

26 February 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

In May 2016, HM Inspectors published a letter on West Calder High School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and West Lothian Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in June 2017. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Improve the quality and consistency of learning and teaching across the school.

Since the last inspection a new headteacher and depute headteacher have been appointed. The headteacher is providing highly effective leadership across the school, which is complemented by her strong team of depute headteachers. They work very well together providing clear leadership and direction to staff with consistent expectations. The work being done to take forward learning and teaching is resulting in young people being more aware of the purpose of lessons and what they need to do to be successful. This is a more consistent feature of practice across the school. The climate for learning and achievement is considerably enhanced by the design and facilities of the new school building. These include a range of flexible learning spaces which are providing young people with more creative approaches to learning. They now all have access to high quality digital technology which is improving their motivation and engagement in learning. While there have been improvements in young people's learning experiences across the school, there is still scope for these to be of a more consistently high quality across the school. Young people in the senior phase particularly value the regular conversations they have with their teachers about their progress and learning targets. Teachers should continue to improve the quality of feedback provided to young people so that they are more confident in being able to discuss their strengths and areas for improvement. Overall, the school's value of respect is playing a greater role in the life and work of the school. This is contributing to the significantly improved relationships across the school between young people and staff. Young people are polite, well-mannered and interact positively with their teachers. They have a real sense of pride in their school.

Continue to improve the curriculum, in particular young people's experiences from S1 to S3.

Staff are enthusiastically taking forward improvements to the curriculum, to ensure that young people experience a more relevant and challenging experience. They value the clear sense of direction and leadership of the headteacher and the extended leadership team, the range of opportunities for professional learning and collaborative approaches within and across faculties. As a result, staff feel empowered to develop a curriculum which better meets their young people's needs. New creative skills-based courses have recently been introduced for S1 to S3. These courses were developed through careful planning with the

aim of providing young people with opportunities to apply their learning in new contexts. These need to be carefully monitored to ensure that they provide sufficient challenge and allow young people to make connections across their learning. The system to monitor and track young people's progress from S1 to S3 has also been further refined so that there is now a clear overview of young people's progress across all curricular areas. This is being used well by staff to support discussions about young people's progress and agree on any necessary interventions to support further progress in their learning.

Improve approaches to meeting the learning needs of all young people, in particular those with social, emotional and behavioural needs.

More effective approaches are in place to meet the needs of all young people, including those with social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN). Increasing the size and scope of the support team has been a key part of the school's new revised model for meeting the wellbeing of young people. Teachers are further developing their approaches to better meeting the learning needs of young people in classes by providing more suitable tasks, activities and resources. Improvements are still required in a minority of classes where activities are not always sufficiently challenging and the pace of progress not always appropriate. The learning needs of young people continue to be identified well on entry to S1, helped by close working with associated primary schools and partner agencies. Class teachers now receive comprehensive information and advice to support young people requiring additional support and are increasingly acting on recommended strategies to better support learners. They have benefited from a wide range of professional learning on additional support needs, in particular supporting young people with SEBN. As a result, young people with SEBN now feel more included and part of the school, with fewer instances of being extracted from class. Senior leaders have also reduced the number of support hubs and defined their purpose more clearly. There are a number of examples of improved outcomes for young people such as increased confidence, self-awareness and reduced rates of exclusion as a result of a range of targeted interventions.

What happens next?

The school has made significant progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. West Lothian Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Guch Dhillon
HM Inspector