numeracy. In literacy and numeracy, a minority of young people are capable of achieving more and should be provided with greater challenge in their learning.
- In the last three years, most young people in the senior phase attained a small number of NQ units or full course awards in literacy and English at National 3 level or above. A few young people are working to achieve National 5 level this session. In numeracy, the majority of young people attain NQ units or full course awards in numeracy at National 2 or above. A minority of young people are capable of achieving at a higher level. Senior leaders and staff should continue to support young people to build upon their attained levels. They should ensure that young people achieve the highest level of qualification possible as they move through the senior phase.

Literacy and English

Listening and talking

- Most young people communicate well with staff. A few use more advanced language when discussing topics of personal interest, and some can debate social issues, expressing their views appropriately while respecting the opinions of others. Teachers mainly use one-to-one approaches and, occasionally, small group activities to support listening and talking. While many young people find communicating with peers more challenging, Staff need to continue to provide more opportunities to develop these skills through group and whole-class activities. This will help young people build on their existing strengths, engage more confidently in real-life situations, and take a more active role in decisions that affect them. Young people are participating well in newly introduced therapeutic sessions, which are beginning to strengthen their confidence and communication skills when talking about their own lives.

Reading

- Most young people read as part of their daily lessons. This includes reading tasks and instructions, sharing presentations, and engaging with a small variety of books and texts. They are particularly motivated when reading texts that match their interests. Most young people read texts to find facts. A few young people read plays sharing their thoughts about the authors choice of words. All young people need to develop their reading skills across a wider range of genres. Reluctant readers would benefit from using digital tools, such as audiobooks, e-books, and text-to-speech software more regularly as part of planned learning to engage them further in reading activities. This will help them to engage with text in a way that suits their needs and preferences, making reading more accessible and enjoyable.

Writing

- Most young people write for a range of purposes. They write to answer questions in class. A few create reports of increasing length and detail on topics they are studying. A few young people identify the differences between persuasive and discursive texts. They form sentences and paragraphs appropriately when writing creative texts. A few young people identify the features of a text such as setting and characters. As they move through the school most young people develop their writing skills and extend the length and quality of their writing. This makes their writing more engaging. Most young people identify verbs in sentences. A few are developing their use of punctuation appropriately. All young people should continue to develop their functional writing skills and be supported to see the relevance of this in their life beyond school. Young people who are reluctant to write, would benefit from using digital tools more frequently to support them to produce written work and help them to build their confidence as a writer.

Senior Phase

- Most young people in the senior phase are making appropriate progress in literacy and English compared to prior levels of attainment. Senior leaders and staff should work together to increase attainment for a minority of young people. Most young people are currently sitting NQ in literacy and English at National 4 with a few working at National 5.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

Number, money and measure

- Most young people use multiplication facts to support them to make groupings and repeated additions. A few understand the link between a digit's place and value for numbers up to three decimal places. A few young people need more support to show understanding of simple equivalent fractions.

Information Handling

- A minority of young people use block graphs to display data that they have gathered. A few young people accurately organise and display data using, for example, frequency tables and bar charts. Teachers need to provide young people with further opportunities in real-life contexts to collect, present and analyse data using digital technology.

Shape, position and movement

- The majority of young people can create pictures with more than one line of symmetry. A few understand complementary and supplementary angles and can use this knowledge to calculate

missing angles. A few young people need to develop further their ability to plot and record the location of a point using coordinate notation.

Senior Phase

- The majority of young people in the senior phase are making appropriate progress in comparison to prior levels of attainment. Senior leaders and staff should work together to increase attainment for a few young people. Young people are currently sitting NQ in mathematics and numeracy between National 2 and National 4.

Attainment over time

- Over the last three years, the school's average attendance figure has fluctuated and is under the national average for this sector. Most young people have improved attendance at the school when compared to prior education placements. Almost all young people have experienced disrupted schooling prior to starting at the school. Currently, the overall attendance for the school is 87%. Most young people have levels of attendance at or above 90%. Senior leaders and staff encourage high levels of attendance through regular discussions with young people and residential staff. They monitor the absence of individual young people well. Senior leaders and staff have a strong understanding of the reasons for absences. These are varied and often a result of young people's sense of wellbeing. If staff have a concern about a young person's attendance, they work in close partnership with relevant staff or partner agencies. This has helped to improve the attendance of a few identified young people.
- There are a minority of young people on part-time timetables. These young people spend prolonged periods of time out with their class, which limits progress in their learning and development. Senior leaders and staff need to continue to support these young people to increase their time in programmes of learning including wellbeing interventions in line with their identified needs. This should help ensure they receive their learning entitlements and make the best possible progress.
- There have been a small number of recorded exclusions at the school in the last few years. This is as a result of a few young people presenting with seriously disruptive behaviours. Exclusions at the school are low and are decreasing over time. Staff have engaged in professional learning in trauma informed practice. They use this knowledge well to adapt the learning environment to engage young people in more interest based learning activities successfully.
- Most young people in the BGE make appropriate progress over time and develop their learning well across most curriculum areas. A few young people make more accelerated progress. Recently introduced whole-school planning and tracking systems are beginning to provide clearer evidence of young people's progress through the BGE CfE experiences and outcomes. However, the curriculum is currently too narrow, and a few young people are completing course work in line with NQ while in the BGE. Staff now need to widen learning across all curriculum areas, to allow all young people to develop a broader range of knowledge and skills during their time in the BGE. Staff's termly evaluations are increasingly identifying the knowledge and skills young people are achieving. However, staff report that young people are making progress when they are engaged and active in lessons. This does not sufficiently measure young people's progress in learning. Staff now need to analyse attainment data more rigorously to help monitor and review young people's progress across

all areas of the curriculum. Where learners are making more small step progress, staff should consider more fully the levels of support that young people require to achieve success.

- In the last three years, at the senior phase, all young people attain a range of relevant NQ units and course awards across a small number of curricular areas at National 2 to National 4 level. A few young people have achieved awards at National 5 level. They attain awards in literacy, numeracy, social subjects, history, science and cookery. Most young people who continue their senior phase into S5 and S6 successfully build upon prior attainment and go on to achieve NQs at a higher level. A minority of young people could attain a wider range and higher levels of NQs in their senior phase. Senior leaders and staff should continue to develop the senior phase offer to ensure all young people have the opportunity to attain a greater range of qualifications at a higher level where appropriate.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Senior leaders and staff have recently increased the number of opportunities young people have to engage in wider achievement activities. A minority of young people across the BGE and most in the senior phase now benefit from an increasing range of wider achievement experiences. Young people report positively about the opportunities they are given to participate in work-related activities in the community, such as the local stables and a community cafe. Young people develop their confidence and improve their communication and interpersonal skills well through participating in these work placements.
- A minority of young people are developing valuable work-related skills through engaging in activities such as bike repair, volunteering and employability sessions. A few are using these skills to work successfully towards awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, personal development awards and personal achievement awards. A few young people have achieved accredited certificates and Employability Awards. Although they enjoy these activities, most young people do not yet fully understand the skills they are building or how these skills apply to their lives. Senior leaders are at the early stages of designing a skills framework which has the potential to capture better the knowledge and skills young people develop through participating in a range of achievement experiences. Senior leaders currently track young people's participation levels in these experiences. They recognise that developing further the skills framework will support them to see more clearly the important skills young people are developing. This should help young people gain a clearer understanding of the skills and abilities they are developing and how these are relevant in their lives.

Equity for all learners

- All young people start at the school having experienced previous disruption to their learning. Senior leaders and staff build a strong understanding of the social and economic context of young people and their families. They use this effectively to help build positive and supportive relationships with young people and their families. Senior leaders remove financial barriers where they exist to support young people's participation in school activities. As a result, almost all young people take part in a wide range of learning and wellbeing-based activities. All young people receive free school meals. The school provides clothing and learning resources to meet young people's needs well. This helps enable most young people to engage fully and focus positively on their learning. Senior leaders and staff should now consider ways to engage more fully those learners who are currently on part-time timetables.

- At points of transition, staff support most young people in the senior phase effectively to consider their next steps for when they leave the school. A few young people engage in employability programmes. This is helping them gain an understanding of the practical demands of working life as they begin to consider post-school destinations. In the last few years, a minority of young people have moved on to a positive destination such as training and further education. A few have maintained contact with the school which helps enable staff to track successfully how well these young people have sustained their positive destinations. Staff should continue to identify ways to support all young people to move on successfully into further education, training or employment when they leave the school.

Other relevant evidence

- Across the BGE, subjects including religious and moral education, and personal health and social education are taught in planned blocks across the year. Senior leaders should review the school's BGE curriculum to ensure all young people receive their full education entitlements. All curriculum areas should be taught in a progressive manner as young people move through the BGE. This will help ensure all young people make the best possible progress across all areas of the curriculum.
- Young people learn French as part of the school's approach to 1 + 2 languages. The school is beginning to introduce British sign language as a second language.
- Physical education (PE) is being more systematically planned across the school following the recruitment of a PE specialist. This is helping ensure most young people receive their entitlements to a planned and progressive physical education programme. A few young people in the BGE now need to be encouraged to increase their participation in PE.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard HMIE 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.