

Education, Children and Families Committee

Sub-committee on Standards for Children and Families

2.30 pm, Monday, 8 June 2015

Secondary School Inspection at Firrhill High School

Item number	5.2
Report number	
Wards	Ward 2: Pentland Hills Ward 7: Sighthill/Gorgie Ward 8: Colinton/Fairmilehead Ward 9: Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart

Links

Coalition pledges	PO5
Council outcomes	CO2
Single Outcome Agreement	SO3

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Director of Children and Families

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Executive summary

Secondary School Inspection at Firrhill High School

Summary

- Members should be aware that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), now known as Education Scotland (ES), undertake an annual sample of inspections across Scotland (approximately 240 per year) covering nursery, primary, special and secondary schools. A letter to parents/carers on each inspection is published approximately three months after the inspection. On the basis of this letter the school with the support of the authority amends its improvement plan to take account of any agreed areas for improvement.
- Inspectors usually revisit a school within a year of the publication of the letter where weak or unsatisfactory practice has been identified. For all other schools inspected the local authority will inform the parents about the progress made in improving the quality of education.
- This letter (Appendix 1) and evaluations (Appendix 2) advises the Sub-committee on the outcomes of the initial inspection.

Recommendations

The Sub-committee is requested to:

- note the findings of the report including the areas where the education authority and the school should continue to improve the school; and
- receive an authority inspection follow through report.

Measures of success

The report identified the following key strengths:

- staff who work well together to improve the school;
- young people who are polite, articulate and keen to do well;
- strong achievement, including attainment in National Qualifications which is enabling a very high percentage of young people to move into higher education; and

- improvements through self-evaluation which are leading to better experiences for young people.

Financial impact

There are no financial implications contained in the ES report.

Equalities impact

There are considered to be no infringements of the rights of the child.

Tracking of pupil performance by gender and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) is undertaken at school level and there are no adverse impacts.

Sustainability impact

None.

Consultation and engagement

Parents, pupils and staff completed an ES questionnaire prior to the inspection. There was extensive consultation with all groups, including partners in the course of the inspection week.

Background reading / external references

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports>

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Appendices	1. Inspection letter to parent/carer 2. Evaluations

2 June 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Firrhill High School
The City of Edinburgh Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports young people to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including how the school is developing young people's employability skills, and the range of opportunities for young people to achieve in many different aspects of their school experience. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving young people's education.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Young people learn and achieve very well at Firrhill High School. Relationships across the school are positive. Young people are polite and articulate. They appreciate the range of opportunities provided by the school and the benefits that they will gain through their involvement. Almost all young people are well behaved in class and cooperate well with teachers. Young people are enthusiastic and motivated when a wide range of approaches are used to engage them in exploring and discussing their learning. These include the use of interesting and relevant areas for learning such as enterprise and international business. In some subjects, there is an opportunity for young people to follow their interests, with teachers adapting plans to allow this to take place. Young people respond very positively to working together. In a number of lessons, they also benefited from opportunities to work independently and take responsibility for their learning. These experiences are consistently strong in English where the approaches used by teachers reflect the school's vision for providing learning of the highest quality. The quality of young people's experiences across the school could be improved in a few cases. The school has produced a revised Learning and Teaching Policy which will be a useful basis for promoting greater consistency of practice. In a few classes, the pace of learning could be improved and young people are expected to listen for too long. They would benefit from more consistent discussion of their next steps in learning. There is further scope to improve the arrangements for engaging with, and listening to, the views of young people. They have good ideas about how the pupil council should be improved so that they can play a more active part in improving the school.

Young people's learning is enriched and enhanced through a very wide range of experiences to achieve beyond the classroom. Across the school, around 80 clubs are on offer. These are highly valued by young people and include a range of sporting, cultural and creative activities. Parents volunteer to assist with young people's learning and make a significant contribution by running clubs. A wide and varied range of partners contribute to young people's learning. This often adds relevance and purpose to learning and helps young people connect to employment. Partners bring professional and specialist expertise to learning. In art and history for example, an artist, a media company, the National Flight Museum and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery worked with young people to produce high-quality digital artwork. Young people's work was celebrated at an event at the National Gallery of Art in London. Through a number of local, national and international excursions and field trips such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award expeditions and trips to France and Germany, young people are able to apply their learning including their language skills. Recent trips have also included an expedition to Venezuela where their involvement in community work allowed young people to make a positive difference to the lives of others. Many young people are involved in raising awareness of key health and wellbeing issues to their peers and undertake these activities with a mature outlook. Senior students, for example, regularly present to their peers at assembly and recently younger students ran workshops as part of diversity day.

Young people's attendance is consistently above the national average and exclusions are well below the national average. From S1 to S3, pupils are making good progress in literacy and numeracy. Curriculum leaders and teachers are tracking young people's progress in other subjects. It would now be useful to make fuller use of this information at whole-school level. This would provide school leaders with an overview of young people's progress across all curricular areas and help ensure that attainment from S1 to S3 is as high as possible. Young people leaving Firrhill High have attained significantly above the national average for the last five years. They have performed in line with those with similar needs and backgrounds in other schools across Scotland. There are particular strengths across the school, for example in art and design, music, physical education, English, geography and history. Senior managers are working hard to improve levels of attainment more consistently across the school. They are tracking young people's destinations carefully when they leave school. The percentage of young people moving into a positive destination is high. The number of young people staying on at school from S5 to S6 and the proportion of young people leaving school and entering higher education are both consistently higher than schools serving young people with similar needs and backgrounds.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

The school is good at supporting young people to develop and learn. Across the school in most lessons, tasks and activities meet the needs of most young people very well. However, there is scope for some teachers to tailor tasks more closely to individual young people and allow them greater choice. Most young people with additional support needs are well supported by teachers and support staff. Pupil support staff help teachers by recommending suitable strategies to meet the needs of these young people. Through support from experienced staff within the school and external partners, all teachers should now be taking greater responsibility for meeting the learning needs of all young people in their classes. Clearer long and short-term

plans will also ensure that all young people with additional needs receive the support they require. Commendably, the school provides considerable enhanced support for children from armed forces backgrounds. It also tracks very carefully the attendance and achievement of young carers and young people who are looked after. There is scope for the school and its partners to widen opportunities for achievement for young people with additional support needs through courses leading to formal recognition.

The curriculum is based on the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. The school's ambition is to raise standards of achievement and to help young people move on to positive destinations when leaving school. Teachers plan and develop the curriculum to provide opportunities for young people to develop the skills and attributes they need for learning, and to prepare them for the world of work. The S1 to S3 interdisciplinary work supported by business partners is having a positive impact on learners. Young people learn across a range of subjects from S1 to S3. In S3, they begin to make choices which allow them to specialise within curriculum areas. The school is providing rich learning opportunities for groups of young people through the South East Scotland Academies Partnership and the Edinburgh JET (job, education, and training) programmes for some young people to focus on their employability skills. The school should continue to liaise with partners and ensure that further suitable vocational options allow all young people to develop these skills as they move from S4 to S6. Staff have made very good progress in developing literacy and health and wellbeing across the curriculum. There is more work to be done to ensure young people can develop their numeracy skills across a range of relevant subjects.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The school has very effective approaches to evaluating and improving its work. Staff are highly committed to improving the experience of all learners. School leaders and staff care about the progress of young people and are strongly motivated to do the best they can for them. The school supports teachers to reflect on their practice and work together to improve young people's experiences. Staff are increasingly involved in watching each other teach in order to have discussions about how to improve the experiences for young people. The school makes good use of available time to ensure that all staff are well informed about school developments and participate in relevant professional learning. Recently, for example, staff have improved their skills in using Insight, a new tool which allows schools to evaluate their performance. Increasingly, staff share the purpose of lessons with young people and also involve them in evaluating if the intended learning has taken place. All these approaches are ensuring on-going improvements in young people's experiences and achievements. As a result, the school is very well placed to continue to improve.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Staff who work well together to improve the school.
- Young people who are polite, articulate and keen to do well.
- Strong achievement, including attainment in National Qualifications which is enabling a very high percentage of young people to move into higher education.
- Improvements through self-evaluation which are leading to better experiences for young people.

We discussed with staff and the City of Edinburgh Council how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to develop the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all learners.
- Continue to develop opportunities for young people to be independent learners across all areas of the school.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, the City of Edinburgh Council will inform parents about the school's progress.

Gary Johnstone
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/FirrhillHighSchoolEdinburghCity.asp>

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0141 282 5000, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the publication *How good is our school?*¹. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Firrhill High School.

Improvements in performance	very good
Learners' experiences	good
Meeting learning needs	good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

A copy of the full letter is available on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/FirrhillHighSchoolEdinburghCity.asp>

¹ *How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence: part 3*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/HowgoodisourschoolJtEpart3_tcm4-684258.pdf
Please note that the term "adequate" in the document has been replaced with "satisfactory".