

Summarised inspection findings

Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig - James Gillespie's High School

The City of Edinburgh Council

20 January 2026

Key contextual information

School Name: James Gillespie's High School - Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig
Council: The City of Edinburgh Council
SEED number: 5533139
Roll: 1826

Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig - James Gillespie's High School is a six year comprehensive and culturally diverse secondary school situated in the centre of Edinburgh. The school hosts the city's Gàidhlig Medium Education provision with around 270 learners. The school is split over two campus grounds, around one kilometre apart. Over the past few years, the school roll has risen sharply and is forecast to continue increasing.

The school leadership team consists of a headteacher and five depute headteachers.

The number of young people who leave school before S6 is substantially below the national average. Almost all young people reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) zones seven to ten, with 6.5% of young people receiving free school meals. Attendance is generally above national levels and exclusions are below and declining. In 2024, 45% of young people were recorded as having an additional support need. This is similar to national levels.

1.3 Leadership of change

good

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- Young people and staff consistently model the school values of respect, kindness, integrity, inclusion and high expectations. These are well understood across the school community and underpin the work of almost all staff. Staff across the school reference regularly the values in class and during whole school events such as assemblies. This contributes to the very nurturing and inclusive ethos that exists across the school community. Overall, the school values are significant in the life of the school and strongly influence the rationale for improvement.
- Senior leaders have developed successfully a rights-based culture across the school. Senior leaders show continuing commitment to ensuring that the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) permeate actions. When planning improvements, staff ensure that impact on young people is at the core of anticipated developments. Staff display a strong understanding of the socio-economic context of the school. Senior leaders use this knowledge well to plan improvements that are matched to the needs of young people. For example, senior leaders target appropriately the planned allocation of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to improve outcomes for identified young people.
- The headteacher, supported well by senior leaders, has effectively created a reflective and evaluative culture. He has streamlined the school improvement plan and brought clearer focus on a manageable number of appropriate targets. Additionally, there is now greater cohesion and alignment between whole school and faculty improvement plans. Staff need to engage further with parents and young people in the school improvement planning process. Increasingly, partners of the school feel more engaged with the school's improvement agenda. The headteacher has established recently a successful and collaborative improvement planning process across the James Gillespie's High School learning community of associated schools. Senior and middle leaders should continue to develop these collaborative approaches to support the consistency of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment experiences for young people.
- The school's vision and aims are aspirational and reflect the staff's ambition for the school. Across the school, staff embrace opportunities to support improvement. Staff-led improvement teams across key focus areas are supporting significant change. Middle leaders greatly value being empowered to lead change. A majority of middle leaders have benefitted from their participation in formal leadership training programmes. There is effective collaboration between senior and middle leaders through regular extended leadership team meetings. Senior leaders should develop further the leadership capacity of staff at all levels. This needs to support a greater consistency of leadership of change across the school.

- Leaders at all levels have succeeded in introducing greater robustness in their approaches to self-evaluation. This is well-supported by a thoroughly planned quality assurance calendar. As a result, there is an improved and realistic picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. To build on this, senior leaders should implement plans to extend further how data is used by all staff to identify areas for improvement.
- Staff at all levels have improved how they evaluate the classroom experience of young people. As part of planned professional learning activities, senior leaders are increasingly sharing identified effective practice across faculties. This includes, for example, the use of digital technologies in enhancing learning. Overall, staff have been supported with well-targeted professional learning. This has been well-matched to aspects of the school improvement plan. Over a third of staff have assumed Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) roles. This has been important in developing staff's understanding of national standards which is securing positive outcomes for young people.
- Staff are increasingly seeking young people's views on how to improve the school through a range of surveys and questionnaires. Additionally, there is a pupil council for each year group. Young people welcome the opportunity to participate in school improvement. Staff should now offer further opportunities to engage young people from the start of improvement activities. Senior leaders and staff should also ensure that young people understand fully how their views lead to changes. In the senior phase, there are significant leadership opportunities for young people. This includes acting as subject ambassadors, or science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) leaders and coordinating year group pupil councils. Senior leaders should now consider how opportunities for leadership roles can be extended across all year groups.
- Senior leaders have a clear vision and strategy for broadening the curriculum and actively promote parity of esteem between all pathways. This is helping to meet the needs of young people, improve attainment and leads to positive initial post-school destinations. Additionally, staff work closely with Skills Development Scotland to plan and review the strategic priorities within the School Partnership Agreement. This supports the effective delivery of career information advice and guidance services throughout the school. Senior leaders prioritise Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) to support young people to develop skills for learning, life, and to help young people transition into the world of work. Senior leaders should now develop a strategic plan to ensure that staff embed DYW priorities within the curriculum. Staff should raise the profile of DYW by considering these as part of planned learning and teaching approaches.
- In a number of key areas, well-considered strategic planning by senior leaders has led to important improvements. This has included improving learning and teaching, raising attainment, developing refreshed approaches to wellbeing and establishing a wider range of learning pathways. These developments are improving outcomes for young people. Senior leaders are aware of the need to improve further aspects of young people's experiences.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

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

- Staff and young people benefit from very positive relationships. The calm learning environment and motivated young people reflect the school's values. Young people are proud to be part of their school community and feel well supported to achieve their potential.
- Almost all young people behave very well across the school. Senior leaders are in the process of embedding a relationships, learning and behaviour policy which is contributing to the established positive ethos and climate for learning. When required, staff use a relational approach well to support young people to regulate their behaviour. They evaluate and adapt the learning environments to provide calm spaces.
- Almost all young people are motivated and participate well in lessons. In the majority of lessons, young people enjoy being active in their learning through group discussions, presenting to their peers, or demonstrating their problem-solving skills. Young people would benefit from more opportunities to lead learning in all curricular areas.
- Senior leaders and staff recently developed the James Gillespie's High School learning and teaching policy. This is supporting a whole school approach to develop consistent and effective practice. Staff feel that the four-phase model provides a clear structure for planning and delivering lessons. In almost all lessons, the agreed structure is clearly evident. The framework is at the early stages of implementation and is beginning to improve the consistency and quality of learners' experiences across the school.
- In almost all lessons, teachers share the intended outcomes of the lesson and criteria for young people to be successful. In the best examples, these support most young people well to understand what they need to do to be successful in their learning. Teachers should continue to develop the quality of these to support all young people to understand and articulate how to be successful in learning. The use of effective routines such as appropriate starter tasks help young people focus or re-cap on prior learning. A majority of teachers use a range of helpful strategies to check for understanding and review young people's progress. Senior and curricular leaders should continue to prioritise and share highly-effective practice across all subject areas.
- In almost all lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear and support young people to engage in a variety of tasks and activities. A minority of lessons are overly teacher-led, which leads to a few young people losing focus with their learning. Senior leaders recognise the need to enhance the levels of pace and challenge experienced by young people in their learning, especially in the broad general education (BGE). Teachers should provide appropriate challenge when planning learning to allow all young people to make the best possible progress.

- Across the school, teachers use questioning well to check for understanding and to recall prior learning. In a few examples of highly-effective practice, questioning encourages curiosity and develops young people's higher-order thinking skills. Teachers should now consider how best to develop questioning techniques. They should continue with their focus on this within the established programme of professional learning and sharing practice across the school.
- Almost all young people use confidently their individual digital device to support their learning both in school and at home. This includes research tasks or access to resources on digital platforms. Staff use digital technology successfully within lessons to enhance learners' experiences. Senior leaders should continue to share highly-effective examples of practice across the school.
- Almost all teachers are aware of young people who require additional support with their learning. Senior leaders have recently developed a comprehensive and informative database to share information with staff about young people's additional support needs (ASN). This has been positively received by teachers. Almost all teachers provide strong support to young people during lessons. All teachers should continue to develop their planning of tasks and activities to ensure these are appropriately matched to all young people's needs.
- Most teachers plan well and use a range of effective assessment approaches to measure the progress of young people. In a minority of lessons, teachers use formative assessment strategies successfully to support young people's understanding of their progress. Teachers increasingly use assessment information very well to adjust the planning of learning to meet the needs of young people. Senior leaders should continue to develop whole-school approaches to assessment.
- Almost all young people in the senior phase undertake valuable peer and self-assessments using SQA assessment frameworks. Young people recognise this is helping them to understand and apply National Qualification (NQ) assessment criteria. Young people in the senior phase value the quality feedback they receive on their learning. They appreciate teachers offering whole-class and individual feedback following assessments and verbal feedback during class activities.
- A majority of teachers have regular effective learner conversations with young people in the senior phase. These support young people to know their current level, targets and next steps in learning. Teachers should extend the use of learner conversations to learners in the BGE across all departments to ensure that young people recognise their strengths and next steps in learning.
- In a few departments, teachers work well with primary colleagues to develop a shared understanding and application of national Benchmarks. Teachers are increasingly engaging in structured departmental moderation activities. They should continue to develop their confidence using the learning, teaching and assessment cycle.
- Senior leaders have introduced recently a local authority standardised tracking, monitoring and reporting system. Senior and curriculum leaders are currently aligning their approaches to this system which is strengthening their monitoring of young people's progress at all stages. An important next step is for senior leaders to develop a more consistent whole-school approach to the language used for recording and measuring the progress of young people. This should help young people to be clearer about their progress across curricular areas.

- Curriculum leaders should embed recent improvements in tracking and monitoring all young people's progress. They should continue to use this information systematically to evaluate the impact of interventions and to inform next steps in learning. Senior leaders should develop further teachers' skills in using assessment data to adapt their planning of learning and teaching.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Senior leaders and staff have developed a highly successful transition programme that offers young people a range of beneficial experiences. This supports young people well to transition effectively to James Gillespie's High School. A few young people experience an enhanced transition which is supporting them well in S1. Senior leaders should build on the effective curriculum transitions which are currently in place in a minority of faculty areas.
- Teachers plan learning at Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) third level for almost all young people in S1 and S2 across all curricular areas. By S3 most young people progress to aspects of CfE fourth level. A few young people, who require additional support with their learning, benefit from individualised learning pathways throughout the BGE. In S3, young people specialise by choosing eight subjects. There is an aspect of free choice for young people in S3. Senior leaders need to monitor closely the young people who do not access their full entitlements to a BGE.
- The senior phase offers young people clear progression pathways in almost all curricular areas and subjects. Young people experience a range of NQs including a wide offer of Advanced Higher level qualifications. Senior and middle leaders led a review of curricular pathways. This resulted in all curricular areas offering courses from the wider Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The expansion of the curriculum to include Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression Awards, Skills for Work and SQA awards is meeting effectively the needs of more young people. Senior leaders have aligned their timetables with other schools in the local authority. This enables young people to access a greater range of qualifications. Staff liaise effectively with the regional college to provide further options in the senior phase from SCQF level 4-7 across a broad range of subject areas. Young people are supported well by staff and partners to make appropriate choices. Senior leaders and teachers should continue to keep curriculum pathways under review to ensure young people maximise their opportunities for accreditation. It is important that all staff continue to work with young people and their parents to maintain an understanding of the value of different types of qualifications.
- Young people have limited formal opportunities to identify and reflect on skills for learning, life and work. Young people are not yet able to confidently identify and talk about the skills that they are developing across the curriculum. Senior leaders should work with staff and key partners to develop a skills strategy and framework. They should develop a plan to ensure that staff fully embed meta-skills within curriculum and wider achievement activities. Young people should be encouraged to capture and reflect on these skills and achievements.
- Staff in most curriculum areas maintain informative wall displays to highlight career opportunities and pathways linked to their subjects. This allows learners to make connections with their learning to careers.
- Young people receive their entitlement to modern languages as part of the Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 approach. They also receive their entitlement to high-quality physical education. However, young people do not receive their core entitlement to religious and moral education in S5 and S6. Senior leaders are aware of the need to address gaps in the delivery of young people's entitlements.
- Staff are developing further their approaches of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across the curriculum as a responsibility of all. Senior leaders should accelerate their plans to develop further a consistent shared strategy for ensuring literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

- The school has a well-resourced and staffed library. Young people access regularly this vibrant space to support revision and study. Staff from a range of departments use the library well to support the delivery of courses.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- A majority of parents feel comfortable approaching the school with questions, suggestions or any concerns. A few parents report that they do not receive a timely response when they contact the school. A significant number of parents provided feedback during the inspection process. They represent a wide range of views on a variety of issues, including the need to improve whole-school communication. They also expressed apprehension about the impact of the rising school roll and a few raised concerns about how the school has responded to incidents. Senior leaders should continue to work with parents to develop effective and consistent modes of communication.
- The school has a well-established Parent Council. Most parents feel that they are kept up to date with the work of the Parent Council and are encouraged to participate. Senior leaders meet regularly with the Parent Council and there are examples of members of staff delivering inputs on various aspects of the work of the school. Senior leaders should ensure the Parent Council is involved fully in consultations about school improvement priorities and PEF.
- Most parents feel their child is making good progress at school. The majority of parents would welcome more regular feedback about their child's learning. The majority of parents would like further guidance on how they can use reports to help their child to progress in their learning.

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, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

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

- Almost all staff demonstrate strong, nurturing, caring relationships with young people and know them very well as individuals. Most young people feel safe and included in the school. This creates a very positive culture and ethos, and a calm, purposeful environment in which young people thrive. Most young people have a strong understanding of their own wellbeing and are respectful of others. Almost all young people are confident that they are able to express their feelings and concerns to staff who will help them.
- Young people benefit from a wide range of high-quality opportunities to be physically and mentally active, fit and healthy. They recognise how the choices they make impact on their health. This includes, for example, the link between physical activity and mental health. Young people talk knowledgeably about the importance of all aspects of their wellbeing. Staff should continue to support young people to develop a range of coping strategies.
- Young people from S1 to S5 experience a weekly planned period of personal and social education (PSE). This offers them a safe space to learn about important matters such as developing friendships, making informed choices and careers. Pupil support staff should continue their positive work with a broad range of partners to augment and enhance the PSE programme. Senior leaders should now involve young people in reviewing the PSE programme and key adult time. They should ensure that all young people, to the end of S6, benefit from a progressive, relevant and engaging programme. This should also include more regular opportunities for young people to discuss their wellbeing in order to help them further understand where additional supports would help.
- Almost all staff have a well-developed understanding of their roles and responsibilities relating to meeting the needs of all young people.
- Senior leaders recently reviewed their strategic approach to enhancing inclusive practice across the school. Working together with stakeholders, they developed and created 'Inclusion X', a collaborative and highly impactful approach to meeting young people's needs. This provision encompasses both universal and targeted supports for young people. Senior leaders have encouraged teachers to consider fully the learning environments to improve experiences for more young people. Senior leaders have also improved the way they communicate young people's ASN with teachers. Almost all teachers are informed well by the high-quality information contained in the recently established ASN database. This database captures pertinent information which helpfully informs teachers of strategies to support young people. Staff should continue to develop this evolving approach to enhance further the quality of universal supports for all young people and to better track improvements for particular individuals and cohorts.

- Young people who require additional support with their learning are supported very well by the proactive staff and targeted supports offered through for example, the wellbeing hub, the Support, Nurture, Understanding, Growth (SNUG) room and the Support for Learning departments. These supports are augmented, where appropriate, by effective partnership working with other agencies. Staff work very well together to identify young people's needs. Staff set appropriate targets, which are informed by the views of young people and their parents. These are timeously reviewed. This methodical and systematic approach ensures that almost all young people make progress with their individual targets.
- A few young people in S1 and S2 benefit from specific targeted interventions focusing on literacy and numeracy outwith the classroom. A few class teachers also work closely with specialist support for learning teachers to deliver lessons. This enhances the class teachers' skills while at the same time supports young people to develop confidence in their literacy and numeracy skills. Staff should continue to keep under review the balance of support in and beyond classes.
- A few young people choose support for learning as a course choice from S3 to S6. This allows those young people more time to process information and to consolidate their learning in a small group setting. Staff encourage each young person to develop their independent learning skills by creating their own planning document detailing their targets. Together with effective learner conversations, this approach has led to substantial improvements in literacy and numeracy attainment for young people who require additional support with their learning.
- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.
- Young people greatly value that their school community includes peers from a diverse range of socio-economic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Staff support young people very well to understand differences and accept people for who they are, irrespective of their background. They achieve this through the curriculum, assemblies, and learner-led promotion and education on a range of topical issues.
- Staff and young people, through their Ensuring Equalities group, work very well to increase visual awareness of a range of topics. This includes, for example, Black History month and the work of Amnesty International. Young people value the consideration given to recognising religious festivals and practices. For example, a quiet room provides young people with a valuable space for reflection and contemplation. As an outcome, there is increasing awareness of tolerance and respect across the school. Young people experience and contribute to an inclusive school environment in which they are able to challenge successfully discrimination and prejudice.
- Staff have identified that key areas such as racism, homophobia and misogyny require ongoing focus. They should continue to explore a range of approaches to ensure all young people feel safe and included. Staff record violent incidents in line with local authority processes and should continue to monitor the impact of incidents on a few young people.

- The school's Equalities Principles, aligned with the UNCRC, reflect well the welcoming, caring and inclusive principles that define the work of the school. Young people benefit from a whole-school culture where equality, diversity and the freedom to tackle discrimination are embedded. They are confident in discussing issues relating to inclusion and have a strong sense of social justice. Staff are clear that inclusion is not a discrete initiative, but reflects a school-wide ethos that underpins relationships, learning and leadership at all levels. Young people thrive in this highly inclusive environment, recognised for who they are as individuals.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very good

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

- Overall, young people's attainment over time is substantially above national levels and generally above that of comparator schools. Staff have maintained very high levels of attainment over time for most young people. Senior leaders have focused on ensuring that staff are more skilled in using data to inform impactful raising attainment strategies. As a result, senior leaders have made very strong progress in identifying and addressing successfully young people's attainment gaps.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

Broad General Education (BGE)

- Young people attain very well in literacy and numeracy and sustain these high standards over time. In 2023/24, almost all young people achieved CfE fourth level in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3. These high levels of performance are substantially higher than local and national levels.
- Across the BGE, teachers work together regularly to improve continuously the reliability of their professional judgements of young people's achievement of a level in literacy and numeracy. Teachers should build on the strong transition work with staff in associated primary schools and increase moderation of their work to strengthen further their understanding of achieving CfE levels.

Senior phase

Leavers

Literacy

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, almost all young people who left school attained SCQF level 5 or better in literacy. This is generally in line with the Virtual Comparator (VC). A majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Senior leaders recognised previously that performance at SCQF level 6 was fluctuating and inconsistent over time. It was either significantly lower or much lower than the VC from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Senior leaders' highly effective approach to increasing the pathways for young people to achieve this qualification has resulted in their attainment improving to being in line with the VC in 2023/24.

Numeracy

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, most young people who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy, in line with the VC. In 2023/24, the majority of young people who left school attained SCQF level 6 in numeracy. As a result of targeted focus and increased support for young people, this has increased from being just under half of leavers from 2020/21 to 2022/23. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the performance of young people is in line with the VC.

Cohorts

Literacy

- At S4, overall, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy between 2020/21 and 2024/25, in line with the VC. By S5 and by S6 based on the S4 roll, the majority of young people achieved SCQF level 6 or better, in line with the VC, between 2020/21 and 2024/25. Young people's attainment at SCQF level 6 is demonstrating a pattern of improvement between 2020/21 and 2024/25. This is as a result of how staff plan learners' pathways and support through the senior phase.

Numeracy

- Overall, as a result of staff improving how they use data to inform interventions, young people's attainment is improving in numeracy. This is now significantly higher than the VC in 2024/25 across SCQF levels three to five in S4. Performance in the two years from 2023/24 for SCQF level 6 by S5 has been significantly higher than the VC and S5 attainment generally shows clear patterns of improvement at all levels since 2021/22. By S6, a majority of young people achieve SCQF level 6. This has been showing a clear pattern of improvement since 2020/21, rising from being in line with the VC to being significantly higher than the VC in 2024/25.

Young people with additional support needs (ASN)

- Senior leaders have improved how staff identify and address young people's additional support needs. Staff use data very effectively to identify young people's needs and to inform appropriate and successful interventions where there are attainment gaps. As a result, the attainment of young people who require additional support with their learning has improved over time. For example, in 2023/24, most young people who required additional support with their learning achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy and numeracy on leaving school. The majority achieved SCQF level 6 in literacy and a minority achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy, the best performance across the five year period. Performance is generally similar to or above the VC and notably above national levels.

National Qualifications (NQ) English and mathematics

- Young people's attainment and presentation levels in NQs in English and mathematics at National 5 and Higher level is consistently and substantially above national levels over time. Top quality passes are notably higher than national levels.

Attainment over time

BGE

- By the end of S3, almost all young people achieve CfE third level or better in their chosen subjects across curriculum areas outwith literacy and numeracy. The majority of young people achieve CfE fourth level across the majority of curriculum areas. There is great variability with staff judgements on young people's achievement of a level. Senior leaders acknowledge that aspects of CfE fourth level data across a minority of curricular areas are unreliable. They should, as a key priority, support teachers to develop effective moderation practices and confidence in making judgements about young people's achievement of BGE levels.
- Senior leaders have implemented recently more robust systems to capture young people's attainment over time. Staff are beginning to use this data successfully to plan more appropriate pathways for young people. This is improving young people's attainment at S4. Senior leaders need to continue to embed these tracking and monitoring processes to ensure that all young people make the best progress.

Senior phase

Improving attainment for all

Leavers

- Based on average complementary tariff scores, staff are sustaining very high outcomes for most young people. Where attainment gaps existed previously, senior leaders have identified carefully these gaps and developed highly-effective practices with staff to improve the attainment of almost all young people.
- Senior leaders identified during previous sessions that the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people required significant improvement. This led to a curriculum review across faculties and young people are now offered a broader range of more appropriate pathways suited to their needs. As a result, there are clear improvements in the attainment of this group of young people. In 2023/24, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of leavers is in line with the VC, having been significantly much lower than the VC from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Senior leaders have strengthened tracking and monitoring systems and are confident in these improvements being sustained.
- Senior leaders' use of data to monitor and support young people to attain well has resulted in improvements for the middle attaining 60% of leavers. Their performance has increased to being significantly much higher than the VC in 2023/24, having been in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2022/23.
- The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people who left school has been significantly much higher than the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

Cohorts

- At S4, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC in 2024/25, having been significantly much higher and significantly higher than the VC in 2022/23 and 2023/24 respectively. The attainment of the middle attaining 60% of young people is significantly higher than the VC between 2021/22 and 2024/25. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25.
- By S5, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people is significantly much higher than the VC in 2024/25, having been in line with the VC from 2020/21 to 2023/24. The attainment of the middle attaining 60% of young people is significantly higher or much higher than the VC between 2022/23 and 2024/25. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people has been significantly higher than the VC in 2023/24 and 2024/25 having been previously in line with the VC since 2020/21.
- By S6, attainment of the lowest attaining 20% of young people has been in line with the VC from 2022/23 until 2024/25, having been significantly much lower than the VC in 2021/22 and significantly lower in 2020/21. The attainment of the middle attaining 60% of young people is generally significantly higher or much higher than the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people is significantly much higher than the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. Generally young people make very strong progress as they move through the school and attainment shows clear patterns of improvement.

Young people with additional support needs (ASN)

- Staff have focused successfully on improving the overall attainment of young people who require additional support with their learning. Their attainment is generally above the VC and national levels for the middle attaining 60% in 2023/24 and for the highest attaining 20% of young people from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Performance of the lowest attaining 20% of young

people who left school between 2019/20 and 2022/23 was below the VC and national levels. This then improved to being comparable with these levels in 2023/24.

Breadth and Depth

- Young people have attained exceptionally well across the senior phase over the past five years from 2021/22 to 2024/25. Young people in S4 were presented simultaneously at both National 4 and National 5 qualifications in a few subject areas. The percentage of young people being presented for two qualifications in the same subject is above the VC.
- At S4, most young people undertake a higher number of courses than national levels and experience a high level of success. The majority of young people achieved eight or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better in 2024/25. This has improved from being a minority between 2020/21 and 2023/24. Performance at SCQF level 5C has been generally significantly higher or much higher than the VC between 2021/22 and 2024/25. A majority of young people achieve four or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better. Overall, young people's performance at SCQF level 5A has been significantly higher or much higher than the VC between 2021/22 and 2024/25.
- By S5, as a percentage of the S4 roll, the majority of young people achieve five or more awards at SCQF level 6C or better in 2024/25. This increased from a minority achieving at this level over the previous four years. Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, performance is demonstrating clear patterns of improvement. Young people's performance is generally significantly higher or much higher than the VC over the time between 2021/22 and 2024/25. The majority of young people achieve two or more awards at SCQF level 6A or better. Performance at SCQF level 6A or better over time is generally significantly much higher than the VC.
- By S6, a majority of young people achieved five or more qualifications at SCQF level 6C or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25. Between 2022/23 and 2024/25, the percentage of young people achieving two or more to five or more awards improved and was significantly higher than the VC in 2023/24. In addition, performance was significantly much higher than the VC for these measures in 2024/25. Just under half of the cohort achieved three or more qualifications at SCQF level 6A or better by S6. Performance for one or more to six or more qualifications at SCQF level 6A or better is generally significantly higher or much higher than the VC from 2022/23 to 2024/25. Just under half of the cohort of young people achieve one or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better from 2019/20 to 2023/24. The percentage of young people gaining two or more and three or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better is significantly much higher than the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. Generally, the percentages of young people gaining one or more to three or more awards at SCQF level 7A has been significantly much higher than the VC in the five years from 2020/21.
- In most subject areas, young people attain much higher than national levels over time and high-quality passes are a notable strength.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people benefit from a well embedded culture of achievement throughout the school. Staff work closely with partners, parents and young people to provide a substantial range of clubs and societies as well as a wide programme of excursions. As a result of participation in these activities, young people develop important leadership and technical skills, as well as skills for learning, life and work. Young people gain important social skills and many feel that their achievements are developing their confidence.

- Through sporting activities, enhanced by a highly-effective partnership with Active Schools, young people are improving their health and wellbeing, developing their confidence and enhancing their team working skills. They use this learning to volunteer in the school and the wider community through opportunities such as sports coaching and achieve qualifications through this partnership.
- Staff continue to increase opportunities for young people to receive accreditation for their achievements. These include, for example, significant uptake in the Duke of Edinburgh, Kings' Trust, Youth Achievement Award, and the Young STEM leader award. Young people appreciate the range of approaches that staff use to help them recognise and celebrate their success. This includes, for example, displays in departments, certificates, regular newsletters dedicated to achievements, assemblies, social media, and whole-school celebrations. Staff use online platforms effectively to capture young people's achievements out of school. A notable number of young people benefit from qualifying as finalists in local, national and international competitions.
- Staff currently gather a range of data about young people's participation in achievement activities. Senior leaders should develop a strategic overview of all young people's participation and use this information to help identify and subsequently reduce any barriers to achievement. They should also proceed with plans to link achievements to their planned work on a consistent whole-school approach to skills development.

Equity for all learners

- Almost all young people attend school regularly. Young people's attendance has been substantially higher than the national average and sustained over time. A few young people attend school for less than 90% of the time. A few young people attend school on a part time basis. These arrangements are planned appropriately and regularly reviewed. Very few young people attend school but not class. Senior leaders recently improved the rigour around recording attendance in class. This means that young people who are not in class are identified and supported quickly to return to class. Staff should continue to develop appropriate processes to help identify the reasons why a few young people do not routinely attend lessons.
- Senior leaders monitor rigorously the attainment of young people who face additional barriers to success. They identify young people who require support to attain and plan effective interventions to ensure they achieve well. As a result, young people who require additional support from having English as an additional language, additional support needs or are care-experienced generally attain in line or notably above young people with similar backgrounds nationally. This includes, for example, the range of supports through their 'Inclusion X' structure which provides identified learners with highly effective support to improve their literacy and numeracy outcomes.
- Staff continue to focus on reducing the cost of the school day and ensure that all young people are valued members of the school community. This includes ensuring that young people have the resources to be ready to learn. Staff offer a breakfast club in both campuses of the school and provide resources such as stationery and digital devices available through a range of discrete formats. Staff ensure that cost is not a barrier to young people taking part in achievement activities. Young people also benefit from targeted academic support. These approaches are increasing young people's participation, engagement and attainment.
- Senior leaders used data effectively to identify a cohort of young people who face socio-economic disadvantage and who were attaining below those peers from similar backgrounds nationally. As a result of targeted support and the effective use of PEF to support

young people, the attainment of this group was raised significantly. This is now above comparator and national levels with the gap reducing positively over the past three years. Senior leaders have identified rightly that there is further improvement required with aspects of the attainment of a few young people who may experience socio-economic disadvantage. Young people who reside in SIMD deciles four to ten generally achieve significantly higher or much higher than peers from similar backgrounds nationally.

- Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, almost all young people progressed to a positive destination on leaving school. The majority of young people progress to higher education with a minority transitioning to further education or employment. Senior leaders have strengthened their support for young people's post-school destinations as in 2022/23, this measure was significantly lower than the VC, returning to being in line with the VC in 2023/24.

Context

Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig is the designated school for Gàidhlig Medium Education in Edinburgh. Young people also travel to the àrd-sgoil – high school from East Lothian Council, Fife Council, Midlothian Council, Scottish Borders Council and West Lothian Council. Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig comprises two learning sites, with one specialising largely on Gàidhlig Medium Education in S1 and S2 at Ath-Thaigh Darroch. A deputy headteacher and a curriculum lead work with the senior leadership team and staff in taking forward Gàidhlig Medium Education.

Leadership of change

- Young people and staff show a very strong commitment to Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig's vision, values and aims. They model the values of respect and kindness particularly well. Senior leaders should increase further how the vision, values and aims guide the significance of Gàidhlig language and culture across Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig. Strategic planning should be clear on what constitutes effective, progressive immersion across the àrd-sgoil, both in Gàidhlig and English designated areas of the school. As a strategic priority, all young people in English Medium should have an awareness of why Gàidhlig language and culture is part of Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig's offer. Young people should have the option of learning Gàidhlig.
- In 2024/25, senior leaders articulated the school improvement plan to identify better key priorities for improving Gàidhlig Medium Education. Guth nam Pàrant and Sgoileir – Parent and Pupil Voice are included in this. Senior leaders are still to include Gàidhlig in Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig's three-year strategic plan. Going forward, planning for improvement needs to identify longer term strategic plans for Gàidhlig, for which further support and resources will be required. This should strengthen the strategic links with the Council's Gaelic Language Plan. Staff should continue using national quality improvement frameworks, with more specialist strategic resources such as the 'Advice on Gaelic Education.' This will deepen longer-term self-evaluation for improvement.
- Staff within the Gàidhlig Medium Education provision are enthusiastic and passionate leaders who are driven to sustain Gàidhlig. Two promoted posts drive change well for Gàidhlig Medium Education. Members of the wider senior leadership team hold a defined remit to support Gàidhlig, encompassing strategic planning, provision for additional support needs and the implementation of effective timetabling. Leaders for Gàidhlig Medium Education have produced a useful Gàidhlig policy. Going forward, this should guide expectations on immersion education and maximise the use of Ath-Thaigh Darroch for this purpose. The staff team takes on leadership roles effectively to extend Gàidhlig Medium Education. Senior leaders now need to start planning more strategically and thoroughly for the increased numbers and growth for Gàidhlig in the city. An important key feature of this would be to have high expectations in developing the senior phase and additional support for young people's learning.
- Staff have very productive connections with other teachers and communities to identify and share practice. They are involved in local and national developments. Staff have access to specific professional learning. The staff team who are positively learning Gàidhlig should be offered more accelerated approaches to learning the language. This would increase impact on creating a high-quality immersion environment, teaching subjects through Gàidhlig and delivering Gaelic (Learners).

Learning Pathways

- Staff contribute very well to P7 to S1 transition programmes as young people move from bun-sgoil – primary to àrd-sgoil. Teachers have a regular teaching input on literacy and Gàidhlig with children at P7 for the whole year. As a result, young people improve their fluency, while getting to know secondary-based teachers. In S1 and S2, teachers have made important changes to the curriculum in literacy and Gàidhlig. Young people benefit from learning in traditional and contemporary contexts related to Gàidhlig. Young people's focus on Gàidhlig in Edinburgh is helping them to engage with the local Gàidhlig community.
- Young people learn through the medium of Gàidhlig in ten subjects across S1 and S2. This is helping to extend well young people's fluency in specialist areas and vocabulary. Young people's language accuracy is supported by the use of a grammar framework in S1. Staff should extend this progressive focus on grammar across S1 to S3 and into the senior phase. This could usefully be part of continuing to develop a clear, shared and planned approach to developing and accessing literacy across Gàidhlig Medium Education. Staff should clarify how numeracy and health and wellbeing as a responsibility for all is taken forward through the medium of Gàidhlig.
- The school's course options enable all young people to study Gàidhlig to the end of S4. This is a major strength in that it ensures that almost all young people are leaving school with a NQ through the medium of Gàidhlig and an award in literacy and Gàidhlig. Young people then have the option of progressing to Higher and Advanced Higher NQs across the senior phase. In 2024/25, less than half of young people continued with Higher Gàidhlig and a few with Advanced Higher Gàidhlig. Senior leaders need to use the totality of CfE to help young people have a structured way of retaining their fluency, should they not do a subject through the medium of Gàidhlig. As a next step, senior leaders should develop a personalised and dynamic curriculum offer to achieve this.
- Young people make a choice in their learning pathways in Gàidhlig Medium Education at the end of S4 to enable specialisation. The limited curriculum through the medium of Gàidhlig results in a majority of young people not having opportunities to progress their fluency in Gàidhlig as they move through the senior phase. Senior leaders should apply the totality of CfE to ensure that young people leave school equally fluent in Gàidhlig and English through a range of flexible pathways. Senior leaders are at an early stage of planning two further NQs to be available through the medium of Gàidhlig. Their planning should include short- and long-term targets to ensure they are on track to meet this objective.
- Staff create and translate a range of resources to support delivering learning pathways. They are creative in their use of digital technology. Going forward, staff need high-quality teaching, learning and assessment resources as they deliver and develop the immersion curriculum for Gàidhlig Medium Education. Senior leaders' planning of the curriculum needs to take more account of the increasing number of young people enrolling for Gàidhlig Medium Education. The learning space for Gàidhlig Medium should support high-quality immersion, with accommodation for practical subjects.

Learning, teaching and assessment

- Young people experience a warm and nurturing learning environment that supports both their wellbeing and immersion in Gàidhlig. As a result, young people's behaviour is consistently positive. Staff and young people demonstrate pride in their language, culture and identity as a community speaking Gàidhlig. Young people have realistic aspirations of how their offer for Gàidhlig Medium Education should grow.

- Teachers structure their immersion teaching around clear aims and details of how young people will be successful. Young people are motivated when tasks and activities are challenging and well-paced. This should be a more consistent feature of learning. Young people work well in small groups but should talk Gàidhlig in these activities. Teachers should have higher standards on young people's use of Gàidhlig in all of their learning and socialising. Senior leaders and teachers should include in their policies for Gàidhlig, learning, teaching and assessment details of what constitutes effective, progressive immersion across the school, both in Gàidhlig and English designated areas of the school. This should be much clearer on immersion rather than the stated bilingual pedagogy being central to Gàidhlig. There is a need to increase immersive learning experiences, particularly in S3 and throughout the senior phase.
- Young people's use of digital technology to support their learning is an embedded feature of learning. They access a range of tools on digital devices and digital platforms to support their learning and creativity.
- Teachers use appropriate assessment approaches, to monitor progress in learning through Gàidhlig. They should continue with their plans to make deeper use of data. Self- and peer-evaluation is evident in lessons. As a next step, teachers' feedback to learners on progress should be more consistently focused on how they can develop fluency and literacy in Gàidhlig. Teachers should strengthen monitoring and tracking of progress, achievements and attainment and set targets to assist young people achieve more highly. Senior leaders should establish the groups and individuals whose progress and achievement should be tracked to ensure that equity is maximised for all young people.

Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

- Young people and staff enjoy positive and caring relationships. Young people feel they know how to lead a healthy lifestyle. They take part enthusiastically in PE and develop a range of important skills through a range of wider achievement activities through the medium of Gàidhlig. Young people have been involved in improving the area outside Ath-Thaigh Darroch as an area where they can learn, relax and socialise. Staff assist learners well to understand their own wellbeing by increasingly completing surveys based on the wellbeing indicators. Young people are supported well through accessing a wellbeing hub as a safe and relaxing space. Senior leaders should continue planning for more of young people's support for wellbeing to be through the medium of Gàidhlig.
- The staff team takes forward statutory duties and guidance relating to wellbeing, equality and inclusion alongside the strategies used in English Medium Education. They should audit more thoroughly their progress with the 'Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education', 2017. As resourcing enables, young people should get support with their learning and development through the medium of Gàidhlig. As a next step, senior leaders should ensure resources to make support for learning more consistent and specialised for young people. This is to improve outcomes for young people that supports their immersion in Gàidhlig.
- Young people ably recognise their own rights and those of others. They are keen to support their peers in English Medium understand more of the importance of Gàidhlig language and culture. Young people at the senior stages established a group to promote equalities towards Gàidhlig. They analyse very well how the visibility and respect shown to Gàidhlig can be improved across Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig. Young people initiated discussing Gàidhlig with all children in P7 at the associated primary schools to raise their understanding of Gàidhlig Medium Education. In so doing, they supported effectively their peers who are learning in Gàidhlig Medium Education. Senior leaders should develop the whole-school PSE course to

support developing informed attitudes on Gàidhlig. This should be part of a strategic overview of where young people learn about how Gàidhlig relates to equalities, diversity and protected characteristics across the curriculum.

- Staff have a well-established transition process for young people, including those who require additional support for their learning. As a result, most young people feel supported well to move to Àrd-sgoil Sheumais Ghilleasbuig. The information on the school's website about Gàidhlig Medium Education needs improved so that parents and their children have access to higher quality information.

Raising attainment and achievement

Broad general education

- In 2024/25, most young people attained CfE fourth level in literacy and Gàidhlig. Teachers do not have data on numeracy through the medium of Gàidhlig. Teachers should have higher expectations of all young people's accuracy in talking in high-quality Gàidhlig. It would be useful to engage in more moderation activities for listening and talking.

Senior Phase

- The percentage of young people in S4 presented for National 5 in Gàidhlig increased in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Almost all young people in the cohort were presented at this level. Almost all young people achieved a pass at grade A to C and left school with a qualification in Gàidhlig in 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- The number of young people being presented for Higher Gàidhlig is increasing. In 2024/25, almost all young people attained a pass at grade A to B for Higher Gàidhlig. The school is sustaining high attainment in Higher Gàidhlig over the period 2020/21 to 2024/25. The number of young people presented for Advanced Higher Gàidhlig is small, however, they attain very well at this level. In 2024/25, young people did work experience in a Gàidhlig context to encourage them to be in a post-school positive destination using Gàidhlig. They also experienced a Career Fair focusing on Gàidhlig.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Young people develop a range of leadership, language, cultural and performing skills from working with a range of skilful partners through the medium of Gàidhlig. This is an important strength that is resulting in sustained positive outcomes for young people over time. A few young people in the senior phase develop their leadership skills through volunteering at the Gàidhlig youth club, Sradagan and taking forward roles in the Gàidhlig community within Edinburgh. Young people talk about some of the skills and capacities they are developing, such as increased confidence and improved fluency. They need to be clearer on the benefits of bilingualism. A helpful next step is to develop a more strategic approach to leadership and achievement progression pathways, including further use of recognised or accredited awards for such opportunities as the Mòd, An Deasbad Nàiseanta and FilmG. Leadership opportunities across the BGE should also be developed further.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Mathematics Department – approaches to raising successfully young people’s attainment in numeracy

The mathematics staff team, led ably by the curriculum leader, work collaboratively together to develop a range of highly-impactful strategies to ensure that young people attain very well in numeracy both in the BGE and senior phase.

Subject staff have reviewed thoroughly their BGE curriculum and moderated effectively using national guidance to ensure young people have a high-quality and progressive experience to the end of S3. They have created a range of high-quality resources which are having a significantly positive impact on improving young people’s numeracy skills. Staff use effectively the information from rigorous faculty-level tracking to identify learners who need support to attain well. Young people, as a result, benefit from a range of well-considered interventions. This includes the very well attended and targeted study support sessions.

As a result of this relentless focus on raising attainment, young people have sustained high levels of attainment over time with performance substantially higher than local and national levels.

Whole school approaches to embedding a culture of inclusion and diversity

Staff have worked collaboratively with young people to embed successfully a culture of equity, inclusion and celebrating diversity across the school. This work is very well aligned with the UNCRC, and has resulted in young people learning in a welcoming, caring and inclusive environment. Most young people are clear how to tackle discrimination and understand how to include others. Staff are developing successfully a school-wide inclusive ethos that underpins relationships, learning and leadership at all levels. Young people thrive in this highly inclusive environment, recognised for who they are as individuals. This work is supported and led well by the Ensuring Equalities group who successfully promote awareness of important issues through campaigns. They respond well to young people’s feedback and implement thoughtfully initiatives and change. Staff and young people recognise that there is further work to be done to ensure all young people feel respected, however, there is a strong climate of tolerance and understanding being developed across the school.

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.