

Summarised inspection findings

Fettes College

Independent

2 September 2025

Key contextual information

Scottish Ministers requested that HM Inspectors conduct a special inspection of Fettes College in accordance with section 66 (1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. In February 2025, HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Fettes College. During our visit, we engaged with children and young people, parents/carers and partners and worked closely with the Board of Governors, the head and staff. We examined the college's provision in relation to approaches to ensuring equality and inclusion and for challenging discrimination or bias. We also looked at the college's approaches to curriculum development, improving the quality of learning and teaching, and measuring children and young people's progress. Approaches to safeguarding, child protection and pupil welfare including college policies, and the implementation of these policies were also included as part of the inspection.

Fettes College is a co-educational independent day and boarding school situated in the west of the City of Edinburgh. The college has a preparatory (prep) school for children aged seven to 13 and a senior school for young people aged 13 to 18. In February 2025, there were 160 children and young people at the prep school and 560 young people in the senior school. Most children and young people in the prep school are day pupils. Most young people in the senior school are boarders.

The head of college (head) has been in post for six years. She is supported by a leadership team of 25 colleagues. In the prep school this includes a headmaster, a deputy head and head of pastoral care and child protection. In the senior school this includes a senior deputy head, deputy head (academic) and deputy head (pastoral).

1.2 Leadership of learning: Impact of career-long professional learning

- Supported by the Board of Governors (the Board), senior leaders have created conditions which positively promote and support career-long professional learning. This approach to professional learning is a key contributor to initiating well-informed change. Staff use protected time well to engage in professional learning opportunities, including collaborating with colleagues and sharing effective practice. At all levels, staff are dedicated to improving their practice. They participate in a comprehensive range of valuable individual, departmental and whole-college professional learning. Their professional learning is linked closely to college improvement priorities and takes appropriate account of General Teaching Council standards for teaching staff. A few staff are working towards achieving accredited awards in leadership.
- Board members and all staff engage in ongoing, high quality professional learning to improve their understanding of antiracism, decolonising the curriculum and equity. This includes guest speakers, online courses and professional reading. Teachers are successfully adopting new learning and teaching approaches, making positive adaptations to the curriculum and promoting antiracism and equity, for example through the use of wall displays. Senior leaders monitor and evaluate closely the impact of professional learning on staff performance in this area. They observe the quality of teaching and learning, examine adaptations to the curriculum and gather views from staff, children and young people on their understanding and appreciation of issues related to antiracism and equity.
- Staff's engage in an extensive range of professional learning to help promote diversity, equality and inclusion, and to decolonise the curriculum. Across all curricular areas, teachers have engaged in relevant professional learning which is helping them recognise and work to address the legacies of colonialism, racism and injustice. Staff are challenging bias and stereotypes related to race and religion, for example, through class debates on stereotypes portrayed in contemporary music lyrics. Teachers are promoting and celebrating the contribution of ethnic minority figures to academia, culture and science. Texts and wall displays in English, history, economics and science promote the importance and contribution of African and Asian authors. Through this work, most teachers are recognising and addressing the legacies of colonialism, racism and injustice successfully. Children and young people speak confidently and knowledgeably of their learning about diversity, equality and inclusion.
- Senior leaders have developed a comprehensive approach to improving the quality of teaching. This includes high-quality professional learning for staff, a clear learning and teaching strategy and staff-led, research informed initiatives to improve practice. Senior leaders use a considerable range of quality assurance arrangements to regularly review and enhance the quality of teaching. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching across the college. For example, staff's recent focus on skills development in the prep school is leading to children and young people understanding better the skills they are developing through their learning. Senior leaders should continue to develop their learning and teaching strategy to ensure expectations are clear to all staff.
- Staff are highly responsive to the emerging health and wellbeing needs of children and young people. House parents and tutors are accessing high-quality, bespoke professional learning which is enabling them to support children and young people with their social, emotional and mental health needs.

1.4 Leadership of management and staff: Governance framework

- Board members have clear oversight of the work of the college including the prep school, senior school and the boarding residences. They monitor and evaluate effectively the college's performance and contribute well to both regular full board meetings and a range of sub-committees. In sub-committees, Board members monitor and evaluate key areas of college performance well including academic progress, safeguarding and risk management. Board members work effectively with senior leaders. Their collective strategic leadership contributes well to supporting high-quality outcomes for children and young people, particularly their attainment and achievement.
- Board members provide regular and appropriate support and challenge to senior leaders on many aspects of college performance. They have a key focus on meeting the academic and pastoral needs of children and young people. Senior leaders speak very highly of the ongoing support and challenge they receive from board members. In particular, they value board members' availability to provide support and advice. Board members should now work with senior leaders and staff to help ensure all approaches to promoting positive behaviour are applied consistently across the whole school notably, the use of merits and demerits, suspensions and sanctions.
- Overall, governance arrangements in the school are of a high quality but this is not always evidenced sufficiently well in meeting minutes. Board members and senior leaders should improve the quality of minutes of board meetings to recognise and record better the work of the Board of Governors. Minutes should illustrate clearly that the Board of Governors are content that all policies and procedures are being adhered to by senior leaders.
- All board members have clearly defined roles to support governance arrangements. The Board has introduced a nominations sub-committee to oversee succession planning for future board membership. The nominations sub-committee consider potential candidates for the board, ensuring new members bring valuable skills and experience to strengthen school governance further.
- All board members are regular visitors to the college and are invested in engaging with the school community. They attend a wide range of sporting and cultural events at the school, and recently provided parents with an opportunity to engage more with them through a 'Meet the Governors' event. Board members have also started to seek the views of parents on college performance through surveys and questionnaires. To build on this positive engagement, the Board should continue to identify ways to be more visible across the school. They need to continue to seek the views of the wider school community, particularly children and young people, to help identify and support further school improvement.
- The school takes account of a range of factors when considering the awarding of scholarships, including the need to attract new students for financial purposes, and ensuring the process for awarding scholarships is fair and equitable. All assessments for scholarships use consistent criteria to help ensure fairness throughout the process. Staff have completed an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the arrangements for awarding scholarships to help make sure children and young people with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged. Using the EIA, the school's diversity, equality and inclusion team explored if any children or young people with protected characteristics required support during the assessment process for the awarding of scholarships. They subsequently identified the need to adjust assessment approaches for the awarding of academic scholarships for applicants with English as an additional language (EAL). As a result, children and young people with EAL are given more thinking time during the

interview component of the assessment. Their language proficiency, including English vocabulary when answering questions is factored into their score. The school's arrangements for awarding scholarships also takes good account of children and young people's prior learning and personal circumstances. For example, children who have not previously studied Latin or Greek are excused from completing this component of the academic assessment.

- The school has in place a well-established, committee-led, approach for the awarding of scholarships. A group of senior leaders including the headteacher, scrutinise the outcomes of the assessment process and agree collectively who should be awarded a scholarship. All the assessment outcomes for academic, all-rounder and specialist scholarships are moderated carefully by this group. This helps minimise and mitigate the risk of any bias in the decision-making process. A further level of governance is provided by the Chair of the Board of Governors who also scrutinises the outcomes of the committee prior to scholarships being awarded.

2.2 Curriculum

excellent

This indicator highlights the importance of placing the needs of learners at the centre of curriculum design and development. The structure and delivery of the curriculum should take good account of local and national circumstances. The curriculum is the totality of learning experiences across the four contexts as delivered by the school and its partners. An effective curriculum results in strong outcomes for all learners. The themes are:

- Rationale and design
- Development of the curriculum
- Learning pathways
- Skills for learning, life and work

- Children and young people benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum that in its totality is outstanding. Staff ensure that the curriculum offer is underpinned strongly by an aspirational vision with a clear focus on academic excellence, building character and supporting personal wellbeing. Staff use this vision very well to provide children and young people with a wide range of very high quality experiences across all areas of the curriculum. Children and young people benefit greatly from extensive opportunities for personal achievement and participation in the wider life of the school. As a result of the very high quality curriculum, children and young people's attainment and achievement are excellent.
- Across the college, staff design, develop and deliver a curriculum that takes account of the diverse, international and boarding context. They make effective use of the extended school day and week to provide a well-balanced blend of academic learning, games, sports, music and drama commitments. A few children and young people find the demands of the day challenging. Staff should continue to support children and young people to manage their academic and wider curricular commitments and sustain their wellbeing.
- Children experience a broad and balanced curriculum when they start the prep school at age seven. Their needs and interests are at the centre of the prep school's curriculum design and development. Staff are very successful in achieving their core aim of developing thoughtful, reflective, resilient, kind and creative learners and in best preparing children and young people for the move to senior school. Children and young people benefit from a well-developed creative and performing arts programme that plays a central role in developing their creativity. Their participation in sport is a core element of the extensive and wider curriculum on offer. Children and young people develop an increasingly broad and varied range of important skills and qualities including teamwork, collaboration, determination and self-esteem as they progress through the college.
- Across the prep school, staff engage in a robust and regular review of the curriculum at a department and whole prep school level to ensure children and young people experience a high quality and relevant curriculum. Heads of department in the prep school are passionate subject specialists. They work very well with staff, including colleagues from the senior school, to ensure programmes of work support children and young people to build on their prior learning. Staff's strong collaborative approach supports very effective curricular transition between the prep and senior school. They engage in regular professional learning and action research which ensures that the curricular offer evolves and develops to meet the changing needs and interests of learners.
- All departments in the prep school use very well-structured programmes of work which support teachers to plan interesting and varied learning experiences that support and challenge the learners very effectively. Staff's plans for learning focus very well on ensuring children and

young people gain the appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to their age and stage. Heads of department create these very helpful programmes of work and engage in regular cycles of evaluating and improving the offer. All children and young people experience learning across the curriculum that is progressive, relevant and provides appropriate levels of challenge.

- At the senior school, staff use clear and strong processes which enable departmental curriculum development. They are reflective and continuously review and refine the curriculum. This is ensuring young people benefit from a very high quality curriculum with numerous opportunities for personal achievement, interdisciplinary learning as well as learning in specific curriculum areas. Staff have worked successfully with parents and young people to adapt and improve both the academic and wider curricular offers. For example, in response to feedback staff recently successfully introduced engineering, enterprise and technology to widen their curricular offer.
- Staff across the college have a deep professional understanding of their key curricular areas. They use this knowledge very well to engage in significant college and sector wide curricular improvement. They work with colleagues both locally and nationally to support curricular development within their school and beyond. For example, the college's sports coaches train regularly local children and young people. Through this, local coaches have built capacity in hockey and netball. Physics staff are helping teachers in other schools develop successfully a challenge club model to support young people to develop their knowledge of the subject. Staff are also developing Scottish Council for Independent Schools (SCIS) leadership courses linked to the national model for professional learning to build the capacity of independent school staff in line with national guidelines. Prep school modern languages staff hosted an international speaker to help develop their curriculum and invited teachers from local schools to participate. Prep school staff also shared their expertise at a national conference for independent schools. They are rightly proud of their role in influencing curriculum design and improvement beyond their school.
- Staff are very cognisant of the diverse range of children and young people in their school community as they develop the curriculum. They are very aware of the need to ensure all children and young people experience a curriculum which reflects them. The Diversity, Equalities and Inclusion (DEI) team have implemented very effective practices when developing the college curricula. Staff are proactive in ensuring diversity is embedded in the school curriculum. They consider the full range of protected characteristics when planning learning, selecting topics and texts, creating wall displays and highlighting historical figures in their subject areas. Staff have also developed the curriculum to ensure well-planned and progressive learning across a range of diversity, equality and inclusion topics. This development is supported using equality impact assessments of the curriculum. Importantly, staff's approach to diversity, inclusion and equality is supporting greater understanding and challenge of prejudice-based language by both staff, children and young people. As a result, the curriculum goes beyond raising children and young people's awareness of diversity and equality and equips them with the skills and confidence to challenge prejudice and discrimination.
- The DEI team are supporting all departments in the school to review their curriculum to reflect best practice in DEI. Staff ensure that children and young people's learning in multi-faith and religious education (RE) is well-planned and progressive. They use clear course plans that detail the content to be covered across subject areas including both personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and RE. As children and young people move through the school, they are supported to and are actively exploring a broad range of diversity and multifaith issues. For example, staff have successfully focused developing their diversity,

equality and inclusion curriculum in PSHE. This includes lessons examining multi-faith issues such as Islamophobia and antisemitism, hate crimes and challenging racist ideology. In the prep school, children are benefiting from well-planned learning in religious and moral education. In the senior school, staff work closely with a local interfaith society to ensure young people learn about a wide range of religions through guest speakers. These approaches develop children and young people's understanding of living in a diverse society. Most children and young people appreciate this learning as it encourages a culture of respect and tolerance across the school.

- As young people move into the senior school, they benefit very well from an appropriately broad core curriculum that successfully builds on their prior learning. In third form this includes three sciences, two languages, two humanities subjects and three expressive arts. Young people are set in English and mathematics with these sets carrying through to their other subjects. In fourth and fifth form, young people study nine GCSEs. They study five core subjects plus a language. These are English, mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics. Young people are then able to exercise choice across their remaining subject areas.
- In sixth form, young people choose one of two pathways, A-levels or the International Baccalaureate diploma programme (IB). These two routes provide young people with personalisation and choice in their studies. Young people typically study three or four A-levels. Staff also encourage young people to undertake the A-level Extended Project Qualification (EPQs). There is very well-judged use of EPQs. Young people in the sixth form who undertake these qualifications are highly motivated and enthused because of these opportunities which are deepening and extend their learning very successfully.
- Staff provide an outstanding and rich curricular offer beyond the normal courses of study to all children and young people. Children and young people engage in very high quality experiences through sports, drama, music, outdoor learning and a wide variety of clubs and societies. Children and young people also play a significant role in developing and leading the wider curricular programme across the school. This is supporting children and young people to contribute effectively to their school community.
- The college's super-curriculum provides rich opportunities for young people to extend and deepen their academic knowledge and understanding through a wide range of enrichment activities. Young people benefit highly from academic challenge classes, clubs and activities that stretch their thinking and challenge them to apply their learning in different contexts. They also engage readily and have success in a range of school, local, national and international competitions in English, mathematics, science, music and computing. Their success and recognition in these events are building young people's confidence and self-esteem.
- Staff have developed a very popular IB pathway over a number of years. Young people value highly the opportunities to personalise their studies through the IB programme. They develop important thinking and interdisciplinary skills through the very effective use of extended essays, the theory of knowledge course and the programme of creativity, action and service. Young people who study the IB pathway choose six subjects across a broad range of curricular interests.
- Staff, children and young people have a clear focus on learning for sustainability. Children and young people are developing very well a broad range of skills and understanding which promotes global citizenship, outdoor learning, children's rights and sustainable development. Young people are active agents of change in this work through, for example, the sustainability working group, equalities society, sustainability prefects and the volunteering planning club. Those staff who are leading learning for sustainability improvements have based their

approach very effectively on national self-evaluation guidance. They are in the process of mapping carefully young people's learning on sustainability across the curriculum so that there is increased consistency in learners' experiences.

- Across the college, children and young people's literacy, numeracy, digital and wellbeing skills are being developed very well across the curriculum. Staff use reading initiatives, digital tools for mathematics and the PSHE programme to provide meaningful opportunities for all children and young people to apply their knowledge and skills across all aspects their learning. Staff are very well supported to embed oracy skills in different curricular areas. This enables children and young people to articulate, discuss and challenge ideas. In the senior school, young people are very adept at using digital tools to access materials, create coursework and access feedback to support their learning across the curriculum.
- Across the college, staff, children and young people use the unique context very well to engage successfully in stimulating and high-quality outdoor learning. Children and young people's learning is enriched significantly in a broad range of aspects through varied indoor and outdoor experiences within extensive college grounds.
- Children and young people's literacy learning is enhanced by the well-used and vibrant school libraries. Key staff lead a range of initiatives to promote literacy through the libraries. Most departments make use of the libraries to enhance learning, especially literacy-based subjects, who use the provision in a range of ways. This includes, for example, developing young people's research skills. Staff in the library lead whole school initiatives such as World Book Day to promote literacy, assisted enthusiastically by pupil leaders. Staff, children and young people lead a range of clubs, events and competitions organised through the library which provide opportunities for children and young people to enhance further their literacy skills as well as applying these across many contexts. The library also contains a broad selection of diverse texts with an increasing number of carefully considered texts to meet a range of learning needs such as dyslexia. Staff have also developed a well-received provision to increase the offer of e-books and audio books. Young people and staff across the school influence the choice of texts and activities on offer. The library staff support young people to study and develop referencing skills, as well as preparing them well to use libraries confidently in their transition to post-school destinations.
- In recent years, staff have refreshed the prep school curriculum to have a stronger focus on skills development. Staff agreed a core set of five key skills of collaboration, resilience, critical thinking, creativity and empathy. They have reviewed and refreshed programmes and courses across the prep school to identify meaningful and relevant opportunities to embed skills development throughout learning. Staff and learners use confidently the language of skills within lessons. In a few departments, staff are trialling an approach to pupil profiles that incorporate the five skills. They have clear evidence of this supporting learners to reflect on their skills development and identify opportunities to build on these in all aspects of their curricular experiences.
- Staff have developed very successfully a middle school diploma which helps young people reflect on and develop their skills across the curriculum. This bespoke internal qualification recognises young people's achievements outside of class. It builds successfully on the skills young people developed in second form and prepares them for the demands of GCSEs. Young people achieve the diploma at bronze, silver or gold level when they have completed successfully their Fettes Passport in four areas: community; creativity and curiosity; wellbeing; and communication. Through this, young people gain important skills in leadership, communication and organisation. Staff should now consider how they develop further young

people's skills progressively across all stages of the curriculum. They should consider how best to build on the middle school diploma for young people in fifth and sixth forms.

- Staff are supporting young people very well to develop skills for life, learning and work. They have a focus on ensuring young people make informed choices. They provide very helpful careers guidance, university pathways sessions and subject choice meetings. Staff ensure young people are well-prepared for the world of work through careers fairs, work experience, summer internships, sixth form lectures and the professional digital profile workshop. Staff use a broad range of local, national and international intelligence sources to develop the curriculum. They use data-driven careers trends and higher education information successfully to ensure young people are well-placed for their next steps in the world of learning or work. The college's careers team work with a range of partners to ensure young people develop an important understanding of the world of work. For example, young people benefit from working with a range of employment and volunteering partners such as the local hospital and Fetlor Youth Club. Positively, young people are encouraged to reflect on their experiences following periods of volunteering or work experience. Staff use information from these appropriately to support further discussions about the full range of pathways on offer to young people.

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 motto of 'aim high, give back' underpins the ethos of learning across the college. Children and young people learn in a highly-positive, supportive and purposeful environment. Overall, children, young people and staff are very respectful towards each other and have positive relationships and interactions. They are highly motivated to succeed, displaying very strong levels of engagement and focus with their learning in almost all lessons.
- Children and young people participate extensively in school life. Their learning is enhanced through their strong sense of community which children and young people value. Children and young people learn and benefit from a vast range of experiences. They develop and acquire a depth of knowledge and skills in lessons and through a substantial offer of high-quality experiences beyond the classroom. This includes music, sport, scientific, cultural, and creative experiences.
- In most lessons in the prep school, children and young people have active roles when learning. They experience a high degree of choice with the learning content or in how they complete activities. Children and young people experience a balance of being able to work independently and to collaborate with peers. Children and young people's verbal and written responses to questions and activities are impressive and of an exceptionally high standard. In almost all lessons, children and young people learn in very well-paced lessons.
- In the senior school, young people's learning is enhanced significantly through a range of well-sourced partnership working such as highly-informative visiting speakers. In the majority of lessons in the senior school, aspects of lesson delivery can be overly teacher-led. Young people are very well-placed to take a greater role in leading their learning. Staff should continue to develop provision that results in young people learning through an appropriate balance of active learning and direct teaching in the senior school.
- Across the college, children and young people use digital technology well to help them learn. In the prep school, children use software productively to create posters and presentations as well as online platforms to support mathematics, English and reading homework. In physical education, children, young people and staff use devices appropriately to record and review practical activities, for example, gymnastics. Children and young people use these recordings appropriately to understand and know how they have been successful in their learning. Those children and young people who have additional support needs use digital technology very effectively to assist their learning and progress. They confidently use accessibility tools such as text to speech to access learning materials.
- In the senior school, most staff use digital technology effectively to deliver impactful learning experiences for young people. In the majority of lessons, there are highly-effective examples

of young people using digital devices, applications and programmes creatively to deepen and enhance their learning. Teachers use digital technologies and applications sensitively to support young people with specific learning requirements. This includes, for example, adaptive technologies and creative use of well-judged programmes to ensure young people for whom English is an additional language can participate fully in completing activities in lessons.

- Across the college, almost all teachers deliver very well organised, motivating lessons which offer very well judged pace and challenge to further children and young people's learning and progress. They ensure that children and young people contribute successfully to lessons. Their explanations and instructions are very clear. Children and young people's learning is considerably stimulated through delivery from passionate, enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers.
- In almost all lessons, teachers share the intended outcomes of learning effectively with children and young people. Almost all children and young people are clear about what they are learning and why. In the prep school, teachers work very well with children and young people to co-create learning intentions and success criteria at times. Children and young people need to do this regularly with all teachers to help understand what they are learning and why. In the senior school, in a majority of lessons, teachers share informative criteria with young people so that they know how to be successful in their learning. The quality and value of this criteria can be variable across departments. Teachers should develop further their skills in sharing high-quality success criteria so that all young people understand the measures of success.
- In the prep school, almost all teachers use questioning skilfully to check children's understanding, extend their knowledge, and develop higher-order thinking skills. As a result, children and young people are developing as critical thinkers who problem solve and make rational decisions in numerous areas.
- Teachers are implementing a shared approach to improve learning and teaching through a consistent approach to developing skills. They offer helpful advice to each other to improve children and young people's learning.
- In the senior school, almost all teachers use a range of effective strategies to check young people's understanding. The majority of staff use well-considered questioning to extend and deepen young people's learning. In highly-effective examples of practice, teachers use probing questioning to promote deeper levels of thinking amongst young people. Teachers use well-considered plenaries in most lessons to re-cap and consolidate young people's learning. In a majority of lessons, staff use plenaries constructively to make reference to planned future learning.
- In most lessons in the senior school, teachers provide experiences which cater effectively for the range of young people's needs. Teachers circulate well during lessons to offer timely support so that all young people can complete tasks and activities successfully. Staff also adapt activities and technologies appropriately and encourage young people to use their individual learning support strategies to access learning. This includes groups of young people who require additional support with their learning and those for whom English is an additional language. Staff foster a highly-inclusive culture where young people support peers with confidence.
- Across the college, almost all teachers give children and young people relevant feedback on the quality of their learning. They help children and young people to self-reflect and empower

them to comment on others' work. Children and young people value teachers' constructive verbal and written comments. This is supporting them to know what they have done well and how to improve their work. Senior leaders monitor teachers' feedback regularly which ensures consistency and alignment with school guidance.

- In the prep school, children and young people are very reflective. They use well-established prompts to reflect on areas where they achieve well or find challenging. They know what they are learning and what they have to do to achieve success. They share with their house tutor significant information about their learning, including personal progress targets which are reviewed on a termly basis. They use reflections very well to agree relevant individual targets for academic, co-curricular and wellbeing or kindness targets with form tutors. Individual children and young people are supported very effectively to achieve and know themselves as learners.
- In the prep school, teachers use a range of formative and summative assessments very well to assess children and young people's learning in different contexts and curricular areas. Summative assessment is particularly well-developed, with children and young people in first and second forms undertaking examinations for all subject areas twice per year. Teachers use various data sources very well to evaluate children and young people's learning, progress and attainment on a regular basis. Senior leaders monitor assessment practice closely, maintaining an accurate overview of learners' progress to identify those who need extra support.
- In the senior school, staff are supporting young people self and peer-assessing their learning. As a result, in a majority of lessons, young people are strengthening their own understanding of complex content by supporting peers. Staff offer a range of detailed and highly-impactful feedback to young people, including throughout lessons. This results in almost all young people understanding well and articulating clearly their progress and next steps in learning.
- In the senior school, teachers frequently use an extensive range of formative and summative assessments to check young people's progress. Assessment is well-matched to young people's level of need. Staff use robust moderation to plan assessment and to ensure they have highly-reliable and accurate judgements about young people's progress and attainment. To support their approaches to moderation, staff in most departments have successfully established links with staff in similar schools. Staff use learning from external verification to confirm or improve further their assessment judgements. Staff have a well-developed understanding of standards and use this knowledge to prepare young people very well for success in examinations.
- In the senior school, young people's progress in learning is tracked and monitored rigorously through well-established arrangements across all departments. Staff use this information very well to contribute to whole school monitoring systems. Middle and senior leaders use this information very well to quality assure effectively departments' success in supporting young people. Across all departments, staff use information about young people's progress meticulously to inform ongoing lesson planning help identify gaps in young people's attainment, and report progress regularly to parents.
- Teachers provide high quality teaching and learning experiences which cater very effectively for children and young people's needs. They use a range of approaches to ensure the individual needs of children and young people are met, including, support teachers, graduate assistants, digital supports, challenge classes, academic tutor sessions, in-class differentiation and setting. Setting is applied from second form onwards. In the second form,

setting takes place in mathematics only. In third form, young people are set in English and mathematics, with these sets carrying through to their other subjects. Teachers review these regularly to ensure young people are placed in the appropriate set.

- Staff in the senior school work well with young people and their families to use tracking data effectively to agree and review target grades. Staff, middle leaders and senior leaders track progress and attainment through monitoring groups such as young people who require additional support, young people for whom English is an additional language, academic scholars and those joining the school from a diverse range of backgrounds. Staff's approaches ensure and identify concern with young people's attainment or achievement are addressed effectively.
- Teachers plan effectively for all subjects in the prep school. They make meaningful links when planning children and young people's learning that incorporate various subjects and contexts. Teachers consistent use of planning approaches has a positive impact on children and young people's learning. They use assessment information and overviews of learners' needs very well to adapt planning of learning. They discuss regularly children and young people's progress, including in English and mathematics. Their collaborative approach provides an accurate overview and helps moderation through ensuring that judgements of children and young people's learning are accurate. Senior leaders meet bi-annually with teachers to discuss children and young people's progress in English, numeracy and mathematics. They review assessment data and identify and plan as appropriate next steps in learning with staff. Teachers support children and young people very well to identify targets, track progress in achieving these and agreeing next steps.
- In the senior school, senior leaders have supported staff well to develop highly effective approaches to planning which enhance young people's learning. All departments plan medium and long term learning judiciously through collaborative approaches. Staff value the ownership and flexibility they are afforded to their short-term planning. As a result, planning of individual lessons is responsive to ongoing formative assessment, with flexibility to adapt learning to young people's needs, interests and ongoing relevance of learning. Almost all teachers take account of prior learning when planning lessons. Most staff plan learning carefully for young people who have additional support needs. Staff plan high levels of challenge to meet young people's needs.

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, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the Board of Governors.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

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

- Across the school, staff have a strong focus on improving the wellbeing of children and young people. Staff are proactive in identifying and responding to welfare issues and concerns. Staff foster very nurturing and mutually respectful relationships with almost all children and young people. Staff meet frequently with children and young people to talk about their learning and wellbeing. This is built on staff's commitment to supporting children and young people's sense of wellbeing. As a result, almost all children and young people feel safe in school. They benefit from a welcoming and inclusive ethos. Almost all children and young people feel that staff help them to understand and respect others. Children and young people feel that staff treat them fairly and with respect. These are evident in daily interactions between staff and children and young people.
- Children and young people value the full boarding ethos provided to both boarding and day learners. They are supported very effectively by a team of adults aligned to school houses, including tutors, house parents and matrons. These pastoral teams demonstrate that they know children and young people as individuals very well. They respond proactively to concerns about a child or young person's wellbeing or academic progress and ensure appropriate support is offered. Importantly, they support children and young people to set well-considered and meaningful targets relating to their studies and wellbeing. This ensures children and young people understand their progress across all aspects of school life. Staff teams work together successfully to provide a very high standard of pastoral care. Children and young people share information such as concerns about relationships with peers, worries about exams or health issues. Staff are very responsive to concerns raised by children and young people. They immediately take action to support them and engage with others such as medical staff or counsellors if required. Most children and young people know they have a trusted adult to speak to when they are worried or upset.
- Almost all children and young people have a strong understanding of their wellbeing. They articulate confidently the meaning and importance of feeling safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included. Staff use termly wellbeing surveys successfully to gather helpful information about children and young people's health and wellbeing. Pastoral staff use this information very well to plan targeted interventions for children and young people. For example, staff will use children and young people's individual wellbeing surveys to talk about issues and concerns that impact on wellbeing, such as stress and anxiety. Staff and pupils agree strategies that will support them, including seeking help from others such as medical staff or specialists to support mental health.
- Children and young people are developing a sound understanding of children's rights and how these can improve their lives and those of others. The school community received a nationally recognised award for their work related to the United National Conventions on the Rights of the

Child (UNCRC). This work involved staff and children working together to audit current practices in the school and how these practices aligned with UNCRC. This first level of the award allowed children and young people to share information and raise awareness across the school community about how UNCRC can improve the lives of children and young people in the school beyond. They are building on this achievement by working towards the next level of this national award. Positively, senior leaders and staff are working together to review all of the school's policies and practice to ensure children's rights are well-established in all aspects of the work of the school. Importantly, staff started by reviewing their promoting positive relationships policy, with a clear focus on prioritising children and young people's sense of wellbeing, equality and inclusion. A few children and young people currently take a leading role in raising awareness about children's rights with their peers. Staff should now extend the participation of pupils to ensure they have an active role in decision making about new practices and policies under development.

- Almost all children and young people enjoy sports and games, including training by specialist coaches, as a regular feature of their curriculum. They speak enthusiastically about their achievements and success in team and individual sports, including many who represent their school, local area or nation in sporting endeavours. Children and young people demonstrate knowledge of the importance of a healthy diet and regular exercise to help them live healthy and active lives. Children and young people demonstrate very well developed teamwork and interpersonal skills as a result of these opportunities.
- Groups of young people in the sixth form lead aspects of health and wellbeing. These include well-considered roles such as personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) prefects and house prefects, mental health ambassadors, and Mentors in Violence Prevention. These young people act as role models to younger peers, offering valuable learning experiences which are highly motivating and relevant. They help their peers to develop emotional resilience and recognise societal issues. Young people value the chance to develop their confidence and leadership skills through these roles. Staff should continue to develop further opportunities for more children and young people to lead aspects of wellbeing, equality and inclusion. This will allow more children and young people to develop key life skills.
- Staff understand and apply very well their statutory responsibilities in relation to wellbeing, equality and inclusion. They meet their obligations to child protection and safeguarding. The college's approaches align very well with national guidance such as Getting it right for every child. As a result, staff are skilled in assessing and responding to the wellbeing needs of children and young people. In addition, they use information and guidance related to equalities very well resulting in an inclusive environment in which all children, young people and staff feel valued.
- Children and young people requiring additional support with their learning or wellbeing benefit and thrive as a result of carefully planned, holistic support. Key staff monitor and review these supports on a regular basis. Staff also work well with well-considered partners, such as a life-coach, school nurses and psychologists, who offer a range of helpful interventions to support children and young people. Children and young people speak very positively about the extensive support they receive from the team in the medical centre.
- Staff use support plans very well to capture their evaluation of children and young people's needs, the strategies used to support improvements, and to monitor and evaluate their progress over time. Almost all children and young people's barriers to learning or wellbeing are identified early and addressed proactively using these positive systems and processes. Children and young people with additional support make positive progress and achieve successful outcomes.

- Children and young people for whom English is an additional language (EAL) are supported very effectively by staff. When children and young people join the school, Teachers of EAL carry out assessments to understand their language proficiencies and use the data to plan appropriate support. Teachers routinely adapt and share materials to reflect children and young people's home language. Children and young people with EAL use digital technology skilfully, offering increased independence in their learning. Teachers of EAL provide professional learning to all staff on strategies to support learners with EAL. Positively, children and young people act as integration ambassadors and mentor new pupils to help them to adjust to their new environment. As a result of these approaches, most children and young people with EAL achieve very positive outcomes. Staff should continue to work with a few children and young people with EAL that they have identified as performing below expectations to improve their outcomes.
- Pastoral staff offer a highly effective PSHE curriculum that is progressive and relevant to children and young people's lives. Importantly, they use a range of well-considered contexts for learning. This includes speakers at chapel assemblies, discussions within boarding houses, and through timetabled lessons. Many of these inputs are led by children and young people and are informed by individuals sharing their valuable real-life experiences.
- A major strength of the school is staff's well-developed approach to promoting equality and diversity. They recognise the need to ensure fairness and equality in all aspects of their work and comply with the school's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy. Staff use equality impact assessments (EIA) appropriately to ensure policies take account of learners' protected characteristics. Following the EIA, staff amended the counter-bullying policy to provide clear information relating to prejudice-based bullying and how incidents should be recorded. This is resulting in the school community having a better, shared understanding of approaches to address and challenge prejudice-based bullying.
- The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) staff leads are dedicated to improving inclusive practices across the school. This includes supporting teachers to ensure resources and teaching approaches value and celebrate diversity and promote equality. Most teachers make reference to the protected characteristics through learning. They use a shared language that promotes inclusive practice. This helps almost all children and young people to make links with the concepts of dignity and respect across their learning. Importantly, the DEI lead has an integral role in reviewing and providing constructive challenge to improve the school's policies and practice to align with the Equality Act 2010.
- Children and young people join the school from diverse backgrounds, with over thirty countries represented within the school community. Children, young people and staff benefit from a range of highly effective opportunities to celebrate their cultural diversity. Staff encourage children and young people to share information regularly about their cultural heritage during learning, assemblies and whole school events. The school community celebrates cultural events and religious celebrations together in an inclusive, respectful way. Children and young people speak very positively about their ability to recognise and value differences.
- Children and young people report that there are occasions when prejudicial language is used by a few peers. They understand their role in reporting this type of behaviour as this ensures staff are able to address issues. They are supported to challenge discrimination through PSHE courses, assemblies and the house tutor system. Most children and young people feel that staff deal with these incidents well. The wide range of diversity, equality and inclusion work being undertaken across the school community is having a positive impact in reducing such incidents.

- A few young people in the senior school benefit leading and attending leadership groups focusing on equality and inclusion. This allows young people to meet in groups to discuss and explore issues relating to their identities and to explore and celebrate their cultural identity. These include the African Caribbean Society, Queer Culture, Asian Society, Islamic Society, Christian Union and the Fettes Equalities Society. Through these groups, young people also support their peers proactively to understand different cultures and faiths better.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

excellent

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

Prep school

- Overall, children and young people's attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is excellent. All children and young people achieve highly across their learning. Almost all achieve or exceed expected levels of attainment in English and mathematics. Those who have any additional support needs make very good progress in attaining or overtaking individual targets. Children and young people for whom English is an additional language progress very well.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

Attainment in English

- Children and young people are highly effective communicators. Almost all are highly attentive when listening to others. They respond very well to others' ideas. Almost all children and young people engage in quality conversations, sharing suggestions with enthusiasm and confidence. They are thoughtful, responsive, and put forward well-considered points of view when debating. A few need to develop further their confidence in contributing to group and class discussions in order to improve their verbal communication and collaboration skills.
- Almost all children and young people are fluent readers. They describe with confidence why they select books for enjoyment and personal reading. They use the extensive resources available to reinforce and extend their knowledge of different genres using them for various purposes, including research. Almost all children and young people talk confidently about different features in books. They use expression very well when reading aloud which engages the listener. They enjoy sharing their own poems and short stories which they are excited about submitting for the school's competition. They have well-developed skills in analysing and evaluating texts and can apply these skills in relating information to solve problems or predict outcomes.
- Children and young people's progress in writing is excellent. They write enthusiastically and at length for various purposes using correct structure, grammar and punctuation. Almost all are very competent when writing using varied styles, tones and content for different forms of writing. Almost all present their work very well, have high standards and clear expectations for their writing. Children and young people demonstrate very well their writing skills across their learning. For example, they create detailed diary entries for key historical figures and compile comprehensive fact files to demonstrate their knowledge of class topics.

Attainment in mathematics

- Across all stages, children and young people demonstrate very strong mathematical skills. Their attainment and progress is excellent. As children and young people move through the prep school, they use an increasing range of mental strategies and written methods with

accuracy. Almost all children and young people answer word problems with confidence. They convert word problems with confidence into solvable equations. Younger children solve one-step multiplication word problems confidently. They solve problems and know the order of operation in calculations involving indices accurately. By the end of prep school, most young people use algebraic vocabulary correctly and understand its use to solve linear equations. Almost all children and young people explain and justify their strategies with confidence. Children and young people use their skills in mathematics across curricular areas. For example, young people explored fractions as part of their recent work on artists. As planned, children and young people will benefit from consolidating how they represent improper fractions visually and convert between mixed numbers and improper fractions.

- Children and young people recognise and name two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects and features with accuracy. By the end of prep school, young people are confident in using, analysing and drawing parallel, alternate and corresponding angles. Throughout the prep school, children are developing a sound understanding of information handling. They collect data using charts and graphs to share information. By the end of prep school, most young people present and interpret information correctly in tables, charts and graphs in mathematics, and in other subjects, for example science.

Senior school

- Overall, young people's outcomes in literacy and numeracy are excellent. Very high levels of attainment are sustained. Young people develop exceptionally strong literacy and numeracy skills.
- All young people leave school with at least GCSE level literacy and numeracy, achieved through their English and mathematics qualifications. The majority of young people have achieved A-level in English and mathematics since 2019. In 2024, all young people who studied the IB qualification leave school with a higher level of English and mathematics as part of the diploma. All young people who study A-level English pass this course, with the majority attaining an A* to B grade.

Attainment over time

Prep school

- In recent years, almost all children and young people have maintained very high standards in English and mathematics. They attain in line with or exceed expected levels. Those, who have additional support needs, progress very well in achieving or exceeding personal targets. Senior leaders have a clear overview of children and young people's attainment over time in English and mathematics. They gather attainment data in other subjects which shows that children and young people progress very well and achieve consistently high standards across the curriculum. Senior leaders use data very effectively to identify attainment trends and where appropriate take actions to ensure children and young people have success.

Senior school

- Overall, young people's attainment is excellent. Almost all young people make excellent progress from prior levels of attainment and their achievement is consistently of an exceptionally high standard.
- Senior leaders and key staff have developed a robust range of systems to measure young people's progress and attainment over time across all stages and curricular areas. Staff ensure the consistency of this data very well through a common approach to tracking young people's attainment and effort. Staff's judgments are reliable and based on a wide range of well-planned

assessments, including baseline and standardised assessments. Senior leaders have robust approaches to maintaining an overview of the accuracy and effective use of this data.

- Between 2019 and 2024, almost all young people achieved eight or more passes, grades 4 - 9 at GCSE level, with most young people achieving nine or more awards. Notably, over a third of young people achieve ten or more passes at GCSE level since 2019 with a few learners achieving eleven or more pass grades. In 2024, the majority of young people's GCSE grades were 7 - 9, substantially above the independent school average. Generally, young people's performance is very strong and improving.
- Almost all young people who undertake qualifications at A-level achieved three or more of these awards between 2019 and 2024. The majority of young people achieve three or more A levels and an EPQ. A few young people achieve four or more A levels. In 2024, the majority of the cohort gained A* to B grades with a minority of all grades being A*. This is generally an increase on 2023 and 2022 levels of high performance.
- All young people in the sixth form who undertake the worldwide IB, achieved this qualification between 2019 and 2024. In 2024, performance of young people was at its highest level since the pandemic, with young people gaining an average of 38 points, compared with the global average of 30 points. Impressively, a few young people's achievement was near or at the maximum points award available.
- Young people's performance experienced a post-pandemic dip from 2022, however, for most levels, attainment remains very strong and continues to demonstrate patterns of improvement. The school's data demonstrates added value and improved performance from young people's prior levels of attainment. Staff also use this data to identify effective networks to collaborate effectively with other schools.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- All children and young people achieve successes and develop key skills in teamwork, communication and leadership and attributes for life and work through a wide variety of experiences. They develop significantly, their confidence and self-esteem. Children and young people's efforts and extensive achievements are acknowledged and celebrated on a very regular basis. Their successes are given high regard and praised by others at chapel, in lessons and through various internal and external awards. Their achievements are evident and exemplified throughout the prep school and across the college on displays, photographs, pictures and other examples, including art.
- Children and young people achieve skills in creativity, perseverance and self-reflection in expressive arts, including through music and drama performances. Children and young people contribute extremely well to the musical and artistic life of the college, including school coffee concerts. They value their involvement with national organisations, including Scottish Opera which inspire them further in creative arts. Children and young people have a strong understanding of sustainability. They are highly skilled when upcycling various materials as part of their fashion design activities. They are successful members of various teams through considerable outdoor education and sporting pursuits. Children and young people achieve high levels of local and national success in competitions in sports, for example hockey, cricket, rugby and lacrosse. They are developing as strong leaders but also highly effective team members who understand what skills are needed for these roles. Across the college, significant numbers of children and young people enjoy success when playing various instruments, including piping or as orchestra and choir members. They have regular success in local and national competitions.

- Children and young people develop a sound understanding of citizenship, being caring and responsible citizens. Young peoples' involvement in 'SuperTroop' and Fetlor Youth Club enables them to acquire important life skills, including communication and negotiation. They engage with other children and young people who have complex learning needs or face life challenges. Children and young people raise funds for worthy causes including through cycling or charity runs. High numbers of children support others through volunteering. Through these experiences children and young people develop important skills in problem solving, empathy and organisation. Children and young people help others within lessons and across the college, for example as reading and health ambassadors where they are positive role models.
- Children and young people are developing as skilled leaders. Prefects and other pupil leaders are very positive role models for younger pupils. Children and young people achieve considerable success in other aspects, including public speaking, debating and chess. They enjoy taking part in numerous competitions and quizzes, for example middle school science and maths challenges where they have significant success. Their involvement in various societies and clubs develop important skills in teamwork and communication.
- Children and young people's numerous achievements are recognised externally through various boards and associations, including the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). In outdoor education, these are recognised through the Cadet Vocational College, the Radio Society of Great Britain, the Cyber Programme, Sports Leadership, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Lowland Reserve Forces and Cadets Association. Other young people gain the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Staff are introducing further external accreditation in sport to ensure children and young people's achievements are rightly recognised whenever possible. This enhances children and young people's achievement across all aspects of their learning and supports them to achieve high academic and personal success.
- Through their achievements, children and young people are enabled to achieve high levels of personal success through taking risks and 'having a go' at numerous experiences offered across the college. Staff have high expectations and aspirations for their achievements. Their achievements are monitored and tracked to ensure that no child or young person misses out but reaches their potential and uses their talents.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff are very understanding and sensitive to children, young people and families' circumstances. Their clear systems identify children and young people who have gaps in attainment or are not on track to attain expected progress. Form tutors and teachers implement helpful interventions, including using digital technology, which improve children and young people's progress. Their strategies support cohorts of children and young people to progress, including those for whom English is an additional language, are new to the school or have other additional support needs.
- Individual members of staff lead on a range of initiatives, such as academic challenge classes, to raise attainment. This includes a well-judged focus on identifying groups of young people who are highly able and exceed expectations. This includes the 'academic scholars' who are known by staff who provide high levels of challenge during lessons and through the wider curriculum. Key staff ensure that young people for whom English is an additional language are supported individually to ensure they can be part of this group.
- Through the Fettes Bursary Scheme, the school provides financial support to approximately sixty children and young people. The bursary a scheme supports children and young people to

attend the school and access boarding as well as a range of activities and excursions. Almost all children and young people who access a bursary attain and achieve very well.

- Individual members of staff focus specifically on supporting all young people's positive post-school destinations. This includes the Oxbridge Co-ordinator who leads a highly-effective strategy to support young people through the application processes to Oxbridge universities. This includes former pupils, the 'Old Fettesians' who share their experience by mentoring young people through the application process. They also help them prepare for settling into the routine and culture of these institutions. Young people applying to Oxbridge universities progress and attainment is monitored rigorously to ensure that they are receiving all the required support to progress successfully. A few subject departments offer young people additional tuition. Staff track and monitor the success of groups in transitioning to Oxbridge who may face barriers to their learning such as those young people who require additional support with their learning, or those for whom English is an additional language. Additionally, staff organise well-planned careers and general university preparation support which is well-received by young people. Almost all young people progress consistently to a positive destination on leaving school. Staff follow up on young people who left school in the past few years and these impressive percentages are generally sustained.
- Commendably, the school shares their highly-effective provision in supporting young people to progress to positive destinations with other schools locally. Senior leaders evidenced how this approach is leading to more young people benefiting from this highly-impactful support to make the transition to university life on leaving school. Staff ensure young people develop emotional resilience and knowledge of supports required to navigate the challenges of life after school. This includes developing young people's understanding of personal finance, mental health and practical skill such as cookery.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland 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.