HMIE | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Summarised inspection findings

Holy Rood RC High School

The City of Edinburgh Council

2 June 2026

Key contextual information

Holy Rood RC High School is a denominational secondary school in Edinburgh serving a highly diverse community, with young people representing more than 70 nationalities. The headteacher has led the school for six years and is supported by three depute headteachers and a senior development officer.

School Name: Holy Rood RC High School
Council: The City of Edinburgh Council
SEED number: 5533031
Roll: 1209

Attendance is generally in line with the national average and exclusions are below the national average in 2024/25.

In September 2024, 15.1% of pupils were registered for free school meals and 48% of pupils lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2024, the school reported that 46% of pupils required additional support with their learning, this has risen to 51% in 2026.

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2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	very 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 school's Gospel values of love, forgiveness, justice and compassion underpin a highly positive and nurturing ethos across Holy Rood RC High School. This very positive climate for learning is characterised by trusting and respectful relationships between almost all young people and staff. Young people value the well-embedded 'Ready to Learn' approach, which sets clear, aspirational expectations for behaviour and engagement in the classroom. In almost all classes, young people are courteous, caring and act responsibly. As a result, there is a calm, supportive and purposeful atmosphere that strongly promotes effective learning.

- Almost all young people are highly motivated and are keen to learn. They engage very well with the rich and relevant learning contexts provided by most staff. Engagement is strongest when young people collaborate and take ownership of their own learning. Staff should continue to extend creative learning contexts that maintain high levels of engagement. Teachers know learners very well and are supported by high-quality information about individual needs. In most lessons, teachers use this information effectively to design tasks and activities that provide appropriate challenge and support. This keeps young people engaged and ensures they access learning at an appropriate level.

- Senior leaders and teachers maintain a relentless, collegiate focus on improving the quality of teaching. Staff worked collaboratively to define clear expectations for high-quality learning and teaching, including guidance on lesson structure and an effective toolkit for evaluating pedagogy. Well-established processes enable staff to share effective practice, learn from one another and continue to strengthen teaching across the school.

- In almost all lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning clearly and outline how success will be measured. Almost all use effective starter activities, and their explanations and dialogue support young people to make progress. Staff should now further develop more consistent use of plenaries to ensure young people deepen their understanding of what they have learned.

- In most lessons, teachers use questioning thoughtfully to check understanding and encourage young people to reflect on their learning. In the best practice, evident in a minority of lessons, teachers use hierarchical and probing questioning to deepen thinking and increase challenge. As planned, teachers should ensure more challenging questioning consistently supports the development of higher-order thinking skills.

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- Staff have developed a strong, strategic approach to digital learning that significantly enhances young people's experiences. All young people have their own device, which enables access to class notes, presentations and assignments both in school and at home. As a result, young people develop a wide range of digital skills and use these confidently to support learning. Teachers increasingly use a broad range of digital platforms to provide engaging learning experiences. A minority of teachers use innovative and discrete approaches to differentiation, including artificially-generated learning materials and podcast-based support for learners who benefit from auditory input. Young people absent from school can continue learning through digital platforms. Almost all learners regularly use their device to interact with teachers, receive feedback, reflect on learning and prepare for assessments. Overall, digital learning is a major strength of the school.

- Young people have a strong awareness of their own progress. In almost all subjects, they engage in peer- and self-assessment, which helps them understand their learning and next steps. Young people value opportunities during tutor time to discuss and reflect on their progress, encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning.

- Across both the broad general education (BGE) and senior phase, almost all teachers provide focused and supportive feedback well. In most subjects, young people use learning logs and pupil passports completed with staff. This helps them identify strengths, current working grades and next steps for improvement. Almost all young people feel the feedback they receive is helpful and supports them to make further progress.

- Staff have collaboratively developed a helpful position paper on assessment. As a result, teachers have a shared and clear understanding of the principles and purposes of assessment. Within almost all subjects they apply this sound rationale for assessment and use an appropriate range of formative and summative approaches.

- In the BGE, almost all staff plan assessment activities that align well with national Benchmarks and include appropriate breadth and challenge. All teachers engage in moderation activities, and a minority of staff in all faculties have worked with colleagues in other schools. Moderation features consistently in faculty quality assurance calendars, which supports valid and accurate assessment judgements. As planned, staff should continue to extend moderation opportunities outwith the school.

- In the senior phase, almost all staff plan assessments that align closely with national course expectations. Almost all teachers in the senior phase make well-considered and valid assessment judgments. A majority of faculties have appointees with Qualification Scotland (QS) who share their expertise effectively, contributing to robust assessment approaches. Internal estimate grades correlate closely with final certificated outcomes.

- Across all subjects, teachers use effective processes to track young people's progress in both the BGE and senior phase. Staff understand their roles well and analyse assessment data systematically. Young people benefit from a shared language for discussing progress, which strengthens their understanding of learning. Teachers use rigorous tracking and monitoring which supports early identification of underachievement. Staff plan targeted interventions to support improvement, and in almost all subjects, data analysis informs meaningful learner conversations that help young people build on strengths and to identify next steps.

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- Most teachers use analysis of attainment data well to adapt their plans for the learning of individual young people. Teachers in all subjects should continue to use tracking data to plan learning that is tailored to provide all young people with appropriate levels of challenge and support. Middle and senior leaders collate data to provide a strategic overview of progress across the school. They use this analysis effectively to make necessary adjustments to planning at faculty and whole-school level.

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2.1 Safeguarding

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

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3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	very 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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy BGE

- Almost all young people achieve CfE third level or better in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3 in 2024/25. This is in line with local and national measures. In 2024/25, most young people achieve CfE fourth level or better in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3. Attainment at fourth CfE level literacy has been improving since 2021/22 and is above local and national measures.

- Teachers of English and mathematics work effectively with colleagues across the Learning Community to strengthen moderation, verification and pedagogy. This collaboration deepens shared understanding of national standards and increases the accuracy of professional judgements. Transition staff provide targeted support to individuals, groups and whole classes, ensuring more coherent progression in learning and as young people move from primary to secondary education. Moderation in both faculties is robust, supported by well-established approaches to assessment, tracking and monitoring. For example, the English faculty's detailed rubrics, aligned to CfE third and fourth level Benchmarks, strengthen staff understanding of progression and help young people identify their level and next steps. As a result, staff have increased confidence in assessing a level, and their judgements are reliable and accurate.

- English and mathematics staff use literacy and numeracy data from P7 to the senior phase very effectively to plan learning, tailor courses and guide young people into appropriate pathways. Strong correlations between BGE performance and National Qualification (NQ) outcomes demonstrate clear progression and positive impact on attainment.

Senior phase Leavers

Literacy and numeracy

- Performance for leavers in literacy at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better is in line with the virtual comparator (VC), with most young people achieving this between 2022/23 and 2024/25. There is a pattern of improvement at this level over the last four years. The majority of young people achieve SCQF level 6 or better. This is in line with the VC between 2021/22 and 2024/25 with a four-year improvement pattern.

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- Most young people leaving school in 2024/25 achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy and a minority achieved SCQF level 6. This is in line with the VC, with attainment at its highest level since 2021/22 when the school is compared against themselves.

- In 2024/25, the majority of young people who require additional support with their learning achieve SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy and literacy and a minority achieve SCQF level 6 or better. There is a fluctuating pattern of improvement at both levels over five years.

- The newly introduced pupil-tracking system, combined with rigorous data analysis, enables senior leaders to identify promptly any young person at risk of not achieving a literacy or numeracy qualification. Staff implement clear, targeted interventions to support learners to make progress, including those whose attendance is low. Pupil support officers, support for learning staff and outreach provision staff work together very well to remove barriers and help young people achieve positive outcomes, including improved attendance and attainment.

Cohorts

- At S4, most young people achieve SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is significantly higher than the VC for the last four years, including 2024/25. By S5, based on the S4 roll, just under half of young people achieve SCQF level 6 or better, generally in line with the VC. By S6, based on the S4 roll, the majority of young people achieve SCQF level 6 or better. This has been improving since 2021/22 and is now significantly higher than the VC in 2024/25.

- In 2024/25, most young people in S4 achieve SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy, which is significantly much higher than the VC. This is the highest attainment in the last five years. By S5 and S6, based on the S4 roll, a minority of young people achieve SCQF level 6 or better. This is the highest attainment in the last five years and is significantly above the VC in 2024/25.

National Qualifications (NQ) English and mathematics

- Attainment across English and mathematics is strong. This is supported by an aspirational presentation policy, high levels of support for young people and faculty staff who are appointees for QS.

- The percentage of young people being presented for mathematics in S4 is much higher than the national average over the last five years. In 2024/25, the percentage of passes at grade A-C are also above the national average. In S5/6 presentation levels and percentage of passes for Higher mathematics are in line with the national average.

- In S4 the percentage of young people being presented for National 5 English has been steadily increasing over the last five years and is now slightly above the national average. The percentage of passes at A-C grades are all above the national average, with a 96% pass rate at A-C. As young people progress into S5/6 the percentage of grade A-C passes continue to be slightly above the national average.

Attainment over time

- Senior leaders confirm that in 2024/25 almost all young people achieved CfE third level in all curricular areas, outwith literacy and numeracy, by the end of S3. In 2024/25, most young people achieve CfE fourth level in all curricular areas.

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- Senior leaders and pupil support leaders use the whole-school tracking and monitoring system very effectively to analyse attainment over time for individuals, cohorts and year groups. They interrogate this data well and work collaboratively with pupil support leads and curriculum leaders to identify and implement targeted interventions. These supports include in-class support, small group work, support for learning input, and enhanced provision input. Staff record most interventions systematically, and senior leaders monitor their impact to ensure they lead to improved progress and attainment for identified young people.

Senior phase

Improving attainment for all Leavers

- When using average complimentary tariff scores, the attainment of the lowest 20%, middle 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people leaving school is broadly in line with the VC. Attainment is at its highest in 2024/25 for all cohorts of leavers in five years when the school is compared against itself.

- Young people who require additional support for their learning are maintaining good levels of performance as they leave school. Attainment compared using average complimentary tariff scores is broadly similar to the national average for the lowest attaining 20%, the middle 60% and the highest attaining 20%.

Cohorts

- At S4, using complementary tariff scores, attainment of the lowest attaining 20%, middle attaining 60% and highest 20% of young people has generally been improving over five years, with 2024/25 being the strongest performance when the school is compared against themselves. The lowest attaining 20% and the middle 60% is generally significantly higher or significantly much higher than the VC over the last three years.

- By S5 and S6, based on the S4 roll, the lowest attaining 20%, the middle attaining 60% and the highest attaining 20% is broadly in line with the VC. In S6, based on the S4 roll, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% is significantly higher than the VC in 2024/25.

Breadth and depth

- At S4, most young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF level 5C and a majority achieve two or more and three or more awards at this level. Performance at this level in 2024/25 is the highest it has been for one and more to eight or more awards over the past five years. This is significantly higher or significantly much higher across almost all measures in 2024/25. The majority of young people achieve one or more award at SCQF level 5A and a minority achieve three or more and five or more awards at this level. This is generally in line with the VC with the exception of 2024/25 where it is significantly higher than the VC for one or more to three or more awards. In 2024/25, attainment is at its highest in the five-year period.

- By S5, the majority of young people achieved one or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better between 2023/24 and 2024/25. This is significantly higher than the VC in the last two years. A minority of young people achieve two or more and three or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better in line with the VC. Performance at SCQF level 6A or better is broadly in line with the VC with a minority of young people achieving one or more awards and a few achieving three or more awards at this level. As identified by senior leaders, they should continue to work with

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faculty staff to improve attainment in S5. This should have a particular focus on improving the percentage of passes and quality of passes at SCQF level 6.

- By S6, in 2024/25, attainment at SCQF level 6C is at its highest attainment over five years across one or more to four or more awards. This is either significantly higher or significantly much higher than the VC. Attainment at SCQF level 6A is significantly higher than the VC in 2024/25 for one or more and two or more awards. Performance at SCQF level 7C or better is in line with the VC, with a minority of young people achieving at this level.

- In 2024/25, the A-C pass rate at National 5 in almost all subjects is either above or in line with the national average. This pattern continues to be strong with the percentage of Higher A-C passes in most subjects either above or in line with the national average.

- Senior leaders and staff have collaborated extensively to refresh the school's curriculum rationale. All faculties have now mapped progressive learner pathways within their subjects, and almost all faculties have introduced at least one new course enabling young people to achieve beyond National Qualifications. New pathways include National Progression Awards in criminology, musical theatre, legal studies, climate studies, and creative industries. Although recently introduced, these courses are beginning to demonstrate early positive impact by widening opportunities and adding value to young people's achievements.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- The overall quality of young people's achievements is a significant strength of the school. Staff work effectively with partners and young people to provide a wide range of well-designed activities and clubs that respond to young people's interests and needs. The offer includes excursions, leadership opportunities across all year groups, and more than fifty clubs and study opportunities each week. The annual 'Sign-up September' initiative ensures all young people are aware of the full range of opportunities available. As a result, almost all young people participate in at least one club or wider-achievement activity. They talk positively about the broad and relevant set of skills they are developing through their involvement, such as independence, problem solving and leadership. Ongoing digital notices and tutor-time updates help sustain high levels of engagement throughout the year.

- Young people within the BGE benefit from a programme of core experiences, including the John Muir Award, Mercat Tours Skills Day and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) workshops. As a result, almost all young people participate successfully in a range of valuable achievements. Young people who cannot access these experiences are supported through bespoke programmes that meet their individual needs. This enables them to develop important skills, such as teamwork, confidence and communication.

- Almost all young people from S1 to S6 develop their leadership skills through a wide range of high-quality initiatives. These include high-profile local community volunteering linked to Caritas, the Mark Scott Leadership Award, the Youth Philanthropy Initiative and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Participation in these programmes strengthens young people's confidence, communication skills and a strong sense of social responsibility. Senior leaders increasingly ensure that young people gain formal accreditation for these achievements over time.
- Young people contribute positively to the school's ethos by undertaking a wide variety of leadership roles. These include digital ambassadors, subject prefects, sports coaching, Mentors

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for Violence Prevention, peer mentors and transition-support roles. Through these opportunities, young people further develop valuable skills for learning, life and work.

- Senior leaders are supporting staff well to embed meta-skills across the curriculum. Almost all young people in S1-3 reflect on their skills development in a range of contexts and record their progress within a BGE skills and achievement profile. Senior leaders should continue, as planned, to embed further the work around meta-skills and track the progress young people are making.

- Senior leaders have created a very comprehensive, user-friendly, wider achievements tracker that systematically records young people's participation in and out of school. Staff update the tracker regularly, enabling senior leaders to identify patterns, remove barriers to engagement and plan targeted interventions. This information is used very well to celebrate the successes of young people.

- Young people's achievements are celebrated through well-established annual awards ceremonies, regular assemblies, social media updates and termly newsletters. Staff in all faculties recognise young people's successes consistently through approaches such as praise postcards, pupil-of-the-week awards and recognition boards. As a result, young people feel valued, recognised and included.

Equity for all learners

- The school's approach to ensuring equity for their learners, rooted in their Gospel values, is a major strength of the school. All staff have a very strong understanding of the socio-economic context of their young people and their families. They are relentless in ensuring that any stigma and barriers to learning and achieving are removed. Support is provided in a very discreet way that is sensitive and respectful of the families they serve. As a result, they have created an inclusive environment in which young people feel valued and are supported to attain and achieve.

- Senior leaders use a detailed and sophisticated tracking system to monitor the progress of identified equity groups, including young carers, care-experienced learners, those in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 1 and 2, learners in receipt of free school meals, and those requiring additional support. Senior and middle leaders meet termly with key staff to analyse progress and plan timely, targeted interventions. Staff use this information well to reduce barriers and ensure learners receive appropriate support. Clear roles and responsibilities strengthen the consistency of this work. Robust quality-assurance processes enable leaders to evaluate the impact of interventions. As a result, young people within equity cohorts are making improved progress in their learning.

- The well-established equity team works very effectively to ensure young people in equity cohorts receive the support required to attain and achieve. Each team member has clear responsibilities and engages with specific groups across the school. Through strategic use of data, the team maintains a strong understanding of the poverty-related attainment gap and closely tracks the progress of targeted young people. This enables timely and targeted interventions, including the well-established senior-phase mentoring programme, which reduces barriers to learning and improves attainment. School data indicates that most young people who participated in mentoring last session increased their attainment. Effective quality

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assurance informs ongoing improvements to the programme, and the number of young people participating has increased this session.

- Staff in enhanced support have strengthened their practice through collaboration with other schools, resulting in an enhanced range of supports that they now share more widely across and beyond the school. A few young people receive targeted support through bespoke interventions, tailored groups and opportunities to gain relevant qualifications. These approaches have improved young people's engagement and attainment. In addition, support for learning staff and enhanced support staff, work effectively with curriculum leaders and teachers to build capacity and improve support for young people across the school.

- The attainment of school leavers from SIMD decile 1, from 2021/22 to 2024/25 has improved and is in line with national data. The attainment of school leavers from SIMD decile 2 has improved. This was significantly higher than the national data in 2022/23 and was significantly much higher in 2024/25. The rigorous tracking and monitoring of attainment ensures that interventions are put in place reduce the impact of any barriers to improving their attainment.

- Senior leaders plan their use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) strategically to maximise its impact on the attendance, wellbeing and attainment of targeted groups. Funding is used primarily to provide staffing that supports young people who face social-economical barriers. This work has also enabled the school to identify an increasing number of young carers and ensure they receive appropriate support. As a result, young people benefiting from PEF remain engaged in learning, improve their attainment, and are on track to achieve a positive destination. Senior leaders and staff evaluate the impact of PEF very effectively and adapt priorities and approaches in response to young people's needs.

- Almost all young people leaving school between 2020/21 and 2024/25 have entered and sustained a positive destination, with an increase recorded in the most recent year. The majority of young people in 2024/25 progressed to higher or further education, and this proportion has risen over time. Senior leaders and key staff use data very effectively to identify when targeted support and interventions are required. A minority of young people move into training or employment.

- Senior leaders and staff track and monitor attendance closely. Overall, attendance is in line with national averages, and the percentage of young people who are persistently absent is also broadly comparable. School data shows a decrease in persistent absence this session. The school's exclusion rate is below the national average. A few young people across the school attend school on a part-time basis, this is well planned for and regularly reviewed. The school's off-site engagement programme provides effective support for young people who have disengaged in their learning. This enables them to re-engage in education and achieve relevant qualifications. Senior leaders and staff should continue working with families to improve attendance further.

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Other relevant evidence

- Young people experience their entitlement to high-quality physical education and their entitlement to modern languages 1+2 through Italian and French. Young people receive their full entitlement to religious and moral education (RME) from S1-6 and religious observance in line with national guidance.

- 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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school meals provider that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

- Young people benefit from the use of a vibrant school library. Young people take part in a wide range of activities such as competitions, reading groups and activities. A range of faculties use the library provision to enhance young people's learning effectively.

- Senior leaders and staff ensure that the cost of the school day is reduced. Young people have access to a wide and varied range of supports to ensure that they are not missing out, such as, uniform bank, personal care items, breakfast club, free trips and school resources. Support provided to young people and their families for uniform begins as part of the transition process to secondary school. Staff across the school have secured additional funding to provide additional experiences for young people. For example, the expressive arts faculty has secured funding which provides young people with an instrument and music tuition across a range of possible instruments. As a result, they have reported an increase in the number of young people from their equity cohorts who have taken up this opportunity. Young people and their families are also supported financially throughout the year, in a discreet and dignified manner.

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Practice worth sharing more widely

- The school's values-led approach to equity is a significant strength. There is a strong understanding of the poverty-related attainment gap across the school. Staff understand the context of their community very well and work sensitively to remove barriers to learning. This results in an inclusive environment where young people feel valued and supported to attain and achieve. Senior and middle leaders use robust tracking and quality assurance processes to plan and evaluate targeted interventions, leading to improved outcomes for equity cohorts. Effective approaches, including mentoring and data-informed practice, are supporting young people to improve outcomes.

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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.

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