

6 October 2026

Dear Parent/Carer

In March 2025, HM Inspectors published a letter on Ayr Academy. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and young people. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

All staff should continue to ensure there is high-quality learning and teaching in all lessons. This should include a focus on planning tasks and activities set at the right level of difficulty to meet the learning needs of all young people.

Strong progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Senior leaders and staff have worked hard to create a more consistent approach to learning and teaching across the school. Staff are working well to develop a shared understanding of what high-quality learning and teaching looks like across the school through the implementation of the 'Ayr Academy Lesson'. Lessons now follow a clearer structure and teachers have higher expectations of young people. As a result, young people's engagement in learning has improved. While improvements are evident in most lessons, all staff should continue to strengthen consistency in learning and teaching across all classes.

Teachers have engaged positively in professional learning and collaborative working to improve classroom practice. This is resulting in lessons which are better planned and structured. In most lessons, learning is increasingly at an appropriate pace and becoming matched more effectively to the needs of learners. Teachers know young people well and are becoming more skilled at adapting learning and support. Classrooms are increasingly inclusive and supportive environments where young people feel able to learn and succeed. Staff should continue to ensure that learning activities provide the right level of challenge for all young people so that everyone can make the best possible progress.

Senior leaders should further develop approaches to evaluate the work of the school. This will help to ensure that staff at all levels are more confident at applying national standards to all aspects of change and improvement.

Strong progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Senior leaders have created a stronger culture of ambition, aspiration and success across the school. Staff and young people demonstrate higher expectations and greater confidence in improvement activities. Senior leaders have strengthened arrangements for checking the quality of the school's work and supporting improvement. Staff at all levels are now more involved in evaluating practice and using evidence to identify what is working well and what needs to improve. Departments have clearer improvement plans and there is greater focus on tracking progress and improving outcomes for young people. Senior leaders review improvement work more regularly, helping staff to monitor progress and evaluate impact. Professional review and development arrangements are now more closely linked to school improvement priorities. This helps staff to understand their contribution to improving outcomes. The school should continue to strengthen the use of self-evaluation to ensure all improvements lead directly to better outcomes for young people. This should include helping young people understand how their views influence school improvement.

Staff are developing a stronger understanding of national standards through moderation activities, professional learning and collaboration with other schools. This is helping to improve their confidence in professional judgement and is supporting greater consistency across the school. Staff should continue to develop their understanding and application of national standards, particularly where this impacts on attainment.

All staff need to work together to raise attainment and aspiration at all stages across the school. This will help to ensure learners achieve outcomes in line with other young people in similar contexts across Scotland.

Sufficient progress has been made in this area for improvement.

Attainment in S1-3 is improving, with more young people achieving expected Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy than in previous years. Staff are making better use of attainment data to identify young people who require support and to intervene earlier when concerns arise.

Staff are increasingly working together to improve learning, teaching and attainment and there is growing evidence of a whole-school commitment to raising aspirations. Learner conversations are more targeted and contain more ambitious and achievable targets. New success planning approaches provide young people with clearer guidance about how to improve their attainment. This is helping young people to set more aspirational goals and to take greater ownership of their learning.

The school should continue its work to ensure that attainment is consistently strong across all stages and for all groups of learners. While attainment in the broad general education is improving, the impact of improvement activity in the senior phase is not yet as strong. Staff

should continue to concentrate on closing gaps in attainment and ensuring that more young people achieve qualifications at higher levels.

Raise attainment in the senior phase, with a particular focus on English, maths and top-quality passes across all subjects.

Progress has not yet been sufficient to secure the required improvements.

Leaders and staff have taken a more strategic approach to analysing attainment information and planning interventions to support young people. The English and mathematics departments have reviewed courses and introduced new pathways to improve progression and attainment. There are early signs of improvement in entries and attainment in some courses, particularly at S4. While this is encouraging, attainment in English and mathematics remains too low and is below national measures and that of similar schools. Targeted interventions are helping more learners remain on track to achieve qualifications. Staff are increasingly concentrating on helping young people achieve their highest possible level of success and are making better use of data to support this work. The number of young people achieving higher level qualifications and top-quality passes remain important areas for improvement. Leaders should continue to monitor the impact of new pathways and interventions to ensure they lead to sustained improvements in attainment over time. Staff should maintain a strong focus on aspiration, participation and achievement to ensure more young people leave school with the qualifications they need for future success.

What happens next?

The school has made progress since the original inspection. We will ask for a report on progress for the area for improvement related to attainment in the senior phase within 12 months of the publication of the letter. This report will inform any decision made by HMIE regarding further engagement. This may include another inspection visit. When such a decision is made, we will write to parents again, detailing the improvements the school has made and outlining any further action, agreed with South Ayrshire Council that we intend to take.

Jacqueline Gallagher
HM Inspector

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