

Record of Visit Berwickshire High School Progress Update on behalf of Scottish Borders Council

Over the past 12 months, Scottish Borders Council (SBC) has monitored the progress of Berwickshire High School following the visit by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMI) in November 2021. This has included regular visits to the school by members of the Quality Improvement team, an in-depth Attainment Analysis meeting following the publication of 2022 attainment data, and a formal Review Visit in November 2022. During this visit, the team talked to children and young people, members of the middle and senior leadership teams, teaching and support staff, and parents. They also observed children and young people in their learning.

Area for improvement 1

There is an urgent need to improve leadership at all levels across the school. This includes engaging all young people, parents and staff in reviewing the vision, values and aims with a view of developing a strong identity, with clear attention given to the direction and expectations for Berwickshire High School.

How is the school doing? (What has improved since the last inspection?)

The HMI Summary of Visit letter, based on the November 2021 visit to Berwickshire High School, reported the following:

The school has made considerable progress in this area for improvement. Young people and staff have been enabled well by all senior leaders to engage in leadership roles and activities across the whole school and within faculties. This includes a 'head team' of young people, prefects, and house captains who are working enthusiastically and responsibly with senior leaders to improve the school. It also includes a student council that is working continuously to encourage and act on young people's views. Senior leaders have strengthened a staff 'extended leadership team', and increased the roles for middle leaders across the school to impact positively on change. Teachers are also demonstrating leadership behaviours more consistently. For example, most teachers now have a more visible presence. They communicate more effectively with young people and their parents, and are more willing to engage in professional learning to develop their classroom practice. Almost all stakeholders spoken to during the visit identified the very positive impact of the headteacher's leadership, and the new, clearer sense of direction and purpose in the school. They value the clarity of this direction and purpose, saying it has helped to build a cohesive learning community that strives continuously to be the best it can be. The refreshed vision, values and aims of the school, developed in partnership with stakeholders, have helped the school to begin to develop its identity. The vision, values, and aims are displayed throughout the school, and teachers, and increasingly young people, use the language of these regularly. A few young people feel the school's revised vision could focus more on how the school plans to meet the needs of all young people. A few parents appreciate how the school emphasises and nurtures a different school value each week. Work on enacting the vision, values and aims is having a very positive, motivating effect on work across the school. However, further work will be required to ensure the vision, values, and aims influence more consistently all aspects of school life, including the school's drive to raise attainment.

Over the past 12 months, there has been a continued focus to develop leadership at all levels. This has included establishing a new mission statement of the school - 'Aim for Best' -



in consultation with key stakeholders. This is helping to create a shared sense of community, purpose and ambition.

There is a coherent approach to school improvement with a clear improvement cycle to evaluate progress. A strategic focus on leadership capacity development, with a particular focus on the middle leadership team, is having a very positive impact across the school. For example, middle leaders are now leading programmes of professional learning workshops for teachers, and are playing an enhanced role in the planning of a newly introduced Supported Self-Evaluation Programme, with follow-up coaching. There is clear alignment between the school and faculty improvement plans.

Communication at all levels has improved significantly, with a regular pattern of leadership team meetings, and systems to share key messages with staff. This is having a positive impact on staff, who feel valued and supported to participate in collaborative improvement.

As well as meeting on a weekly one-to-one basis with middle leaders, members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meet weekly with focus groups of young people, on a rotation, to ensure the voice of all young people is heard. These ensure pupil voice is at the heart of school improvement. The student Head Team attend weekly SLT strategic meetings. The Student Council is also playing an important role. The headteacher has maintained a rolling programme of one-to-one meetings with all staff.

Further opportunities have been created to promote leadership at all levels. These include three newly established Assistant Head of Year positions with a pastoral focus, a digital learning lead, and a support staff member co-leading Beekeeping in senior phase curriculum. Individual staff members have volunteered to take on additional leadership responsibilities, including leading the Student Council, the Equity and Diversity Group, and mentoring Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs).

How do you know? (What is the evidence of improvement?)

- In a survey conducted in October 2021, completed by almost all teaching and support staff:
 - All staff said the school is well led and managed.
 - o Almost all staff said the school's vision and values underpin their work.
 - Almost all staff said that collaborative working across the school is effective in taking forward school improvement.
 - Almost all staff said they have regular opportunities to undertake leadership roles.
 - Almost all staff said they are actively involved in the school's on-going selfevaluation.
- In focus groups as part of the SBC Review Visit, all stakeholders reported continued improvement in this area.
- Weekly student focus groups, carried out as part of the school's continuous selfevaluation programme, evidence that almost all students feel that leadership opportunities are available to them.
- Minutes from weekly Extended Leadership Team meetings, and samples of faculty Improvement Reports and Improvement Plans, evidence the focus on continued leadership development at this level, and the alignment of school priorities to those of teams within the school.
- The school website, weekly Heads Up bulletin, student Learning Logs, and calendars showing the weekly pattern of meetings now established in school, provide evidence of significant improvements to communication, within and beyond the school.



Continue to strengthen middle and senior leadership capacity, through a focus on high-quality professional learning, self-evaluation and enhanced whole-school leadership opportunities. There will be a particular focus on coaching.

Continue to broaden the range of leadership opportunities that are available to all staff and students in the school, and to evaluate their impact.

Area for improvement 2

Senior leaders should ensure that, as a key priority, there is a whole school focus on creating a calm, safe and purposeful learning environment which is conducive to high quality learning. This strong focus should include fostering positive relationships across the school and ensuring that there is much greater consistency in the promotion of high expectations at all times with clear boundaries set.

How is the school doing? (What has improved since the last inspection?)

The HMI Summary of Visit letter, based on the November 2021 visit to Berwickshire High School, reported the following:

The school environment now offers a calm and orderly context for young people's learning. Staff are highly visible and approachable, and almost all young people demonstrate maturity, respect and courtesy in classes, social areas, and outside the school. Staff and young people report that the school is a more pleasant and rewarding place to learn and that they feel safer. Overall, relationships between young people and staff are positive. With strong and supportive leadership from the headteacher, all senior leaders are working effectively with young people and staff to set clear expectations for learning and behaviour. These actions are having a positive effect on the ethos of the school. Staff are promoting positive behaviour more effectively, using praise regularly in classes and recognising young people's successes and contributions to the life of the school. Awards celebrating young people's success are displayed attractively in social areas. Senior leaders, teachers and support staff report a significant reduction in the number of incidents requiring intervention by senior leaders. The curriculum is now providing a wider range of experiences and pathways for young people. This is helping to increase their motivation to learn by being more responsive to their needs. In the small sample of lessons observed, young people's learning experiences were wellstructured and purposeful. Teachers should continue to develop strategies to engage actively all learners, for example, through improved questioning techniques. Within the school's broad strategies to develop high-quality learning and teaching, teachers should ensure that they provide work at suitable levels of challenge to meet the needs of all young people.

Over the past 12 months, this area for improvement has continued to develop positively.

The learning environment within Berwickshire High School is calm and safe. The updated vision, values and aims set clear expectations and identify respect and safety explicitly. There are clear procedures in place for moving around the school, which are adhered to consistently across the school. There are also clear systems and procedures in place to help ensure high standards of behaviour across the school. Young people demonstrate polite behaviours in corridors and are well behaved and courteous in classes. Professional learning initiatives, such as weekly reading and discussion groups focusing on teaching positive behaviour, are having a tangible impact across the school.

Most young people report they feel safe in school and feel their views are listened to. A renewed assemblies programme, focusing on school values, is having a positive impact on culture. Staff report that they feel valued as members of the school community and that Berwickshire High School is a rewarding place to work.



How do you know? (What is the evidence of improvement?)

In a survey conducted in October 2021, completed by almost all teaching and support staff and a quarter of young people:

- Almost all young people said they feel safe when they are at school.
- Almost all young people said that the school helps them to feel safe.
- Almost all young people said that the school treats them fairly and with respect.
- Almost all young people said that the school helps them understand and respect other people.
- Almost all young people reported that the school deals well with any bullying.
- All staff said that children and young people are encouraged and supported to treat others with respect.
- Almost all staff said that young people are well behaved.

Focus groups and observations carried out as part of the SBC Review Visit in November 2022 validated these statements.

What are they going to do now?

Continue to use the robust self-evaluations systems that are now embedded in the school to monitor and further strengthen ethos across the school. This should include via the Student Council, weekly student focus groups, weekly one-to-one meetings with staff, and surveys with parents.

Continue to use our in-school professional learning programme to respond to needs, as and when required.

Area for improvement 3

All staff should develop an agreed shared understanding of what high quality learning, teaching and assessment looks like and ensure they apply these standards consistently across the school at all times. Further development of approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's progress, especially in the broad general education, are needed. This will enable staff to put in place clearer next steps in learning for young people to enable them develop the skills and attributes needed for life and work.

How is the school doing? (What has improved since the last inspection?)

The HMI Summary of Visit letter, based on the November 2021 visit to Berwickshire High School, reported the following:

The quality and consistency of learning, teaching and assessment has improved considerably across the school, with teachers demonstrating increased confidence in classrooms. Teachers now have a much improved shared understanding of what high quality learning and teaching looks like. They also demonstrate deeper understanding of how they can enhance their teaching, for example, using a daily review, sharing the aim of the lesson, and sharing how young people can be successful in their learning. Senior leaders and staff have clear plans to continue to improve learning, teaching and assessment, to meet the needs of all young people and to continue to raise attainment. All teachers have been supported well to improve their pedagogy. They have been able to engage in high-quality professional learning, including ongoing work with national partners and the principal teacher of pedagogy. All teachers benefit from regular self-evaluation, frequent lesson visits and observations, ongoing dialogue with peers, detailed lesson-observation feedback, and the use of a well-defined lesson evaluation toolkit. Teachers are increasingly taking part in the school's professional reading group. These initiatives are helping teachers to become more



enthusiastic about learning and teaching, and are improving teachers' confidence in classrooms. Senior leaders and staff have made improvements to tracking and monitoring in the broad general education (BGE), although they plan continued work in this area. Teachers spoke positively of the use of tracking spreadsheets during the second period of school closure. Using the spreadsheets helped them to maintain an overview of young people's progress across all subjects. Teachers also value the use of learning logs as part of the school's ongoing monitoring processes. Moving forwards, it would be beneficial to streamline the format of these learning logs to help all young people and their parents be clear about the expectations of different faculties. Increased dialogue between senior leaders, middle leaders, staff, young people and parents is used well to help young people reflect on their learning, and develop a better understanding of their progress and learning targets. This dialogue is leading to suitably targeted interventions. Improved regular written communication with parents is making them aware of important information, such as assessment dates, and helping them to be more proactive in supporting young people.

Over the past 12 months, there have continued to be considerable improvements in this area.

Improving learning and teaching across the whole school is now the core business of all teachers. This is evidenced in the high quality professional learning, which is on offer for all staff, the rich professional dialogue around pedagogy and the significantly improved experiences in the classroom for young people. There is a shared understanding of 'what excellent looks like' and all staff are encouraged and supported to deliver their best for the young people.

The Principal Teacher of Pedagogy maintains a high profile and there is clear evidence of his impact across the school. A plethora of opportunities are available for all teachers to improve their pedagogy, including: professional reading groups, YouTube bite size tutorials, staff-led workshops, peer review programmes, and coaching sessions. Digital technology has a very high and growing profile in all aspects of the school and its work.

Young people are able to articulate how they learn and use the language of learning with confidence. Assemblies focusing on study skills allow students to take next steps with this understanding of their own learning.

A shared understanding of lesson structure has been developed through the use of a Lesson Evaluation Toolkit, which is used consistently by almost all teachers. An inaugural Pedagogy Conference was held in November 2022, showcasing the school's journey of improvement in learning, teaching and assessment.

How do you know? (What is the evidence of improvement?)

Whole-school self-evaluation systems, such as newly-introduced Supported Self-evaluation Programme, student focus groups and teacher Professional Learning Plans, indicate that very good progress is being made in this area. Records from an extensive programme of lesson observations evidence significant improvements in the consistency of lesson structure, including the use of 'daily review' to support learning, which now features in almost all lessons. Weekly student focus groups, led by depute headteachers, also provide strong evidence of continued improvements in this area. Parents report that Learning Logs are helping them to better understand their child's progress.

In a survey conducted in October 2021, completed by a quarter of young people, almost all young people said that they were happy with the quality of teaching in the school.



Lesson observations and focus groups with staff and students as part of the SBC Review Visit in November 2022 validated the progress being made in this area.

What are they going to do now?

Continue to focus on pedagogical improvement across the school, with a particular focus on specific classroom practices (such as making thinking visible) and the development of students' independent learning skills. There will be a specific focus on staff coaching. Fully embed the newly developed tracking and monitoring systems.

Area for improvement 4

Staff should develop curriculum pathways, as already agreed, at all stages, including with partners, to promote challenge, provide more flexibility for learners and meet their needs and aspirations. The addition of well-considered vocational pathways is key to enable some young people to succeed. This will take account of national priorities and learner entitlements.

How is the school doing? (What has improved since the last inspection?)

The HMI Summary of Visit letter, based on the November 2021 visit to Berwickshire High School, reported the following:

Staff across the school have engaged effectively in reviewing the curriculum. A 'knowledge curriculum' has been agreed to help staff, learners, parents and partners know what young people are expected to learn in each subject area by the end of the BGE. Teachers take account of a wide range of information from learners to inform the curriculum offer. They also use their knowledge of young people, achievement surveys and 16+ data hub information. A dedicated principal teacher post has been created to lead and co-ordinate partnership work linked to the curriculum. Staff are having supportive learning conversations with young people, to increase understanding of the skills they are developing and potential career opportunities. Work with partners is leading to the development of more flexible pathways to meet the needs of all young people. Partners demonstrate a very good understanding of the needs of particular groups and individuals that they work with. Partners talk positively about the effectiveness of partnership working and note that staff are keen to engage in developing a greater range of opportunities for young people. Staff should proceed with their plans to review course choice in the senior phase, to ensure that curriculum areas provide appropriate pathways for young people to meet their needs and aspirations sufficiently. Senior and middle leaders should continue to develop a robust evidence base with which to evaluate the success of curriculum provision in meeting the needs and aspirations of all young people. In doing this they should ensure that all stakeholders, including young people, can contribute effectively.

Over the past 12 months, this area has continued to develop and improve.

The curriculum is now providing a wider range of pathways and experiences for young people. The addition of NPAs and new National courses is better meeting the needs of the learners. These include: Drama, Citizenship, Beekeeping, Criminology, Politics and Classics. Plans are well underway to introduce additional courses, including: Dance (level 5), Media (level 5), Exercise & Fitness (level 6), Applications of Maths (level 6) and Refereeing (level 7).

The S3 curriculum has been revised and improved, with a renewed focus on clear learning pathways and relevance to both the senior phase, and skills for life and work. There has



been implementation of improved 1 + 2 languages model, in collaboration with Education Scotland.

In consultation with key stakeholders, there has been a redesign of options in senior phase to support personalisation and choice (this includes the flexibility to choose from a suite of 'long' and 'short' short level 4 and 5 courses). The development of broader range of level 5 courses supports the drive for higher levels of attainment for all students, allows students to engage in new learning pathways, and to develop vocational skills.

Expanded partnership working is supporting the newly designed curriculum. This includes a new partnership with Marchmont House and new curriculum enhancement opportunities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI). The work of the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) lead is having a very positive impact on the use of employability partners to support the delivery of the curriculum. This includes strengthed links with college and local businesses and tracking positive destinations. As a result, the contribution of local partners, including Community Learning and Development, in curriculum delivery is much stronger.

There is improved collaborative curriculum design across the cluster, with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy, languages and sciences. While this work is in an early phase, it has the potential to significantly improve the learning experience for all young people.

How do you know? (What is the evidence of improvement?)

In a survey conducted in October 2021, completed by almost all teaching and support staff, most staff said that they have regular opportunities to help shape the curriculum through discussions with colleagues, parents and partners.

The new senior phase Course Choices form evidence the addition of a considerable number of new qualifications, including NPAs.

Positive leavers destinations data evidences a positive picture compared with the Virtual Comparator over the past three years.

There has been positive feedback from parents about the changes to both the broad general education and senior phase. The evidence for this has come from consultation evenings and the Parent Council.

Focus groups with staff and young people as part of the SBC Review Visit in November 2022 validated the improvements the school continues to make in this area.

What are they going to do now?

Continue to ensure that our curriculum meets the needs of all young people, with a particular focus on ensuring coherent pathways that are appropriately challenging. Continue to introduce new courses to broaden the curriculum offer.

Monitor the impact of curriculum redesign, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy and the partnership with cluster primary schools.



Area for improvement 5

The wellbeing indicators, such as being safe, nurtured, achieving, respected and responsible need to be embedded in the everyday work of the school. Young people need support to understand their relevance, and to use them well to enable learners to take responsibility for their own wellbeing.

How is the school doing? (What has improved since the last inspection?)

The HMI Summary of Visit letter, based on the November 2021 visit to Berwickshire High School, reported the following:

Staff have taken a number of important steps to equip young people with the skills to understand and take action on their wellbeing. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have revised the school's formal wellbeing programme. A few young people spoken to during the visit drew on the structure and vocabulary of the national wellbeing indicators to articulate issues associated with their mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. External partners confirmed that young people could describe how features of wellbeing, such as mutual respect and a sense of individual responsibility, were becoming increasingly embedded in their daily experiences. Pastoral staff meet young people on a one-to-one basis twice yearly, providing space for open discussions centred on wellbeing. Staff use the wellbeing web for these discussions, reinforcing young people's awareness of the indicators. The indicators also feature across the work of the health and wellbeing faculty. Staff have invested considerable time in professional learning to enhance their skills relating to young people's wellbeing. This professional learning includes collaboration with national partners. Staff have made progress in identifying how the concept and practice of nurture could have a positive influence on young people's learning and achievement. This indictor has been a clear focus of the local authority's work. The nurture base provides an important resource for young people. Staff's professional learning has also explored the role of nurture across the school's work. In time, this professional learning is likely to have a positive impact on practice.

Over the past 12 months, the school has continued to make strong progress in this area. The school has worked in partnership with Education Scotland to develop and implement a strategic plan, focusing on wellbeing and inclusion.

As a result, the school now offers a calm, safe learning environment. Standards of behaviour across the school are high. The strong focus on student leadership and student voice is having a very positive impact on ethos.

Success is widely celebrated, included through assemblies, House competitions and Praise Postcards. There is improved tracking and communication of this, including with staff and parents.

The improved health and wellbeing curriculum is having a positive impact on student's understanding of wellbeing indicators, including how they can take responsibility for their own wellbeing.

Wellbeing indicators are now tracked using MS Forms, with data analysed and presented at weekly Berwickshire Intervention Group (BIG) meetings. This allows pastoral staff to review, plan and intervene, to support students in a timely manner. Communication with wider staff has also improved significantly.

There have been considerable improvements to Support for Learning, including communication, bespoke professional learning offers, and use of standardised assessments in literacy and numeracy, with a planned programme of follow-up interventions.



In response to student feedback, there are improved opportunities to contact pastoral and support staff when the need arises, for example, to report bullying.

How do you know? (What is the evidence of improvement?)

Observations and conversations as part of the school's continuous self-evaluation processes, which include:

- Day-to-day observation and monitoring by the Senior Leadership Team.
- Weekly student focus groups, led by depute headteachers.
- Lesson observations, including via weekly learning walks.
- Feedback from the Student Council and student Head Team.
- Twice-yearly one-to-one meetings that all students now have with their Head of Year.
- One-to-one meetings that the headteacher has throughout the year with all staff.
- Seeking the views of parents, including through weekly parental surgeries and from the Parent Council.

In a survey conducted in October 2021, completed by almost all teaching and support staff and a quarter of young people:

- Almost all young people said they feel safe when they are at school.
- Almost all young people said that the school helps them to feel safe.
- Almost all young people said that the school treats them fairly and with respect.
- Almost all young people said that the school helps them understand and respect other people.
- Almost all young people reported that the school deals well with any bullying.
- All staff said that children and young people are encouraged and supported to treat others with respect.
- Most students said other students treat them fairly and with respect.
- Most students said that the school is helping them to feel confident.
- Almost all students said they enjoy learning at school.

The progress the school continues to make in this area was validated by a series of one-day visits by the SBC Quality Improvement team, and by the SBC Review visit in November 2022.

What are they going to do now?

Continue to gather, interpret and act on data to ensure we are 'getting it right' in terms of the wellbeing indicators.

Continue to work closely with Scottish Borders Council to monitor and further improve this area.

Area for improvement 6

All staff should continue their work to raise standards of attainment and provide wider opportunities for achievement to improve outcomes for young people. This includes identifying those young people who may miss out, through taking part in few or no wider achievement activities.

How is the school doing? (What has improved since the last inspection?)

The HMI Summary of Visit letter, based on the November 2021 visit to Berwickshire High School, reported the following:

Senior leaders and staff have taken a strategic and well-considered approach to planning for improvements in attainment and achievement. The headteacher



acknowledges that it might take time to demonstrate measurable impact on improved outcomes for all learners, particularly due to the current pandemic. Significant improvements have been made to teachers' professional learning in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. Improvements have also been made to tracking and monitoring young people's progress in learning, developing flexible curriculum pathways, and providing increased options for wider achievement and leadership. All these improvements continue to support a culture of raising attainment while closing the povertyrelated gap. Senior leaders and staff are identifying, tracking and monitoring young people's achievements robustly. Staff are increasingly developing ways to recognise and celebrate the achievements of all young people. Further consideration needs to be given to ensuring parity of esteem across the wide variety of achievement. Staff are implementing increasingly the Career Education Standard (CES), and focusing more effectively on young people's employability skills. Staff are also using social media and digital communications to ensure that young people and families are kept informed about career opportunities. Information from tracking and monitoring ensures that there is effective alignment between the needs and aspirations of young people, their skills profile, and available career opportunities. The school has an agreed approach to standardised testing with one of its associated primary schools. This approach is being extended across the cluster to support a clearer understanding of young people's needs and progress and to address any gaps in learning effectively. Senior leaders should continue with their plans to further develop the data analysis skills of all teachers to help them monitor and evaluate the impact of improvement activities.

Since this visit, there has been considerable improvement in this area, with particular gains in S4 and S6. These have come about as result of senior leaders taking a rigorous, strategic approach to planning for improvement in the attainment and achievement for all young people.

Approaches to data gathering and interventions planning have been reviewed and now provide robust and reliable evidence for improvement. There is annual Insight training for all staff and there has been development of an improved whole-school tracking system. Young people are attaining more qualifications at SCQF levels 4-6 and are attaining well in literacy and numeracy.

Analysis and discussion of tracking data with class teachers and faculty leaders is much stronger. Every faculty has a clear plan for raising attainment at faculty level. Plans are discussed and reviewed with the Senior Leadership Team each term. This includes at annual Attainment and Improvement Review meetings. There is improved sharing of attainment data with pastoral staff.

A newly appointed Principal Teacher of Raising Attainment and Curriculum Enhancement is focusing on raising attainment for the lowest attainment students in S4-6. The school has continued to develop its positive relationship with Borders College, which is allowing students to attain more widely. There is improved summative and formative assessment across all year groups. Improved systems to track and celebrate wider achievement are also having a very positive impact.

How do you know? (What is the evidence of improvement?)

2022 Insight data analysis. High-level messages include:

- The complimentary tariff points for the lowest attaining 20% of S4 students are significantly above the Virtual Comparator.
- Positive five-year trends for the middle 60% and highest 20% of S4 students.



- The attainment of S4 students being level with or above the Virtual Comparator for five of the six SIMD deciles that comprise the school profile.
- The complimentary tariff points for the middle attaining 60% and highest attaining 20% of S6 students being significantly above the Virtual Comparator, and showing positive five-year trends.
- 90% of S4 students attained 5+ level 4 qualifications (the Virtual Comparator is 80%).
- 60% of S5 students attained 5+ level 5 qualifications (the Virtual Comparator is 53%).
- 49% of S6 students attained 1+ level 7 qualification (the Virtual Comparator is 45%).

The whole-school wider achievement tracker and weekly Heads Up newsletter evidence that the school has a much fuller picture of achievements across the school community.

An in-depth Attainment Analysis meeting, which included a team of senior education leaders from Scottish Borders Council, and the SBC Review Visit in November 2022, validated the significant improvements that have been made in this area.

What are they going to do now?

Continue to monitor attainment at planned points in the school year. This will include in partnership with Scottish Borders Council's Quality Improvement team and national Insight advisors.