

# Summarised inspection findings

Ochil Tower School

28 January 2025

## Key contextual information

Ochil Tower School  
Independent special school  
SEED number: 5381142  
Roll (November 2024): 14

Ochil Tower School is an all-through independent residential special school, located in Auchterarder, Perth and Kinross. The school supports children and young people with a range and complexity of additional support needs. Local authorities can request a care and education placement for children and young people at the school, following an assessment of needs. At the time of inspection, the school's registration is for up to 40 children and young people.

The school has an Executive Director and a Board of Trustees. The school has a head of education who leads the education team, supported by an education manager. Children and young people are educated across three classrooms. There are four teachers, seven support assistants and a range of volunteers and other support staff.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- School leaders and staff are beginning to improve standards and consistency across the school. School leaders and staff engage in useful discussions that focus on how they can build positive relationships across the school, enhance the quality of young people's personal development and how to improve support. This is underpinned by the school community's clear and shared vision of 'living together, learning together, growing together' and the newly developed curriculum rationale.
- Staff provide young people with high standards of care and inclusion in school. Staff have an accurate and appropriate understanding of the needs, social and cultural context of young people. This is leading to young people experiencing a school environment that is supportive and reflective of their context. School leaders should now build upon the positive and supportive school environment. They should do this through ensuring that young people's educational experiences meet all national policy and guidelines. For example, there is a need for school leaders and staff to reconsider the length of the school week. This will ensure young people have more opportunities to receive their full entitlements to a broad general education. Additionally, school leaders and staff need to plan improvements to national qualifications. This should include a more expansive curriculum as young people progress through their senior phase.
- Staff are committed to contributing to improvement through attending high-quality professional learning opportunities. They use their learning very well to make useful adaptations to learning environments. This is impacting positively on changes to how they work with young people. For example, staff have used what they have learned about school values to adapt and improve relationships and interactions across the school day. They have improved their approaches to communication and awareness of how young people experience, interpret and react to the rhythm of the school day. This is helping young people engage better with learning across the school day.
- School leaders have recently begun to undertake observations of teaching and learning across the school year. They have agreed with teachers relevant and appropriate teaching and learning themes across the school year. This supports school leaders and teachers to have a clear and agreed focus when observing learning. School leaders provide written feedback to teachers based upon their observations. They should continue with their plans to undertake support and challenge discussions with individual teachers focusing on the analysis of young people's attainment and achievements. School leaders would benefit from opportunities to engage with other school leaders to moderate outcomes from observations of teaching and learning. This will support them to enhance their understanding of high-quality teaching and learning and improve the quality of feedback provided to teachers.

- School leaders have actioned a suitable three-year planning cycle for the school improvement plan (SIP). They are beginning to refine the content of the SIP supported by external consultancy work. They have determined accurately that current improvement planning is overly task focused. They have developed three relevant high-level improvement priorities with 15 actions aimed to support the delivery of the priorities. School leaders have identified correctly that there is a need to connect improvement priorities to self-evaluation. They should now ensure priorities outline clear outcomes to be achieved in relation to young people and how progress towards priorities will be measured. These need to be expressed better as outcomes for learners and demonstrate how staff can take on more leadership responsibilities of improvement areas.
- School leaders value and have established very positive patterns of participation from partners in self-evaluation activities. Partners are included effectively in feedback on their views about the work of the school. School leaders should progress with their plans to use evidence gathered from annual evaluation returns to influence more closely areas for improvement. School leaders should use this information along with other quality assurance and self-evaluation information to plan systematic improvement.
- Senior leaders have made a positive start to developing a pupil council that focuses on improving pupil voice across the school. As a result, pupils are enhancing their understanding of children's rights in line with the United Nations Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC). School leaders and staff work well to increase young people's participation in groups that make a difference to the school. For example, pupils work well in their eco-activities which has led to national awards being achieved. They are demonstrating how well their school respects the rights of children and have national recognition of their success in this area. School leaders and staff should continue with their plans to gather and reflect upon young people's views in relation to improving their school experience. They should use these to influence self-evaluation which leads to meaningful change in the school. School leaders and staff should develop further the opportunities young people have to take a lead role in progressing the pupil council and ensure it meets regularly.

## 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Staff across the school, led by the head of education, have established a very positive culture and ethos which reflects a strong commitment to school values and social pedagogy. Senior leaders and staff enjoy high quality relationships with young people. Almost all staff work in a caring and nurturing way across the school upholding children's rights. Young people feel safe and cared for and this helps them to interact well during learning opportunities.
- Staff reflect regularly as a team on how to improve levels of engagement within classes. They ensure each classroom learning environment is well organised and conducive to young people's needs. For a few young people who struggle to join group learning activities, staff provide appropriate quieter learning spaces. Staff are effective in developing personalised strategies that most young people adopt to support their own emotions and behaviour well. They use a suitable range of approaches and movement breaks to help young people to sustain engagement with their learning. Staff support most young people well to understand their emotions and self-regulate. This is resulting in almost all young people accessing learning opportunities successfully within the classroom setting.
- Most young people's learning experiences are challenging and focused on personalised learning outcomes. They are motivated to learn and engage purposefully with their learning. Most young people exercise choice and use digital technology particularly well to support their communication. In a few lessons, staff need to plan learning that is matched better to all young people's needs. This will better ensure that all young people build upon prior learning and become more active participants in their learning.
- Staff work well to engage young people in relevant learning activities around the school grounds to practise and apply learning in different contexts. However, staff should ensure learning activities incorporate increasingly progressive and relevant learning opportunities. For example, they could include more skills-based learning which can be applied and assessed in the local community.
- Staff are very attuned to the needs of young people and support them to cope with transitions and change well. Their detailed knowledge of each young person's needs helps them support young people to make positive choices. Staff take time to assess young people's wellbeing very well. They plan together in class teams considering effectively how best to support young people when they are anxious or distressed. Most staff anticipate very well when young people are at risk of becoming dysregulated. Resulting interventions are well timed, often including a change of activity which helps young people consistently to manage their emotions and regulate their behaviour successfully. Most staff use movement breaks well or time away from classes to support young people to regulate. As a result, young people consistently return to lessons ready to reengage purposefully with their learning.

- Most young people require risk assessments for their behaviour. Staff nurture and respect young people, working well to devise strategies and interventions which are supporting young people's self-regulation and minimising distressed and dysregulated behaviour. Most young people across the school are patient and understanding of other young people's behaviour. There have been no exclusions in the school during the last three years. Ochil Tower School provides physical intervention training to all staff. It is also part of the restraint reduction network. Recorded instances of physical restrictions are tracked and monitored appropriately. There is a focus on continuing to reduce restrictive practices. Staff are increasingly skilled at using the least restrictive practices to calm young people.
- Teachers provide almost all young people with task-based learning when in classrooms. These tasks are linked to individual targets or whole class activities. Most staff give clear instructions and explanations to young people about the activities they will undertake. They use symbols and signs very well to help young people understand these instructions and explanations. However, staff overly direct and structure classroom learning across the school day. Staff also need to improve ways for young people to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding across a broader range of learning experiences.
- Staff are developing well their assessment approaches and how they use this to make decisions about next steps in learning. Teachers meet weekly to reflect on and improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and this is beginning to improve the validity of their professional judgements. A few young people are involved in evaluating learning and this is supporting them to become more independent and confident. However, teachers are not yet involved in systematic, meaningful moderation activities across the year. Senior leaders need to programme more moderation activities both internally and with other schools to help ensure teachers' have a shared understanding of standards. This will help them develop a better understanding of national standards.
- Teachers use observations effectively to measure young people's progress in learning. Assessment of young people's progress takes account of personal interests, strengths and gaps in their learning. Young people's progress in the senior phase is monitored regularly to ensure that they can gain certification for their achievements. Overall, young people are working at appropriate levels, and most courses and programmes are suited to their needs. A few young people in the senior phase could be challenged more with their learning and attain qualifications at a higher level.
- Teachers use a whole school planning framework well to monitor and track young people's progress and achievements. Teachers are in the initial stages of data analysis skills strengthen their existing approaches to tracking and monitoring of young people's progress. Senior leaders and staff should continue with plans to use data to ensure all young people make the best progress in learning that they can. For example, they should continue as planned to enhance current tracking systems to evidence small steps and successes better in young people's attainment and progress.
- Staff track and monitor effectively young people's progress in achieving '50 things to we do at Ochil Tower School'. Young people contribute meaningfully to the assessment of their progress towards their targets using a traffic light system. They take strong ownership of their learning pathways and are proud of their progress in meeting targets.

## 1.4 Leadership and management of staff: theme 1 Governance framework

- In recent years, the Executive Director and the Chair of the Board of Trustees are working closely to reform the school's strategic and operational priorities. Overall, staff understand the roles of school leaders, the Executive Director and the board of trustees (the board). However, there is now need for the Executive Director to articulate clearly, through a framework of governance, how they and the board will undertake their agreed areas of responsibility. The Executive Director should align current policies with who is accountable for ensuring the quality of school performance, when developing the framework of governance. In doing so, it should be made clear how the Executive Director and the board will quality assure the impact the work of the school. This will support them develop a robust understanding of the impact the school is having on children and young people. The Executive Director should work with the board to develop further the governance arrangements for child protection and safeguarding. There is a need for them to state their responsibilities beyond the expectations of the children protection coordinator.
- The Executive Director and the board have made initial changes to the education management structures. They identified correctly that the head of education was focusing too much on operational matters and required more time to lead the school strategically. The Executive Director and the board have recently appointed an education manager to oversee the operational delivery of education. This is beginning to allow the head of education to focus more directly on quality assurance and strategic leadership. As a result, education staff are developing well a culture that focuses better on the quality of young people's engagement in learning. However, it is too early to evidence fully the impact recent leadership changes have had on improving learning.
- The head of education provides the Executive Director and the board with regular reports across the year. Their reports focus mainly on high level information based upon agreed agenda items. The head of education now needs to agree with the Executive Director how to develop further what data, information and evidence clearly outlines what is working well and what requires improvement. They should use this to provide the board with timeous and relevant evidence-based information as required for governance arrangements.

## 2.4 Personalised support: theme 2 Targeted support

- Staff across the school and care service are skilled at identifying learner's needs through appropriate observations and assessments. They provide relevant and proportionate support that aligns well with the young person's level of need. School staff work effectively with partners to ensure participation in planning and reviews of young people's progress. In doing so, staff adhere to legislative requirements for which they are accountable. Additionally, they are effective at improving outcomes for young people.
- School leaders should work with placing local authorities to find out which young people may require a coordinated support plan (CSP). This will ensure young people's legislative rights are upheld in line local authority legislative obligations. School leaders should develop chronologies to ensure they meet expectations outlined in national guidance. This will support school leaders to have an additional tool which should be used to inform their understanding of young people's need and risk.



## 2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the Board of Trustees.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- The wellbeing of young people is a very strong feature of the school. Staff are highly attentive to the wellbeing needs of all young people. They work together very well to provide appropriate care and support to young people. Young people benefit greatly from positive, nurturing relationships with adults and each other, and a welcoming learning environment across the school. All young people and staff are respectful to each other. Young people follow organised structures and routines very well, engaging purposefully in learning activities. As a result, almost all young people attend school regularly and make progress with their learning.
- Young people's complex wellbeing needs are met well across the school. Almost all young people identify someone they can speak to if they are worried or have a problem. Young people are building wellbeing skills successfully, including confidence, resilience and how to keep themselves safe. They feel included and valued. Staff access a wide range of valuable professional learning to enhance their understanding of young people's needs. Partners such as speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists provide insights into young people's needs. They offer useful strategies to support learning and improve wellbeing. Staff adopt highly effective approaches to help meet the needs of young people. This is having a meaningful impact on supporting young people's wellbeing.
- Almost all young people, appropriate to their additional support needs, have developed an understanding of their own wellbeing very well. The wellbeing indicators are embedded firmly into school practice. All staff promote a shared understanding of the wellbeing indicators. They use a wide range of learning activities in classes, assemblies and in the school grounds to share effectively ways that young people can stay safe, healthy, active, and be responsible. Senior leaders and staff should continue to identify appropriate therapeutic interventions to support young people's wellbeing further. Young people are building an increasing awareness of their rights, supported by staff. Staff should continue to embed children's rights into the work and ethos of the school.
- Young people have a strong awareness of how to follow a healthy lifestyle including adopting a balanced diet. Most young people engage in a wide range of purposeful sports and physical exercise activities both in the school and local community. They participate enthusiastically in activities such as swimming, horse riding, cycling and folk dancing. This often leads to young people achieving accredited awards.
- Staff have a strong awareness of their statutory duties, including those identified in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child. They follow national guidance on child protection and safeguarding. They understand how to protect young people and meet their needs effectively. All staff engage in appropriate professional learning, including child protection training, de-escalation techniques and understanding trauma, attachment and loss. They

understand well how a young person's past trauma can have a lasting impact on their emotions, behaviour and learning. Senior leaders should now strengthen their use of chronologies in line with national guidance. They need to ensure all chronologies are kept up to date and note outcomes of any actions agencies have taken.

- All young people benefit from individualised planning that considers very well their strengths and areas for development. All young people have a care and education plan in place with an appropriate range of outcomes related to their additional support needs. Plans are reviewed regularly with the 'team around the child' to monitor young people's progress and identify next steps. Staff work very effectively with young people to ensure they play a key role in the review of care and education plans. Staff are developing approaches creatively to help young people contribute meaningfully to reviews, using their preferred method of communication. Partners speak very highly of the resulting level of learners' participation in the review process.
- Young people learn about world religions and observe a variety of important religious festivals across Christianity and other faiths. They celebrate diversity through exploring other cultures and languages. They have a growing understanding of equality and inclusion as they learn about other faiths and cultures, their history and the school's commitment to children's rights. Young people would benefit from more learning activities centred on equality and diversity in relation to protected characteristics.

### 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

#### Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Across the broad general education (BGE) and senior phase, most young people are making good progress in literacy and English. A few are making very good progress. The majority of young people are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Across literacy and numeracy, a few young people could attain more.

#### Attainment in literacy and English

- Most young people are making good progress in literacy and English. A few young people are making very good progress.

#### Listening and talking (including communication)

- Most young people are making very good progress in developing their listening, communicating and talking skills using their preferred mode of communication. Staff use a consistent approach to communication and young people use symbols and short words and sentences to communicate choices. They respond to verbal prompts, symbols, words and questions about events in a song or story. Young people demonstrate progress from prior levels. At early level, most young people give shared attention to a range of sensory stimulus and objects. They use words to talk about how they feel. The majority of young people use a communication book to support them to communicate well in words and pictures. They name people or objects in pictures and can say what's happening in a picture. Young people working at first level join in with conversations very well using preferred modes of communication. Staff use alternative and augmentative communication well to ensure all young people are active participants in all aspects of literacy across the school.

#### Reading

- Most young people are making good progress in developing their pre-reading and reading skills set within personal learning plans. Young people at early level explore sounds, letters and words, discovering how they work together. They use this to help them to read and write and to build words and sentences. They can reinforce and apply skills in different contexts such as during assembly, folk dancing and apple pressing. A few young people at first level explore sounds, letters and words discovering how they work together and use this to help them to read and write. This supports them to express feelings and manage emotions better. Young people should be given more opportunities to read for enjoyment.

#### Writing

- Most young people working at early level explore and develop their fine motor, pre-writing, and writing skills in wider curriculum activities such as cooking, art, and weaving. They enjoy exploring patterns and sounds through engaging in tactile activities. A minority of young people form letters and write simple sentences. At first level, a few young people read and write initial sounds and match these to pictures. They build stories using simple sentences and use words

to write about how they feel and make choices. A few young people write more extended creative pieces of writing, applying their writing in different contexts. Staff should use digital technology to support young people to participate more fully in writing tasks.

### **Attainment in numeracy and mathematics**

- The majority of young people are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A minority of young people are making satisfactory progress.

### **Number, money and measure**

- At early level, most young people are able to follow a sequence of events well such as their visual timetables. A majority of young people recognise numbers from zero to 20 and identify the number before and the number after. At early level, most young people are using measure in everyday activities such as baking. Most young people engage with money through life skills such as shopping and cooking. At first level, most young people carry out accurately addition and subtraction mentally to 20. They count in bundles of ten and five with increasing confidence. Most young people are increasingly confident in using coins to purchase items. At all stages, young people could strengthen their use of time particularly in real-life situations.

### **Shape, position and movement**

- Most young people at all stages take part to varying degrees in activities and games that develop the use of positional language and concepts of movement, direction and speed. At early level, the majority of young people describe and sort common two-dimensional shapes, and match objects and shapes by colour. Young people are not yet confident in exploring the properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They need to understand further the properties of shape through real-life situations.

### **Information handling**

- At early level, a majority of young people are developing their skills in interpreting simple pictorial displays to ask and answer questions. At first level, most young people are building confidence in displaying information using bar charts and tables. They should apply their information handling skills further using digital technology.

### **Attainment over time**

- Most young people at the BGE make good progress with their learning and engagement over time. Senior leaders and staff have recently introduced new approaches to track and monitor young people's progress. They are not yet confident in identifying young people who could achieve more. Senior leaders and staff now need to ensure that they analyse data and evidence of young people's progress over time more robustly. In doing so, senior leaders and staff will be more able to focus on improving all young people's attainment and progress.
- Based on their individual additional support needs, the majority of young people in the senior phase have gained relevant Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications units, predominantly at National 1. They achieved awards successfully across a range of curriculum areas including communication, religious and moral education, science, and social subjects. A few young people achieve units at National 2 level. However, a minority of learners could achieve more. Teachers need to continue to develop the curriculum in order to provide young people with more opportunities to gain National 2 course and unit awards, particularly in numeracy and mathematics.
- Almost all young people attend school regularly. On occasion, young people miss school for extended periods due to their health needs. These young people have been supported well to return successfully to education. In 2023/24 young people's attendance at school was above the national average for special schools. Across education and care, staff have a range of

effective personalised approaches in place to support young people to attend school and engage with their education. Young people increasing their participation in their education is an integral part of the school culture. Young people respond well to this support, attending regularly and enjoying their learning.

### **Overall quality of learner's achievements**

- Across the school, young people's participation and success in personal achievement activities is widely recognised and celebrated. Learners' achievements are shared through assemblies, school displays and 'My Pathways' booklets. Young people's achievements are a strong feature of success at review meetings.
- Young people experience high levels of success with their achievements across the school and in the community. Young people enjoy participating in a range of personal achievement activities such as apple juicing, cycling, visiting the local library and beach litter picking. They are demonstrating skills in for example, communication, working well with others, and being responsible. Most young people engage predominantly in personal achievement activities which take place in the school grounds. They would benefit from achieving in more learning activities within the local community.
- Young people receive accreditation for many of their achievements, predominately through Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network certificates. All young people have a 'My Pathways' booklet which measures their progress towards '50 things we do at Ochil Tower School'. Young people take ownership of their 'My Pathways' booklet and are proud of their achievements. Supported by staff, they review their own progress towards achieving milestones. Staff should now support young people to note the date when they have achieved success in their booklets to measure achievement over time better.

### **Equity for all learners**

- Senior leaders and staff provide equitable support which helps young people and families to overcome any potential barriers to learning, including the cost of the school day and personal family circumstances. This enables young people to attend school regularly and experience success in their learning.
- Young people build a wide range of important skills for life and work including being independent and coping with adversity. Staff should continue to support young people to understand more fully the skills they are developing to help them achieve success as young adults. Most school leavers move on into Ochil Tower School's adult learning life skills centre upon leaving school. At the skills centre, young adults engage in community learning including college placements. They plan for transition back into their local community, including identifying potential positive post-school destinations. Senior leaders and staff need to work more closely with local authority partners to plan for post-school transitions whilst young people are still attending school. Young people in the senior phase would benefit from more opportunities to engage in community initiatives to build skills for life and work including college tasters and work placements.
- Senior leaders need to lengthen the school week to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged in relation to their peers in other schools. They should also consider whether all young people require a rest hour in the middle of the school day in order to best meet their needs.

## Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.