

Summarised inspection findings

Dumfries Academy

Dumfries and Galloway Council

21 April 2026

Key contextual information

School Name:	Dumfries Academy
Council:	Dumfries and Galloway Council
SEED number:	5939038
Roll (February 2026):	575

Dumfries Academy is a non-denominational, comprehensive school serving communities in central Dumfries.

The headteacher has been in post for 13 years. She is supported currently by two deputy headteachers. There have been recent changes within the school's management structure and a few subjects, including science, have been impacted by staffing challenges. Just over one quarter of young people leave school at the end of S4. By S6, 50% of the S4 cohort choose to stay on at school.

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

Exclusions are in line with the national average and reducing.

In September 2024, 23.5% of pupils were registered for free school meals.

In September 2024, 27.3% of pupils live in 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In February 2026, the school reported that 57% of pupils had additional support needs. This has increased by 17% since 2020.

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

- The very positive relationships between staff and young people are an important strength of the school. Almost all young people are well behaved and respectful to staff and to one another. This contributes to a calm and purposeful learning environment. The positive, caring ethos is underpinned by the school's values of compassion, respect and responsibility. Almost all young people feel that staff know them well and are confident in approaching staff to support them with their learning.
- Almost all teachers use a clear lesson structure that supports young people's learning and participation in activities well. The "DA Way," incorporating "Ready, Respond and Reflect" is well understood by all staff and young people. This enables teachers to plan learning consistently across all subjects. Teachers at all levels take part in learning walks to evaluate learning and teaching. Senior leaders should ensure that effective practice is shared more systematically to strengthen further consistency in the quality of learning and teaching across the school.
- In almost all lessons, teachers use starter activities at the beginning of the lesson effectively to recall learning. As a result, young people use prior knowledge well and are prepared for new learning. Teachers share clearly the purpose of learning and how to be successful. In a few lessons, teachers involve young people in co-creating success criteria. This enables young people to better understand what they are learning. Senior leaders and teachers should consider how this practice could be shared more widely.
- Teachers' explanations and instructions are clear in almost all lessons. As a result, young people know what is expected of them. In a few classes, teachers use skilled questioning to check for understanding, develop thinking skills, and actively engage young people as partners in learning. There is scope to develop this practice further across the school. The majority of teachers check for understanding during lessons using a variety of approaches, including show-me boards. This helps maintain engagement. Senior leaders should continue to support teachers to improve the quality of plenaries.
- Almost all staff, through the Pupil Information PowerPoint, are aware of young people who require additional support with their learning. A minority of staff use this information well to plan learning at the appropriate level of challenge for individuals. All staff should make use of this information to plan and adapt learning to ensure that the needs of all young people are met. In the majority of lessons, learners complete tasks at a similar pace. Teachers should now

consider how they further increase appropriate pace and challenge in learning for all young people.

- In the majority of lessons, young people benefit from a range of teaching and learning approaches, including opportunities to work collaboratively and independently. This helps young people to be more engaged as they take responsibility for their learning. Senior leaders and teachers should ensure that more regular, planned and progressive opportunities are provided for young people to access digital technology in their learning.
- Almost all staff have taken part in high-quality professional learning activities aimed at improving learning and teaching. The school's monthly professional learning bulletin provides staff with resources on teaching methodologies. Staff welcome these opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge. As a result, most staff are improving their classroom practice in identified areas.
- A minority of teachers refer to meta-skills as part of their lessons and a few young people are beginning to understand, recognise and articulate the skills they are developing. As planned, staff should continue to develop this practice across the school.
- Planning in the broad general education (BGE) is progressive, based on Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) outcomes. The relationship between planning and assessment is not yet fully developed across all departments. Senior and middle leaders should develop a clearer overview of planned assessment across all subject areas. This should include systematic planning of quality assurance and moderation. Young people would benefit from a more consistent approach to how teachers help them prepare for assessments.
- Staff across almost all departments record interventions to support identified young people on recently devised trackers. Senior leaders should continue to support staff to develop their use of the data available to inform planning. As a next step, senior and middle leaders should develop approaches to measuring the impact of interventions.
- In the majority of departments, staff engage in moderation of planning, learning and assessment. In a minority of departments, there remains variability in the extent to which staff are confident in making assessment judgements in the BGE. Senior leaders should ensure that all staff engage consistently in moderation activity, including with colleagues beyond the school.
- Most departments engage in moderation of senior phase course planning both internally and in collaboration with colleagues from other schools. In the best examples, this is leading to reliable and robust teacher judgements that result in positive outcomes for young people. As an important next step, senior leaders should support staff within a few subject areas to develop their understanding of assessment standards.
- Staff monitor and track well the progress of young people in the senior phase. They are at the early stages of using more consistent approaches to monitoring individual and cohort performance in the BGE. Senior and middle leaders should continue to support staff to ensure this data is used effectively to inform planning and interventions.

- Learner conversations are embedded well across almost all departments and at all stages. Young people describe how these help them understand their next steps in learning, particularly in the senior phase. Young people in the BGE are growing in confidence when describing their own progress. In a few departments, there are innovative examples of ongoing digital feedback provided at all stages. Senior leaders should ensure that the most effective approaches to feedback are embedded across all faculties. In the BGE, staff should continue to embed recently revised criteria for reporting on progress over time.
- Learner profiles are an emerging feature of almost all BGE courses. These profiles assist young people to reflect on their learning over time. Senior leaders should consider how pupil reflections within subject profiles are captured across the totality of a young person's learning. This will support young people to identify how the skills they are developing can be applied in different contexts. This will also provide senior and middle leaders with a clearer overview of planned skills progression across the curriculum.

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 that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- Following the inspection Dumfries and Galloway Council, working with Dumfries Academy, have provided an action plan 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 the education authority and do not require any further information.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

Broad General Education (BGE)

- Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, most young people achieved CfE third level in literacy and numeracy. Performance at CfE fourth level is variable. Generally, the majority of young people achieved CfE fourth level in literacy. A minority of young people achieve fourth level in writing between 2021/22 and 2024/25. A minority of young people achieve numeracy at CfE fourth level. The percentage of young people achieving this level has increased. Performance remains notably below local and national levels. Teachers now leading on numeracy have revised course planning and approaches to moderation and assessment. Current data provided by senior leaders suggests that achievement of CfE third level in literacy and numeracy is improving. The majority of young people who require additional support with their learning and access the school's support base are making good progress in literacy and numeracy.
- Senior leaders have identified a need for collaborative working across schools within the local area to support effective planning for progression. Teachers are at the early stages of using data to support more effective curriculum planning and to identify young people for interventions to improve literacy and numeracy. Senior and middle leaders should develop approaches to planning and assessing literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Senior leaders should, as planned, ensure these developments are taken forward strategically and evaluated regularly.

Senior phase

Leavers

- Senior leaders are aware that improving attainment in literacy and numeracy for young people leaving school is an urgent priority. They have taken steps to address this in the current school year and should continue to monitor the impact of these actions.
- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the majority of young people who left school achieved Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24 this was significantly lower, or significantly much lower, than the virtual comparator (VC), except for 2020/21 when it was in line. At SCQF level 6 or better, performance in literacy declined between 2020/21 and 2023/24. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, a minority of those who left school achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy. Between 2021/22 and 2023/24 this was significantly lower or much lower than the VC.

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the majority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy and a minority achieved SCQF level 6. This was in line with the VC, other than at SCQF level 5 or better in 2023/24 when performance was significantly lower than the VC. At SCQF level 5 and 6 or better, performance declined between 2020/21 and 2023/24.
- Young people who require additional support with their learning generally leave school with lower levels of SCQF qualifications in literacy and numeracy when compared to similar young people across the country. Performance at SCQF level 5 or better in literacy and numeracy is improving but remains below that of other young people nationally.

Cohorts

- At S4, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in 2024/25. This increased between 2020/21 and 2023/24 then decreased in 2024/25. In 2020/21, 2022/23 and 2024/25, performance was significantly lower than the VC. There is no consistent pattern of improvement at this level.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy in 2023/24 and 2024/25. This increased from the majority achieving this level in 2022/23. Performance at this level is significantly lower than the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25, with the exception of 2022/23 when it was significantly much lower. At SCQF level 6, following a decrease between 2020/21 and 2022/23, performance has increased from a minority of young people achieving this level to the majority in 2023/24 and 2024/25. In 2023/24 and 2024/25 performance is in line with the VC, having been significantly lower in the three preceding years.
- By S6, based on the S6 roll, most young people achieved SCQF level 6 in 2024/25, in line with the VC. This improved from the majority achieving this level between 2021/22 and 2023/24, which was significantly lower than the VC.
- At S4, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy in 2022/23 and 2024/25, in line with the VC. A minority of young people achieved this level in 2023/24 which was significantly lower than the VC. There is no consistent pattern of improvement at this level.
- By S5, based on the S5 roll, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in 2024/25. Performance decreased between 2020/21 and 2022/23 then increased in 2023/24 and 2024/25. By S5, based on the S5 roll, and by S6, based on the S6 roll, a minority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy between 2020/21 and 2024/25, in line with the VC. This improved in 2024/25 when the majority of young people achieved this level in S6. The percentage of young people achieving this level increased in 2023/24 and 2024/25 following a decrease between 2020/21 and 2022/23.
- Senior leaders have identified correctly the need to improve and sustain attainment in literacy and numeracy. They have identified reasons for individual young people not attaining appropriate levels. They should continue with developments to improve approaches to literacy and numeracy learning within the BGE and to ensuring all young people attain appropriate levels of qualification within the senior phase. This includes the planned widening of opportunities in the senior phase.

National Qualifications

- Young people's presentation levels and pass rates in English at National 5 and Higher are generally in line with national levels.
- Young people's presentation levels in Mathematics at National 5 and Higher are below the national average. Pass rates at National 5 are in line with the national average. At Higher, pass rates have been in line with the national average and increased to be above the national average in 2024/25. Presentation rates for National 5 and Higher Applications of Mathematics are above the national average. Pass rates at Higher are above the national average. The percentage of young people being presented for both Mathematics and Applications of Mathematics at National 5 in S4 is above the national average. Senior leaders demonstrated that this number has decreased and they plan to reduce this further.

Attendance

- Attendance is in line with the national average. Forty-seven percent of young people experience persistent absence below 90%. This is above the national average. Planned targeted supports for individual young people are positively supporting attendance for a few young people. Senior leaders should now consider further their strategic approach to engaging more young people and families to review approaches to maximising attendance. This should include approaches to minimising late coming and should involve the voices of young people being central to planning. A few young people engage in learning through part-time timetables. Senior leaders should ensure these are reviewed regularly to provide all young people with their entitlement to 27.5 hours of education.

Attainment over time

BGE

- Senior leaders have developed recently more robust approaches to moderation, monitoring and tracking in the BGE. This is now providing more robust data to allow them to measure young people's attainment over time. The approach to gathering this data is improving staff confidence in making judgements on young people's progression. This is also supporting them to identify young people for specific interventions to support their learning.
- Senior leaders have developed specific pathway plans to support identified groups of young people to achieve appropriate attainment and broaden their skill development. It is too early to measure the impact of these approaches. Senior leaders should ensure they keep these models under review and measure the impact for all involved to ensure they lead to successful outcomes.

Senior phase

Improving attainment for all

- In a few departments, senior phase attainment is significantly lower than national averages. This is impacting on outcomes for young people. Low levels of numeracy attainment over time in the BGE has impacted on presentation levels and attainment in the senior phase. Senior leaders and those leading on numeracy have altered course progression routes to broaden qualifications on offer.
- At the senior phase, most young people accessing the support base are attaining successfully a range of National Qualifications and wider achievements. Most young people accessing course and unit awards attain from National 1 to National 3, with a minority attaining at National 5.

Leavers

- The attainment of young people leaving school, using average complementary tariff points, is generally in line with the VC for the lowest attaining 20%, the middle 60% and the highest attaining 20%. In 2023/24, attainment for the lowest attaining 20% fell to being significantly lower than the VC. For the middle 60% and highest 20%, between 2019/20 and 2023/24 performance fluctuated and there was an overall pattern of decline.

Cohorts

- At S4, by S5 and by S6 based on the S5 and S6 rolls respectively, using average complementary tariff points, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25, with the exception of 2023/24, when this was significantly much lower than the VC for young people at S4 and by S5.
- At S4, by S5 and by S6 based on the S5 and S6 rolls respectively, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. Performance for the middle attaining 60% of young people by S5 and S6 and for the highest attaining 20% by S6 fluctuates with no consistent pattern of improvement.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified priority actions to improve attainment and have begun to implement a number of these. This includes ensuring young people are entered and accredited for appropriate courses. They should now collate a strategic plan to raise attainment. This should clearly detail the actions required, the roles and responsibilities of all staff, and timescales for improvement to ensure clarity and accountability.

Breadth and depth

- Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, a minority of young people at S4 achieved five or more SCQF awards at level 5C or better. This is in line with the VC and has increased over the five-year period. Between 2022/23 and 2024/25 the majority of young people at S4 achieved one or more award at SCQF level 5A, which was significantly higher than the VC. Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, a few young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better. The percentage of young people achieving this has decreased over the last five years. At SCQF level 5A and 5C, there is no consistent pattern of improvement.
- Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, for young people in S5, based on the S5 roll, performance at SCQF level 6C and 6A was in line with the VC. A minority of young people achieved two or more to four or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better, with the exception of 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2023/24 when the majority achieved two or more awards at this level. A few young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better in 2021/22. This increased to a minority in 2022/23.
- Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, the percentage of young people by S5, based on the S5 roll, who achieve one or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 6A is decreasing but is in line with the VC.
- By S6, based on the S6 roll, performance in 2024/25 increased following decreases from previous levels of performance for young people achieving one or more to five or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better. In 2024/25, this was significantly much higher than the VC for those achieving two or more to three or more awards and significantly higher for four or more awards. Almost all young people achieved one or more award at Level 6C or better. A minority

achieved five or more awards at this level. The majority achieved one or more award at SCQF level 6A and a few young people achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 6A. While this is in line with the VC, the percentage of young people achieving one or more to five or more awards at this level is generally decreasing.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people are developing skills, confidence and motivation through participating in a range of achievement activities. These include a wide range of opportunities in sports, dance activities, a business club and the school show. Participation and success in wider achievements are mainly celebrated through social media. Senior leaders should now develop further approaches including through, for example, celebrating success walls across the school and additional regular celebratory assemblies. Senior leaders and staff are at an early stage of tracking how well young people participate in achievement opportunities. This should now be further developed as part of a more strategic approach to developing skills and leadership capacities through wider achievement. Senior leaders and staff should support young people to identify and address any gaps in their experiences and offer young people relevant opportunities.
- Young people who learn within the support base have their achievements celebrated within the Additional Support for Learners weekly newsletter. Most young people participate in a range of inclusive sports including swimming and boccia, where they receive medals that validate their individual achievements.
- A few young people benefit from taking part in an increasing range of pupil leadership and volunteering opportunities. Young people develop their confidence, leadership and management skills well. For example, through involvement in, the rights respecting group, sports leadership and as nurture mentors. Senior leaders and staff should now increase the range of leadership roles available to young people across the school, such as the recently reintroduced pupil council. The implementation of pupil council representatives from S1 to S6 may increase the engagement of young people in the life and work of the school and further develop their skills.
- Across the school, a few young people develop skills and gain recognised youth awards such as Saltire and Dynamic Youth Awards. A recently introduced wellbeing profile booklet supports young people in S1 to maintain a profile of their achievements both in and out of school. This supports young people to recognise and reflect on their successes as they progress across the school and beyond. This approach should now be consistently extended beyond S1. Senior leaders and staff should work together to capitalise further on the achievement offer and seek out appropriate accreditation to maximise young people's skills development and attainment outcomes.

Equity for all learners

- Young people are supported through a well-attended breakfast bar which enables young people who may not have otherwise had a meal before arriving at school, the chance to do so. This supports them to feel ready to learn. In addition, items of school equipment and clothing are made available and accessible, free of charge. Young people appreciate the availability of these supports which help to mitigate the cost of the school day. Senior leaders should ensure that they are supporting and encouraging young people at the greatest risk of disadvantage to access these universal supports.

- Young people benefit from a wide range of school trips, excursions and events free of charge. This supports families to ensure that young people do not miss out on trips which enhance their life experiences and support their curriculum learning across a range of subjects.
- Two-fifths of young people in the school reside in SIMD deciles 1 – 3. Young people who left the school and reside in decile one performed significantly lower or much lower than young people in comparable areas of Scotland in three out of the last 5 years. Young people residing in decile two performed significantly lower or much lower than other young people in comparable areas of Scotland over the last 5 years of data up until 2023/24.
- The Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) plan highlights the amount of money allocated to a number of staff and interventions to support young people to attain and achieve. This includes staff supporting identified young people who require support with their learning in literacy and numeracy well. Key staff have a clear focus on attendance and signposting families to financial and practical supports. This is making a significant difference to the attendance patterns of a few young people, enabling them to access their education and improve their outcomes. In addition, funding for a nurture area provides young people who require it, a range of experiences to support their wellbeing. This improved wellbeing is supporting identified young people well to access mainstream classes more confidently. PEF planning currently provides support and interventions for a range of young people. Senior leaders are not yet able to demonstrate fully the impact of planned interventions on closing attainment gaps for those most affected by socio-economic challenges. Senior leaders should take a strategic approach to ensure that the data gathered about the attainment and achievement of the most disadvantaged young people is carefully tracked and monitored. They should evidence clearly how interventions are helping to address the poverty related attainment gap.
- Almost all young people progressed to a positive destination on leaving school between 2019/20 and 2023/24, except in 2019/20 when this was most young people. Performance has been in line with the VC between 2020/21 and 2023/24, having been lower in 2019/20. The majority of young people consistently enter higher or further education when they leave school. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the proportion of young people entering higher education decreased. An increasing minority of young people directly entered employment when they left school.

Other relevant evidence

- Young people receive their entitlement to physical education. Not all young people receive their entitlement to 1+2 modern language learning after S2 or to Religious and Moral Education after S3.
- The school library is used by classes in English for reading time and by young people in the senior phase for study and to engage in online learning opportunities. A review of the resources available could support further learning about inclusion and diversity.
- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the 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. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

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.