

Summarised inspection findings

Irvine Royal Academy

North Ayrshire Council

5 May 2026

Key contextual information

School Name: Irvine Royal Academy

Council: North Ayrshire Council

SEED number: 8215138

Roll (December 2025): 716

Irvine Royal Academy is non-denominational secondary school situated in the town of Irvine. There are five associated primary schools. The head teacher has been in post for five years. She is supported by three full time equivalent depute headteachers.

Attendance is generally below the national average. Exclusions are generally in line with the national average and are reducing.

In September 2024, 31.8% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2024, 72.8% of pupils lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland. Most young people reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 to 3.

In September 2024, the school reported that 51% of pupils had additional support needs.

Currently, one fifth of young people leave the school following S4. Just under 40 % of the S4 cohort stay on at school until S6.

Senior leaders identified previous challenges in securing staff to posts, including in English and mathematics, as a factor that has impacted on attainment.

The school houses a North Ayrshire Council Secondary Support Resource (SSR). The SSR provides secondary education for 15 young people in S1-S5 with additional and complex support needs. Young people are placed in the SSR via the North Ayrshire Council Inclusion group.

1.3 Leadership of change

good

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to- ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher is very highly regarded and respected by young people, parents, partners and staff. She is ambitious for the school and has led school improvement well. Under her leadership, the school vision of 'Irvine Royal Academy believes in better' ensures a very strong sense of community and belonging. Senior leaders and staff share a sound understanding of the context of the school. This supports young people and staff at all levels to make an increasingly positive contribution to the life of the school.
- The school values of ambition, respect and responsibility are very firmly embedded throughout the school. Learners and staff demonstrate the values very well. Senior leaders and staff across the school ensure that school values are embedded within the life and work of the SSR. Senior leaders and staff celebrate young people's success in a number of ways clearly linked to school values. These successes are acknowledged very well at whole school, house, departmental and class levels. As a result, young people speak positively about how the values impact meaningfully on the school community. There is a strong focus on staff wellbeing and staff feel valued and supported. This contributes positively to staff working well together to effect change. While the school values remain relevant, senior leaders are planning to review these to ensure that they remain reflective of the views of all stakeholders.
- Middle leaders are empowered to lead change. Senior leaders, in consultation with staff, have reviewed leadership structures to increase collaboration at all levels. All staff are engaged in improvement working groups with priorities aligned to the SIP. Staff value the contributions they make to school improvement through these groups. There are opportunities to liaise and share approaches for faculty improvement at Extended Leadership Team (ELT) meetings and collaborative days. All middle leaders are committed to developing further their approaches to leading change and are participating in a local authority professional learning leadership programme. Senior and middle leaders should continue to work together to further increase consistent outcome-focused approaches across all faculties. Senior leaders need to consider how to build on current effective approaches to strengthen further support for middle leaders. They should ensure a consistent level of quality assurance and performance review across all areas of the school.
- Senior leaders have developed increasingly robust approaches to inform self-evaluation. They consult with staff, young people and parents to create the school improvement plan (SIP). SIP priorities are identified using a wide range of information, including from local authority quality assurance visits and work with partner schools. While self-evaluation procedures are providing useful information, senior leaders need to use this information more strategically. They have

recognised the need to streamline the SIP to provide a clearer focus on the most important next steps. By reducing the number of implementation priorities, key areas for improvement should become more focused and easier to quality assure.

- Senior and middle leaders plan carefully how they aim to improve outcomes for young people. They should now develop further their approaches to quality assurance procedures to maximise the impact of approaches taken.
- Senior leaders and staff use data well alongside external evaluation of practice to identify priorities within the SSR that align with the school improvement plan. SSR plans show well-considered priorities with sound evaluations of progress. As a result, young people now make better progress in their learning following important changes to the model of delivery. This included an increased focus on curriculum content, attendance and access to specialist teaching for young people. While it will take time to embed changes, there is a need to ensure the plan continues to be rigorously evaluated to increase the pace of change.
- Young people are proud of their involvement in leading school improvement. Most staff collaborate very well to provide an extensive number of leadership opportunities for young people. These roles are enabling young people to contribute very effectively to their school and community. For example, members of the school of rugby, active girls group and sports ambassadors are helping to promote healthy lifestyles and increase participation across the school. Every faculty involves young people as 'subject ambassadors' and a few young people are engaged as Young Leaders of Learning. 'Royal Reps' and members of the Senior Pupil Leadership Team contribute very well to school activities and events. Young people are becoming aware of the skills they are gaining through these activities and how these skills support them to improve their confidence.
- Most class teachers and support staff engage in leadership roles on an ongoing basis. They link well with the deputy head teacher who provides well targeted support and clear guidance at a strategic level as well as on a day-to-day basis. Young people in the SSR make valuable contributions as individuals about improving this resource. There is an opportunity to enhance further leadership opportunities for staff and young people with their contributions to improving both the SSR and the school as a whole. Staff should now involve young people in the SSR more in shaping decision making processes and improvement priorities at departmental and whole school level.
- All staff are supported well with structured professional learning opportunities which are enhancing the school's collaborative culture. Faculty trios provide a useful platform for staff to share practice and approaches. Staff at all levels are contributing to the school Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) calendar. Resources are shared effectively through a school digital learning platform which provides easy access for staff to take part in further professional enquiry. As a result, almost all staff are supported by leaders at all levels to engage in activities which enable them to reflect on their own practice.
- Senior leaders have allocated Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) well to provide appropriate interventions linked to SIP priorities. Senior leaders are monitoring progress well using regular PEF update reports. As planned, senior leaders should continue to develop their use of data to further track and monitor the impact of interventions on those affected by socio-economic disadvantage.

- Senior leaders connect well with local community partners. As a result, they are better able to respond to the socio-economic context and assist families with financial inclusion. Staff work effectively with a wide range of community partners to support young people experiencing barriers to their learning. Senior leaders are aware that their next step is to involve all partners in evaluating the impact of their involvement and plan further improvement together.
- Senior leaders and staff work effectively and strategically in partnership with Skills Development Scotland. Young people benefit from a range of valuable opportunities to learn about a wide range of career opportunities, including practical experience with local employers. Young people are well supported through partnership working and as a result are increasingly confident as they progress toward post school destinations. Staff's effective planning and interventions are leading to almost all young people who leave school entering positive destinations.

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

- Young people benefit from calm and positive learning environments. Senior and middle leaders work well with young people, staff and the wider school community to develop and maintain very positive relationships across the school. These positive relationships are underpinned by the school values of ambition, respect and responsibility.
- Young people within the SSR benefit from highly supportive relationships, including when accessing mainstream classes. Staff in the SSR care deeply for the young people and truly value them as individuals. They are attentive to each individual's pastoral needs and most of their learning needs. Most young people are motivated in their learning and respond positively to the structures and routines in place.
- Staff know young people and the context of the school community very well. This has led to senior and middle leaders establishing very consistent structures and routines in learning across the school which are expected and understood by almost all young people. This allows almost all young people in most classes to engage with tasks set for them during their lessons.
- The pace and the challenge of learning are appropriate in a minority of lessons. Senior leaders acknowledge that improving the pace and challenge of learning experiences for young people is an important next step. Senior leaders delivered a well-received Festival of Ambition to highlight the importance of improved aspiration among young people. Senior leaders know that they must now prioritise with teachers how to improve pace and challenge to stretch young people of all abilities in the classroom. Senior leaders should continue to work with staff to ensure that methodologies to deliver this are monitored and evaluated robustly. This should support them to identify what best contributes to improved outcomes for young people.
- Most teachers demonstrate an awareness of young people who require additional support with their learning using the helpful pupil information spreadsheet. In most lessons, teachers create and use additional learning resources to support identified young people to engage in work alongside the rest of the class. It will be important for teachers to also consider the experience of young people who require additional support in their learning as part of their work to improve appropriate pace and challenge for all learners.
- Teachers have consistently embedded elements of the 'SLIPP' structure for learning and teaching (starters; learning intentions and success criteria; pace and challenge; plenaries) into the school. The SLIPP structure successfully supports classroom routines. As a result of a consistent use of and reference to the SLIPP model, almost all teachers use starter tasks, share

clear expectations and instructions and share learning intentions and success criteria with young people. Young people respond well to this clear and consistently used structure and are now well-placed to enjoy further challenge in their learning.

- Senior leaders acknowledge that more work is required to improve the quality of use of the SLIPP structure across the school. Currently there is consistency in the use of the model, but inconsistency in its quality of use. For example, in a minority of lessons, too much time is spent on starter activities. The majority of teachers share a differentiated success criteria to support learning, but the quality of measures of success and their differentiation is variable across the school. In a few highly effective examples, teachers use their knowledge of young people to assign carefully appropriately challenging success criteria to them. Most teachers use plenaries to check for learning or for young people to reflect on their learning. The quality of plenaries is variable across the school and senior leaders should look to reinforce them as they develop further the quality of embedded aspects of the SLIPP model.
- Within the SSR, teachers and support staff work effectively together to ensure that each young person benefits from appropriate learning and teaching. Most young people access mainstream classes to learn alongside their peers. Staff skilfully work together supporting young people to regulate their behaviour and focus on their learning. They are proactive in anticipating each young person's emotions and applying strategies that help them to learn. Learning pathways in the SSR and those accessed in mainstream classes are highly individualised and bespoke to each individual's needs. Staff working alongside the young people positively to remove barriers to learning.
- Senior and middle leaders have worked well with staff to develop a culture which recognises the importance of working collaboratively to develop approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. For example, all teachers are involved in trios and peer observations which have led to structured 'Learning Studies' on pedagogical issues. This approach supports teachers to try and develop a range of different classroom approaches to learning. Teachers are also encouraged to access a wide range of internal and external professional learning on learning and teaching. This includes, on collaborative learning approaches. Teachers would now benefit from working further with senior and middle leaders to very clearly identify which strategies are having the most success with young people and plan next steps accordingly.
- Young people would benefit from more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and engage more independently in tasks. In a minority of lessons, teachers balance direct instruction to the class with independent or collaborative learning activities for young people. Staff should now consider how themes of responsibility and leadership can be best experienced by young people in day-to-day learner engagement in class.
- Staff have undertaken professional learning and planning exercises in relation to digital learning. They are at the early stages of incorporating more digital learning into young people's experiences. Young people use an online portal as a digital resource across all faculties. Professional and collaborative working is broadening staff awareness of its application in classroom learning, home study and advice to parents.
- In most classes, teachers use questioning to assess young people's understanding and recall of information, often at a whole class level. In a few lessons, teachers encourage a deeper understanding among young people through skilled questioning. This prompts young people in these classes to reflect much more deeply and apply critical thinking skills. A greater emphasis

on questioning that promotes analysis and personal reflection should help increase young people's engagement and understanding in their learning.

- In the majority of lessons, teachers are at the very early stage of identifying how learning links with meta-skills. Senior leaders should ensure the development of this work is carefully planned and evaluated within a consistent approach.
- Teachers primarily assess young people's progress through the use of summative assessments. They should continue to use their professional learning and collaboration to explore different assessment strategies with young people. For example, a few teachers use well-planned approaches to peer- and self-assessment, especially in the senior phase. Greater consistency in embedding agreed approaches should help improve young people's appreciation of their strengths, progress and their responsibilities as learners. Teachers should also use evidence from this greater range of assessment strategies to more effectively plan learning within and across lessons.
- Learner conversations are embedded across the school. They are helping young people reflect on their progress and identify next steps. Young people are confident in discussing their working and target grades. The quality of learner conversations is variable. Young people appreciate the advice and support they receive through feedback. Most young people would benefit from improved quality feedback and formative comments on their work. This should offer more specific advice on what next steps to take in their learning. Senior and middle leaders should now look to capture and share effective practice surrounding feedback to learners and learner conversations.
- Moderation activities within departments and with colleagues in other schools are improving the confidence of staff professional judgement when determining the achievement of levels in the broad general education (BGE). Staff should now develop further their use of the moderation cycle to inform planning for high quality and consistent learning, teaching and assessment.
- In the senior phase, staff are improving their understanding of national standards through moderation activities within and outwith the school. Staff in every faculty are involved as markers for the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). SQA markers share their professional insights with colleagues. Within faculties, SQA verification activities further support staff in planning programmes of learning to satisfy assessment requirements.
- Teachers in the SSR share information with mainstream class teachers very well about young people's progress. In addition, they work collaboratively with each other to ensure that learning is appropriate. As planned, teachers in the SSR would benefit from more opportunities to moderate learning alongside their mainstream peers. For a minority of young people, expectations of achievement and attainment in planned learning vary across the SSR and the mainstream classes. Therefore, young people could be achieving more when learning in the SSR.
- Senior leaders and faculty heads should continue to monitor the robustness of data gathered through tracking exercises, and the progress of young people who are supported through targeted interventions. While school data provides an overview of progress within cohorts and classes, faculty heads must ensure the robustness of the evidence being gathered within the curriculum area. Young people, especially in the BGE, do not experience appropriately planned

progression in their learning across their school experience. Teachers should use more effectively information about young people's progress and strengths to plan appropriately challenging learning activities. Within faculties, teachers should evaluate the quality of learners' experiences and the evidence base used to assess progress. Senior and middle leaders should monitor closely the impact of this to ensure that all learners are making the progress that reflects their ability levels.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The curriculum reflects the school's aim of providing learning experiences and pathways to meet the needs, interests and aspirations of learners. In the BGE, staff plan learning to include all curriculum areas. Learning pathways in the senior phase offer more focused areas of study that offer accreditation and wider learning experiences.
- A numeracy initiative involving moderation and joint planning, with primary staff, supports the transition to secondary. In S1, young people continue their learning in their primary class groupings for mathematics. Early evidence demonstrates improving levels of engagement. A similar exercise in literacy is planned for the current session. A wellbeing survey and other curriculum projects are furthering this partnership. Extending these links should help to bring further coherence and continuity to learning pathways.
- In the BGE, the experiences and outcomes shape learning across all curriculum areas. In S3, young people personalise their choice of subjects while retaining curriculum breadth. In the senior phase, learners in S4 follow a course of study that offers the opportunity of seven national qualifications, with English and mathematics as core subjects, in addition to personal and social education (PSE) and physical education (PE). In S5 and S6 learners draw from a range of options retaining PSE and PE as core subjects. The curriculum offer in the senior phase offers clear progression routes in most SQA courses to Higher level. In addition to SQA certificated courses, learners can access a range of vocational orientated courses and National Progression Awards (NPAs), as well as courses delivered in, for example, adjacent secondary schools and Ayrshire college. Learners also have access to online learning and courses through local consortium arrangements. Curriculum pathways are flexible and respond to the identified needs of learners.
- Literacy and numeracy are the shared responsibility of all staff and a focus within school improvement planning. While at an early stage, plans are evolving to promote common approaches that will support young people in developing their skills in different contexts. Young people benefit from a well-stocked library of reading materials and computers.
- At S2, S3 and within the senior phase, planned programmes support learners well in their course choice decision making. In personalising their curriculum, young people reflect on their strengths, areas of interest and future career intentions. School staff support learners in this exercise through the PSE programme, one-to-one discussions, detailed subject course outlines, progress reports and career focused activities. As young people personalise their course of study for the senior phase, learners are advised to select their highest attaining subjects with English and mathematics. It is important that advice is carefully balanced to take full account of career aspirations.
- Senior leaders should reflect on the increasing the range and the balance of courses being offered or proposed within the school to ensure that they are sustainable and do not limit planned progression routes from the BGE.
- School and college staff have well-developed and highly productive working relationships aligned to DYW priorities. This supports young people in making links to career-related skills in their learning.

- Learners in S1 and S2 access French and Spanish, but do not receive their full entitlement to the 1+2 languages learning policy in S3.
- Overall, arrangements for the delivery of PE are broadly in line with national guidance. Young people receive additional time in PE in S1 and S2 but do not receive their entitlement beyond S3, with one period allocated per week throughout the senior phase.
- Senior leaders should review the delivery of RME to ensure young people receive their entitlement within the senior phase. There is scope to build on existing arrangements for Religious Observance to provide young people with meaningful opportunities for reflection and to celebrate the shared values of the school community.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Senior leaders develop positive partnerships with parents to help improve outcomes for learners. The well attended 'Parents in Partnership' events help to develop relationships and trust, fostering a positive school community.
- The Parent Council works closely with senior leaders in actively supporting families. This helps remove barriers to learning for young people. The Parent Council's active social media presence helps reach the wider parent forum.
- Almost all parents view the school positively and feel staff are approachable. Parents feel staff deal with issues raised promptly and are very committed to young people's progress and welfare. Parents value frequent communication from the school, for example, the headteacher's weekly newsletter. Parents welcome hearing about the many achievements of young people.
- Parents feel staff know their child well. The wide range of activities and opportunities provided by staff to support young people is appreciated by parents. A few parents also appreciate how the school helps them access further learning, along with their child, through the school's links with local colleges.
- Most parents indicate that they find the feedback they receive on their child's progress helpful and that they understand how their child's progress is assessed. Senior leaders should continue their efforts to engage with parents, particularly about how to support young people in their learning at home.

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 were agreed with the school and the education authority to be addressed as a matter for urgency.
- Following the inspection North Ayrshire Council, working with Irvine Royal Academy, have taken forward areas for improvement in safeguarding which required urgent action. HM Inspectors have reviewed information relating to these areas for improvement. HM Inspectors are satisfied with the response taken by North Ayrshire Council and do not require any further information.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Most young people are very proud of their school and refer to the school as a family in which they belong. Young people are welcoming, kind and almost all demonstrate the school values very well in their daily interactions. The very strong commitment from staff, supported by the clear Promoting Positive Relationships policy, provides a safe, nurturing, caring, and aspirational environment in which young people can thrive. Young people appreciate the House System which encourages them to be both supportive of each other, but competitive too.
- The nurturing approach is evident across the whole school. Senior leaders provide each young person with a key adult, in addition to their registration teacher, guidance teacher and their link deputy headteacher. This key adult, selected by the young person, is a trusted person in the young person's life who listens to them and helps support them as required. This strategy supports the development of strong relationships between staff and young people and has, for a few young people, improved their attendance at school. Young people also appreciate the specific and planned 'safe spaces' provided for them at unstructured times throughout the school day. These spaces help young people feel safe, valued and included in the life of the school.
- Teaching and support staff have a highly developed understanding of the social, emotional and communication needs of young people who attend the SSR. Staff place a very high priority on each young person's physical and mental wellbeing and provide useful updates that are considered by all SSR staff and most of the mainstream staff on an ongoing basis.
- Most young people realise how staff help them recognise how their wellbeing can impact on their lives. They benefit from regular learner conversations specifically focused on their health and wellbeing which help them understand the importance of looking after their own health. Young people appreciate how staff help them to develop ways of resolving difficulties, improve their mental wellbeing and respect others. Through for example, consistent wellbeing check-ins and discrete ways of seeking support, young people feel included and able to achieve. Staff also check in regularly with each other and benefit from mutually supportive and respectful relationships.
- Young people meet their guidance teacher weekly, from S1 through to the senior phase, through a planned, progressive PSE programme. This helps strong relationships develop between guidance teachers, and young people and their families. The PSE programme is supported well by a range of partners. This programme enables young people to consider aspects of their wellbeing, as well as discuss sensitive topics in a safe environment. Through PSE young people are supported effectively to complete university and college applications

and explore work experience. These sessions also provide structured time for interview preparation and ensure that young people are making informed decisions. Young people appreciate and value their opportunities to influence the PSE programme which evolves in response to specific issues or concerns around the community.

- Senior leaders have worked well to develop effective systems and processes for accessing support across the school. Staff have a very good understanding of statutory duties and guidance relating to inclusion and equality. As a result, they exercise their roles and responsibilities with compassion and care.
- Senior leaders follow a staged model of intervention, enhanced very well by a good range of partners, to support young people. At universal level, almost all teachers make good use of the pupil information spreadsheet to help inform their practice. This includes supporting young people well in inclusive, nurturing environments. Young people appreciate the efforts that almost all teachers make to ensure that resources specific to meeting their needs are available to help them succeed. Staff should now consider extending the scope and range of universally required resources provided.
- Support for learning staff in 'The Hub #Believes in better' provide a good range of well-considered and planned support for staff and for young people. Almost all teachers engage keenly in the effective 'support circles' led by pupil support staff. Together they share information and strategies relating to a variety of additional support needs. This leads to staff adapting their approaches for specific young people and to more young people engaging in education.
- Young people are supported well through focused curricular supports such as the nurturing English and mathematics classes where they learn in small groups. This helps them make progress in their learning, as well as develop important social skills. Additionally, young people benefit from, for example, initiatives such as That Reading Thing (TRT), digital tools to help with their reading and a craft club where they develop dexterity, concentration and confidence.
- SSR staff meet their statutory duties well. Young people, parents and partners are involved in review meetings and their views are considered. Individual targets are set for each young person which identify next steps. There is a need to review the targets and ensure that written documentation reflects accurately the individual needs of each young person. A few targets are similar for a few young people and do not reflect the wide range of needs or their strengths and areas for improvement across the curriculum.
- The very effective Secondary Inclusion Resource (SIR) is an additional support, designed to help young people improve their attendance and attainment at school. There is within this resource, a very clear focus on raising aspirations. Working in collaboration with subject teachers, learning, for most young people, continues in the SIR. A few young people attend the SIR as a means to re-engage with education. Staff in the SIR take account very well of the unique circumstances of young people and their families when planning appropriate programmes to enable young people to succeed. This has led to almost all young people feeling a strong sense of belonging and a few returning to mainstream classes. Additionally, almost all young people improve their attendance at school and gain a range of qualifications. As a result, these young people move into positive post school destinations.

- Young people who are care-experienced or who are young carers are known to staff. The majority are supported well through bespoke planning, individual empathy maps or Young Carer statements. Care-experienced young people are considered for a coordinated support plan in line with national guidance. These help young people feel valued and able to cope. Staff should continue to review individual plans for young people to ensure targets are fully informed by the views of the young people and their families, and that they are specific and measurable. This should enable young people to better measure their individual progress.
- Senior leaders should now consider streamlining systems and processes for reviewing and recording young people who require additional support with their learning. This should help staff be able to measure more effectively the impact of any support offered to young people. Senior leaders should continue to develop further their integrated approaches to supporting young people.
- Most staff recognise their role in promoting attendance at school. The attendance strategy, based on a staged approach to promoting and supporting good attendance, sets out clearly the roles and responsibilities of staff, young people and their parents. Supports have helpfully been identified as universal, additional, enhanced and intensive with an increasing range of partners involved as non-attendance persists. Staff are increasingly using data to identify patterns or trends to young people's absence and to help young people recognise the potential longer-term impact of absence from school. This has led to a few young people increasing their attendance at school. A few young people attend school on a part-time basis with a view to re-establishing their link with school. Staff should continue to review regularly young people's part-time timetables to ensure that they engage further in education as appropriate.
- Exclusions from school are declining. This is in part because staff have engaged well in the school's promoting positive relationships policy and recognise the benefit of a whole school, consistent application of restorative approaches to rebuild damaged relationships.
- Young people are encouraged to challenge discrimination, including through the 'Call to Action' campaign. Young people discretely report situations causing concern, including through the use of matrix bar codes or email, to their guidance teacher. This initiative, along with themed assemblies and other awareness raising events has helped tackle discrimination and reduce bullying. These interventions and events support almost all young people to feel valued, cared for and included. Senior leaders should continue with their plans to engage young people and other stakeholders in the review and development of the anti-bullying policy.
- Diversity is recognised and celebrated across the school well. The importance of diversity and inclusion is considered across various curricular areas. For example, learning about 'black history month'. Staff, supported well by partners, lead an active LGBTQI+ club and young people appreciate this. Staff and a few young people promote the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. As a result, young people are considerate of cultural and other differences across the school. This helps reinforce the respectful and inclusive environment.
- Young people attending the SSR show high levels of respect for each other. They are highly inclusive of each other. In addition, they learn about aspects of diversity through the curriculum and their individual differences are celebrated. There is a need to promote equality and diversity more effectively through contextualised learning. A minority of young people do not yet understand a range of diversity or are able to challenge discrimination.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

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

- Senior leaders recognise the need to raise the attainment of young people. Although there are a few recent increases in some aspects of young people's attainment within individual years, these have not been sustained. There are important declines in the attainment of the majority of young people in the senior phase. Senior leaders have developed more robust systems and are supporting staff to use data more effectively to improve attainment. Staff's recent efforts to raise attainment require more time to impact positively on raising the attainment of all young people.
- Attendance at school is below the national average and a significant minority of young people are affected by persistent absence. Senior leaders monitor this carefully. Staff provide a range of targeted support to address this and are making an impact for a minority of young people. They have significantly reduced the number of young people leaving, or truanting from, individual lessons. Senior leaders are aware that improving attendance should continue to be a priority. They should continue, as planned, to address this through targeted intervention and through the identified priority of increasing engagement in classroom learning.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

BGE

- Generally, there are declines in young people's literacy attainment in the BGE. Young people's attainment has reduced from almost all young people achieving CfE third level in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2022/23 to most young people achieving CfE third level in 2023/24 and 2024/25. In 2024/25, most young people achieved CfE third level numeracy, with a minority achieving CfE fourth level by the end of S3. Young people's performance in numeracy at CfE third level has improved, and in 2024/25 was the strongest performance in four years. Young people's performance at CfE fourth level shows no consistent pattern of improvement.
- Staff's recent improvements in planning and the use of data to support improvement, particularly in numeracy, are helping to ensure that performance in literacy and numeracy in S3 articulates well with attainment in the senior phase. However, for too many young people this is not at the highest level they could attain. Performance at CfE fourth level is now notably below local and national levels in literacy and substantially below in numeracy. Recently developed approaches to supporting progression in learning through transition from primary to secondary in numeracy are demonstrating early signs of supporting improvement in engagement and attainment for specific groups in S1.
- In literacy and numeracy most young people in the SSR in S1-S3 are making good progress working within CfE first and third level experiences and outcomes. A few young people make

very good progress. A few young people working across the SSR and mainstream classes are capable of making better progress.

Senior Phase

Leavers

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the attainment of leavers in literacy has been broadly in line with the Virtual Comparator (VC). Performance at SCQF level 4 does not show a consistent pattern of improvement. In 2022/23, almost all young people who left school achieved this level. In 2023/24, this decreased to most young people. In 2022/23 and 2023/24, the majority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 5 for literacy. This has reduced from most young people achieving this level in 2020/21 and 2021/22. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6. Performance at this level in 2023/24 was in line with the VC, having been significantly below the VC in 2022/23.
- For young people who left school, performance in numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better has improved and in 2022/23 and 2023/24 was significantly much higher than the VC with almost all leavers achieving this level. Performance at SCQF level 5 in numeracy has been inconsistent. Between 2019/20 and 2022/23, a minority of young people left school with SCQF level 5 in numeracy. This was significantly much lower or lower than the VC in each of these years. This improved to being in line with the VC with the majority achieving SCQF level 5 in 2023/24. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24 a few young people left school with SCQF level 6 or better in numeracy. This was significantly much lower or lower than the VC in three years of the five-year period between 2019/20 and 2023/24.
- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, most young people who require additional support in their learning left school having achieved SCQF level 4 or better in literacy. The majority achieved SCQF level 5 or better. At SCQF levels 4 and 5, young people's performance is generally above that of the VC and their peers nationally. Between 2019/20 and 2021/22 and in 2023/24 a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better, while a few achieved this level in 2022/23. Performance at this level is generally below that of the VC and young people nationally.
- Between 2021/22 and 2023/24, most leavers who require additional support in their learning achieved SCQF level 4 or better in numeracy, with almost all achieving this level in 2022/23. In 2022/23 and 2023/24, performance at this level is above that of the VC and young people nationally. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, a minority of leavers who require additional support in their learning achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy, with a few achieving SCQF level 6. Performance at these levels is below the VC and young people nationally.

Cohorts

Literacy

- At S4, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in 2022/23 and 2024/25. In 2024/25 this was significantly much lower than the VC and was the lowest performance in five years. This has declined from being significantly higher than the VC in 2021/22 with the majority of young people achieving this level.
- By S5, as a percentage of the S5 roll, performance at SCQF level 5 has been broadly in line with the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. The majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in 2023/24 and 2024/25. This has reduced from most young people achieving this level in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and being significantly higher than the VC in 2022/23.

Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better. Performance at this level generally shows patterns of decline over the last five years and in 2023/24 and 2024/25 was significantly lower than the VC, having previously been in line.

- By S6, as a percentage of the S6 roll, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better in literacy between 2020/21 and 2024/25, with the exception of 2022/23 when a minority achieved this level. Performance at this level fluctuates and previous increases have not been sustained. Performance at this level has been significantly much lower or lower than the VC in three years of the last five years.

Numeracy

- At S4, between 2021/22 and 2024/25 a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better. This improved from being significantly lower than the VC in 2020/21 and 2021/22 to being in line with the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24 before becoming significantly lower in 2024/25.
- At S5, as a percentage of the S5 roll, between 2021/22 and 2024/25 the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better. Performance at this level has changed from being in line with the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24 to being significantly lower in 2024/25. Performance at SCQF level 6 is in line with the VC from 2021/22 to 2024/25.
- By S6, as a percentage of the S6 roll, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Young people's attainment at this level has improved between 2020/21 and 2024/25 and is now in line with the VC, having been significantly much lower. A minority of young people achieve SCQF level 6 or better. Performance at this level was in line with the VC in 2024/25 having been significantly much lower or lower than the VC for three of the last five years.

National Qualifications

- Entries for National Qualifications (NQs) at National 5 and Higher in English and mathematics have decreased from 2020/21 to 2024/25. Young people's attainment at National 5 in English and mathematics is inconsistent. While attainment increased in 2024/25, the percentage of young people being presented for these qualifications was the lowest in the five-year period. Young people's presentation levels and attainment in NQs in English and mathematics at Higher level are generally substantially below national levels. Entries for National 5 Applications of Mathematics have increased from 2021/22 to 2024/25. Entries and attainment at National 5 Applications of Mathematics is generally in line with national levels.
- Senior leaders are aware of this and have taken action to improve entries and presentations in national qualifications in English, mathematics and across the curriculum for session 2025/26. They have developed robust processes to review attainment at all levels. It will be important for senior leaders to support staff in their approaches to maintain young people within these qualifications and to improve the quality of passes for young people.
- Young people at the senior phase in the SSR are working towards NQs in English and Applications of Mathematics. Qualifications across subjects range from SCQF level 2 through to SCQF level 4.

Attainment over time

BGE

- By S3, the majority of young people achieve CfE third level across most of their curricular choices. A few achieve CfE fourth level. More robust approaches to track progression across subjects have been developed from 2023/24. This data is now in the early stages of being used to more effectively plan improvement. Senior leaders are aware that improving the performance of young people at CfE fourth level is a priority. This should support more successful progression into the senior phase for more young people. Increasingly robust approaches to moderation internally and with other schools are supporting teachers in making judgements on pupil progress. This is not yet consistent across all faculties. As planned, senior leaders should continue to work with staff to develop consistent approaches to moderation of planning, learning and assessment to further develop robust and accurate judgements about young people's progress. This should include a focus on ensuring appropriate pace and levels of challenge in learning.
- Senior leaders are at the early stages of tracking attainment over time across all curricular areas for young people in the SSR. As a result, they were unable to demonstrate each young person's progress across the BGE curriculum. In addition, although attendance rates are improving, for a minority of young people these remain too low. There is a need, as planned to continue to improve attendance and the learning provision for a few young people, including those on part-time timetables who learn at home.

Senior Phase

- Senior leaders and staff are committed to raising ambition across the school community for young people to achieve their best. Senior leaders have increased the use of data to support identification of young people at all stages who may require support to attain. This is enabling staff to identify young people for a range of well-considered interventions. Senior leaders can evidence progress for individuals through engagement with interventions. This is not yet impacting on overall attainment. In the majority of subject areas, presentation rates for NQs, and pass rates within these, are too low. Going forward, senior and middle leaders should support teachers in all areas of the school to utilise the information available to consider adaptations in their planning to ensure the most appropriate levels of challenge for all young people. Senior leaders should also continue to analyse the available data and to support planning to close gaps for discrete groups of young people.

Improving attainment for all

Leavers

- When compared using average complimentary tariff scores, overall attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people leaving school, has been in line with the VC between 2019/20 and 2023/24. Attainment for these groups fluctuates and there is no clear pattern of improvement. For the highest attaining 20% of young people, attainment was significantly lower than the VC between 2020/21 and 2022/23. This increased to being in line with the VC in 2023/24. Generally, the attainment of leavers who require additional support with their learning is similar to the VC. Senior leaders and staff identified a priority of ensuring that young people likely to leave school before S6 have in place a suite of qualifications. They have put in place a range of targeted supports to develop this approach which are supporting targeted individuals to achieve a range of qualifications before leaving school.

Cohorts

- At S4, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people fell to being significantly lower than the VC in 2024/25, having been in line between 2021/22 and 2023/24. In 2024/25, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% of young people was significantly much lower than the VC having been previously in line. Generally, improvements are inconsistent for this cohort. In 2024/25, the attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people was in line with the VC, having been significantly lower in 2022/23 and 2023/24.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll and by S6, based on the S6 roll, attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people has been generally in line with the VC between 2021/22 and 2024/25.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll, the attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people was in line with the VC between 2021/22 and 2023/24 having previously been significantly lower. In 2024/25 this fell to be significantly much lower than the VC. For young people who remain in school, by S6, based on the S6 roll, the attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people has been consistently in line with the VC for five years.

Breadth and depth

- Most young people are presented for six or more courses at S4. The majority of young people attain five or more qualifications at SCQF level 3 or better with a minority achieving five or more awards at SCQF level 4 or better. Generally, performance at SCQF level 4 is decreasing and was significantly lower than the VC in 2024/25. At S4, young people's attainment at SCQF level 5C or better is declining. In 2024/25, performance was significantly much lower or lower than the VC for one or more to six or more awards at level 5C. At SCQF level 5A, performance declined between 2020/21 and 2023/24. Attainment at this level improved in 2024/25 and is in line with the VC for two or more to six or more awards. In 2024/25, a few young people were dual presented for one subject at National 4 and National 5.
- By S5, as a percentage of the S5 roll, a minority of young people achieve one or more to two or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better. This is in line with the VC for one award or better. A few young people achieve three or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 6C. In 2024/25 this was significantly lower than the VC for those achieving two or more awards to five or more awards at this level. Generally, attainment at SCQF level 6 by S5 is declining. A few young people achieve one or more award at SCQF level 6A or better, this was significantly lower than the VC in 2024/25, having been previously in line with the VC.
- By S6, as a percentage of the S6 roll, the majority of young people attain one or more to two or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better and a minority achieve three or more to five or more awards at this level. A minority of young people achieve one or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better and a few achieve four or more to six or more awards at this level. Performance at SCQF level 6 has been inconsistent but broadly in line with the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. Performance at SCQF level 7 has been consistently in line with the VC between 2021/22 and 2024/25, with a minority of young people achieving one or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better and a few achieving one or more at SCQF level 7A or better.
- Staff have increased the range of courses available to young people with an aim of ensuring greater levels of accreditation. When all SCQF courses are considered, the breadth of attainment increases for S5 and S6 at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, bringing attainment of numbers of qualification closer to the level of the VC. It is important for senior leaders to identify the

value added by additional courses to young people's attainment and ensure that appropriate pathways are planned to maximise the quality of attainment through S4-S6.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Senior leaders and staff routinely celebrate and acknowledge success of young people in a variety of ways including newsletters, social media and faculty pupil of the month displays. Monthly headteacher awards are issued to young people who consistently demonstrate school values. Young people benefit from a range of inclusive and celebratory creative arts activities and events. These support young people in developing confidence and recognising their achievement. Royal Recognition awards are presented to an increasing number of young people who contribute to the life of the school and the wider community. These awards are becoming increasingly embedded and valued highly by young people and parents. This is supporting increasing participation and is helping young people to develop skills and confidence. The school hosts celebration events to recognise ambition, achievement and academic success. Senior leaders should continue to develop clear processes, with partners, to record the collective impact of their achievement offer.
- Young people benefit from an extensive range of wider activities that enhance their learning experience. The extra-curricular fayre and daily bulletin ensure that young people are encouraged to engage in a variety of activities. Senior leaders track participation with staff and have now established a baseline of participation linked to Royal Recognition awards. Identified groups of young people benefit from a range of outdoor learning activities including working in the school garden, environmental projects and school visits. These activities support young people to develop their knowledge of the local environment, learning about sustainability and help to develop their confidence. Young people taking part in these activities gain a range of relevant accreditation. Senior leaders should, as planned, ensure staff track participation closely, identify gaps for young people and help young people link their achievements to skills for learning, life and work.
- Young people succeed in a wide range of well-established sports activities, including the school of rugby, sports leaders and ambassadors. Engagement in school sport continues to have strong participation levels. Effective partnership working is supporting young people within the school of rugby programme to develop confidence and skills. A few identified young people are gaining an increasing number of accredited awards. The majority of young people are being supported to work towards gaining a saltire award through participation in school activities. A minority of young people benefit from sporting events, excursions and gym memberships, which are encouraging these young people to be more active. A few young people are increasing their skills for life and work through their role engaging with primary children as Sports Leaders. An increasing number of young people are making progress and achieving the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards. This is helping to improve young people's wellbeing, mental health and fitness.
- Staff recently introduced more opportunities for young people in the SSR to access wider achievement activities. The majority of young people access the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, supported well by Community Learning and Development colleagues. This is at the early stages of development and moving forward, as planned, there is a need for more young people to participate in whole school activities that promote further achievements and accreditation.

Equity for all learners

- Staff across Irvine Royal Academy demonstrate a strong understanding of barriers which can exist for young people as a result of socio-economic disadvantage. Staff support sensitively young people by highlighting appropriate help and resources. Senior leaders understand well the importance of building trust and positive relationships with families to help them address these barriers. To achieve this, senior leaders plan events and activities to build trust. For example, the family engagement evenings are well-attended by staff and by families and support positive relationships and engagement with school. This informs planning by senior leaders to further develop approaches with families to tackle poverty-related barriers for young people. This is helping to reduce perceived stigma in relation to accessing support. As a result, increasing numbers of young people and families access support and resources that help to reduce challenges with engaging in learning.
- Senior leaders ensure a wide range of universal supports are in place for young people, their families and the wider community. For example, help for families with regard to welfare or to reducing or removing the cost of educational excursions. Young people and staff on the 'cost of the school day' (COSD) group manage the successful Royal Resource. The Royal Resource effectively supports young people and families through provision of resources such as school uniforms, prom and interview clothing, and a foodbank. This is reducing barriers to engagement as young people increasingly access resources to be ready for learning in classes. The COSD group regularly publicises its work and engages with young people and families to evaluate demand and needs. As a result, an increasing number of young people and their families are engaging with support from the Royal Resource.
- Staff engaged in universal or targeted activities, including those supported by Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), evaluate well of the impact of their work. For example, staff can demonstrate improvements in attendance for individual young people attending the breakfast club. A few young people are involved in targeted literacy work as part of an equity strategy and there is evidence this is supporting these identified young people to make progress. Senior leaders have developed systems to track the progress of targeted groups and individuals. Staff should continue to make more use of the data available to ensure they consider how the activities they provide can most effectively accelerate progress for those impacted by socio-economic disadvantage.
- Senior leaders undertake additional actions to support young people who may be at risk of underachieving due to a range of potential barriers to learning. This includes challenges relating to poverty. Senior leaders have deployed resources well to appoint additional staffing to deliver this. There have been improvements in attendance and in attainment for a few identified young people targeted for this additional support.
- When compared using complementary tariff points, the attainment of young people leaving school fluctuates over time in comparison with their peers who live in similar circumstances in Scotland. For example, young people leaving school and living in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2 attained broadly in line with young people living in similar circumstances in Scotland in 2021/22 and 2023/24. However, this level of attainment was significantly below the VC in 2022/23 and, for young people living in SIMD decile 1, in 2020/21.
- Almost all young people moved onto a positive destination in 2023/24 and in all of the preceding years since 2019/20, except 2021/22 when most young people moved into a positive destination. This has been in line with the VC between 2019/20 and 2023/24, except in 2022/23

when it was significantly much higher than VC. The proportion of young people entering positive destinations fluctuates each year. The majority of young people consistently enter higher or further education when they leave school, with a minority moving into employment.

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.

On behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.