

Galashiels Academy Progress Report to Parents

Sept 2016

Context

Galashiels Academy is comprehensive secondary school and has a roll of 881 pupils and 11 associated primary schools. The school was inspected in April 2013. At the end of the inspection, inspectors agreed with the school and Scottish Borders Council these main areas for improvement:

- To raise expectations and improve attainment and achievement
- To develop a culture of inclusion
- Consistency in learning and teaching

The following is a summary of the steps that have been taken by the school to address these areas.

To raise expectation and improve attainment and achievement

Young people and staff are positive about the improvement in the school ethos at Galashiels Academy since 2013-14 and there is a strong sense of community. There is an awareness of raised aspiration and expectations for everyone and relationships between young people and staff are positive and respectful. Young people are welcoming, friendly and proud of their school.

The attainment of young people is now more often in line with those with similar needs and backgrounds in schools across Scotland with an increase in presentation levels in 2015-16. The school recognises that attainment can be improved even further.

S4 Attainment Summary:

The performance of young people by the end of S4 at SCQF level 4 and level 5 in 2015-16 shows signs of improvement. The percentage of young people achieving five or more awards at SCQF level 3, 4 and 5 is now broadly in line with that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds in other schools across Scotland.

S5 Attainment Summary:

The performance of young people gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 5 has improved from 2014-15. The percentage of young people achieving five or more awards at SCQF Level 4 has declined in 2015-16 and is now much lower than that of young

people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. There are improvements in the percentage of young people gaining five or more awards at grade C or above at SCQF level 6 from 2013-14 and also in the percentage achieving four or more awards at grade A. Performance at SCQF level 6 overall is now in line with that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds in schools across Scotland.

S6 Attainment Summary:

By the end of S6 in 2015-16, young people's attainment at SCQF level 6 and level 7 has remained broadly in line with that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds in schools across Scotland. There is still scope for improvement by S6 at SCQF Levels 4 and SCQF level 5 as attainment has been lower in the last few years compared to that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. The school has put new curriculum changes in place to try and address this for 2016-17.

Literacy & Numeracy:

Overall school leaver attainment in literacy and numeracy at SCQF level 4 or above has continually improved over the last three years. For those leaving school at the end of S4 performance at this level is in line with that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. School leaver attainment in literacy at SCQF level 5 or above has continually improved over the past three years however numeracy at this level has continually fallen. In 2015-16 there has been an improvement in literacy and numeracy attainment for young people leaving school at the end of S5 however performance is still lower than that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland at SCQF level 4 or above and much lower at SCQF level 5 or above.

Literacy and numeracy attainment by the end of S6 over the past three years has continually improved at SCQF level 4 or above and the five year trend in this measure is now higher than that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds in other schools. The five year trend in literacy attainment at SCQF level 5 or above and at SCQF level 6 is higher than that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds in schools across Scotland. Whilst there are improvements in attainment in numeracy by S6 at SCQF level 3 and level 4 or above, attainment in numeracy at SCQF level 5 or above and at SCQF level 6 are lower than for young people with similar needs and backgrounds in other schools across Scotland.

The school has implemented a revised presentation policy resulting in an increase in the number of young people sitting exams. Departments, supported by the senior leadership team, are encouraging young people to aim higher and to be aspirational. The senior leadership team have implemented rigorous procedures to ensure young people have increased levels of qualifications and a wider range of new qualifications while recognising that further curriculum development is needed to meet the needs of all learners.

Consistency in Learning and Teaching

Many young people enjoy their learning and feel encouraged and supported to do their best by all staff, they work cooperatively, are being responsible for their own learning and are beginning to lead learning. The consistency of quality learning and teaching for

young people is continuing to improve and though there are good examples of differentiation in a few classes, this needs to be more consistent across the school.

Overall the quality of homework for learners in all years has improved with increased expectation. Staff have been identifying skills linked to life, learning and work and all departments have evaluated how these skills are developed in their subjects and across the school.

Young people are clear about the purpose of their learning and most have regular learning conversations with staff to help identify strengths and next steps in learning, either in the classroom, in the Personal Support Period or, on some occasions, with a member of the senior leadership team through the mentoring process. The school should continue to develop young people's understanding of what they do well and what they need to improve. Young people have previously been involved in school improvement but the senior leadership team acknowledge there is now a need to establish informal and formal structures for Pupil Voice such as the development of the Pupil Council.

The school values achievement and this is contributing to the positive school culture where success is used to inspire others, ensuring that young people have the opportunity to celebrate their achievements. Many young people participate in a range of learning experiences both in and out of school and are developing their confidence and skills. An increasing number of young people gain awards such as Youth Achievement Awards and Saltire Awards and The Duke of Edinburgh award is a recent success where participation has grown rapidly in the past two years. An evaluation of the personal support period was carried out last term. This has led to a review of the programme and young people and staff can see the improvement and the value of this period. The effectiveness and consistency of experience for learners will continue to be evaluated and monitored by the senior leadership team.

Developing a culture of inclusion

In order to support this target, work has been ongoing to improve the structure and format of Individual Educational Programmes. Support for Learning staff continue to engage with staff through the Individual Educational Programme process in order to build capacity in meeting learners' needs, and to develop greater partnership working across all classrooms. Young people in the Secondary Support Centre have regular opportunities to make use of the facilities in the main building in order to enhance their learning including home economics, physical education and art and design. Where appropriate, young people access mainstream classes and have the opportunity to access the Galashiels community for wider learning.

The head teacher has a clear vision for developing an inclusive school and has made this a strong focus and young people report that there is a strong ethos of inclusion. The

recently implemented merit system was regarded by young people as being fair and transparent and the work to improve growth mind-set was apparent to them.

Staff have continued to improve the curriculum to better meet the needs of young people and opportunities have been created to support pupils with barriers to learning. The Connect Zone has had a significant impact in transforming outcomes for a targeted group of young people and has led to increased presentations and higher attainment levels for the target group. The work of the Connect Zone has had a clear impact on influencing the inclusive and aspirational culture of the school and the group were awarded the Inspirational Group Award at the Inspire Awards this 2015-16.

Conclusion

Since the inspection of 2013 the school has increased its focus on self-evaluation leading to school improvement. The headteacher has a strong vision for improving the school, with a clear focus on the school values of ambition, inclusion and respect. As a new team, the depute head teachers effectively support the work of the headteacher. There is a culture of high expectations for all with staff committed to improving the outcomes for young people.

The school is aware of its strengths and areas for development and has introduced key initiatives to drive improvement. Though it is too early to measure the impact of some of these initiatives, the impact in regards to attainment, inclusion and aspiration is evident. The school is well placed to continue further and future improvement with the following recommendations:

- Overall, attainment is beginning to improve but there needs to remain a clear focus on improvement
- Continue to ensure high quality learning and teaching through quality assurance procedures and professional learning which ensures that the needs of all learners are being met
- Pupil Voice should become a key integrated feature of the work of the school
- Continue to evaluate and refine IEP's to measure impact and to engage parents, young people and staff in the process