

Summarised inspection findings

Aboyne Academy

Aberdeenshire Council

23 June 2026

Key contextual information

School Name: Aboyne Academy

Council: Aberdeenshire

SEED number: 5257530

Roll (January 2026): 622

Aboyne Academy is a six-year non-denominational school in the town of Aboyne in Aberdeenshire. The school provides secondary school education for the areas of mid and upper Deeside. The school has nine associated primary schools. The catchment areas are a mix of local authority, traditional and new housing in a remote rural area. Many pupils travel by bus to school. The headteacher has been in post for six years. He is supported by three deputy headteachers (DHTs). There are significant challenges with staff recruitment, which staff have approached in a creative way, working well with partners to provide young people with relevant experiences.

Attendance is generally above the national average.

Exclusions are generally below the national average.

In September 2024, 7% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2024, all of young people lived in Scottish index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles six to ten. No pupils lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2023, the school reported that 54% of pupils had additional support needs. In September 2024, after a review of how additional support needs were classified, the school reported that 25% of pupils have additional support needs.

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

- Across the school, relationships between almost all staff and young people are positive and respectful. As a result, learning takes place in calm, purposeful environments where most young people feel supported and valued. Almost all young people demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and engage well in lessons. They are polite, cooperative and interact confidently with staff and peers. Almost all young people report that staff are approachable and know them well as individuals. This supports young people to participate confidently in class discussions and learning activities.
- Most staff work together well to develop an appropriate range of initiatives aimed at improving learning, teaching and assessment. This includes a 'Learning, Teaching and Assessment Charter' providing a framework the majority of teachers use. Most young people understand the purpose of their learning and in almost all lessons, teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. As a result, most young people know what they need to do and start learning quickly. Teachers should continue with planned approaches to strengthen further the 'Learning, Teaching and Assessment Charter'.
- Teachers in almost all faculties use a range of effective and well-planned activities, which in a majority of lessons, are well matched to most young people's needs. In a minority of lessons, teachers should ensure tasks and activities are sufficiently challenging, particularly for young people in the broad general education who exceed expected national levels of attainment.
- Teachers successfully encourage most young people to take responsibility for aspects of leading their learning. Most young people share ideas, ask questions and support each other's learning well. The variety of experiences in class, including supportive direct instruction from teachers, well organised group work and opportunities to learn independently is helping develop a majority of young people's confidence and independence in learning.
- Most teachers use a range of questioning strategies effectively to engage young people in discussion and reflection. This contributes to young people's positive engagement in their learning. A few teachers extend young people's thinking and promote higher-order thinking skills well through questioning. This positive practice should continue to be shared across the school.
- Almost all young people have meaningful opportunities to learn in a variety of contexts, which has a positive impact on developing young people's teamwork and communication skills. Almost all departments and faculties effectively plan and deliver this learning alongside a

range of partners. This approach makes effective use of the local rural environment to enrich learning experiences.

- Diverse activities, including work with a charity offering wellbeing support through equine-assisted learning and structured outdoor learning in the Cairngorms National Park, helps to improve learners' wellbeing and confidence
- Most teachers use online platforms purposefully to share resources, provide feedback and enable young people to access learning materials beyond the classroom. These approaches help consolidate learning at home and support continuity of learning when pupils are unable to attend school due to adverse weather conditions. Young people with additional support needs use assistive technologies effectively to communicate and access tasks more independently.
- Staff have worked together well to develop a strong broad general education assessment (BGE) policy which focusses on five key strategies. The majority of teachers use this policy well and have a clear and robust understanding of how assessment supports pupils' learning. Most young people in the BGE are aware of their level of and progress in learning. There is robust moderation within BGE literacy and numeracy leading to reliable data on the progress of young people. Most teachers participate in structured moderation activities at a departmental, cluster and local authority level within 'QUADs'. These are developing a more consistent understanding of achievement of nationally expected levels of attainment and application of a range of high-quality assessment strategies across all other faculties.
- Senior and middle leaders have developed a comprehensive tool for all staff to access up to date, appropriate information on all young people. This includes appropriate strategies to overcome barriers to learning. In the BGE, teachers use this information and national Benchmarks well to plan learning activities at third and fourth Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels. The majority of teachers adapt their teaching well to meet the needs of all young people.
- In addition to a traditional Parents' Evening, senior leaders have recently introduced a 'Shared Learning Event' for young people in S2 and S4. This further increases young people's responsibility for their own learning by creating a valuable opportunity for them to showcase their progress with their parents and carers.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the 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

- Young people's attendance is consistently above the national average and has improved over the last five years. The percentage of young people who have persistent absence of more than 10% is substantially less than the national average. Senior leaders identified the need to improve attendance for young people residing in particular SIMD deciles. Attendance for this cohort, and other identified groups including those entitled to free school meals, care-experienced and those who require additional support for their learning, is improving in the latest year. Very few young people occasionally attend school but not class. A range of supports and an effective use of part-time timetables is supporting young people to maintain their attendance.
- Senior leaders carried out a significant review of young people who were recorded as requiring additional support for learning. This resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of young people recorded as requiring additional support in 2024/25. As a result, this data is more valid and reliable. This has subsequently impacted on the virtual comparator (VC) in 2024/25.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

Broad general education

- A sustained and strategic whole school focus on reading and oracy is having a positive impact on improving literacy and English attainment through the school. Young people progress well through the BGE with most young people attaining CfE fourth level in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3 consistently between 2021/22 and 2024/25. This is above local authority and national averages. Most young people who require additional support in their learning achieve literacy and numeracy at CfE fourth level.

Senior phase

Leavers

- Almost all leavers achieved Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy and numeracy from 2020/21 to 2024/25. In literacy, this is significantly higher than the virtual comparator (VC), and in 2020/21 was significantly much higher. A majority of young people in the same period left school with SCQF level 6 in literacy. This is significantly lower than the VC in 2023/24 and 2024/25. A minority of leavers achieved SCQF level 6 numeracy from 2020/21 to 2024/25. Attainment at this level is broadly in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25.

- Most leavers who require additional support in their learning achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This is generally above or in line with the VC. A majority of leavers who require additional support in their learning achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2021/22 to 2023/24. A few leavers who require additional support in their learning achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy in the same period.

Literacy: cohorts

- In S4, almost all young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy between 2020/21 and 2023/24. This is significantly higher or significantly much higher than the VC in the same period. In 2024/25, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better. In line with the VC.
- By S5, based on the S4 roll, between 2021/22 and 2024/25 around half of young people attained SCQF level 6 literacy, broadly in line with the VC.
- By S6, based on the S4 roll, an overall majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 literacy, broadly in line with the VC.

Numeracy: cohorts

- In S4, a majority of young people attained SCQF level 5 or better between 2021/22 and 2024/25. In 2022/23 this was significantly higher than the VC.
- By S5, based on the S4 roll, most young people attained SCQF level 5 or better in 2023/24 and 2024/25. This was an improvement on previous years and significantly higher than the VC in 2023/24. A minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in the past five years. There has been a pattern of improvement in the percentage of young people who attain SCQF level 6 numeracy. Attainment at this level is now in line with the VC having been previously significantly lower in 2022/23.
- By S6, based on the S4 roll, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in between 2021/22 and 2024/25. In 2021/22 and 2023/24 this was significantly lower than the VC. Attainment has improved in 2024/25 and is in line with the VC.

National Qualifications

- Almost all young people are presented for National 5 (N5) English in S4 and almost all attained N5 English at an A–C pass in 2024/5. This is above national averages. The majority of young people presented for N5 English attained A grade in 2024/5 and young people's attainment at N5 English A grade shows an improving pattern over time. A minority of young people are presented at Higher English which is in line or above national averages. This has been an improving picture since 2021/22. Most young people presented attained Higher English at an A–C pass in 2024/5.
- A majority of young people are presented for National 5 Mathematics in S4 and a majority attained National 5 Mathematics at an A–C pass in 2024/5. A minority of young people presented for National 5 Mathematics attained A grade in 2024/5. A minority of young people are presented for Higher Mathematics which is in line with national averages. A majority of young people have attained above the national average A passes since 2021/22. Almost all young people attained Higher A – C pass in 2025. This is improving over time.

- The minority of young people are presented for both N5 Applications of Mathematics and Mathematics in S4. Most young people in S4 presented attain A-C pass in N5 Applications of Mathematics. Senior leaders should continue to review how appropriate dual presentation is for young people in N5 Applications of Mathematics and N5 Mathematics.
- Senior leaders should continue to review the appropriateness of young people being presented for National 4 and National 5 awards in one subject.

Attainment over time

- Almost all teachers use a whole school tracker effectively. This tracker enables staff to check for prior attainment across all faculty areas and review young people's progress across all subjects. Teachers use this information well to identify individual and groups of young people who require additional supports to accelerate progress within the BGE and through to senior phase.

Broad general education

- Teachers track, record and report on the attainment of almost all young people throughout the broad general education (BGE) across curricular areas beyond literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders report that in 2024/25, most young people attained CfE third level, in most curriculum areas beyond literacy and numeracy.

Senior phase

- At planned points in the academic year, senior and middle leaders reflect on young people's progress against their expected attainment. They use the whole school tracking system well to do this. When needed, young people and their teachers agree on interventions to help them to improve. A range of holistic supports are available to empower young people to do their best. Interventions such as supported study, individualised plans and worksheets help young people to know what to do to improve.

Senior phase: leavers

- When compared using average complementary tariff points, the attainment of all leavers was in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25.
- Based on average complementary tariff scores, the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of leavers has been broadly in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25. The highest attaining 20% of leavers attainment was significantly higher than the VC in 2023/24.
- The attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of leavers who require additional support in their learning is in line with the VC between 2021/22 to 2024/25. The highest attaining 20% of leavers who require additional support with their learning was in line with the VC in the period from 2020/21 to 2023/24.

Senior phase: cohorts

- In S4, 2020/21 to 2024/25, the attainment of young people was broadly in line with the VC. The exception being the lowest attaining 20% of young people's attainment. This was significantly much lower than the VC in 2024/25.
- By S5 based on the S4 roll, from 2020/21 to 2024/25 the attainment of all young people was in line with the VC.

- In S6, based on the S4 roll, from 2020/21 to 2024/25 the attainment of the lowest 20% and middle 60% of young people was in line with the VC. The highest attaining 20% of young people's attainment is significantly higher than the VC in 2020/21 and 2022/23. Young people in the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% attain additional SCQF awards by both S5 and S6.
- The lowest attaining 20% of young people make less progress in their attainment as they move through senior phase than young people in the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20%.

Breadth and depth

- At S4, most young people attained two or more courses at SCQF level 5C or above. The majority attained five or more courses at SCQF level 5C or above. A minority of young people attained eight or more courses at SCQF level 5C. This was significantly higher than the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24. A majority of young people attained one or more courses at SCQF level 5A. The minority attained six or more courses at SCQF level 5A. A few young people attained eight or more courses at SCQF level 5A. This was significantly higher than the VC in 2023/24.
- By S5, based on the S4 roll, a majority of young people attained two or more courses at SCQF level 6C or above in 2024/25. A minority of young people attained three or more courses at SCQF level 6A. In 2024/25, young people attaining one or more awards courses at SCQF level 6A was significantly higher than the VC. A few young people attained five or more courses at SCQF level 6A or better. This in line with the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25.
- By S6, based on the S4 roll, a majority of young people achieved two or more awards at SCQF level 6C or above from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This is in line with the VC. A minority of young people achieved six or more awards at SCQF level 6C or above from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This is in line with the VC. A minority of young people achieved between two or more and four or more awards at SCQF level 6A from 2020/21 to 2024/25. This is in line with the VC. A few young people attained seven or more awards at SCQF level 6A over the five-year period. A few young people achieved three or more awards at SCQF level 7C over the five-year period. This is broadly in line with the VC.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Staff create interesting and varied activities designed to broaden young people's experiences. This helps almost all young people to feel included in the full life of the school. Almost all young people develop greater self-awareness and resilience by taking part or leading these experiences. Most young people develop positive social connections through extra-curricular activities such as taking part in the highly acclaimed school concerts, or attending one of the wide variety of clubs on offer. Clubs and events take place at lunch as well as after school, to enable young people who live further afield to participate. These activities help almost all young people to exemplify the school values of compassion, determination and respect, and recognise and develop their skills.
- Overall, young people are developing their understanding of skills by taking part in a wide range of activities which begin as young people transition into S1 and continues through the BGE and into senior phase. Senior leaders should continue with their plans to expand young

people's understanding of the meta and transferrable skills they are gaining through participating in these activities.

- Staff have worked well with local partners to develop a helpful school learner profile, linked to meta-skills. Using this profile enables young people to identify and record key skills, attributes and character traits. This is at an early stage of implementation. As planned, all staff should consider how all young people can use this profile to support their skill development.
- Senior leaders track participation in activities leading to achievements in all year groups rigorously. They are able to identify those young people who may be at risk of missing out from these valuable experiences, and support them to take part. As a result, almost all young people from specifically targeted groups attend at least one activity. This includes experiences which improve these young people's confidence in public speaking, reduces their levels of anxiety or encourages them to develop specific skills such as playing the guitar or hill walking.
- The majority of young people from S1 to S6 are developing their leadership skills well. For example, through collaborating with staff and others to develop the new anti-bullying policy and through senior prefect roles, and the House Council. A majority of young people are developing their understanding of democratic values and how to influence change effectively. A few young people also represent the school on the Pupil Participation Forum, to debate and influence pertinent topics with peers out with the school.
- Each year, young people in S6 lead the very successful and much anticipated fund-raising day for Children in Need. This, along with the regular involvement in the Youth Philanthropy Initiative, helps young people in all stages in school to gain a greater understanding of the impact of their input to support charities both locally and nationally.
- Supported very well by a wide range of partners, young people experience real-life contexts for learning, life and work. In the senior phase young people experience and benefit from mock interviews, work experience placements and information shared at future pathways events. These include equine assisted learning, practical cookery and support to enter local and national competitions. Through these experiences almost all young people develop their meta-skills well. In the senior phase, a minority of young people achieve a range of qualifications linked to their achievements. Senior leaders should continue to seek further opportunities for accrediting the wide range of activities and leadership roles undertaken by all young people.
- Almost two thirds of young people from S3 to S6 take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme across bronze, silver and gold categories. Almost all successfully complete the scheme. This demonstrates young people's strong commitment to challenge and achievement that go beyond the classroom, as well as delivering a significant amount of service to the local community.
- Young people appreciate the variety of ways in which their achievements are regularly recognised and celebrated. This includes certificates of achievements, appreciation postcards which recognise their achievements linked to the school values. They also value the

recently established House ceremonies where young people appreciate their own and others' achievements.

Equity for all learners

- The whole school pupil profile contains clear and helpful information on young people and challenges they face. Almost all staff use this well, which results in a solid understanding of socio-economic challenges young people may experience. Appropriate and discrete support to enable all young people to participate in activities is provided. This includes school uniform and physical education (PE) kit if required.
- Senior leaders and staff use the comprehensive whole school tracking data well to identify gaps in the attainment of young people. Senior leaders use pupil equity funding appropriately to support targeted groups of young people. This is effective and resulting in increased attainment for those young people identified. Appropriate strategies are in place to improve attainment of identified groups of young people. These approaches are regularly reviewed by senior leaders to ensure they are having impact. Almost all staff are aware of and implement successfully, key strategies which support young people in these targeted groups. There have been positive increases in attainment of these young people.
- The numbers of young people staying on in S4, S5 and S6 is increasing. In the five-year period for 2020/21 almost all young people moved on to initial positive destination on leaving school. In 2023/24 all young people moved into a positive destination from school.

Context

- The complex needs provision is a unit in the school which supports a few young people with a range of severe and complex additional support needs. The unit includes a classroom and quiet space. The unit is led by a deputy headteacher and acting principal teacher. The acting principal teacher has been in post for six weeks.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Staff establish caring and supportive relationships with all young people. They show all young people high levels of attention. Staff understand the importance of their role in ensuring young people's rights are protected. They have a good knowledge of each young person's individual support needs. All staff interactions with young people are highly sensitive to young people's needs. They are creative in delivering lessons tailored to each young person's personal interests. This results in young people engaging well in their learning. Young people learn in a calm purposeful learning environment.
- The school's values are embedded effectively in teaching in the complex needs provision. Staff model the school values well at all times. This supports young people to feel respected and valued. Staff use a range of approaches well to help young people access their learning. They use visual symbols effectively to communicate with young people. This helps young people know when they are moving on to a new task. Staff use objects of reference effectively to help young people understand the context of their learning. Staff use different spaces throughout the school to enrich young people's learning experiences. For example, they enjoy listening to stories when in the school library. Staff should consider how they could use digital technologies more effectively to enrich young people's learning. In instances where young people become dysregulated, staff's timely and effective interventions support young people to reengage quickly in their learning. Staff use praise effectively to help young people know when they have been successful.
- A multi-agency group assesses young people's needs prior to young people attending the complex needs provision. This ensures staff have high quality information regarding each young person's needs when they start their placement at the school. Staff work very well with a range of partners to assess each young person's physical, communication and developmental needs. This helps staff plan to meet each young person's needs very well. Staff observe each young person closely throughout each day. They adjust planned learning effectively dependent upon how well each young person engages in their learning. This supports young people to maintain their focus in class. Assessment is not yet integral to planned learning. Staff should now develop further their approaches to assessment to ensure staff gather valid and reliable information to assess young people's progress.
- Staff plan young people's learning over a range of timescales. This ensures young people's learning is regularly set in new and interesting contexts. Staff's approaches to planning supports young people to learn in a range of curricular areas. Planned learning takes good account of young people's additional support needs. Staff ensure lessons support young people well to develop important postural, physical and developmental needs. Staff are developing their skills in using a recently implemented local authority tool to check young people's

progress. This tool has the potential to be overly bureaucratic and time consuming. Staff need to develop their approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's progress further to ensure this provides them with high quality meaningful information on young people's progress. This includes tracking and monitoring young people's progress against their targets in their individual education programmes more effectively. They need to use information on young people's progress to plan learning more effectively which supports young people to build their skills on what they can already do.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

- Young people are making good progress in their learning. Where appropriate, young people in the senior phase attain units at National 1 level. Staff have recently developed further their approach to identifying young people's individual targets. Young people's targets are now focussed more on measurable outcomes. Staff need to use information on young people's progress to evaluate young people's attainment more effectively as they move through the school. This includes, evaluating young people's progress against their individual targets.
- Young people are developing their abilities appropriately to communicate in a range of ways meaningful to them. For example, when matching visual cues, vocalising sounds or gesturing. They use alternative and augmentative communication aids well to develop their understanding of sounds and words. Young people are developing their understanding of cause and effect when using a switch to operate a mixer to make muffins. They are developing their abilities well to respond to social interaction such as when spoken to or touched. Young people are developing their attention to stimuli effectively for example when playing with foam or recognising an object. They are developing important physical skills such as manipulating objects or moving independently without support. Young people are developing their understanding of time well through phrases such as 'now' and 'next'. In previous years, a few young people have successfully moved on from the complex needs provision to learn more independently in other classes in the school.
- Young people develop their skills well when learning beyond the classroom. They are developing their tolerance of different noises effectively when learning in spaces such as the school gym hall. They develop their understanding of communication and social interaction when eating in the canteen alongside their mainstream peers. Young people are developing their skills in understanding routines well in the canteen. For example, knowing when to take their tray back after they have eaten lunch. They are developing their understanding of different foods effectively through touch, taste or smell.

Other relevant evidence

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. A few areas for improvement have been agreed with the catering service. Aspects of good practice were identified in relation to food and health promotion in the school.
- The school library is a vibrant and inclusive hub and makes a significant contribution to learning and teaching across the school community. The librarian plays a highly proactive role and delivers a wide range of planned learning experiences. This includes curriculum-linked lessons, research and study skills development, and targeted support for literacy and English. The librarian also provides valuable professional learning for staff, particularly in developing effective approaches to oracy and questioning, which is strengthening pedagogy across faculties.
- The library offers a rich programme of wider achievement opportunities, including book groups, themed events such as World Book Day, and lunchtime and after-school clubs. The librarian delivers sensory storytelling sessions for learners with complex additional support needs, ensuring meaningful engagement and access to learning for all. This extensive provision is having a clear positive impact on learner confidence and attainment, whilst fostering a strong reading culture and supporting inclusive practice across the entire school community.
- Young people receive their full entitlement to religious and moral education from S1-S4 and religious observance in line with national guidance.
- Young people experience their entitlement to two hours of high-quality physical education per week.
- Young people from S1 to S3 receive their entitlement to modern language learning in French and Spanish as part of the Scottish Government's Language Learning in Scotland 1+2 policy approach.

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.