

Summarised inspection findings

Kelso High School

Scottish Borders Council

3 February 2026

Key contextual information

School Name: Kelso High School
Council: Scottish Borders Council
SEED number: 5632838
Roll (Sep 2025): 555

Attendance is generally in line with the national average.

In 2022/23, the school's exclusion rate was in line with the national average. In 2024/25, exclusions have decreased substantially, based on the school's data.

In September 2024, 10.5% of young people were registered for free school meals.

In September 2024, no young person lived in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

In September 2024, the school reported that 56% of young people had additional support needs.

The school has challenges in filling teaching vacancies and covering for teacher absences. Senior leaders have increased their teaching time to support young people.

1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

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

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

- Senior leaders actively involved young people, parents and community partners in developing a shared vision, values and aims for the new school. These were reviewed most recently in 2024. The school's values, encapsulated in the acronym PRIDE, are clearly articulated and embedded consistently across the school community. Young people's use of the values makes a strong and positive contribution to the school's ethos and quality relationships. Young people demonstrate the values through their leadership of whole-school events, such as an annual remembrance service. Young people show a high level of respect and responsibility in commemorating those who served and sacrificed in war. Senior leaders have made limited progress in aligning the school's values, vision and aims with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This work remains at an early stage. As a next step, senior leaders should ensure a coherent and sustainable rights-based approach is embedded consistently across the school.
- Senior leaders and staff have a strong understanding of the school's social and economic context. This insight informs improvement planning effectively. Senior leaders use this contextual knowledge strategically, for example, in the allocation of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to raise attainment. Young people most likely to benefit from planned interventions are targeted for support using PEF. The headteacher has worked well with partners to develop the curriculum to meet the local and unique aspects of the school community.
- Senior leaders take account of national and local priorities when devising the school improvement plan. They use detailed quality assurance and evaluative activities that provide a structured approach to instigating and monitoring change. The headteacher has an accurate overview of most of what is going well in the school and what needs to improve. Senior and middle leaders give teachers feedback on how to improve further learning and teaching. Most teachers also visit each other's classes and give feedback. As a result, almost all teachers seek ways to improve their practice. The programme of professional learning is now matched better to improving the school. Senior leaders' and staff's efforts in doing this has been recognised by external accreditation by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). Senior leaders should ensure greater consistency in how improvement priorities are addressed across the school. Leaders at all levels should align further whole-school and departmental improvement plans, while still focusing on subject-based priorities. Further, all improvement plans should more explicitly indicate details of expected outcomes and how they are evaluated.

This would help senior leaders to strategically monitor improvement activities and ensure a thorough approach to driving sustained change.

- The headteacher has revised the structure and focus of the Extended Leadership Team involving senior and middle leaders. This supports consistency in how improvements in key areas are taken forward to implement change. Senior and middle leaders are collaborating more on areas such as improving young people's skills in literacy and auditing how numeracy can be improved further. Recent impact is being realised in the use of digital technology, improved learning and teaching and broader curriculum pathways. Senior and middle leaders need to apply more strategic approaches to raising attainment. A number of initiatives are at an early stage of implementation. For example, senior leaders are beginning to embed important aspects of inclusive practice. Senior leaders should continue to embed important aspects of Developing Youth Workforce (DYW) priorities in whole-school strategic planning. These areas include meta-skills and career education. Senior leaders need to work with staff to establish a clear and coherent vision for implementing these priorities. As planned, the headteacher should continue to develop the leadership capacity of the senior leadership team.
- The headteacher has created successfully very collegiate and open approaches with staff to improving the school. She has created a range of staff-led improvement groups. Leaders of these groups should now engage young people in this work. Almost all staff have assumed and embraced a whole-school leadership role. This has increased staff motivation to support improvements. The headteacher has established successfully a range of additional promoted principal teachers with remits focused on key aspects of the school's improvement agenda. The headteacher is aware of how these leadership roles need to increase the pace of change. Senior leaders' pace in taking forward change has been impacted by challenges in staffing and increases in their own teaching time. Going forward, senior leaders will need more support from the local authority with teacher recruitment, retention and short-term absence cover.
- Stakeholders and partners contribute well to learning pathways in a minority of areas. Going forward, senior leaders should build on how partners have shaped changes to the senior phase curriculum. The Parent Council's focus on young people's appropriate use of mobile phones during the school day has been accepted well by young people. More partners, young people, and parents should be involved from the outset of planning school improvement.
- Young people in the senior phase engage very effectively with a range of leadership roles. For example, the Head Team have a high profile across the school. They lead activities at assemblies and a variety of committees. Other young people in S6 lead a drama group and have roles as sports leaders, digital leaders, buddies and subject ambassadors. A few young people have gained formal leadership awards. Recently, young people have engaged in aspects of staff recruitment. Going forward, young people across all year groups should have leadership opportunities. Additionally, the established Pupil Parliament needs to have a sharper focus on influencing change.
- Teachers across faculties have participated in meaningful practitioner enquiry to support leading change. They shared their findings with the wider teaching staff. In a minority of departments, teachers have roles with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Middle leaders value how they are empowered to lead change. They lead their teams well and feel

that they are supported well by senior leaders. Most middle leaders have engaged in formal leadership training and use this well. Additionally, middle leaders share effective practice with colleagues from other schools. Teachers' and staff's use of digital technology have been shared locally, nationally and internationally. Teachers' sharing of practice is supporting greater consistency in achieving improvements in all departments.

- Senior leaders and staff are increasingly incorporating the GTCS professional standards into the Professional Review and Development programme. This includes references to expectations and skills associated with effective leadership. As a next step, senior leaders should continue developing leadership capacity at all levels. This would support effective leadership that drives forward improvement across the school.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Across the school, almost all staff and young people enjoy positive and respectful relationships. Most young people experience a calm, nurturing and inclusive environment that promotes a sense of belonging to the school. Most young people feel that they can approach staff when they need help and are encouraged to do their best.
- In most lessons, young people behave well and remain on task. They contribute well to a calm learning environment. However, in a few lessons low-level disengagement limits young people's progress. Staff should continue supporting a few young people with improving their behaviour.
- Almost all teachers use a clear lesson structure that supports well young people's learning and participation in activities. Teachers' approaches to delivering lessons are part of the recently refreshed Kelso High School lesson framework, 'The Kelso Way - This is how we do it here'. This outlines a shared approach to high-quality learning and teaching, expectations and consistency. Teachers are beginning to embed this approach in almost all lessons. Young people have well-established routines that support them to be confident in class.
- Senior leaders have established a programme of visits to classrooms to monitor how well changes are being implemented in lessons. Senior leaders and teachers gather data from these observations to inform future priorities for improving further learning and teaching. Senior leaders should, as planned, continue to work with staff to strengthen consistency, the quality of learning and teaching and inclusive approaches in line with the school values and aims.
- For the majority of time, teachers plan consistently activities that provide sufficient pace, challenge and active engagement. As a next step, all teachers should focus further on these areas to accelerate progress and attainment.
- Almost all staff are aware of the young people who require additional support with their learning. They access information about young people's needs in the 'Knowing our learners' overview provided by the pupil support team. All staff should now make better use of this information to plan and adapt learning better. Staff should focus more effectively on meeting the needs of all young people who require additional support with their learning.

- In most lessons, teachers use activities at the beginning of the lesson effectively to recall learning. As a result, young people recall prior knowledge well and are prepared for new learning. In most lessons, teachers share clearly the purpose of learning and how to be successful. Teachers are increasingly referring to how learners can be successful to keep them focused and concentrating on their learning. In almost all lessons, teachers' explanations are generally clear, and questioning is used to check for understanding. Staff should now develop further questioning to include more higher-order questioning approaches to promote deeper thinking.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers use summaries well, including at the end of the lessons to check for understanding. As planned, teachers should continue to embed high-quality summaries of learning more consistently. This would enable young people to consolidate and reflect on their progress effectively. Staff should continue to build on approaches to differentiation consistently across the school to support learners understand their next steps in learning. This would enable all young people to access better their learning and raise attainment.
- Teachers' and young people's use of digital technology is a strong feature of practice. This has been recognised with national awards. Teachers use digital learning effectively to motivate young people, sustain their interest and engagement, and reduce barriers to learning. Young people with additional support needs have improved access to learning through using digital technology. They use a range of assistive technologies confidently. These tools enable them to access the curriculum more readily, develop independence skills and prepare them for the world of work. Young people and staff's ongoing professional learning, delivered by the Digital Avengers, supports them build confidence and creativity skills.
- Across the school, most teachers use an appropriate range of assessment approaches. These include quizzes and sharing answers to questions using whiteboards. Teachers check regularly learners' work in the classroom to identify where support is needed. Summative assessments are issued in line with the school's quality assurance calendar. These help staff understand young people's progress. Across S1 to S6, staff should now make more effective use of assessment information to plan next steps and interventions to better meet the needs of all learners. This should include working with groups of young people, such as the middle and highest attaining young people.
- Teachers benefit from collaborating on standards with colleagues across the local authority during 'Cross Schools Day'. They engage in moderation activities, verification and understanding of standards. Teachers should plan using experiences and outcomes, and national Benchmarks. This is while aiming for breadth, challenge and application to provide young people with more coherent progression in their learning. Teachers should engage further with the approaches in the moderation cycle to support thorough and reliable professional judgements on young people's attainment. Verification in the senior phase is supporting a shared understanding of standards. A few teachers helpfully share their understanding of standards through their SQA duties.
- Teachers use a range of ways to check young people's progress. This assists them in planning learning for the majority of young people. Senior leaders and teachers should continue with

their plan to develop the S1 to S3 'Dynamic Tracker' to provide a more comprehensive overview of progress and resultant interventions across all curricular areas. In the senior phase, a majority of teachers use information from checking and monitoring young people's progress well to plan learning and interventions. Senior leaders have introduced a new and more detailed way of checking progress. This is at an early stage of identifying more timeously where additional support is required to secure better progress and attainment. Senior leaders and teachers should continue to develop skills in analysing data to raise attainment.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Senior leaders and pupil support principal teachers, work well with primary and secondary staff to ensure that wellbeing and learning needs are understood and addressed. Staff plan effectively to ensure young people are supported prior to transition to secondary school. Identified groups of young people benefit from a well-planned enhanced transition programme as they move from primary to secondary school. Senior leaders gather data only in literacy and numeracy at the point of transition from P7 to S1. Secondary-based teachers use this information as a generic baseline for English and mathematics.
- In S1 to S3, young people receive their full entitlement to learning across all curriculum areas. Young people learn French and German. Young people learn of the economic value of languages. However, the uptake for languages remains low in the senior phase. In S3, young people specialise within curriculum areas and study eight subjects. Senior leaders should consider further how project-based learning in S1, electives in S2, and the wider achievement offer in S3 provide clear progression pathways across S1 to S3 into the senior phase. Young people should, as required have an option at the end of S3 to check that their choice in subjects is the most appropriate for achieving qualifications in the senior phase.
- Staff recognise the need to continue developing a clear and shared strategy for ensuring literacy and numeracy as a responsibility for all is embedded across the curriculum. The school library is not utilised fully by staff and young people.
- Staff are creative in utilising the local area for outdoor learning experiences. For example, in S3, a few young people maintain the school garden as part of the rural skills course and the cycling programme. Moving forward, senior leaders should develop a coherent programme of outdoor learning experiences for all young people.
- Young people enjoy participating in physical education to the end of S5. They are not receiving their entitlement to religious and moral education (RME) in S4 to S6.
- Senior leaders make positive use of data, including preferred learner routes and career choices, to inform curriculum design. They have extended curricular options across the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 1 to level 7 to improve outcomes and engage young people in the senior phase. These include three Foundation Apprenticeships, a range of college courses, the introduction of Agriculture, Creative Industries, Barista Skills and Communications and Literature. A few young people progress to modern apprenticeships from foundation apprenticeships.
- Senior leaders have introduced new courses to reflect local labour market demand. These courses include rural skills, health and construction. Positive changes have recently been made to better meet the needs of young people attending college. As a next step, all departments should make more use of local labour market intelligence to inform curriculum planning.

- The personal and social education (PSE) programme provides opportunities for developing career management skills. This is yet to be integrated across subjects. As a next step, staff should embed the Career Education Standard (CES) within the curriculum.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Most parents appreciate the positive relationships established across the school community. They value staff's support for their children. Young people's achievements are celebrated routinely through assemblies and social media. Parents appreciate that staff and young people are organising performances again, such as musical shows.
- Most parents feel comfortable to contact the school if they have any queries or concerns. Senior leaders should continue to ensure that all parents receive consistently high-quality feedback on supporting their child's progress. They should continue to collaborate with a few parents who find the booking system for appointments at parents' evening restrictive.
- The Parent Council is establishing a more representative approach to the school community. Recently, parental numbers attending Parental Council meetings have increased. The Parent Council has engaged very well with the school on a mobile phone policy and in increasing the profile of the Awards Ceremony within the local community. Senior leaders should continue discussing with the Parent Council key areas of improving the school, as relevant to their remit.

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.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

satisfactory

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

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Most young people enjoy positive relationships with peers and staff. These support strongly young people's wellbeing and contributes to a calm, purposeful learning environment. Most young people feel safe and respected. Almost all young people are confident in approaching staff with concerns, and as a result, they understand strategies to keep themselves safe.
- Young people's wellbeing is enhanced through staff's use of a wide range of effective activities and interventions. These help young people develop resilience and positive mental health. Initiatives focusing on sleep, gender equality and mental wellbeing have led to increased awareness and healthier lifestyle choices among most young people. Senior and middle leaders should improve further their leadership of wellbeing to ensure consistently high outcomes for all young people. Teachers need to be clearer about their role in promoting wellbeing so that every young person experience coherent support aligned with school and departmental priorities.
- A range of key partners support well the school's work on health and wellbeing. This includes police, education psychology, autism spectrum disorder and health service. Young people feel well supported as they grow and develop based on this effective offer of services. The National Health Service offer young people a weekly drop-in service within the school. Young people use this well. This gives them a secure and safe space to discuss their wellbeing concerns with a specialist health professional. The police are reactive to issues across the school and local community. They also provide supportive inputs to the PSE programme. As a result, young people's understanding of their own wellbeing, and strategies to use, are increasing.
- Young people in S1 to S3 demonstrate increased awareness of their wellbeing through regular assessments. Young people are aware of their overall holistic wellbeing, their strengths and any barriers to growth. As a result, young people access timely interventions that improve resilience and mental health. Young people in S4 to S6 have a more limited understanding of wellbeing indicators, which reduces their ability to apply strategies in daily life. Staff should strengthen support so that all young people understand how wellbeing influences learning and equips them with practical strategies for adulthood. Senior leaders need to continually raise the profile of wellbeing to ensure consistent, high-quality universal support across the school.

- Young people develop their knowledge, skills and understanding well in PSE to help them be prepared for various stages of life and development. Senior leaders, staff and young people should review the content of PSE course regularly to ensure it remains relevant and continues to improve outcomes for young people. It is important that course content affords young people more progressive learning in aspects such as inclusion, racism, diversity and personal safety.
- Most young people experience increasingly inclusive learning environments and timely strategies that reduce barriers to learning. Staff demonstrate awareness of statutory duties to promote wellbeing, equality and inclusion. This is contributing to safer and more supportive experiences for young people. Staff engage well with professional learning on inclusion, neurodiversity, nurture, anxiety management and suicide prevention. This has strengthened classroom practice and improved support for young people.
- Staff use detailed information about young people's strengths, areas for development and suggested strategies to plan increasingly effectively for learning. This enables timely support that reduces barriers and helps young people engage more successfully in lessons. Young people's strong ability to use digital technology independently to access learning and overcome barriers equips them very well for lifelong learning. Senior leaders should continue to support staff to implement successful strategies quickly and share good practice, ensuring consistently positive outcomes for young people.
- A few identified young people and small groups, receive targeted support from a skilled team of teachers, pupil support and pastoral assistants. These are leading to improved outcomes in literacy, numeracy and developing social skills. Young people benefit from dedicated nurture spaces, as well as teachers' adoption of strategies that enhance learning. This is improving young people's learning experiences, with young people being more confident in larger spaces. Young people overcome barriers and engage more successfully in learning. Senior leaders should continue to ensure universal supports develop further inclusive approaches. Teachers should strengthen awareness of neurodiversity and promote consistent sharing of effective practice that leads to improved experiences for all learners.
- Young people who face challenges with attendance are supported effectively by staff and key partners. This is resulting in attendance levels that match the national average and improved punctuality. Young people engage more consistently in learning. Senior leaders should continue to strengthen and use monitoring approaches to sustain positive trends and reduce barriers to achievement.
- A few young people follow part-time timetables for a variety of reasons. Effective support from partners helps these young people maintain engagement in learning and reduce barriers caused by absence. Senior leaders should review the use of part-time timetables more regularly in line with local authority guidance. They should ensure clear action plans are in place so that all young people return to full-time learning as quickly as possible.
- The number of exclusions in the most recent year is very low and has declined over time. This contributes to a more inclusive and stable learning environment for young people. Senior

leaders should continue to strengthen approaches that reflect national guidance on preventing and managing exclusions to sustain positive relationships and reduce barriers to achievement.

- 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 children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.
- Most young people feel that staff manage incidents of bullying well. A few young people express concern about the negative impact of bullying. These young people are unclear about how the school addresses incidents. Senior leaders should work further with young people, staff, parents and key stakeholders to develop clear, transparent guidance that promotes positive relationships and reduces bullying. Young people should be enabled to feel safe, confident to report concerns and understand the support available. Teachers' professional learning in restorative approaches will support staff to continue managing issues effectively and to sustain positive outcomes for learners.
- Young people refer to a few areas where they learn about equality, diversity and tackling discrimination. Senior leaders currently do not have a clear overview of where and how young people learn about, promote and support equality, diversity and discrimination. As a result, staff cannot demonstrate fully improved outcomes for young people in this area. Young people's deeper understanding of equality and diversity, and how to apply this in their daily lives, should remain a priority for senior leaders' curriculum planning. Senior leaders should build on existing models to increase stakeholders' awareness of neurodiversity and dyslexia. They should involve young people in a leadership group focused on promoting inclusion, leading to improved experiences for all young people.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

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

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

- Senior leaders should increase their strategic overview of progress and attainment from S1 to S3 into the senior phase. The current lack of oversight is limiting the school's capacity to secure sustained improvement. As a result, patterns of improving progress and attainment across the school are inconsistent, with the school not maintaining high standards over time well enough. Promptly, senior leaders need to develop and implement a coherent and planned strategy to ensure continuous improvement and better outcomes for all young people. Senior leaders indicate that they are improving the accuracy of how they record the percentage of young people requiring additional support with their learning. This will assist in analysing data.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy S1 to S3

- In 2023/24, almost all young people attained Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level or better in literacy and English. Most young people attained numeracy at CfE third level or better by the end of S3. For the same period, the majority of young people attained CfE fourth level in literacy. Less than half of young people attained CfE fourth level in numeracy in 2023/24. Attainment in numeracy has notably declined in 2023/24. Staff attribute this partially to challenges with staffing. Senior leaders should prioritise addressing these weaknesses to secure improvement in numeracy outcomes.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy senior phase

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, generally almost all young people leave with awards in literacy and numeracy. When this is not the case, senior leaders are able to justify the underpinning reason. Senior leaders have sharpened their focus on maximising the number of young people leaving school with an award in literacy and numeracy.

Literacy

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the school performed well for young people leaving school with a literacy award at SCQF level 5 or better for four out of five of these years. This was significantly higher or in line with the virtual comparator (VC). During these same four years, there is no clear pattern of improving literacy at SCQF level 6. In 2023/24, a minority of young people leaving school attained SCQF level 6. This is significantly lower than the VC.
- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the percentage of young people leaving school who require additional support with their learning (ASN) achieving a literacy award at SCQF level 5 or

better through units and at SCQF level 6 varies. In 2023/24, attainment improved at SCQF level 5 or better, with most young people with ASN achieving literacy. During the same time period, attainment declined at SCQF level 6. A minority of young people attained SCQF level 6.

- Between 2021 and 2025, most young people presented from S4 attained grade A to C passes in National 5 English. In Higher English, in three out of five of these years, most young people presented from S5 attained a grade A to C pass. Teachers should continue improving the quality of passes.

Numeracy

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the school's performance for leavers in numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better is generally in line with the VC for four out of five years. During this four-year period, the majority of young people attained numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better through units. In 2023/24, the majority of leavers with ASN attained numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better through units. Over time, between 2019/20 and 2023/24, there is no clear pattern of improving attainment at SCQF level 5 or better.
- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, there is no clear pattern of improving numeracy at SCQF level 6 for leavers, including for those with ASN. In 2023/24, only a minority of young people, including those with ASN, attained numeracy at SCQF level 6. This is lower than the VC for all leavers.
- Between 2020/21 and 2024/25 in S4 young people's numeracy at SCQF level 5 or better through units is declining. In 2024/25 attainment declined, with less than half of young people attaining SCQF level 5 or better. This is significantly much lower than the VC.
- By S5 and S6, based on S4, the school's performance at SCQF level 6 is declining. As a result, the school is performing significantly much lower or lower than the VC in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Only a minority of young people attained numeracy at this level.
- In 2024/25, senior leaders newly presented young people in S4 to S6 for National 5 Applications of Mathematics. This was to endeavour to raise attainment by using this course to better meet young people's need. As a result, a minority of young people attained a qualification. Going forward, the number of no awards in Applications of Mathematics should be reduced. In 2024/25, most young people presented from S4 and S5 attained a grade A to C in National 5 and Higher Mathematics. This was an improvement from 2024 when just over a half of young people attained National 5 Mathematics. Senior leaders increased their teaching time in mathematics in 2024/25 to reduce gaps caused by staffing issues. Teachers need to have a much closer look at providing progressive learning in mathematics so that young people are presented successfully for courses at the right level.

Attainment over time

S1-3

- As a high priority, senior leaders need to establish a clear and comprehensive overview of attainment across S1 to S3. There is considerable capacity to raise attainment through better use of data and quality moderation of learning, teaching and assessment.

Senior phase

- Senior leaders need to develop a coherent and thorough strategy to accelerate progress and attainment across the senior phase. Current approaches are diminishing attainment for too many young people. Senior and middle leaders review young people's attainment. There are a few action plans in place to support raising attainment in subjects. Senior leaders need to agree clearer action points with teachers, which are monitored regularly as part of attainment reviews. This should avoid unnecessary dual presentations in both National 4 and National 5 in the same subjects. Recently, senior leaders improved arrangements for planning, tracking and monitoring young people's progress at the senior stages to be more coherent and consistent. It is too early for this to have impact. Policies for presenting young people for courses and levels are not clearly defined, resulting in variability in decision-making and support. Going forward, senior leaders need to address more thoroughly emerging patterns of underperformance. They should continually monitor how well the curriculum is raising young people's attainment. This is a stated aim of the curriculum rationale.

Improving attainment for all

- Attainment for the lowest attaining 20% of all leavers is in line with the VC between 2019/20 and 2023/24, based on the average complementary tariff scores. For all leavers, including those with ASN, there is not yet a steady pattern of improvement.
- Attainment for the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of leavers, including for those with ASN needs to improve. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the attainment of the middle attaining 60% of leavers is significantly much lower than the VC for three out of five years. During the same time period, for the highest-attaining 20% of leavers attainment is significantly lower than the VC for three years and much lower than the VC for one year.
- Based on data for respective years, as the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of young people move through the school, there are too many patterns of the school's performance being significantly lower or much lower than the VC.

Breadth and depth

- Across all possible number of courses taken as qualifications in S4, by S5 and S6 the school is too often performing significantly much lower or lower than the VC. The percentages of young people in S4, S5 and S6 attaining the maximum number of qualifications is too low.
- Staff are increasing the choice of courses available to young people. This includes what is relevant to them locally, such as getting accreditation for Scots language. New courses are having most impact in raising attainment at SCQF level 3 or better and SCQF level 4 or better.
- At S4, between 2020/21 and 2024/25, a minority of young people attained six or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better. During this time period, the school performed significantly much lower or lower than the VC. Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, most young people attained one or more qualifications at SCQF level 5C or better. For two out of four of these years, this is significantly lower than the VC. Between 2022/23 and 2024/25, attainment at SCQF level 5A or better for one or more to three or more qualifications is declining. There is a three-year pattern of the school performing significantly lower and much lower than the VC.

- Overall, by S5, between 2020/21 and 2024/25, less than half of young people attained SCQF level 6C or better for one or more to four or more qualifications. The exception to this is for one or more courses at SCQF level 6C or better at this level in 2020/21 and 2021/22. Between 2022/23 and 2024/25, the school performs generally significantly lower or much lower than the VC at SCQF level 6C or better for one or more to three or more qualifications. In 2023/24 and 2024/25, the school improved attainment at SCQF level 6C or better for four or more qualifications. Attainment at this level is now in line with the VC. Senior leaders should ensure that this improvement is sustained.
- By S5, between 2020/21 and 2024/25, only a minority of young people attained SCQF level 6A or better for one or more and two or more qualifications. During this time period, the school performed significantly lower or much lower than the VC in three out of five years. In 2024/25, attainment declined for SCQF level 6A or better for three or more and four or more qualifications compared to the VC.
- By S6, between 2020/21 to 2024/25, at SCQF level 6C or better and SCQF level 6A there is no consistent pattern of improving attainment. Between 2022/23 and 2024/25, at SCQF level 6C or better for one or more qualifications attainment is declining and is now significantly much lower than the VC. In 2024/25 for SCQF level 6C or better for two or more and three more courses and SCQF level 6A or better for one or more courses, the school performs significantly lower than the VC.
- By S6, between 2020/21 and 2024/25 attainment at SCQF level 7C or better for one or more qualifications has declined. A few young people attain at this level between 2022/23 and 2024/25. This is significantly much lower than the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24, and significantly lower than the VC in 2024/25.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Senior leaders have a range of successful approaches to celebrate achievements. As a next step, senior leaders should assist young people recognise the skills they develop through wider achievements. Senior leaders should also have a thorough overview of young people's participation in wider achievements to ensure that no young person is missing out on achievements.
- A few young people worked together to improve a local skatepark and light system. In doing so, they were supported well by Kelso High School youth workers and community learning and development. Young people demonstrated their leadership skills and increased their confidence through this project. This was recognised with awards such as Saltire, Dynamic Youth or Silver Youth Achievement Awards.
- The majority of young people do very well in sports, such as horse racing, rugby, mountain biking and curling. A few young people compete locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Staff make strong use of local resources to raise standards in achievements, particularly around sport. Young people's achievements are shared with the wider community in a variety of ways, including school social media platforms, the local community magazine and the Weekly Update to all families.

Equity for all learners

- No young person resides in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 1 and 2. Senior leaders are aware of how rural poverty manifests in their catchment area. Most young people reside across SIMD 5, 6 and 7. In 2022/23 and 2023/24, the school's attainment, when compared using average complementary tariff scores to national data, improved for leavers at SIMD 5 to be in line from a low base. Leavers who reside in SIMD 6, perform lower than national data for three out of five years between 2019/20 and 2023/24. During the same time period, leavers residing at SIMD 7 have significantly lower attainment for three out of five years, and significantly much lower in 2019/20. Staff are currently improving how they identify young people and groups of young people whose progress and attainment they should be tracking better to close gaps in attainment.
- Senior leaders and staff used PEF and locally-based funding to impact positively in closing gaps for identified young people. This supports young people's wellbeing and accelerates progress for identified individuals, including winter leavers. As a result, a few young people increase their total learning time in school, leading to raised attainment. Senior leaders take good account of the cost of the day. They minimise or remove costs for trips and events. Young people bid for financial support from a local fund, the Thomas Macconochie Trust. Senior leaders should continue using these funds to enhance opportunities for achievement, as relevant to the school's context.
- While young people's attendance is in line with the national average, there are a few individuals for whom low attendance is a barrier to attainment. Senior staff use data from the local authority hub effectively to plan targeted support for young people at risk of not achieving a positive destination. Partners work well together through 14+ meetings to coordinate interventions, such as the 'Inspiring Young Minds' and 'Effective Now' programmes. As a result, young people develop skills for learning, life and work. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, almost all leavers are in a positive destination. There has been a decline in the percentage of young people going to higher and further education. At the same time, there has been an increase in the percentage of young people going into employment on leaving school.

Explanation of terms of quantity

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

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

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

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