

Summarised inspection findings

Lesmahagow High School

South Lanarkshire Council

11 February 2025

Key contextual information

School Name: Lesmahagow High School
Council: South Lanarkshire Council
SEED number: 8550131
Roll (provided by school): 631

Lesmahagow High School is a six-year comprehensive school, serving the villages of Coalburn, Lesmahagow, Kirkmuirhill, Blackwood, Auchenheath and surrounding areas. Lesmahagow High School is part of the Clydesdale Locality of schools along with Biggar High School, Carluke High School and Lanark Grammar School. The associated primary schools are Bent, Blackwood, Coalburn, Milton and Woodpark.

The current school building opened in August 2007. The school has a large 'Street' area, bright wide corridors and two teaching wings with high-quality teaching facilities. This provides a modern learning environment for all subject areas.

The headteacher has been in post for three years. She is supported by four Depute Headteachers (DHT). Almost half of the senior leadership team, faculty heads and teachers have been appointed to the school since 2019. The school was impacted by significant staff absences in session 2023/24.

In September 2024 the school roll was 634 young people.

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

The exclusion rate is generally above the national average.

In September 2023 22.8% of pupils live in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2023 the school reported that 33.9% of pupils had additional support needs (ASN). In September 2024 senior leaders reported 47% of pupils had ASN which represents a recent increase.

In February 2024 22.1% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

Good

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 are confident, friendly and polite. Staff and young people demonstrate strong, supportive relationships. This leads to a calm, purposeful, and respectful atmosphere across the school, reflecting well the expectations 'Be Prepared, Be Engaged, Be Respectful'. As a result, almost all young people feel supported and valued in a nurturing learning environment. In most lessons, young people engage positively and focus on their learning. Most teachers display young people's work to share examples of successful learning and encourage a sense of pride in young people. Teachers have useful visual prompts, such as previously worked exemplars or supportive strategies, to help young people to be successful.
- All staff are working towards realising the school vision Together we Learn; Together we Achieve; Together we Succeed. The 'Learners' Statement', devised in consultation with young people, and the 'Excellent Lesson' framework for staff, underpin areas of improvement that have been identified in learning and teaching. Staff in the learning and teaching working group support the ongoing development of the Learning and Teaching Hub. Staff use the Learning and Teaching Hub to share good practice in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. Career long professional learning (CLPL) opportunities for staff are highlighted through the Hub. Middle leaders have benefited from external CLPL to strengthen their skills in aspects of leading learning. Teachers, supported effectively by senior leaders, engage well in peer observations of learning and teaching. As part of this self-evaluation process, staff identify key areas for improvement. As a result of this well-planned approach, teachers are improving the consistency in learning and teaching for young people.
- Teachers structure activities well in most lessons and this supports young people in progressing their learning. Teachers create opportunities for young people to apply their knowledge in familiar as well as new contexts. Young people in a few lessons collaborate effectively in small groups and actively participate in their learning. In a minority of lessons, when young people are offered tasks that challenge their thinking, they respond positively, showing increased enjoyment and engagement in their learning. Most young people in the senior phase enjoy making choices about how they approach learning. Staff should now support choice of approaches to learning for young people in the broad general education (BGE). In most lessons, staff should develop further approaches to effectively meeting young peoples' needs by providing tasks and activities set at the right level of difficulty. Teachers also need to increase the pace of learning.
- Teachers, across the school, focused recently on improving the quality of the beginning of lessons. This has resulted in almost all lessons containing effective starter tasks and a prompt start to lessons. In a few lessons, teachers use retrieval strategies effectively, to reinforce prior learning and to scaffold new learning. This helpful practice should be shared more widely across the school.

- Most teachers share the purpose of learning and let young people know how to be successful in their learning well. In almost all lessons, teachers offer clear instructions and explanations. This enables young people to understand the tasks and activities in the lesson. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to promote critical thinking and develop higher-order thinking skills. Young people would benefit from being more fully involved in co-creating the success criteria in lessons. This would enhance further their engagement in learning and help them understand better where they are in their learning and what they need to do to improve.
- All young people have access to a digital learning platform; however, this is not used consistently to enhance learning experiences. Young people reflect on their progress through the digital learning platform. This helps them understand better what they need to do to improve. Staff should continue to increase the use of digital learning in the classroom to impact positively on young people's learning experiences and enhance their learning.
- Most teachers use summative assessment effectively. They use a range of assessment approaches to provide evidence of young people's progress and attainment. A minority of teachers make effective use of a range of formative assessment strategies to check young people's understanding. As planned, senior leaders should continue to review approaches to assessment to develop further a shared understanding about the principles, purposes and aims of assessment.
- Most teachers demonstrate rigour in professional judgements of young people's learning in the BGE. They make effective use of a variety of assessment data to help inform professional judgements. All teachers and faculty heads participate in moderation activities within their subject areas with colleagues from across the authority. Senior leaders should continue to support moderation activities across all faculties within the school.
- A minority of teachers have roles with the Scottish Qualifications Authority. This enables them to support colleagues in their understanding of assessment standards in National Qualifications (NQs).
- Most teachers provide regular, constructive feedback to young people in a variety of verbal, written and digital ways. This helps most young people to identify their strengths and areas for improvement in their learning. Most teachers use a rich variety of assessment data effectively to support young people in their understanding of next steps in learning. As a result, most young people are clear about their strengths and what they need to do to improve. Senior and middle leaders should continue to develop a consistent approach to target setting across all faculties through regular and focused learning conversations in both the BGE and senior phase.
- Staff track and monitor young people's progress effectively. Staff use faculty and whole-school tracking data to support their understanding of young people's progress and attainment. This data also enables staff to identify young people who are at risk of underachieving and to monitor the progress of young people who require additional support. Staff deploy a range of intervention strategies appropriately to support young peoples' progress. For example, specific programmes of work, digital resources, increased communication with parents and supported study help young people to make progress in their learning. Teachers now need to use this data more effectively to help inform their planning of learning, teaching and assessment so that all young people have tasks and activities set at the right level of difficulty.

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, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attendance

- Almost a third of young people currently attend school for less than 90% of the time. Staff track attendance of groups and individual young people well and identify those for whom additional support to attend school is required. This includes focussed, targeted conversations with young people, improved communication with their families and greater use of outdoor learning. Additionally, staff are supported through the local authority 'Test of Change Project' to promote attendance at school. A few young people leave classes during lessons, but they remain in school. The extended support team have enhanced the procedures for identifying and supporting this group to remain in class.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

BGE

- Most young people make very good progress in literacy and in numeracy in the BGE. Between 2016/17 and 2022/23, almost all young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3. At CfE fourth level, the majority of young people achieve literacy and numeracy. These levels of achievement continued into 2023/24 with improvements in reading and listening and talking at CfE fourth level.
- As a result of BGE moderation activities within faculties and across the Clydesdale Locality of schools, teachers' professional judgements of achievement of a level are increasingly reliable and robust. Staff should continue as planned to develop moderation activities across the school.

Senior phase

Leavers

Literacy

- Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, almost all young people who left school achieved Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 4 or better in literacy and most achieved SCQF level 5 or better. While this is in line with the Virtual Comparator (VC), achievement at this level is generally improving. Overall, the majority of young people achieved literacy at SCQF level 6 or better, although this declined slightly in 2022/23.

Numeracy

- Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, almost all young people who left school achieved SCQF level 4 or better as a unit award in numeracy. Most achieved the course award at this level. The majority of young people who left school in this period achieved SCQF level 5 or better as a unit award. Less than half achieved the course award at SCQF level 5 or better. A few achieved numeracy at SCQF level 6 or better.

ASN

- Most young people who require additional support with their learning leave school with literacy or numeracy qualifications at SCQF level 4 or better. As a percentage, more young people who require additional support with their learning achieved SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6 or better in numeracy in 2022/23 than those who do not require additional support.

Cohorts

Literacy

- At S4, almost all young people achieve literacy at SCQF level 4 or better and the majority achieve SCQF level 5 or better, from 2019/20 to 2023/24.
- By S5, most young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better and the majority achieve SCQF level 6 or better from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Across both S4 and S5 this is generally in line with the VC, however this figure declined in 2023/24 to being significantly lower than the VC.
- By S6, most young people achieve literacy at SCQF level 5 or better from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Less than half achieve SCQF level 6 or better over the same period, in line with the VC.

Numeracy

- At S4, most young people achieve numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better and the majority achieve SCQF level 5 or better as a unit award from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Less than half achieve the SCQF level 5 course award. This is in line with the VC, other than at S4 in 2023/24 when the percentage of young people who achieved SCQF level 4 or better, declined to being significantly much lower than the VC.
- By S5, almost all young people achieve numeracy at SCQF level 4 or better and the majority achieve SCQF level 5 or better as a unit award from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Less than half achieve the SCQF level 5 course award in line with the VC. A few achieve SCQF level 6 or better over the same time period. This is in line with the VC, other than in 2023/24 when the percentage of young people who achieved SCQF level 6 or better, declined to being significantly much lower than the VC.
- By S6, the majority of young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better as a unit award from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Less than half achieve the SCQF level 5 course award. A minority achieve SCQF level 6 or better over the same time period, generally in line with the VC.
- Senior leaders should continue to explore the differences between young people achieving numeracy through units compared to course awards to ensure all attain as highly as possible. Teachers should keep under review the number of young people being presented for qualifications in both mathematics and applications of mathematics.

Attainment over time

BGE

- Teachers use a wide range of evidence and assessment information to inform their professional judgements of achievement of a level. Teachers in all curriculum areas are at the early stages of effectively tracking and monitoring progress over time in the BGE. Teachers are able to evidence progress for young people in all curriculum areas from 2022/23. This shows that the majority of young people achieved CfE third level in all curriculum areas by the end of S3.

Senior phase

Leavers

- Between 2018/19 and 2022/23, the attainment of young people who left school has broadly been in line with the VC when using complementary tariff points.
- Young people who require additional support and left the school between 2020/21 to 2022/23 attained above the VC. Attainment is improving for this group of young people.

Cohorts

- At S4 based on S4, from 2019/20 to 2023/24, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20%, and highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC. The middle attaining 60% attained in line with the VC for four of these years, however attainment declined in 2023/24 to below the VC.
- By S5 based on S4, from 2019/20 to 2023/24, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC. The middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% attained in line with the VC for four of these years, however attainment declined in 2023/24 to below the VC.
- By S6 based on S4, from 2019/20 to 2023/24, the attainment of all young people is in line with the VC. Attainment improved for the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people from 2021/22 to 2023/24.

Breadth and depth

- At S4, a minority of young people achieved five or more to seven or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better, between 2019/20 and 2023/24, in line with the VC. Over the last few years, the percentage attaining SCQF level 5C or better including top quality passes show a considerable decline. Over the same period, at S4, a few young people achieved five or more to seven or more qualifications at SCQF level 5A or better, in line with the VC.
- By S5, the majority of young people achieved one or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better between 2019/20 and 2023/24, however this declined to significantly lower than the VC in 2023/24. A few young people achieved four or more to five or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better, in line with the VC in the same time period. By S5, a few young people achieved two or more to five or more qualifications at SCQF level 6A or better between 2019/20 and 2023/24, in line with the VC. Performance in the latest year across a number of measures is the lowest it has been over the last five years.
- By S6, attainment at SCQF level 7C or better is in line with the VC between 2019/20 and 2023/24. The percentage of young people attaining one qualification at 7C or better has improved in each of the last three years from 2021/22 to 2023/24. By S6, attainment at SCQF level 7A or better is in line with the VC in this time period.
- A few young people successfully achieve qualifications equivalent to SCQF level 6 such as exercise and fitness, leadership, computer games development, criminology or foundation apprenticeships in a range of subjects.
- Senior leaders should continue to address the percentage of young people dual presented for both National 4 and National 5. In the latest year, 2023/24, over a quarter of young people were dual presented with nearly a fifth of learners presented for both NQs in one subject. Senior leaders need to review the number of courses young people are presented for to ensure that young people maximise success.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people achieve well. Staff and the wider school community, support young people effectively. Young people are encouraged to lead suggestions for new clubs and activities, for example, cheerleading and S1 gaming. The majority of young people are involved in at least one of the wide range of clubs and activities across the school week. Participation is improving in for example, various sporting activities, developing creativity and the debating club. Young people develop well their collaborative and social skills, build confidence, and improve their self-esteem as a result of their participation in clubs and activities.
- An increasing minority of young people across the school are developing their leadership skills. They are building these skills through their roles, for example, as house captains; captains of equity and inclusion; and primary school link mentors. This is increasing well their sense of responsibility, communication and engagement. Young people in S5 and S6 are leading clubs and activities. For example, the badminton and guitar clubs. This enhances the range of activities available for all young people. Importantly, young people in S5 and S6 who lead these clubs develop well their practical, organisational and leadership skills.
- Young people appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their achievements through their wellbeing logs, which are shared with their pastoral support teachers. Staff use this information, along with the well-developed achievement tracking system, to identify successfully young people who may benefit from further encouragement and support to develop wider interests and skills. This has resulted in an increasing number of young people becoming involved in activities within or outwith school. Staff should continue to work with those young people who may be at risk of missing out of these valuable activities.
- Young people feel valued and included by staff and peers, as their achievements within and outwith school are recognised and celebrated regularly. These celebrations include assemblies, award ceremonies and social media posts. Young people and parents value the recently introduced celebrations of achievement and involvement. Staff are at the early stages of helping young people understand and articulate the skills they are developing as a result of these activities. Staff should continue to develop young people's understanding of their skills development and link these more explicitly with their learning across the curriculum.
- A minority of young people succeed in accredited award programmes. For example, a few identified young people benefit from awards relating to outdoor learning, leadership awards, volunteering and from accreditation through activities with partners.

Equity for all learners

- Staff have a clear focus on ensuring equity by supporting sensitively young people and their families who may be impacted by poverty. Young people living in the most deprived datazones and those entitled to free school meals are highlighted by school leaders clearly, but discretely, for staff. This helps staff take account of potential barriers for these young people and to put in place strategies to support them.
- The 'Inspiring Lesmahagow' equity strategy helps young people, staff and parents to understand some of the issues in the community. A very effective universal package of support is in place. For example, a pre-loved hub for school uniforms, welcome packs for young people starting school, and a breakfast club all address the cost of the school day. This universal focus has allowed staff to identify and support young people affected by poverty who may otherwise have been missed. As a result, young people and their families benefit from support from staff. This helps young people to attend more regularly, engage better with school and feel more included.

- As part of the equity strategy, senior leaders developed interventions to raise attainment for identified young people. For example, one-to-one support in literacy and numeracy, young people in S5 and S6 acting as mentors and intensive targeted support by staff and partner organisations. These approaches have helped to raise successfully the attainment in literacy and numeracy for identified young people. Staff reduced the poverty-related attainment gap when measuring complementary tariff scores, between young people living in the most and the least deprived datazones who left school between 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- Senior leaders consider young people's engagement in learning as part of their strategy to challenge inequity. A wide range of approaches including outdoor learning and work with attendance mentors has successfully improved attendance for a few young people. The popular Friday Club which works with families, is helping to improve engagement and attendance at school for identified young people.
- Together with staff from other schools in the Clydesdale Locality, staff use strategic equity funding (SEF) to support a virtual school. The virtual school supports a minority of young people in S3 and S4 who face a range of potential barriers to their learning, including poverty. This has improved attainment in literacy and numeracy for identified young people.
- Most young people remain at school for S5 and the majority remain for S6. When compared using complementary tariff points, young people who left school in 2022/23 attained in line with their peers who live in similar circumstances across Scotland. For the past five years, from 2018/19 to 2022/23 almost all young people who left school entered an initial positive destination. The majority of young people leave school to go to higher or further education. A minority enter employment on leaving school and a few take up training opportunities.

Context

The Inclusion Support Team (IST) is a local authority provision located within Lesmahagow High School. There are currently 40 young people attending the IST from S1 – S5. Young people who attend the IST have a range of additional learning needs. Almost all young people attend some mainstream classes and benefit from targeted support in the IST, as required. The IST provides a well-resourced learning environment which comprises four classrooms and a nurture room/kitchen area.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- The IST provides a nurturing, caring environment in which young people learn well. Young people in the IST are polite and respectful with staff and with each other. Staff are aware of the learning and wellbeing needs of young people. Teachers and support assistants provide appropriate levels of support to ensure that young people engage in planned learning tasks. Staff have created a strong, inclusive environment and ensure young people are supported well to access learning. Young people are engaged with learning activities which are well matched to their needs. As a result, young people are highly engaged in their learning.
- The quality of teaching in the IST is very good. Teachers are consistent in their approaches to teaching across the IST. Explanations and instructions are clear and staff have high expectations of young people. Teachers and support assistants effectively use questioning to check for understanding, to support young people in their thinking and to encourage them to develop their responses. Teachers use classrooms and other learning environments, including outdoors, effectively to develop young people's skills. Almost all young people who attend the IST are included for some time during the week in mainstream classes. Commendably, there are positive examples of reverse integration when a few young people from mainstream classes benefit from direct teaching from IST staff. Staff encourage young people through praise and support them to remain on task. In a few classes, young people work in pairs and small groups well. Teachers should develop further this approach to teaching. Staff should review all learning environments to ensure appropriate visual stimulation for young people and that all teaching materials are in language accessible to young people.
- Teachers use a variety of assessment approaches. These include assessments of young people's reading ages, specific areas of numeracy, wellbeing and readiness to learn. Teachers use these assessments to inform their planning for young people and to develop appropriate interventions. Teachers use formative assessment techniques effectively to encourage young people to deepen their thinking and demonstrate their knowledge. Teachers record and collate assessment information in a variety of formats. Staff should develop a consistent approach to recording of information about young people's progress. This should enable staff to use data more effectively and measure progress over time more easily.
- Staff plan learning with a focus on young people's additional support needs. Young people and their parents are appropriately involved in the planning process. Teachers record progress across curriculum areas in a variety of ways. Staff are at the early stages of developing an overview of the progress that young people are making over time. This should enable leaders in the IST to quality assure progress and intervene when young people are not making expected progress.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

- Overall, young people in the IST make very good progress in literacy and numeracy. Almost all young people access a blend of learning in the IST and in the mainstream of the school. Learning activities are well structured and all young people engage well with their learning. In the senior phase, young people gain appropriate certification in NQs. Leaders in the IST are at the early stages of developing a progressive tracking system to record attainment over time in literacy and numeracy.
- Young people make very good progress over time. Staff have a robust transition process which ensures that data from primary school informs next steps as young people transition into the provision. Staff use assessment data well to identify curriculum pathways and individualised support strategies for young people. This has a positive impact on young people's engagement with learning and enables young people to increase attainment over time. Leaders in the IST should reflect on how to track progress more effectively in order to plan better any interventions which may be required.
- Young people benefit from an extensive achievement programme supported well by partners. This includes accredited outdoor learning programmes and NQs in areas such as beekeeping, navigation skills, mental health and wellbeing awards and first aid. Staff are providing well-planned experiences for young people by considering how NQs and accredited youth programmes can be packaged together. A few young people gain valuable leadership skills through, for example, collaborating with a local farmer to help reduce food waste. These activities help young people become more successful and confident. They also support well young people's personal development and make a valuable contribution to the wider community.

Other relevant evidence

- Young people access the school library regularly with their English classes to select texts for reading for enjoyment and for research, working with the school librarian. The library is used as an area for study and research by a few young people undertaking SCQF level 7 qualifications. A few young people access the library at lunchtimes as a safe and quiet place to read and work.

Practice worth sharing more widely

The extensive achievement programme provided by the Inclusion Support Team (IST).

- Staff have developed a creative and innovative approach to maximise qualifications and accreditation for young people who attend the provision. Staff, supported well by partners, offer a large variety of experiences and qualifications which enrich and enhance young people's experiences. These include accredited outdoor learning programmes and National Qualifications in areas such as beekeeping, navigation skills, mental health and wellbeing awards and first aid.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.