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, 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