

4 November 2014

Dear Parent/Carer

**Madras College
Fife 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 work to support transitions for young people from the armed forces, the impact of tracking and monitoring pupils' progress, and of the opportunities young people have for leadership and personal achievement. 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 through lessons and activities beyond the classroom. They appreciate what the school has to offer despite the significant difficulties of the split site. Almost all young people, including those in the Department of Additional Support (DAS), are well behaved and keen to learn, both independently and in groups. They would benefit from more regular opportunities to work collaboratively and direct their own learning. Almost all benefit from positive relationships with their teachers. Young people have begun to evaluate their own work, and improved monitoring of their work by teachers has made them more aware of their strengths and where they need to improve. They need more focused feedback to help them identify how they will do this. Overall, young people feel safe and valued in school. However, the school is aware that a few do not and has begun to take steps to address this. Young people appreciate the daily contact with the headteacher, particularly in the junior building. They feel his 'five-a-day' interviews give them a say in how the school works.

Young people benefit from an extensive and stimulating variety of experiences delivered by staff and partners. At all stages, learning is enriched by highly effective links with the University of St Andrews. For example, learning at S1 was brought to life through a university interactive digital programme on the history of the local cathedral. The vast range of academic, sporting and cultural opportunities to learn outwith the classroom includes a substantial number of local and international trips, some linked to school partnerships. Large numbers of young people are developing a sense of

citizenship further by volunteering in the local community and raising money for a range of charities.

At all stages, young people are developing confidence and skills in leadership and teamwork through participation in the activities outlined above. A number have achieved a Saltire Award for their efforts. The school is aware it needs to record young people's achievements more effectively so that they may be formally accredited in greater numbers. Through organising events, serving as prefects, as peer mentors and on a range of committees such as the Eco-Club, young people are developing leadership and other skills for life. The welcome introduction of S3 prefects has increased leadership opportunities in the junior school. There is scope to increase these further. Activities where young people achieve include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, debating, music, art and sporting events. Many individuals and teams have achieved local and national success. For example, the school has been national champion for two years in the Mathématiques sans Frontières competition. In science, over 40 young people at S2 were successful in the British Science Association Bronze Crest Awards. Young people from S1 to S3, including the DAS, gained awards in the Museum of the University of St Andrews Young Artists Awards 2014.

From S1 to S3, almost all young people are building well on progress at P7 and achieving at expected levels, with many achieving these earlier than might be expected. Learners' skills in literacy and numeracy are being developed further by senior pupils working with their younger peers and through events such as creative writing competitions and maths challenges. By S4, performance in literacy and numeracy has been increasing in recent years. Overall at S4, performance in national examinations rose notably in 2014. Young people achieve very well at Higher and Advanced Higher levels and better than those with similar needs and backgrounds. Almost all, and all of those in the DAS, move on to positive destinations on leaving school, with the proportion of those moving on to higher education substantially higher than the national average. However, the school is aware that staff need to provide stronger input for those pupils who require it, to ensure that all can achieve as highly as possible.

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

The school supports most young people well to develop and learn. Departments have revised courses from S1 to S3, and most offer relevant and challenging learning in line with Curriculum for Excellence. At these stages, learners experience some specialisation in the sciences and expressive arts. The school should review this to ensure that young people do not narrow their options too soon. A broad programme of electives at S2 and S3 enables young people to study a second modern language and engage in more in-depth study in science. The school has plans to increase opportunities for accreditation through these choices. Young people appreciate the very extensive range of subject options across S4 to S6. However, the range of National Qualifications for young people in the DAS needs to be extended. Better tracking of young people's progress and effective careers advice is helping them select the most appropriate level of study. Young people benefit from a few opportunities for work-related courses, such as computer games development and childcare. The school recognises the need to work with partners to increase such provision. There is an extensive programme of work experience at S5-S6 which is helping young people

develop skills for life and work through partnerships with local businesses. At all stages, the curriculum is enriched by inputs to subject programmes from partners or associations. This should be extended to aspects of health and wellbeing. However, themed work, such as the work on the Commonwealth Games, needs to be more consistently challenging and the school should explore more effective ways of helping young people make connections in their learning. The school has improved significantly links with primary schools and is helping young people build well on their literacy and numeracy skills when they enter S1. Young people receive strong support to progress to the next stage in their learning on leaving school. The work in supporting armed forces families into the school and on to subsequent destinations is particularly commendable.

Guidance staff know the young people in their care well. Support for learning staff, including those in the DAS, work effectively with a range of partners such as the Fife Autism Services Team, Community Learning Development and Elmwood College to provide additional support to help young people learn. A number of parents expressed a need for better communication of young people's support needs across all staff and the recently revised pupil support structure has begun to address this. Specialist staff identify, address and review young people's learning needs well. Overall, most young people feel that help is there if they need it, including through supported study for different levels. In lessons, teachers provide tasks and activities which suit most young people. However, there is a clear need to challenge some pupils more and provide others with more supportive tasks. The school has recently introduced form time as an opportunity for pupils to reflect on their skills development. We have asked the school to review this approach, to ensure a meaningful experience for all.

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

The headteacher knows the school very well and has identified clear priorities for improvement, with a focus on improving learning and teaching to raise attainment. Many staff are involved in working groups linked to the school's priorities. Subject departments recognise the importance of reflecting on their work to seek improvement and a number have begun to share practice, for example through the Teacher Learning Community. The headteacher has introduced a range of helpful approaches to finding out what the school does well and where it could improve. For example, the system for tracking pupils' performance has led to a closer look at the progress of individuals to help ensure all attain as highly as possible. Reviews of young people's attainment with subject departments are more rigorous and now identify more clearly the work required to bring about improvement. Short visits to classes by senior managers have raised expectations about the quality of young people's learning experiences. The school should now consider introducing longer observations of learning by senior and other staff to bring about greater improvement. School staff could work more closely with a wider range of partners in planning and evaluating the potential contribution of partners to the school's work. Commendably, the school has improved the ways in which it consults parents, including through the Parent Council. However, the school needs to find more ways of consulting young people and ensuring that they know what has been done as a result.

The headteacher has been at the forefront of all developments in the school. His reorganised senior management team is better placed to take forward priorities for

improvement and is keen to do so. In a relatively short period of time, the headteacher has gained the trust and respect of all stakeholders and inspired them with a new vision for the school. Most importantly, at the heart of recent developments he has placed the interests and futures of young people. All staff should maintain this focus on addressing young people's needs better as the school continues to develop.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- The motivational leadership of the headteacher.
- The significant impact on learners' experiences of links with the University of St Andrews.
- The impact on young people's achievements of the extensive range of opportunities for personal development.
- Outstanding transition support for children of the armed forces.
- Young people's attainment at S5/S6.

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

- Continue to review the curriculum and ensure it meets the learning and personal development needs of all learners, in particular lower-attaining young people.
- Continue to develop ever more rigorous approaches to self-evaluation across the school to ensure the greatest impact on learning and teaching.

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 evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. During the inspection, we identified aspects of innovative practice which we would like to explore further. We shall work with the school and Fife Council to record the innovative practice and share it more widely.

Fiona A Pate
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/MadrasCollegeFife.asp>

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