

# **MEARNS CASTLE HIGH SCHOOL**

## **Standards and Quality Report 2021-2022**

### **Context of the School**

Mearns Castle High School is a large non-denominational secondary school in Newton Mearns in East Renfrewshire. The Mearns Castle Cluster consists of one partner Family Centre, Hazeldene and five partner Primary Schools:- Mearns (shared with Eastwood High School), Kirkhill, Eaglesham, Calderwood Lodge and the recently opened Maidenhill Primary School.

Our school roll (at June 2022) is 1401. We have a staying on rate of well over 90% and maintain very high numbers in our senior school.

The school is fully staffed with 116 teachers and 30 support staff. We also benefit from a dynamic Parent Council which takes an active interest in promoting and supporting the school. Together we work in partnership with staff from a range of partner agencies to ensure the highest quality educational experience for our pupils.

Our school has an excellent reputation for high levels of academic attainment as well as very successful wider participation and achievement. We pride ourselves on providing an inclusive education for all of our pupils and we are committed to ensuring that all pupils achieve their full potential. We work hard as a school community to successfully deliver our shared vision for our school.

Throughout session 2021-22, we have consulted extensively on our new Mission, Vision & Values. This will be launched in the first term of 2022-23. Our existing School Charter is:

### **Our Vision**

The Mearns Castle High School community will work together to sustain a safe, inclusive and high quality learning environment that enables us to develop fully our capacities as successful pupils, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society.

### **Our Vision, based on our Values, will be realised through the achievement of Our Aims**

#### **Our Values**

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|------------------------|---|
| <b>Respect:</b>        | show self-respect and be considerate of the needs, wishes and feelings of others. |
| <b>Inclusion:</b>      | treat all people fairly and enable them to feel included.                         |
| <b>Integrity:</b>      | be honest and sincere.  |
| <b>Responsibility:</b> | be accountable for your actions and make a positive contribution to society.      |
| <b>Ambition:</b>       | show a pride in your school and have high expectations of what you can achieve.   |
| <b>Achievement:</b>    | be enthusiastic and show a determination to succeed in all you do.                |

#### **Our Aims**

We will be motivated and enthusiastic in our learning and teaching and determined to reach the highest standards of attainment and achievement.

We will be confident and ambitious, build positive relationships and pursue a healthy and active lifestyle. We will show initiative and be enterprising, creative and responsible citizens.

We will show respect for others, care for our environment and make a positive contribution to society.

## **Improvement Plan Priorities 2021-2022**

- Based on Scottish Government Guidance and the Education Department's Local Delivery Phasing Plan, and guided by the relevant Risk Assessments and Operational Protocols, safely and successfully maintain a Covid Secure school.
- Review the school's Mission, Vision, Values & Aims alongside the formation of a Strategic Improvement Plan.
- Development of MCHS Curriculum Rationale linked to revised mission, vision and values.
- Review of curriculum and learner pathways in line with Rationale and ensure a widened offer to meet the needs of all learners. SLWG to assist with this.
- A whole school community evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching utilising QI 2.3, led by the Learning & Teaching Improvement Team.
- L&T Imp. Team lesson observation pilot completed with recommendations for session 2022-23.
- Build on the improvements made during session 20-21 with a clear framework for excellence in Digital Learning & Teaching in MCHS focussed, in particular, on enhancing the use of digital tools to ensure a seamless experience between remote and in-class learning.
- Devise and implement a MCHS Leadership Academy based on the EEF's evidence based approach to school improvement.
- Implement ERC GIRFEC Framework through the re-formation of Pupil Support to ensure integrated support, a clear Named Support Person and common assessment and planning approaches across the dept. as part of an enhanced pupil support offer.
- Based on the Education Department's Health and Wellbeing Action Plan implement a whole school approach to enhanced universal and targeted support for wellbeing and positive mental health.
- Introduce a new wellbeing base. A new universal and targeted CBT programme – 'Living Life to the Full'. A range of universal activities to promote wider wellbeing supports.
- Implement the MCHS Equalities Strategy focussing on school cohesion across the three strands of: Sexuality and Gender, Faith and Culture, Disability and Accessibility
- Review the school's attendance policy and procedures in line with ERC updates and linked to increased in-school interventions being introduced this session.
- Implement a clear Recovery Programme as part of the Build Back Better Strategy meeting the needs of specific Year Group cohorts and pupils.
- Identification of target groups of S4 pupils at both subject and whole school level with interventions and follow up assessment implemented to close gaps in learning from the two 'lockdown' periods.
- Implement a pilot study skills programme for S5 pupils.
- Identify groups that may have been most disadvantaged by lockdown periods and devise a programme to close the attainment gaps for these learners.
- Re-introduce Mentoring programme and widen focus from boys to those most impacted by learning loss.
- Implement our new tool to record, track and recognise pupils' personal achievements within and outwith school.

## **Method of Gathering Evidence**

The evaluative judgements made throughout the Report are based on evidence gathered from the following sources:

- Systematic analysis of SQA, Curriculum for Excellence and Standardised Test attainment data at both school and Cluster level
- Systematic analysis of other key performance data e.g. finance, attendance, exclusion, SLDR
- Systematic evaluation of performance against Local Authority targets
- Regular meetings of School Teams at all levels including SLT, ELT, Faculty and Departmental Teams and School Improvement Teams
- Regular Self-Evaluation Meetings between HT and PTs/Faculty Heads
- SLT link arrangements with Faculties/Departments
- School Recovery Group Meetings and evaluations of recovery implementation.
- Regular meetings between Head Teacher and Teachers' Representatives
- Informal and formal consultation with staff, pupils, parents and other stakeholders
- Staff involvement in PRD programme
- Regular consultation with Parent Council
- Parental feedback formally and informally throughout the session
- Regular meetings between Head Teacher and School Support Leaders

## **How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?**

(1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4)

**Evaluation: Very Good**

<b>NIF Priority</b>	<b>School Priorities 2021-22</b>
All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implement a Leadership Academy and enhance the use of evidence to inform improvement priorities.</li><li>• Revise the school's mission, vision, values and strategic improvement plan.</li><li>• Develop a revised approach to self-evaluation of Learning, Teaching &amp; Assessment utilising HGIOS4 QI 2.3</li><li>• Develop a new MCHS Self Evaluation Policy to assist all school staff in identifying agreed, evidence based strengths and well selected next steps.</li></ul>
<b>NIF Driver(s)</b> School Leadership Teacher Professionalism School Improvement	

## **Progress, Impact and Outcomes**

We ensured a safe, successful return following the lockdown periods last session and have built on this throughout this session. Attendance rates have been high, demonstrating confidence in our covid-secure protocols and the arrangements in place to keep the school community safe. Leadership at all levels has ensured the safe, successful return has been implemented successfully. This session, we have built on this through the re-introduction of an extensive extra-curricular programme and a range of educational excursions.

Building on communications approaches from last session, we have ensured very effective approaches to communication for all stakeholders through the continued issuing of very regular Parent Updates, HT Virtual Assemblies, the return of in-person House and Year Group Assemblies, Virtual Parents' Evenings and a return to in-person partnership events. The confidence of the school community in the school's approaches have been built through these strong communications and this is evidenced in parent and staff surveys and pupil focus groups.

All staff understand that self-evaluation is an integral aspect of our approach to continuous improvement. We use a range of effective approaches to ensure all staff, partners, pupils, and

other stakeholders are actively involved in our ongoing self-evaluation activities. Throughout this session all Extended Leadership Team (ELT) meetings have focussed on self-evaluation and re-visiting approaches to effective self-evaluation.

We are currently utilising HGIOS4 to form of our Three Year Strategic Plan in line with ERC Education Department's Towards 2025 agenda. The whole school community have been extensively involved in developing our new Mission, Vision & Values. Leaders at all levels support reflection by individuals, groups of staff, and with partners across our learning community. Pupil participation is a strong feature of our approach to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. We have further developed our Pupil Leadership and Pupil Council arrangements. We have expanded the membership of our Pupil Council to all pupils with a formal leadership position – over 80 pupils. This session, the Pupil Council has discussed learning and teaching, a new digital homework tool and the use of our £5,000 Pupil Leadership Budget – resulting in outside seating, fitness equipment and other priority areas being addressed. Through regular and effective collaboration our community has a shared understanding of the school's strengths and contribute to identifying improvement needs. We have a very large number of S6 pupils involved in our Community Involvement programme, including over 100 peer-tutors. These pro-active members of the school community assist in identifying and driving forward areas of school improvement. We have developed very effective mechanisms to consult with stakeholders, including regular self-evaluation questionnaires and can show how their views inform change and improvement. This session we have utilised these approaches to help inform our approaches to school uniform, parental involvement, school mission, curriculum development and learning & teaching.

Within our school and with our learning community, we engage regularly in effective quality improvement and moderation activities and have agreed standards and expectations. We have a representative from every Faculty/Department involved in the Education Department Moderation Programme. All staff analyse and use evidence very well to ensure a clear focus on those priorities which will have greatest impact. We have accurate intelligence about the quality of learning and teaching and the attainment and achievement of all pupils. We gather a range of data and information to monitor and track progress for all pupils. We have continued to use our Gradient of Progression (3-18) to track pupils' progress through the BGE leading to appropriate interventions to maximise pupils' attainment. We regularly interrogate data, making use of digital technology to support this where relevant and appropriate. We have taken steps to ensure all planning, monitoring, tracking and evaluating is manageable and relevant for all involved. We use a wide range of local, national and international advice and research to reflect on current practice and evaluate any new initiatives, ideas and changes which have been introduced. We utilise the EEF Framework to inform improvements and our Leadership Academy has taken forward a focus on improvement methodology. We actively seek out and share good practice within and beyond the school and can demonstrate improvement as a result. We continue to use the CfE Machine and The Results Machine to support our work in this area.

Our self-evaluation focuses on key aspects of our work. We can show clear evidence of improvement based on actions taken as a result of self-evaluation. We can demonstrate the impact of improvement arising from self-evaluation on learning and teaching and the attainment, achievement and wellbeing of pupils. Across our school, an ethos of professional engagement and collegiate working is evident. This session, the introduction of new Professional Learning sessions has allowed all teachers to utilise good practice within the school and has further demonstrated a culture of collegiality and collaboration. This leads to continuous improvement in learning and teaching and improved outcomes for our pupils. The collegiate and impactful work of our Digital Learning Improvement Team has been recognised through our achievement of the Digital Schools Award, the implementation of our successful approach to remote learning and our successful embedding of virtual Parents' Evenings.

There is evidence of strong leadership of learning by staff at all levels and in a range of contexts. We build and maintain constructive relationships, within our school and beyond, which foster collective responsibility and mutual support. Staff undertake roles in ways which help to motivate, support and inspire others. Our school has a collegiate learning culture demonstrated through, for example, all staff engaging in collegiate professional learning sessions, peer

learning, constructive feedback, professional dialogue and debate. Staff work collaboratively with colleagues, pupils, partners and parents to take forward improvement priorities and learn with and from each other. This was evidenced strongly following the remote learning period, with all staff building upon the initial professional learning to take forward further improvements this session. All classes now have online platforms established with weekly updates and regular sharing of resources. Digital platforms were also utilised extensively to support Senior Phase pupils this session through the provision of online Subject Support Packs and virtual Assisted Study sessions.

All staff routinely engage in career-long professional learning (CLPL) and develop enquiring and coherent approaches which build and sustain our practice. A number of staff have undertaken distributed leadership roles this session, enhancing their own professional development and contributing to school improvement. The model of professional learning is understood and used by all staff. Individually and collectively, we plan and evaluate our professional learning directly on the quality of impact on learning and can evidence improvements for pupils. We develop and use knowledge from literature, research and policy sources to support the process of leading and developing learning. We are proactive in extending and deepening our knowledge and understanding of curriculum areas to ensure our subject knowledge is up-to-date. We support staff to access high-quality professional learning linked to cross-cutting themes such as global citizenship, outdoor learning and international education. We are continually improving our approaches to digital learning and teaching including the investment in over 100 Chromebooks, 100 visualisers and a range of digital displays and additional hardware to support use of digital technology to enhance learning. We critically reflect on individual and collective professional learning. We work collaboratively to enhance teaching which leads to high-quality learning experiences for our pupils. This session, this has enhanced digital learning, teaching and reporting for all staff. Our Learning and Teaching Improvement Team has successfully piloted an approach to observation which will inform further improvements to learning and teaching. Our staff maintain effective records of their professional learning and development and create a clear professional learning action plan. We can evidence the impact our professional learning has had on our work and the progress, achievement and attainment of pupils over time.

We provide a wide range of opportunities and support to ensure pupils can take responsibility for their own learning, successes and achievements. Our pupils are developing the necessary resilience and confidence to enable them to make decisions about their own learning and to lead others' learning. They demonstrate this in a range of learning contexts within the school and community. Large numbers of pupils have been awarded the Saltire Award for volunteering. Pupils value the professional advice and expertise of school staff and others who support their learning and decision-making. They actively engage in communication and discussions about their next steps and contribute to planning learning pathways which meet their needs and aspirations. Pupils consistently report they are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning.

We are committed to ensuring that we achieve the highest possible standards and success for all pupils. All staff show commitment to shared educational values and professional standards. Senior leaders provide strong leadership which has enabled our school and wider community to develop, promote and sustain an aspirational vision which underpins our continuous improvement. Our vision evolves through ongoing reflection and debate across the school and community. This has been particularly evident this session. As a result of this active collaboration, the school and community will have ownership of the new mission, vision and values referenced earlier in this document. These have been shaped by our clear understanding of the social, economic and cultural context in which pupils and their families live alongside our awareness of current policy and practice. Through effective leadership at all levels, our school community works together to turn our shared vision into a sustainable reality.

Senior leaders create conditions where staff feel confident to initiate well-informed change and are committed to collective responsibility in the process of change. Senior leaders effectively guide and manage the strategic direction and pace of change. We protect time for professional dialogue, collegiate learning and self-evaluation, so that all members of our school community can contribute to our plans for continuous improvement. During this session our Extended

Leadership Team have met regularly to discuss and review our school's approach to Self-Evaluation. The School Recovery Group – with a range of teaching and non-teaching staff - met at the start of the session to work collegiately to successfully maintain a covid-secure working environment. All staff worked collegiately to successfully implement the clear vision set out by SLT on our approach to the remote learning period and beyond.

Staff at all levels take responsibility for implementing change and promoting equality and social justice across all their work. Senior leaders in our school community promote and support innovation, creativity and creative approaches to professional learning which lead to positive change. They work collaboratively to develop a clear rationale and choose appropriate approaches to effectively facilitate change leading to improved outcomes for pupils. We continually reflect on and develop our practice taking account of our self-evaluation and vision for continuous improvement. Staff, pupils and partners engage regularly in critical and creative thinking.

A coaching and mentoring approach to professional review and development is used effectively to reflect on professional knowledge and skills. Staff actively engage in professional learning activities to improve their effectiveness. Staff capability, capacity and leadership are well developed to support the culture of learning. Staff development and career-long professional learning is well coordinated and provides meaningful opportunities to learn from each other as well as with others out with school. Development of staff has a direct and positive impact on outcomes for pupils. Investment in coaching approaches has improved the experience of professional review and development.

Clear policies and procedures are in place to ensure pastoral support and wellbeing of staff. These are shared with staff and well understood. The culture and ethos of our school is positive and focused on the needs of all pupils, staff and members of our school community. We actively promote equalities for all, so staff feel confident in the workplace. Staff feel empowered and motivated to take decisions and lead aspects of school improvement. This is evidenced by the significant number of staff who volunteered for our Leadership Academy this session. We have a well-established and extensive structure of School Improvement Teams based on the priorities in the School Improvement Plan. All staff take responsibility for ensuring our approaches to communication are wide, varied and effective. Opportunities to consult, share information and raise concerns are well established and understood by all staff. Lines of accountability are clear. All staff share information effectively, listen to others and respond positively to ideas and issues raised with them.

### **Next Steps**

- *Implementation of new Self-Evaluation Framework (developed by Short Life Working Group this session).*
- *Build on successful Leadership Academy through a Phase 2 offer to further expand and promote approaches to leadership of improvement.*
- *Implement a programme of training on coaching to allow teachers to further develop peer-support on learning and teaching.*
- *Further develop pupil leadership with a focus on cluster-wide leadership opportunities.*
- *Launch new Mission, Vision & Values during Term 1 of 2022-23 session.*

### **How good is the quality of care and education we offer?**

**(2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7)  
Evaluation: Very Good**

<b>NIF Priority</b>	<b>School Priorities 2021-22</b>
All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Utilise further increased professional learning sessions to enhance the use of digital technologies for in-school learning.</li><li>• Complete a wide ranging evaluation of QI 2.3 to help inform a three year plan for learning and teaching development.</li></ul>
<b>NIF Driver(s)</b> School Leadership Parental Engagement Assessment of Children's Progress	

School Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a new Wellbeing Base with suitable staffing and resources to deliver 1-1, group and universal activities to promote wellbeing and positive mental health.</li> <li>• Further enhance the curriculum with the introduction of a CLD Youth Worker to take forward a range of wider certificated curricular inputs.</li> <li>• Refresh our curriculum rationale, with a focus on meeting the future needs of our school community through a widened curricular offer.</li> </ul>
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### ***Progress, Impact and Outcomes***

The ethos and vision of the school strongly promotes equality, challenging all forms of discrimination. We have continued to promote equalities issues this session. Whilst Covid restrictions initially limited activities, we have continued to support our LGBTQi and Allies group in the school called Pride! The group built upon their series of 'Promoting Positive Language' posters that are now permanently displayed around the school through activities for a range of themed weeks throughout the session.

Pupils report that they have been able to build up positive relationships with consistent adults whom they trust enough to talk to when they need help. All pupils have access to a Named Support Person to help them; someone who they can discuss personal issues with, whenever they want to, and a clearly identified individual to co-ordinate targeted support should this be needed. Our Support for Pupils team provide both universal and targeted support across their caseloads. Pupils feel that they are supported well to help themselves and are fully involved in decision-making. Self-evaluation activity supports this assertion and is supported by feedback from the wider staff. Our policies for pastoral care are clear, appropriate and implemented. We have well-embedded systems in place to promote wellbeing across all aspects of the life of the school. This session, we have continued to implement a range of strategies to improve the mental health and resilience of our pupils. The introduction of our Wellbeing Base (The Hub) has very quickly become a focal point of our school for many of our pupils.

This session we established a wellbeing base called "The Hub." This involved the complete refurbishment and decoration of the space to create a unique environment which is calm, warm and welcoming. An extensive range of universal activities have been devised and embedded this session, having a positive impact on the whole school ethos, as acknowledged both formally and informally by pupils, parents and staff within the school, as well as external partners. All year groups have had the opportunity to take part in universal activities, such as: be kind to your mind week; pse class visits; pse lessons in growth mindset and living life to the full; kindness cards; lunch clubs; after school clubs and exam supports. This has allowed the team to reach a wide audience and to further foster an ethos of wellbeing and nurture into the life of the school. Effective cluster working has been developed, with our associated primary schools receiving wellbeing lessons, an enhanced offer of transition visits focussed on nurture and wellbeing, alongside P7 parents being given an introduction to The Hub during the P7 Induction Evening.

Significant targeted support is offered to pupils from The Hub, with 63 pupils accessing a range of 1 to 1 and group activities this session. Targeted interventions are accessed via new referral system completed by the Named Support Person. Interventions include: living life to the full 1 to 1 or group sessions; managing exam stress workshops; working with bereaved young people; building resilience; developing problem solving & coping skills; 1 to 1 meetings using a person-centred counselling skills approach; relaxation & mindfulness techniques. Impact has been significant, with all pupils who participated in targeted interventions reporting that they feel safe, cared for and listened to while in The Hub and evaluating the interventions positively.

To further enhance the building of positive relationships between staff and pupils across the school, The Hub team alongside the PT of Personal Development and our Educational Psychologist have contributed to ongoing staff professional learning on the topics of trauma, attachment and nurture. The Positive Mental Health Improvement Team have further developed this work, alongside the pupil team, through activities such as the creation of a new school poster on “relationships: the simple stuff” which was devised and is displayed in each classroom further promoting the message that wellbeing is the responsibility of all. Pupils and staff across the school contribute to lunch time and after school clubs, by offering to lead activities such as jewellery making, embroidery and other creative arts and crafts activities.

Our curriculum is grounded in our commitment to securing children’s rights and wellbeing. It takes account of pupils’ entitlements and the four capacities and reflects the uniqueness of our setting. We are involved in the Unicef Rights Respecting School Award. This session we secured the Silver Rights Respecting School Award. Our Rights Respecting School group has assisted in our school recovery through undertaking pupil consultation on health and wellbeing needs on return to school. The structure of the curriculum provides equity of opportunity to maximise the successes and achievements of all our pupils. We take very good account of the four contexts for learning and cross-cutting themes such as equality, enterprise, creativity, and international engagement.

We work well with partners to ensure creative and innovative approaches to curriculum development are encouraged and support positive outcomes for pupils. We have for example increasing numbers of pupils involved in both the Education Department’s Vocational Programme and in Foundation Apprenticeships. This session we have had the highest percentage of Senior Phase pupils participating in the ERC vocational programme of any ERC secondary school.

The curriculum provides flexible learning pathways which lead to raising attainment through meeting the needs and aspirations of all our pupils. Learning pathways support pupils to build on their prior learning and ensure appropriate progression for all pupils. Learning pathways are based on the experiences and outcomes and design principles of progression, coherence, breadth, depth, personalisation and choice, challenge and enjoyment and relevance. We ensure pupils have access to high-quality learning in all curriculum areas and through outdoor learning. For example, this session we have a group of S1 pupils successfully participating in the Junior Award Scheme for Schools. We also continue to have large numbers of pupils involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award at Bronze, Silver and Gold levels. We have now also successfully provided the opportunity for pupils to participate in the Young STEM Leader Programme. This is in addition to senior pupils successfully completing the Young Enterprise qualification. All staff take responsibility for developing literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and digital literacy across the curriculum, building on previous professional learning.

Our Short Life Working Group on Curriculum Rationale has worked effectively to gather views from staff and parents to identify opportunities for an expanded curricular offer, thereby providing a greater range of pathways. This has so far allowed us to offer new options such as Higher Politics and an NPA in Sports Development. Based on feedback from parent focus groups we are continuing to explore further opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes our young people will require to thrive in the 21st century. These efforts contributed towards a Bronze School Ambassador Award for MCHS from the SCQF, becoming the first ERC school to secure this for our recognition of wider achievement and continuing to expand our learner pathways. We have also established staff and pupil SCQF ambassadors. The pupil ambassadors are beginning their journey on raising the profile of alternative learner pathways.

All staff and partners provide very good opportunities to develop children and young people’s skills for learning, life and work in motivating contexts for learning. We pay particular attention to

ensure pupils experience increasing levels of challenge as they develop skills for learning, life and work. Our staff and partners provide well-planned opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness of the world of work. This session we have built on the recently introduced DYW Careers event to supplement our long established Careers Convention with a virtual combined event, which was well received by learners and parents.

Self-evaluation is central to our achievement of high quality learning and teaching. Throughout this session we have conducted a whole school evaluation of Learning and Teaching. As part of this evaluation the SLT have undertaken learning visits to over 100 lessons across all departments in the school, throughout both the Broad General Education and Senior Phase. We have also shadowed junior pupils over the course of their school day and conducted various learning walks covering different aspects of Learning and Teaching. To gather pupil views we have conducted both pupil and pulse surveys covering all age groups and utilised both Pupil and Year Group Councils across the session. In addition, we have utilised parental pulse surveys and ensured more detailed qualitative discussions through Parental Focus Group sessions.

All teachers engage in quality evaluative discussions on learning and teaching using a variety of methods including DM Challenge questions, PT interviews, Lesson Observation Group feedback and whole staff Self-Evaluation exercises and staff development consultations. This extensive self-evaluative activity, focussed on learning and teaching, has allowed us to make sound judgements on our current strengths and agreed next steps.

The culture and ethos within the school is calm, ambitious, hard-working and supportive and this helps learners to make progress in their learning, attain highly and helps to build resilience. We consider this to be a strong element of our outstanding practice. This is exemplified through the support we have given our Senior Learners throughout this session by providing them with a full and comprehensive recovery programme aimed to offset learning loss and provide opportunity to embed both revision techniques and gain additional support from staff at various stages throughout the school calendar. Working with outside agencies we have been hugely successful in equipping our young people with a deeper understanding of how to cope with the challenges of assessment and exams. Feedback from the pupils demonstrated they valued such sessions for tips on study techniques, time management and the importance of having an organised schedule.

Learners' experiences are appropriately challenging and enjoyable and we consider this an important strength whilst identifying clear next steps for further improvement. The majority of pupils surveyed within the junior phase felt lessons provided challenge and pace. This figure rose to most pupils within the senior phase strongly agreeing that the learning and teaching regularly challenged them. Most parents when surveyed felt that learners' needs were appropriately met and that lessons are suitably challenging. In observed lessons, SLT observe appropriate pace and challenge, which is particularly evident in the senior phase. There is scope to further challenge pupils within the Broad General Education and to return to some of the more challenging and engaging pre-pandemic experiences within the Broad General Education.

Learners' experiences are well matched to their needs and interests. We consider this an important strength with relevant next steps identified. Learners experience a variety of teaching approaches throughout the school day. Shadowing exercises involving S1 and S2 pupils crystallised how varied the school day is for learners within the school.

Almost all classes observed through learning walks had pupils fully engaged in the learning. Pupils surveyed felt that most of their lessons matched their needs and interests, parents felt the majority of lessons were enjoyed by pupils, and through focus groups parents feedback positively about the responses of their children at home regarding classroom lessons being interesting and engaging. Parents through surveys and focus groups felt that pupils enjoy the learning and teaching offered at Mearns Castle, particularly pupils within the junior phase. In most lessons observed across the session engagement levels were high with pupils responding positively to the challenges, tasks and assessments set throughout lessons.

Learners exercise choice and take increasing responsibility as they become more independent in their learning. Learners have opportunities to lead the learning and there is scope to develop this further as learning and teaching returns to pre-pandemic practice. Across a number of evaluative responses it is evident that this practice is not now as embedded as other key strengths within the school. Only some classes observed had pupils leading the learning across both the Junior and Senior sectors and the relaxation of Covid protocols allows this aspect of learning and teaching to be further developed.

We use a wide range of learning environments and creative teaching approaches. Teachers are aware of the need to recover and re-build positive, engaging and interactive relationships following lockdowns and to help combat the learning loss experienced by pupils. Classes delivered through Covid protocols have not provided the same high quality learning environments and experiences but this has been evolving and returning over the course of the school year. Classes being observed have gradually returned to active lessons and activities and we have witnessed evidence of active learning returning to our classrooms, particularly within the junior phase classes.

Learning is enriched and supported by our effective use of digital technologies, which is a major strength of our approach to learning and teaching. Pupils during Year Group and Pupil Council consultations were very positive about how departments/classes use digital technology to support learning, features such as Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and Kahoot all featured heavily in the positive feedback delivered by pupils.

Our explanations and instructions are very clear. Through a variety of evaluations we have found clear evidence that explicit instruction is part of our outstanding practice within Mearns Castle. In almost all of the observed lessons pupils clearly understood the purpose of their learning. Almost all teachers are very confident that their Learning Intentions are assisting learners to understand the purpose of the learning.

We use skilled questioning and engagement to promote curiosity, independence and confidence and to regularly enable higher-order thinking skills in all learners. Staff have considered the need to revisit relationship building within classes, both between pupils and with teachers as lockdown has led to a noticeable reluctance from some learners to engage fully with high quality questioning and discussion.

We observe learners closely to inform appropriate and well-timed interventions and future learning opportunities. We use feedback effectively to inform and support progress in learning. We consider this to be part of our outstanding practice. Pupils during Year Group and Pupil Council consultations were very positive about the levels of feedback they receive with teachers being seen to be very supportive, friendly and approachable, giving regular feedback and supporting pupils when help is needed. Over 70% of senior pupils feel they receive enough feedback on their learning, citing feedback from prelims as well as the additional October Assessments as part of our School Recovery Programme as particularly helpful.

We use a variety of assessment approaches to allow learners to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, skills, attributes and capabilities in different contexts across the curriculum. However, we have identified a need for more evident use of formative assessment as this has recently been observed in less than half of classes visited and will further help to build engagement, self-assessment and resilience. Pupils and parents are very positive regarding the very strong practice relating to feedback based on summative assessments.

Our assessment evidence is robust, valid and reliable. At key milestones, our assessments provide reliable evidence which we use to report on the progress of our learners. We consider both aspects as major strengths of our practice. Throughout the school session we have used robust tracking and monitoring measures to track attainment and identify effective next steps. A detailed Quality Assurance calendar is embedded that allows action points from departments and information passed to pupils and parents/carers at key intervals throughout the session, along with identified areas of support provided such as assisted revision sessions and Easter school sessions.

The Learning and Teaching Improvement Team focused on a lesson observation pilot with recommendations for session 2022-23. A group of staff took part in the pilot using a new toolkit based on HGIOS 4 – 2.3 – Learning, Teaching & Assessment for recording evidence and feedback. The focus for the lesson observation was pupil engagement, with time for feedback and sharing of good practice. Following this pilot we have enhanced our approaches to lesson observation with key areas of focus, and we will combine learning from peer observation along with sharing of good practice.

Pupils benefit from high-quality universal support. We are effective in promoting positive relationships and behaviour which impact on high quality classroom learning. Learning targets are in place specific to individual pupils, built on prior learning and reviewed and evaluated systematically with next steps based on their progress. Our on-going learner conversations are central to this activity. All teaching staff have access to our Confidential File and understand and respond very well to the individual needs of pupils.

Universally, tasks, activities and resources are effectively differentiated to ensure appropriate pace and challenge for all pupils. Our staff and partners work effectively together to increase their ability to meet the needs of our diverse pupils through effective use of professional learning, support and specialist resources. S6 Subject Ambassadors have continued to offer 1:1 support with a growing number of pupils benefiting from this intervention.

Our targeted support builds on robust, embedded universal support. Pupils' needs are identified early through reliable and valid assessment information and ensure appropriate, proportionate and timely support including specialist input where required. We fully adhere to legislative requirements and provide all pupils with additional support needs with high-quality targeted support, including highly-able pupils. We recognise the important role of parents and partners with specific expertise in supporting children and young people. Children, parents and partners are fully involved in decisions about learning and support. Well-planned interventions are leading to positive outcomes for pupils with additional support needs including those affected by financial hardship. The Personal Development department has been able to widen their support offer to pupils since a CLD worker has joined the team. The worker has been included in class delivery as well planning and delivering other bespoke packages for some of our more vulnerable young people.

Staff and partners take positive and proactive steps to ensure that barriers to learning are minimised. Staff are highly-responsive to the circumstances of at risk pupils, including young carers, looked after children and pupils living in poverty. This year we have extended our partnership working with Young Carers. All pupils with a disability, health or social and emotional needs benefit from high-quality targeted support. The school works with key partners to remove barriers to learning and provide an inclusive learning environment. Child's Wellbeing Plans are reviewed regularly through our JST meetings

There is a comprehensive, well-planned programme of transition arrangements in place. We plan and work with partners and other agencies to ensure transition arrangements are effective for all pupils, including those requiring additional support and in line with legislative requirements. These plans take account of transitions for cohorts of pupils as well as individuals.

Targeted extended transitions are also now offered by The Hub to Primary 7 pupils identified by associated primary schools as those pupils who experience higher levels of anxiety. Pupils are able to take part in a range of wellbeing and team-working activities and all pupils reported feeling more relaxed and more positive about starting at MCHS by the end of the sessions.

We work collaboratively across our learning community to ensure effective information sharing about pupils' progress and needs. We have sound arrangements for transferring information from one named person to another to ensure continuity of plans such as a Child's Plan or coordinated support plan. We have agreed shared approaches to record keeping and passing on of information using digital technology including Click and Go Pastoral Notes (the Pastoral

Notes Policy was updated during Session 2021 – 22) to support this as appropriate.

There is continuity and progression in learning across all curriculum areas at all stages of learning. We plan collaboratively to develop a shared understanding of progress both within our establishment and with others. We make very good use of tracking and monitoring and personal learning planning to help pupils identify strengths and next steps in learning. As a result, our pupils continue to build their knowledge, skills and attributes and maintain an appropriate pace of progress. Working with partners we effectively support pupils into sustained positive post-school destinations. We have continued to successfully develop and implement our DYW Strategy and have benefitted from additional staffing in this area this year. This has allowed us to provide additional opportunities and support for those pupils for whom it would otherwise have been difficult to identify positive destinations.

Engagement and communication between partners is regular, structured, supportive and efficient. We have a clear strategy for growing our existing partnerships and for establishing new partnerships. This session we have successfully agreed our first formal partnership agreement with the Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice. We are clear about the purpose of our partnerships. All partners are clear about their roles, responsibilities and contributions. Our partnership agreements set a framework within which our joint working and shared learning can thrive. All partners demonstrate high levels of commitment to improving outcomes for all pupils and with COVID restrictions having eased, we now intend to return to in-person DYW and Careers events, thus growing our partnership network.

### **Next Steps**

- Further broaden our curricular offer with the introduction of new National Progression Awards, develop awareness of alternative pathways and achieve Silver SCQF accreditation.
- Evaluate and consult on developments in the use of core curriculum time.
- Engage with associated primaries on further development of our curriculum rationale.
- Develop approaches to and expertise in Formative Assessment.
- Implement extensive professional learning programme – working with external partners, implement a bespoke programme on formative assessment.
- Facilitate observation programme with a menu of options for observation and sharing of practice.

<b>How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our children / pupils?</b> <b>(3.1, 3.2, 3.3)</b>	
<b>Evaluation: Very Good</b>	

<b>NIF Priority</b>	<b>School Priorities 2021-22</b>
All  <b>NIF Driver(s)</b> School Leadership Assessment of Children's Progress School Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implement our new tool for tracking personal achievement and ensure targeted support for pupils not participating in wider curricular activities.</li><li>• Integrate the Pupil Support Department to ensure a seamless model of support with a clear Named Support Person identified for every pupil and a consistent approach to planning for pupils.</li><li>• Review our Attendance Policy &amp; Procedures to assist in increasing attendance levels and in particular the attendance of those pupils with the lowest attendance.</li><li>• Implement a Recovery Programme for each Year Group as part of our Build Back Better strategy, with targeted assessment and intervention approaches alongside</li></ul>

	Supported Study and Study Skills programmes.
<b>Progress, Impact and Outcomes</b>	
<p>As a result of our approach to ensuring the wellbeing of all pupils and their families, we are improving outcomes for pupils and their families. Our school community has a shared understanding of wellbeing and in the dignity and worth of every individual. We know and can demonstrate that our pupils feel safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Staff and partners feel valued and supported. Relationships across the school community are very positive and supportive, founded on a climate of mutual respect within a strong sense of community, shared values and high expectations. Staff and partners are proactive in promoting positive relationships in the classroom, playground and wider learning community. We consider each pupil as an individual with their own needs, risks and rights. We ensure pupils are active participants in discussions and decisions which may affect their lives. Our staff demonstrate commitment to this ethos through active participation in career long professional learning.</p> <p>We ensure inclusion and equality leads to improved outcomes for all pupils. Pupils are included, engaged and involved in the life of the school. Pupils feel very well supported to do their best. Pupils, parents and carers, staff and partners feel that they are treated with respect and in a fair and just manner. We understand, value and celebrate diversity and challenge discrimination. In our school age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation are not barriers to participation and achievement. The work of our Equalities Improvement Team is underpinned by these approaches.</p> <p>We have effective strategies in place which are improving attainment and achievement for pupils facing challenges such as those most likely to experience deprivation and financial insecurity, young carers, those who are looked after and those with additional support needs. These approaches are sensitive to our setting and culture and ensure additional supports can be accessed in an inclusive way.</p> <p>Pupils make very good progress from their prior levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. We have raised attainment in literacy and numeracy for all pupils. On average students at MCHS SIMD levels 1-9 have performed at least as well as the national average for SIMD level 10 students for national certification (total tariff points). On average S1-S3 students SIMD 1-9 also perform better than the ERC and National averages for Literacy and Numeracy. Standardised Test Score averages in literacy and numeracy are also higher than the ERC Averages. Overall this is robust evidence that we are adding value to the attainment of our learners.</p> <p>By the end of S3, we have 92.9% achieving 4<sup>th</sup> level Numeracy, and 80.8% achieving 4<sup>th</sup> level Reading.</p> <p>By the end of S1, pupils achieving 2<sup>nd</sup> level and/or working on 3<sup>rd</sup> level is 94.1% for numeracy and 92.2% for Reading.</p> <p>By the end of S2, pupils achieving 3<sup>rd</sup> level and/or working on 4<sup>th</sup> level is 93.5% for numeracy and 73.5% for Reading.</p> <p>Across all curriculum areas we have raised attainment continuously over time and/or maintained consistently high standards of attainment for all pupils. We have successfully developed and implemented high quality courses and assessments for the SQA National Qualifications levels 1-7. Pupils make very good progress from their prior levels of attainment. Our staff make effective use of assessments and have a secure understanding of standards to make confident professional judgements about how well pupils are learning and progressing.</p>	

A robust tracking system together with effective interventions ensures continuous progress for pupils across the curriculum and at all phases in their education, including points of transition.

The attainment of individuals and groups has improved consistently over time. This rigorous and robust approach was beneficial in ensuring an effective and successful model to implement the Alternative Certification Model with a high degree of confidence in the judgements made.

SQA Results demonstrate the impact of these successful approaches:

S6 1+ Advanced Higher: 2021 54.4%, 2020 52%, 2019 44%

S5 Higher 3+: 2021 76.3%, 2020 78.8%, 2019 76.5%

S5 Higher 5+: 2021 56.0%, 2020 56.2%, 2019 54.3%

S4 N5 5+ 2021 83.2%, 2020 85.9%, 2019 82.5%

S4 8 N5: 2021 60%, 2020 62%, 2019 51.6%

As a result of the effective implementation of improvement priorities, we continue to successfully raise the attainment of our pupils as measured by their performance in Education Department Standardised Tests, CfE Teacher Judgements and the overall quality of the 2021 SQA results. In some categories the results are the best the school has produced to date in a challenging and unpredictable context. Our performance continues to be at least 'very good' and in some instances 'excellent' in this area.

Overall, our pupils are successful, confident, exercise responsibility and contribute to the life of the school, the wider community and as global citizens. They are personally and socially adept and have achieved a range of skills and attributes through a wide range of activities. Over 200 pupils are involved in school sports teams and after school sports clubs. We have over 150 pupils involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award at all levels. In particular our pupils consistently achieve high levels of success in both Debating and Public Speaking. As they move through their learning pathways our pupils take increasing responsibility for ensuring they continue to add value to their achievements. This session we have implemented a system to track personal achievement following development work last year.

A centralised database has been developed that records pupil achievements and participation (both in and out of school) for all year groups. This ensures that pupil participation and achievements are celebrated in the school community and that appropriate interventions take place to encourage those pupils not involved with wider participation. The database has been trialled with the current S1 Year Group. Analysis of the data is also giving greater awareness of school strengths and areas for development.

This academic year our S1 pupils enjoyed two PSE lessons in October with a specific focus on wider participation. We have information on each S1 student regarding their participation in clubs and activities both in and out of school. The school has shared a Microsoft 'Sway' with all S1 parents. This included a list of all the clubs and activities that are available to students in the school as well as links to clubs and activities in ERC and other Local Authorities. S1 Parents/carers were also encouraged to complete a Microsoft Form with their child that gave the school further information regarding each child's interests,

This data is analysed to assist with support of individual pupils and also as key self-evaluation information to help identify gaps in participation and achievements relating to various school cohorts.

The MCHS Pupil Council ensures that all elected year group representatives (over 80 students) in the school meet up formally eight times a year to support school improvement. The meetings are led by the Pupil Leadership Team and each House group in the school provides feedback on the topics for discussion. Each meeting has had a focus on items in the School Improvement

Plan including learning and teaching, The Hub, Homework Policy and MCHS Colours. This pupil feedback has helped shape decision making in the school and informed improvement planning.

The House Assemblies are presented by the House Captains and now benefit from a more structured agenda with pupils also being given leadership coaching to enhance their presentation skills. There is greater emphasis on celebrating achievement at the assemblies, including interviews with a pupil from the MCHS House. This year we have introduced many extra incentives including 'double points', 'Golden Tickets' and a celebration event for the winners of the MCHS House Cup.

Members of the school community can now easily inform the school of pupil achievements using a simple online format. This information is used to celebrate achievement including MCHS Colours, Pupil displays and the Head Teacher's Parent Update.

There has been a significant increase in the visibility of celebrating achievement in the school building. This includes Departmental Twitter Boards, Colours Boards, S1 'All About Me' displays and the MCHS Hall of Fame.

We have effective systems in place to promote equity of success and achievement for all our pupils. We have raised the attainment of all our pupils and in particular our most disadvantaged pupils. Almost all of our pupils consistently move into sustained positive destinations when they leave school.

Our impressive examination results contribute to the sustained positive destinations achieved by our pupils on leaving school, with almost 90% moving on to Further or Higher education and close to 100% in a sustained positive destination.

Creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation is increasingly embedded across learning. Pupils benefit from learning and teaching through partnerships with employers, creative industries and cultural sectors. Pupils are confident and ambitious with high levels of self-esteem. They are motivated to explore and challenge assumptions. Pupils take ownership of their own learning and thinking. They are imaginative, open-minded, confident risk-takers, and appreciate issues from different perspectives. They can ask questions, make connections across disciplines, envisage what might be possible and not possible, explore ideas, identify problems and seek and justify solutions. For example, this session we have built on our great success in the International Mathematics 'Puzzle of the Week' Competition.

Pupils are innovative, confident and responsible in the use of technologies and staying safe online. They critically examine and make informed choices about the use of digital technology to enhance and personalise learning in school and where appropriate, beyond the school day. Pupils utilised these skills to the full to ensure very high levels of engagement in our strong remote learning offer. They anticipate and respond to new opportunities and threats caused by developments now and in the future. We successfully renewed our Eco-schools Green Flag Award status recently and have continued to promote our eco-school committee this session. We have further demonstrated our commitment to sustainability through the introduction of our re-cycled uniform shop.

Pupils are ambitious and better prepared for the world of work through progressive learning that connects them more directly to employment. They are resilient, adaptable and understand the value of the skills they are acquiring. They feel supported to make suitable, realistic and informed choices based on their skills, strengths and preferences. They are supported to develop an international mind-set equipping them for the rapidly changing and increasingly globalised world. In particular we continue to develop and expand the provision of Mandarin in our Modern Languages Curriculum.

High quality universal and targeted support has assisted in improving outcomes this session. In addition to the well established tracking, monitoring and intervention system, we have developed a range of new targeted and universal supports as part of our Recovery Plans. Measures have included Saturday Study Cafes, Evening Study Cafes, after school Assisted Study Sessions, a

Mentoring Programme, Study Cards roll out, Growth Mindset and Study Skills sessions in partnership with Live'n'Learn and a series of pre-exam Grade Booster sessions. This support has been warmly welcomed by pupils and parents.

### **Next Steps**

- Expand the roll-out of the achievement and participation tracking tool to all Year Groups.
- Support all departments/faculties to consistently utilise school structures to recognise and celebrate personal achievement.
- Explore opportunities to further celebrate and recognise personal achievement through school events – award ceremonies etc.
- Embed the targeted and universal support offered through the Recovery Plan as on-going and established practice through a structured raising attainment programme.
- Increase use of Insight as a key self-evaluation to further identify any gaps and associated actions required at department/faculty and whole school level.

### **Pupil Equity Fund – How are we ensuring Excellence and Equity?**

We have used our Pupil Equity Fund to establish The Hub and implement an extensive programme of universal and targeted supports to enhance wellbeing.

See our Pupil Equity Fund Report (2021-22) for a full breakdown of interventions and impact.

### **What is our capacity for continuous improvement?**

In the Education Department Effective Transitions Review Report of November 2016 the school was evaluated as 'very good' in all dimensions. The Review Team commented "*There is a very strong capacity for the school to improve.*"

The last two sessions have demonstrated the collective capacity of the school to respond dynamically to the needs of the school community in this most challenging of periods. With a new Head Teacher, our Senior Leadership Team have evolved working practices to meet the needs of the current context and have led the school through each of the challenges of the session, whilst leading change and improvement in line with our Recovery Plan (2020-21) and School Improvement Plan (2021-22).

Having developed a refreshed Mission, Vision and Values for our school, we look forward to launching this in the first term of the new session. Our talented, hardworking and motivated staff and pupils, active, caring and supportive parents, positive and successful partnership arrangements, a challenging and supportive Education Department, and very effective and committed leadership will ensure that we will continue to improve the school and achieve our goal of excellence in everything we do.

## National Improvement Framework Quality Indicators

Quality indicator	School self-evaluation	Effective Transitions Review evaluations 2016
1.3 Leadership of change	Very Good	Very Good
2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	Very Good	Very Good
3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion	Very Good	Very Good
3.2 Securing children's progress / Raising attainment and achievement	Very Good	Excellent Upgraded by Head of Service

## School Improvement Priorities 2022-2023

Our main priorities for session 2022-2023, as we continue to strive towards our goal of excellence in every dimension, are as follows:

- *Implementation of new Self-Evaluation Framework (developed by Short Life Working Group this session).*
- *Build on successful Leadership Academy through a Phase 2 offer to further expand and promote approaches to leadership of improvement.*
- *Implement a programme of training on coaching to allow teachers to further develop peer-support on learning and teaching.*
- *Launch new Mission, Vision & Values during Term 1 of 2022-23 session.*
- Further broaden our curricular offer with the introduction of new National Progression Awards, develop awareness of alternative pathways and achieve Silver SCQF accreditation.
- Evaluate and consult on developments in the use of core curriculum time.
- Engage with associated primaries on further development of our curriculum rationale.
- Develop approaches to and expertise in formative assessment.
- Implement extensive professional learning programme – working with external partners, implement a bespoke programme on formative assessment.
- Facilitate observation programme with a menu of options for observation and sharing of practice.
- Expand the roll-out of the achievement and participation tracking tool to all Year Groups.
- Support all departments/faculties to consistently utilise school structures to recognise and celebrate personal achievement.
- Explore opportunities to further celebrate and recognise personal achievement through school events – award ceremonies etc.
- Embed the targeted and universal support offered through the Recovery Plan as on-going and established practice through a structured raising attainment programme.
- Increase use of Insight as a key self-evaluation to further identify any gaps and associated actions required at department/faculty and whole school level.

More details, on each of these priorities, can be found in our School Improvement Plan 2022-2023.