
HERMITAGE ACADEMY CURRICULUM REVIEW

1.0	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
	1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Community Services Committee of the progress in taking forward an internal review of the senior phase curriculum at Hermitage Academy.
	1.2	It is recommended that the Community Service Committee:
	a	Note the progress in taking forward the current internal review of the senior phase curriculum at Hermitage Academy.
	b	Note the outcomes of the individual aspects of the internal review, including areas of strength and further development.
	c	Note the engagement of Education Scotland in working with the local authority and Hermitage Academy to contribute challenge, knowledge and advice to the Council's internal review of the senior phase curriculum at Hermitage Academy.
	d	Agree the recommendations contained within this report.
	e	Note that a further progress report will be presented to a future Community Services Committee meeting.

HERMITAGE ACADEMY CURRICULUM REVIEW

2.0	INTRODUCTION	
	2.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Community Services Committee of the progress in taking forward an internal review of the senior phase curriculum at Hermitage Academy.
3.0	RECOMMENDATIONS	
	It is recommended that the Community Service Committee:	
	A	Note the progress in taking forward the current internal review of the senior phase curriculum at Hermitage Academy.
	B	Note the outcomes of the individual aspects of the internal review, including areas of strength and further development.
	C	Note the engagement of Education Scotland in working with the local authority and Hermitage Academy to contribute challenge, knowledge and advice to the Council's internal review of the senior phase curriculum at Hermitage Academy.
	D	Agree the recommendations contained within this report.
	E	Note that a further progress report will be presented to a future Community Services Committee meeting.

4.0	DETAIL	
	4.1	<p>Hermitage Academy, similar to all Scottish Schools introduced their senior phase curriculum model with the key aims of supporting all learners to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve their potential • Experience success • And be well prepared for life beyond school. <p>The approach implemented by Hermitage Academy offers a two year course with presentation in external examinations at Higher at the end of fifth year for the majority of young people. This approach embraces the key principles of Curriculum for Excellence, aiming to achieve the highest possible outcomes for all young people. Only a small number of schools in Scotland currently apply a similar framework.</p> <p>In August 2015, Hermitage Academy, similar to all schools received the examination results for all pupils presented as part of the 2014/2015 examination diet. While a number of young people achieved successful outcomes, particularly in Higher grade examinations, for a significant number of young people their individual examination outcomes were less positive.</p>

A summary briefing paper outlining the background to the Hermitage Academy curriculum framework, the examination outcomes and future areas for consideration was provided for information to local elected members (5th August 2015) and to assist in responding to constituent enquires.

Following the examination results a number of concerns were raised by parents about the curriculum policy, examination outcomes, the school's presentation policy and consultation and engagement with parents. In addition, a number of parental letters were received highlighting their concerns about what the current framework meant for their children. These concerns were followed by questions and enquiries from local elected members as well as national politicians. In addition several media enquiries were received.

Advice was given either by the school or the Education Authority to confirm that their concerns would be considered in the course of the on-going review and that they would receive a response and assurance following the completion of the review.

At this time Education Services engaged with Hermitage Academy as part of the routine programme of support and challenge with all schools. Through this engagement, it was agreed that a fuller review of the curricular model and its impact would be undertaken jointly by the school and the Education Service.

4.2

At the Council meeting of 22 October 2015 the Council:

- Noted the concerns expressed about the current curricular model (framework) in place at Hermitage Academy and the possible impact on the 2015 academic results for the school
- Reaffirmed that the education of our children and young people is a key priority for the Council
- Noted that the Council's Education Service has commenced a review of the curricular model (framework) in conjunction with the Hermitage Academy Senior Leadership Team following the publication of the first year of results
- Agreed that the review will consult staff, parents and pupils with immediate effect to ensure their views are reflected in the evaluation and its outcome
- Noted that the design of a curricular model (framework) for schools, firmly embedded in the Curriculum for Excellence, is an operational matter based on education professional judgement
- Noted that it would be inappropriate for the council to direct the design of a school curriculum which is not based on a professional evaluation and prior to the conclusion of the current review
- Agreed that any changes to the curricular model (framework) at Hermitage Academy should take account of the needs of all pupils at the school, including those currently in the senior phase
- Endorsed the view of the Education Service that any critical adjustments found to be necessary during the review will be implemented immediately to minimise potential disruption to learners
- Agreed that regular updates on the ongoing review, and any resulting changes to the curriculum model, are reported to the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee and the Community Services Committee
- Agreed that any policy implications or changes required as a consequence of the review were reported to the Community Services Committee and Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

4.3	<p>Following the October Council meeting, Education Services continued to progress the comprehensive review of the senior phase curriculum framework jointly with Hermitage Academy.</p> <p>As the Hermitage Academy curriculum framework was different in structure to that of other Argyll and Bute secondary schools, the engagement included a review of the senior phase curriculum in terms of both processes and outcomes.</p> <p>The principal aim of the review was to assess the effectiveness and impact of the current senior phase curriculum framework in meeting the needs of all of the young people attending Hermitage Academy.</p> <p>To assess this impact a number of review activities were taken forward including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of a wide range of background information including: scrutiny of examination statistics, approaches to whole school and departmental tracking and monitoring: including the effectiveness of the school’s supporting learners programme “/time”, and review of subject timetabling arrangements; • A review of current departmental tracking and monitoring of individual pupil progress; • Issue of questionnaires to all parents/carers, pupils and staff of Hermitage Academy. Full analysis of the questionnaire responses; • Facilitation of a range of opt in focus groups for parents/carers, pupils, staff and pupils; • Analysis of responses from all focus groups; • Consideration of individual submissions by parents/carers; • Participation in one to one meetings, as requested by individual staff members; • Consideration of documentation provided at an initial meeting facilitated by the Parent Council; • Review of the effectiveness of approaches to engagement and communication between the school and parents; • Review of the documentation providing information on the individual learning experiences of young people, and • Meetings with a number of principal teachers.
4.4	<p>Following the initial field work phase of the curriculum review (as noted at section 4.3) Education Scotland was invited by the Council’s Education Service to join the review team to contribute challenge, knowledge and advice to the Council’s internal review of the senior phase curriculum at Hermitage Academy. This engagement included a commitment to provide on-going support to both the local authority and the school in order to offer an independent perspective, as well as advice around best practice, parental engagement and assessment.</p>
4.5	<p>Key themes identified within the Curriculum Review</p>
	<p>Upon completion of the curriculum review, findings in relation to four key themes were agreed by members of the review team. These were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overall effectiveness of the current curriculum framework (model), including enhancement courses in meeting the needs of all young people; 2. Effectiveness and impact of whole school approaches to tracking and monitoring learners’ progress;

		<p>3. Effectiveness of approaches to engagement and communication with key stakeholders; and</p> <p>4. Evaluation of the school presentation policy and its impact on learners.</p>
4.6	Key messages	
	<p>4.6.1 Overall effectiveness of the current curriculum framework (model), including enhancement courses in meeting the needs of all learners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current curriculum framework is resulting in a range of positive outcomes for some learners. • In 2015, Attainment by the end of S5 at Higher (SCQF level 6) has increased since 2014 and is now in line with virtual comparators (the virtual comparator is compiled from the results of pupils across Scotland and is built to reflect the same socio economic/ demographic profile as Hermitage); • Some young people are also achieving certification through the enhancement courses. For example, community sports leadership awards, sociology and positive destination; • In 2015, Attainment at National 3, 4 and 5 is generally significantly below virtual comparators; and • Enhancement courses are perceived, by some, as not adding sufficient value for the time commitment. 	
	<p>4.6.2 Effectiveness and impact of whole school approaches to tracking and monitoring learners progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a range of established procedures and processes in place to track and monitor outcomes for learners this includes the use of “<i>l-time</i>” and targeted support for young people; • Young people, parents and staff do not have a shared understanding of the progress individual young people are making; • Target and presentation levels are not sufficiently clear for all young people and their parents; • The reliability and consistency of assessment information requires to be improved; and • A strategic overview of pupil progress across subjects, courses and levels is not sufficiently well developed to lead to improved outcomes. 	
	<p>4.6.3 Effectiveness of approaches to engagement and communication with key stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broad range of approaches is used by the school to engage effectively with pupils, parents and staff. This includes Parents Evenings, Open Night, P7 Information Evening; • Further work is required to improve engagement and communication with pupils and staff; and • Parents of the current S6 feel that they have been well-informed about the curriculum model. However, overall staff, pupils and parents are not sufficiently clear about the current curriculum framework. In particular there is a notable lack of clarity about the two year course versus the two year Higher. 	
	<p>4.6.4 Evaluation of the school presentation policy and its impact on learners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hermitage Academy’s current presentation policy has resulted in a high level of attainment for many pupils. However for a 	

		significant number of young people the current framework did not fully meet their needs.
	4.7	Key actions
		<p>A number of key actions have been identified to securing improvement in outcomes for all young people attending Hermitage Academy. These include making changes to the current framework :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply greater flexibility in the delivery of the current curricular pathways to improve further the outcomes for all young people. This should include increasing the range of opportunities for one and two years pathways to certification; • Immediately implement changes to the current delivery of enhancement courses to maximise opportunities for all young people to attain highly; • Review individual pupil progress across all subjects to ensure pupils are achieving at the appropriate level; • Build on the recent review of Broad General Education (BGE) to ensure pupils have appropriate opportunities for specialisation (ensuring young people have a suitably broad experience in the BGE to support their subject choices in the senior phase) ; • Develop further the recently revised processes in the senior phase for tracking and monitoring to inform appropriate and timely interventions to help secure improvements in attainment for all young people; • Work with parents, staff and pupils to develop a shared understanding of progress (assessment, working grades, target grades, presentation levels); • Ensure effective systems are in place to confirm the reliability and consistency of assessment information; and • Develop further the school’s strategic overview of pupil progress across subjects and courses. <p>Communicating the action planning to secure improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A letter illustrating the findings of the curriculum review will be prepared and issued to all parents, noting the comments of Education Scotland (see Appendix 4); • Further discussions will be taken forward between the school, Education Services and the recently elected Parent Council to share the findings of the review and subsequent actions; • Individual pupil and family engagement for all S4 and S5 pupils will be offered; and • A further presentation to the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee to share information on the review.
6.0	CONCLUSION	
	6.1	<p>Following the Hermitage Academy curriculum review the team concluded that the current curriculum design should be amended and improved to ensure it effectively meets the needs of all young people.</p> <p>Education Services, Hermitage Academy and Education Scotland have jointly taken forward a comprehensive review of the senior phase curriculum framework. This has resulted in the preparation of an action plan, which addresses identified areas for improvement to be taken forward immediately and also over medium and longer term timescales.</p> <p>Education Services will continue to engage with Hermitage Academy to ensure the delivery of these actions, as well as to provide on-going challenge and support. A programme of visits will be agreed to allow</p>

		<p>Education Services to monitor and report the progress of the school in taking forward the key components of the action plan, as appropriate.</p> <p>A further letter will be prepared for issue to all Hermitage Academy parents outlining the outcome of the review and confirming proposed actions.</p> <p>Support for pupils currently studying in the senior phase will be routinely reviewed to ensure the needs of learners are met. Going forward regular communication and engagement with parents/carers will be a key feature of this commitment.</p> <p>The school will build on the recent review of Broad General Education (BGE) to ensure young people have appropriate opportunities for specialisation in core subjects prior to entering the senior phase.</p>	
7.0	IMPLICATIONS		
	7.1	Policy	The outcome of the curriculum review may result in policy implications.
	7.2	Financial	None
	7.3	Legal	The Council meets its duties in terms of the Education Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000.
	7.4	HR	None
	7.5	Equalities	None
	7.6	Risk	There are risks to the Council in terms of reputation and operational risks
	7.7	Customer Service	None

Cleland Sneddon
Executive Director of Community Services

Policy Lead, Councillor R Colville

10 December 2015

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Summary of outcome of parent questionnaire and focus groups**
- Appendix 2: Summary of outcome of pupil questionnaire and focus groups**
- Appendix 3: Summary of outcome of staff questionnaire and focus groups**
- Appendix 4: Education Scotland Letter**

Summary of parent questionnaire and focus group responses

The school issued a questionnaire to all parents asking them to respond to 15 key questions concerning aspects of the Hermitage Academy Senior Phase curriculum. In addition parents were provided with an opportunity to include further comments within their questionnaire return.

Over 410 responses were received, which reflects a 31% response rate.

Parents were asked to indicate the current stage of their child to assist in further evaluation of particular strengths or areas for improvement for individual cohorts of pupils. The level of response across each of the secondary stages (S1 – S6) ranged from 12% to 18%. In some instances (approximately 12%) a single questionnaire was submitted for pupils across two or more stages.

The following questions were asked:

	as a % of Questionnaires Received			
	Yes	No	Don't Know	% who answered question
1: When moving from the BGE to the Senior Phase has your child had the opportunity for personalisation and choice?	35%	33%	19%	87%
2: Have you had the opportunity to be informed/involved in your child's options choices with the school?	37%	45%	7%	89%
3: Do you think that the Senior Phase is designed to allow your child to achieve their potential in attainment and wider achievement?	17%	61%	17%	95%
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	
4: I have had an opportunity to discuss my child's curriculum and feel that it meets their needs	19%	66%	9%	94%
5: My child is experiencing success through their choices in the Senior Phase	14%	30%	28%	72%
	Yes	No	Don't Know	
6: Does the Senior Phase encourage approaches to learning that help motivate your child?	11%	44%	29%	84%
7: Do you have opportunities to discuss the tracking and monitoring of your child's progress	44%	38%	12%	94%
8: Have you received appropriate information from the school's tracking and monitoring about your child's next steps?	37%	52%	7%	96%
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	
9: I have the opportunity to discuss my child's progress with staff	52%	34%	8%	94%
10: My child has the opportunity to progress through different contexts (e.g. work experience, college, outdoor learning) and pathways/routes throughout the Senior Phase	18%	34%	36%	88%
	Yes	No	Don't Know	
11: Is your child supported by a member of staff who knows them well?	36%	30%	28%	94%
12: Has the enhancement programme allowed your child to broaden their skill set?	17%	38%	24%	79%

13: Do you feel that the S4-S6 curriculum will prepare your child for life beyond school through a positive and sustained post school destination?	12%	50%	29%	91%
14: Do you know who to contact if you wish to discuss your child's learning pathway/route?	40%	42%	13%	95%
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	
15: As the curriculum has developed and refined, how have you been able to put forward your views? Please include any suggestions for on-going improvement.	5%	52%	19%	76%

Key messages arising from the responses received from parents.

- Over half of the respondents agreed that they had an opportunity to discuss their child's progress;
- Provision of supported study programmes for senior pupils is much appreciated by parents;
- Parents report a lack of understanding about the current curriculum framework. They note confusion, difficulty understanding the language/terminology used and inconsistent messages from members of staff;
- Parents are unaware that the curriculum framework is not universally used in most other schools;
- There is a lack of clarity around the idea of a "two year course" versus a "two year Higher";
- Concerns about enhancements: parents do not value enhancements and are concerned about the amount of time being spend on enhancement courses;
- Concerns about the potential lack of achievement in English and mathematics, with further concern about the perceived lack of a safety net for pupils not achieving success in Higher grade examinations;
- Level of knowledge of parents in respect of the progress being made by their children - information provided is not considered to be helpful; and
- Limited preparation of pupils for external examination, lack of exam experience.

Parents requested the following changes and improvements:

- Improved engagement and communication with the school;
- Further updated information on the senior phase at key transition stages, in particular when entering secondary from primary 7;
- Additional parents evenings;
- Greater flexibility within the current senior phase model for individual young people, and
- Increased opportunities for certification in S4 and S5.

Summary of pupil questionnaire and focus group responses

The school issued a questionnaire to all S4-6 pupils asking them to respond to 10 key questions concerning the Senior Phase in Hermitage Academy. In addition pupils were provided with an opportunity to include further comments within their questionnaire return.

The questionnaire was responded to by 480 of the 620 S4-6 pupils, which reflects a 77% response rate.

The following questions were asked:

		As a % of Questionnaires Received			
		Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	% who answered question
1	I feel I got enough information to help me make my choices for the Senior Phase?	43%	42%	15%	100%
2	I was helped by someone in the school when making my choices for the Senior Phase	37%	43%	12%	93%
3	I think that the Senior Phase helps me achieve my best results.	14%	59%	21%	94%
4	I have regular opportunities to discuss my progress and know what I have to do next to improve.	21%	58%	17%	96%
5	I am supported by a member of staff who knows me well.	48%	37%	13%	98%
6	I feel that the Senior Phase will prepare me for life beyond school.	18%	54%	24%	95%
7	I feel that I have had the opportunity to give my views on the curriculum in the Senior Phase.	11%	75%	8%	95%
8	The enhancement programme has allowed me to broaden my skills.	30%	49%	15%	94%
9	The Senior Phase is designed to improve exam results.	18%	56%	21%	95%
10	I have had the opportunity for personalisation and choice in the Senior Phase	25%	43%	25%	93%

Key messages arising from the additional comments received from pupils:

- Some pupils felt that they had been helped by someone in the school and had enough information to make choices in the Senior Phase, however many did not.
- Many pupils felt that they were supported by a member of staff who knows them well through I-time, particularly if their supporter remained unchanged.
- Enhancement programmes that led to certification were highly valued by pupils.
- Many pupils would like the option of using enhancement time as study time or additional time with their teachers in their presentation subjects. This was a view particularly expressed amongst S5 pupils as they felt that it would remove some of the time pressure that they were feeling.

- Some pupils would have preferred to sit N5 examinations in S4 prior to sitting Higher in S5 to secure results and to improve their confidence.
- Some pupils were unclear around their targets, progress and presentation level.
- Some pupils that had been presented for N4/N5 reported that they felt these qualifications were viewed as being of less value by some staff.
- Some pupils reported that they would like the option of being able to change courses at the end of S4 whilst others liked the 2-year course.
- Some pupils reported that they had achieved 6 Highers and that they understood that the school wanted them to achieve highly.

Summary of staff questionnaire and focus group responses:

The school issued a questionnaire to all staff asking them to evaluate three aspects of the Senior Phase in Hermitage Academy:

- 1: Rationale and design of curriculum;
- 2: Development of the curriculum, and
- 3: Programmes and courses.

There were 96 responses from the 115.7 fte staff comprising of teachers, ASN assistants and Classroom assistants; full time, part-time, permanent or temporary. (An 83% response rate).

The following questions were asked which are rated on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 is low and 5 is high; 6 is don't know:

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Indicator		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Each row equals 100% of the respondents.		%	%	%	%	%	%
C1 Rationale and Design of the Curriculum							
Q1	The senior phase enables the development and improvement of approaches to learning that supports and motivates learners.	26	17	16	26	12	2
Q2	The senior phase is designed to improve the achievement of all young people.	29	18	12	24	15	1
Q3	The design of the senior phase creates space for more in-depth learning and allows more time to be spent on challenging learning at higher levels.	38	20	9	13	21	0
Q4	The senior phase affords all young people the opportunity to learn over variable time-frames as appropriate to their ability.	42	24	8	16	10	0
C2 Development of the Curriculum							
Q1	The senior phase enables the development and improvement of approaches to learning that supports and motivates learners.	26	17	16	26	12	2
Q2	The senior phase ensures a continued focus on literacy.	10	21	27	29	8	5
Q3	The senior phase ensures a continued focus on numeracy.	10	27	26	25	4	8
Q4	The senior phase ensures a continued focus on health and wellbeing.	11	20	29	25	8	8
Q5	The senior phase provides	5	15	25	24	7	24

	appropriate provision of RME and PE.						
Q6	The senior phase provides opportunities for progression in personal achievement.	12	15	13	30	17	12
Q7	The senior phase provides opportunities for progression in interdisciplinary learning.	23	37	23	15	0	2
C3 Programmes and Courses							
Q1	Programmes and courses within the senior phase have clear embedded processes and strategies for evaluation and improvement which maximise the range of provision to meet all learners' needs.	14	25	15	25	12	9
Q2	Programmes and courses within the senior phase ensure they maximise the range of provision to meet all learners' needs.	18	38	11	20	10	3
Q3	We collaborate across the school to develop and deliver flexible progression routes related to relevant programmes of learning within our senior phase.	33	26	14	16	3	8
Q4	We collaborate with external partners to develop and deliver flexible progression routes related to relevant programmes of learning within our senior phase.	10	12	16	26	10	26
Q5	We use available evidence about young people's progress and choices to inform and develop the senior phase.	21	20	13	30	12	4
Q6	We take action to ensure the curriculum delivers the entitlements and better meets learner's needs.	16	28	10	29	11	5
Q7	Programmes of learning in the senior phase emphasise depth and application of learning.	18	21	16	29	14	1
Q8	Programmes of learning in the senior phase develop skills, including higher order thinking skills.	9	18	10	45	18	0
Q9	Programmes of learning in the senior phase provide increased opportunities for personalisation and choice.	23	17	4	39	15	1
Q10	Programmes of learning in the senior phase provide increased opportunities for learning through relevant real-life contexts.	8	18	23	32	14	5
Q11	Programmes of learning incorporate an element of flexibility where needed to allow young people to learn across levels.	26	22	14	25	10	3
	Percentage Totals	20	22	16	26	11	6

1: Rationale and Design of the curriculum

A minority of staff agree that the rationale and design of the senior phase curriculum provides young people with the opportunity to achieve and attain appropriately. They have concerns regarding the lack of flexibility, and the time frames of courses.

A minority of staff feel that while the design of the senior phase is aspirational, in practice the framework does not deliver for all young people and can be detrimental to self-esteem. In some subject areas staff feel that double periods would be helpful during the Senior Phase.

2: Development of the curriculum

There is a lack of ownership of the current curricular framework by teaching staff. Overall the feeling from staff is that the current course structure does not fully meet the needs of all young people. A minority agree the development of the curriculum has been appropriate and works well in a number of subjects. Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing are not seen in general as the responsibility of all staff. Staff are concerned about Literacy and Numeracy being covered for all young people as neither English nor Mathematics are compulsory after S3. The time given to enhancements was raised by many staff as a concern especially during S5, although some staff value particular enhancements which lead to accreditation. Those who comment on Inter Disciplinary Learning (IDL) feel there is very little opportunity for this during the senior phase. Personal achievement is recognised by the majority of staff as being strong. Staff have reported that they had spent more time developing Higher courses, but less time developing National 4 and National 5 courses.

The school has recently reviewed the Broad General Education and as an outcome will be introducing some changes to provide Personalisation and Choice to allow the study of subjects at a greater depth within S3.

I-time has the potential to be helpful in supporting young people with their learning. However, the consistency in delivery needs to be improved to support target setting and tracking of progress.

3: Programmes and Courses

The majority of staff understand that all pupils were and are studying for a two year Higher course. This led to concerns when some young people changed level. These concerns included the rushed nature of courses in addressing the required learning for National 5, including the time available for in-depth learning. Staff indicate that in instances where changes were made to the level of presentation for young people (from Higher to National 5) that this was perceived across subject areas by staff and pupils to be "less worthy". There is also perception that allowing pupils to change levels was actively discouraged. Teaching across different levels of qualifications was identified as presenting difficulties.

Letter from Education Scotland



4 December 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Hermitage Academy
Argyll and Bute Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I visited your child's school. At the time, Argyll and Bute Council were leading a review into the curriculum framework at Hermitage Academy and had undertaken to do this in partnership with the school's leadership team, parents and young people. Our visit followed an invitation from Argyll and Bute Council to join their staff to contribute challenge, knowledge and advice, and to help them identify areas for action.

During our visit we talked to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Parent Council and worked closely with authority staff, the headteacher, senior leadership team, and a few principal teachers. We worked in partnership with authority staff and school staff to look at some particular aspects of the school's work, including young people's attainment and the curriculum. We also worked with them to review the findings from their consultation and engagement with young people, staff and parents. We reviewed the school's approaches to monitoring and tracking the progress of young people, and discussed these arrangements with a few principal teachers.

As a result of all of this engagement, we were able to agree with the key messages and proposed areas for improvement that Argyll and Bute Council set out in the committee paper to be presented to the Community Services Committee on 10 December 2015.

Hermitage Academy embraced the principles of Curriculum for Excellence when it introduced the current curriculum framework. At that time, parents were consulted appropriately by the school. We have now agreed with Argyll and Bute Council that parental engagement is an area of improvement for the school.

By S5, the attainment of young people at Higher grade has increased since 2014 and is now in line with the performance of other young people with similar needs and backgrounds in schools across Scotland. In 2015, however, by S5 the overall attainment of young people at (or above) National 3, National 4 and National 5 is significantly below that of other young people with similar needs and backgrounds in schools across Scotland. We believe that this is a result of the inflexible approach taken by the school to two-year courses and a lack of consistently high quality assessment to monitor and track young people's progress through learning. We are unable to comment on the experience of young people in lessons as this was not part of our involvement in the review. Argyll and Bute Council,

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Transforming lives through learning

working with Hermitage Academy, has agreed actions to secure improvements in outcomes for young people.

What happens next?

As a result of our involvement in the review, at the invitation of Argyll and Bute Council, we think that this school needs additional support to make the necessary improvements. As part of Education Scotland's Local Partnership Agreement, our Area Lead Officer will work with Argyll and Bute Council to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact with the school to jointly monitor progress. We will return to carry out a further visit within one year of publication of this letter. We will then issue a letter to parents on the extent to which the school has improved.

Elizabeth Morrison
HM Inspector