

31 March 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**St Ambrose High School
North Lanarkshire Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports them to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including the ethos of the school community and the impact of young people and staff taking on leadership roles. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving young people's education.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Young people benefit from being part of a very caring ethos built on Catholic values promoting their spiritual development and overall health and wellbeing. They are very proud and appreciative of their school and enjoy their learning. They behave very well and are very confident and articulate when sharing their views. Almost all young people are very motivated to do well and have very positive attitudes to their work. They work very well together in groups and pairs helping each other to complete tasks and activities. They reflect regularly on their work and are developing relevant skills that help them progress further. They receive appropriate feedback from teachers, which helps them to be more aware of what they need to do to improve. In most lessons, teachers recap effectively on previous learning and link it well to what young people will be going on to learn. Teachers should continue to increase the extent to which young people are actively involved in their learning. The school uses information and communications technology effectively to support and enhance learning. For example, teachers use short video clips in music to provide instrumental support and promote independent learning. Across the school, young people state that their views are regularly sought and valued by staff. Outdoor learning is an increasing feature of lessons. For example, in physical education, young people participate enthusiastically in mountain-biking and orienteering. As a result, their physical fitness has improved and their interpersonal and team-working skills are better.

Young people's learning is enriched through an extensive range of opportunities to achieve beyond the classroom. They participate successfully in a variety of out-of-class clubs, including a range of sporting opportunities, choir, band, Fairtrade

group and Bee group. The school is one of a few to have gained a Gold Standard for the School Sports Award and national social enterprise status. Young people's citizenship skills were effectively developed through their involvement in sporting and other activities linked to the Commonwealth Games. The school has substantially increased the number of awards through which young people can have their achievements recognised. These include the Caritas Award and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The participation of young people in musical activity across the school is high, with many of them performing regularly in and out of school. Through work with the local Credit Union, young people are developing their enterprise skills and their understanding of finance. They show a caring attitude towards others through outstanding fund-raising activities for a wide range of local, national and international causes. For example, 22 Ambassadors actively support the St Andrew's Hospice and many young people go on from this to undertake voluntary work. The school has a strong tradition of young people volunteering to work with their peers in other countries, for example going to Malawi and Bangalore. This helps the young people at St Ambrose develop their citizenship skills and exposes them to challenging experiences. At all stages, young people have many opportunities to develop leadership skills and take on roles of responsibility. For example, they provide peer support to young people in Buchanan High School and successfully carry out leadership roles at school and house level.

From S1 to S3, young people are building well on their prior levels of attainment across the curriculum. From S4 to S6, achievement in literacy and numeracy has increased over time. In S5 and S6, young people's attainment in numeracy at National 5 or equivalent and Higher level is better than that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds in schools across Scotland. Attainment in National Qualifications and other awards has improved over the past three years. By S6, young people attain well in their Highers and performance is consistently stronger than young people with similar needs and backgrounds in other schools. At all stages, young people perform well in music and art and design. Almost all of them are successful in moving on to a positive destination on leaving school.

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

The curriculum is effectively based on the school's Catholic ethos. There is a strong commitment to high achievement and service to the community. St Ambrose is a music comprehensive, with music playing a very strong role in the school, and a high proportion of young people studying the subject. Following a broad experience in S1, young people are able to choose subjects in S2 and to specialise further in S3. This structure aims to provide them with opportunities for greater depth in their learning. We have asked the school to ensure that young people experience learning across the full range of curricular areas from S1 to S3, in line with national advice. From S4 to S6, young people can progress according to their needs and aspirations to succeed in National Qualifications and gain alternative forms of certification. The curriculum from S4 to S6 is enriched by a number of varied and relevant options, tailored to young people's needs. These options support the development of skills for life, learning and work, for example courses taught by college staff, such as hairdressing and psychology. The pastoral needs of young people, including those requiring additional support in their learning, are well met when they move from their primary school to

St Ambrose High School. The school has made good progress in working with its associated primaries and as a result young people entering S1 can build on what they have already learned. The school's curriculum is enhanced effectively with exciting contributions from partners, particularly by the Community Learning and Development (CLD) team. For example, the CLD team is supporting young people in projects such as the Arts and Employability programme. The school has very strong arrangements to support young people in their learning and welfare. Pupil Support staff have very good relationships with young people and give high priority to their wellbeing. The Support for Learning staff are very successful in meeting the learning needs of those requiring additional support. Both groups of staff work very well together and with teachers to ensure that young people are given the appropriate support to help them learn better. The school is well supported by partner agencies, such as Home School Link Partnership and Youth Counselling. This allows young people access to a variety of supports to ensure that their needs are being met. Skilful planning for additional support allows young people to make good progress with their targets. They and their parents are involved appropriately in setting and reviewing their targets. In most lessons, tasks and activities are well matched to the needs of most young people.

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

The school has a strong culture of improvement and is committed to providing high-quality learning outcomes and experiences for all young people. Staff, young people and parents are regularly involved in a range of activities to evaluate the work of the school. In most departments, staff seek the views of young people on their work and then adapt and change in line with the suggestions made. The headteacher is very well respected and has established strong partnerships with parents and the wider community. She leads improvements in the school and promotes Gospel Values effectively. The depute headteachers and principal teachers are highly committed and work very well together to ensure continuing improvement in the school. Staff are hard-working and committed to professional learning. The Professional Learning Community provides opportunities for many teachers to share good practice and to learn from each other. Staff contribute effectively to school working groups and lead aspects of improvement at school and local authority level. Senior managers and principal teachers have reviewed their approaches to observing lessons. The new system aims to ensure that teachers are confident and supported in developing new approaches to learning and teaching. The school ensures that all staff participate in the analysis of young people's attainment in National Qualifications for their subject. This helps staff identify areas that require further improvement. Teachers track and monitor young people's performance based on a range of information. The school recognises the need to continue to improve these approaches to ensure that improvements in attainment are maintained, and young people continue to be well cared for.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Very strong relationships and ethos in the school and across its community, in line with Gospel Values.
- Confident, polite and articulate young people motivated to learn and succeed.

- Very high-quality provision delivered by the Pupil Support and Support for Learning staff.
- Very strong leadership in improving attainment in National Qualifications and in the care and support for young people.

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

- Continue to develop the curriculum in line with national advice.
- Continue to improve the school's approaches to improvement through self-evaluation.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, North Lanarkshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress.

Hakim Din
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/StAmbroseHighSchoolNorthLanarkshire.asp>

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