

10 December 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

Glenalmond College, Perth

HM Inspectors recently visited Glenalmond College, Perth. The visit was part of our quality improvement and professional engagement visits with independent schools which complement the general programme of inspections. The approach allows us to maintain our knowledge of schools in the independent sector throughout Scotland, and provides assurance to parents on the school's capacity for evaluating its own work and making improvements which have a direct impact on the quality of experiences for its young people. Our visit was based on the school's self-evaluation and priorities identified for school improvement. During our visit inspectors talked to staff and young people and worked together with the warden and senior staff about the planned developments to ensure outcomes for young people continue to improve.

How well does the school ensure outcomes for young people continue to improve?

The governing council provides appropriate strategic direction to the school, and has a vision to deliver the highest possible standards of education and care for young people. The council achieves an appropriate balance of support and challenge to school leaders. The warden, sub wardens, bursar and other promoted staff provide very effective leadership for the school community. In recent years, senior leaders have taken positive steps to strengthen approaches to using self-evaluation for improvement. As a result, senior leaders have an accurate view of what is working well across the school and boarding houses, and what needs to improve further. School leaders are aware of the need to continue to improve systems and approaches for communication between themselves, teaching and non-teaching staff.

Senior leaders have been successful in building a positive culture of self-reflection across the staff team. All staff are involved in identifying priorities to take forward. Young people and parents contribute to the improvement planning process through taking part in surveys, focused questionnaires and through committees. There is potential for the school to develop further creative ways to ensure stakeholders and all staff feel they have a voice in the life and work of the school. Guided very well by sub wardens, almost all staff are committed to developing the use of self-evaluation and career-long professional learning. They are beginning to see the link between these and the processes of school improvement. Across the school, groups of staff are increasingly involved in leading improvement priorities through, for example, the 'learning project'. As planned, the school should continue to develop and embed self-evaluation and quality assurance systems at middle-leadership level. This will help to ensure a greater consistency of high quality learning and teaching across departments.

Young people are courteous, highly motivated and keen to experience challenge in their learning. Overall, young people benefit from high standards of learning and teaching. In almost all lessons, there is a highly positive ethos for learning, underpinned by supportive relationships between staff and young people. Most teachers use questioning well to extend young people's learning. They are increasingly aware of the need to plan lessons that meet

the differing needs of all young people. Senior leaders should increase opportunities for staff to share effective practice across departments. Staff would also benefit from being outward looking by, for example visiting other schools, accessing professional networks and further researching good practice. Staff across departments provide daily 'help' sessions for young people, where they can access extra support in their learning, as well as further opportunities for preparation for assessments and examinations. This is a strength of the school, which young people appreciate and many access on a regular basis. Teachers provide parents with regular update reports that keep them well informed of the progress their child is making. Parents welcome the regularity and content of these reports. This enables parents to have a very good understanding of their child's progress, strengths and areas for further support.

Glenalmond College is a high performing school, with almost all young people achieving A to C passes in national examinations. Standards of attainment have remained high in almost all subject areas in recent years. The school's records show that almost all young people leave Glenalmond College for high quality, positive destinations. Most young people gain a place in the university of their choice. A few choose to take a gap year abroad, or to enter employment.

Glenalmond College offers a broad and diverse range of co-curricular experiences that all young people can access. These include a variety of sports and games, drama and musical societies, the Combined Cadet Force and a wide range of staff-led clubs. There is a variety of leadership roles and opportunities for young people beyond the classroom. Of particular note is the three-day leadership exercise that is offered annually to the Lower Sixth year group. Although voluntary, this experience is routinely attended by most young people in the year group. External organisations, such as the Royal Marines, facilitate a series of challenging events, designed to test young people's skills of leadership, teamwork, planning and resilience. Many young people describe this event as the highlight of their time at Glenalmond College.

The ethos of Glenalmond College is welcoming, friendly and supportive. It promotes a sense of respect and kindness across the school community. Almost all young people speak very proudly about their school and their many achievements. They benefit from supportive relationships with their teachers and pastoral and house staff. The house system gives all young people a sense of belonging and helps to foster good relationships between different year groups. The school has recently introduced an effective tutor system, with a particular focus on enabling young people to become more resilient. Young people meet in groups with their tutor several times each week, to explore issues relevant to their needs. Most young people enjoy this time and they value the supportive role of their tutor. Moving forward, senior leaders should continue to promote the key role of tutors, with a strong focus on what is expected by all staff who perform this role.

Staff are aware of the difficulties, challenges and barriers to learning that young people may experience. Staff in the learning support department work well with young people, parents and colleagues to identify young people's individual needs and to outline strategies for support. Young people who come to Glenalmond College, for whom English is not their first language, are supported well by staff to integrate into school life. Specialist staff support these learners well to improve their English, and a few sit examinations that enable them to acquire the skills they need for university entrance.

Senior leaders and staff place the wellbeing of all young people at the centre of their work. There are comprehensive and appropriate policies and procedures in place to keep young people safe. As a result, staff meet young people's differing needs very well across the school and boarding houses. A programme of weekly and fortnightly meetings with different groups of pastoral and boarding house staff allows senior leaders to monitor and track young people's health and wellbeing needs on an ongoing basis. Young people are given regular opportunities to evaluate their own health and wellbeing strengths and needs. Effective communication between academic, pastoral, boarding house and medical staff results in all young people being known very well as individuals by a variety of adults. The diversity of the Glenalmond College community is recognised in the number of clubs and societies, which are developing. For example, the 'chameleon group' celebrates personal diversity and promotes the wellbeing and rights of those members of the school community with protected characteristics.

What happens next?

We are confident the school has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and board of governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the progress of the school.

Lesley A Johnstone
HM Inspector