

East Ayrshire Council progress report – Doon Academy (8244138)

24 September 2026

In March 2024, HM Inspectors published a letter following inspection of Doon Academy. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which were agreed with the school and East Ayrshire Council.

In February 2025, HM Inspectors returned to the school and heard from the headteacher, young people and staff about the steps the school had taken to improve. HM Inspectors focussed on areas that had been identified for improvement during the original inspection. Following this visit, HM Inspectors provided a subsequent letter outlining progress and areas where further work was required.

This report details the improvements made in response to the request that East Ayrshire Council provide an update within 18 months.

Senior leaders and teachers need to make sure the needs of all young people are met in classes. They should develop a shared understanding of high-quality teaching and learning. Teachers should explore ways to adapt their methodology to increase young people’s motivation to learn and provide activities with the right amount of challenge.

Staff have built upon the good progress noted in February 2025 to further embed all aspects of Doon Academy’s ‘Five Components of an effective lesson’ framework. The Learning and Teaching School Improvement Group has worked with all staff to improve the delivery of the five components of an effective lesson, focussing on development and implementation of an effective feedback policy, adaptive teaching, and review and recall. All staff now have access to a centralised repository to access agreed resources that support effective learning and teaching in each area. This work has led to the development of a greater understanding of high-quality learning and teaching across the staff cohort. Internal school-level quality assurance and local authority visit evidence support the assertion that further improvement has been delivered. This session, all teaching staff across Doon Academy and the wider secondary school estate are participating in the Power up Your Pedagogy programme, which will further enhance consistency of provision across the school.

Quality Assurance of learning and teaching through direct observation occurs three times per academic session, whereby all teachers are observed during each iteration. The approach taken ensures that each teacher is observed once by a member of SLT, once by their Principal Teacher and once by a peer. Staff then complete individual reflections following feedback from the member of staff having observed lessons. This ensures that all staff are engaged in the process of evaluating learning and teaching. Senior Leaders collate overall feedback, which is then used to inform CLPL, INSET planning and the establishment of school improvement priorities.

The school’s approach to targeted intervention has evolved significantly. Planning for learning, teaching and assessment is fully informed by Education Scotland’s Moderation Cycle and the CIRCLE framework. Through the process of engaging with CLPL in these areas, staff recognised that an adapted approach to targeted intervention was required to ensure that support for young people not on track was available to them within all lessons.

In turn, staff planning takes better account of adaptive practice that meets the needs of all learners, both during lessons and across course provision. This focus on adaptive practice and use of the CIRCLE framework has simultaneously supported the school to make continual progress in the level of challenge experienced by learners, and in how inclusive the learning environment is for learners requiring support to engage in lessons. Staff and pupils worked together to revise and refresh the school's Vision, Values and Aims. This has led to the delivery of changes specifically targeted at increasing pupil motivation, both to become active members of the school community and to aspire for greater attainment. Pupil leaders devised an overview of the ways in which success is now celebrated across the school and introduced a revised house system and merit programme. Support from staff has ensured that the now extensive approach to celebrating success and creating a sense of belonging also accounts for meta-skills and incorporates department level recognition of achievement. This revised approach targets parental awareness via wristbands, badges and the introduction of the 'Thrive' award. The Thrive award helps reinforce a culture where pupils are celebrated for setting personal learning targets, supporting and encouraging one another, attending school and applying as much effort as possible to the task at hand.

Those young people who do require further targeted interventions are better supported by the establishment of a 'Connect' base, where lead staff liaise with class teachers to ensure that all learning is well planned and set an appropriate pace. A tandem programme of flexible learning which incorporates online provision, time in school and learning with partners has supported a few young people who are not able to attend school full time. This has had a positive impact on engagement, attendance and attainment.

Triangulation

As evidenced during the local authority learning visit in May 2026, the school continues to reflect a strong culture of learning through the development and implementation of the 'effective lesson' structure. In focus groups, young people stated their teachers know them well, and that teachers adapt learning to meet their needs more regularly. Observations undertaken by visiting staff demonstrated that almost all teachers were adapting their delivery of content to meet the needs of learners. In addition, staff have access to detailed tracking information relating to young people's progress and continue to use this regularly to plan learning and teaching.

The local authority has recently launched a Community of Practice model (led by the Doon Academy Headteacher), to ensure all subject specialists work systematically with colleagues across all of our secondary establishments, with the key aim of collaboratively planning for effective learning, teaching and assessment. This work has helped staff to establish more consistent and reliable judgements when assessing learner progress. This is in addition to ongoing cross sectoral moderation activity which ensures effective transition from the primary sector.

Senior leaders and teachers must improve attainment for all young people, with a particular focus on numeracy. Teachers should track learners' progress across all stages and make sure young people and their parents understand the progress being made.

ACEL Data

The pattern over time up to 2024 was highly variable, with a difference of 54% in Fourth Level literacy between 21/22 and 23/24. In the time since inspection, the data returned has stabilised. At Third level, Literacy returns were 78% and 77%. In Numeracy, the figure has stabilised at 83% and 85%. At Fourth level, Literacy returns have stabilised at 48%, and Numeracy within a range of 60% to 67%. All measures referenced are significantly higher than pre-inspection figures.

The school roll means that an individual pupil often accounts for 2% or more of the overall figure. In addition, Doon Academy serves an area whereby the percentage of learners from SIMDQ1 sits at 77%, which is significantly much higher than both local and national figures. In addition, around 10% of the roll have moderate learning difficulties and attend the Supported Learning Centre. These are important contextual considerations against national attainment patterns. The gains made in context are significant.

	Third Level Numeracy	Fourth Level Numeracy	Third Level Literacy	Fourth Level Literacy
2021/22	67%	26%	57%	2%
2022/23	57%	24%	53%	10%
2023/24	82%	56%	82%	56%
2024/25	83%	67%	78%	48%
2025/26	85%	60%	77%	48%

Correlation between ACEL and SCQF Attainment

Correlation with SCQF attainment for the same cohorts demonstrates clearly that the data submitted prior to initial inspection was not robust or rigorous. While it is acknowledged that direct correlation between ACEL and SQA/QS attainment is not a given, the gaps were significant. All SCQF figures are taken from the data available by the end of S4, and for the same cohort of learners where ACEL data was gathered in S3 (i.e. the following academic year).

	Third Level Numeracy in S3	SCQF4 in S4	Fourth Level Numeracy in S3	SCQF5 in S4	Third Level Literacy in S3	SCQF4 in S4	Fourth Level Literacy in S3	SCQF5 in S4
2021/22	67%	74%	26%	28%	57%	87%	2%	49%
2022/23	57%	78%	24%	20%	53%	80%	10%	41%
2023/24	82%	79%	56%	55%	82%	85%	56%	64%
2024/25	83%	77%	67%	68%**	78%	89%	48%	68%
2025/26	85%	NA	60%	NA	77%	NA	48%	NA

**** Please see S4 Based on S4 Numeracy paragraph within INSIGHT Evidence section on page 5**

The local authority is satisfied that current processes are now rigorous, and the school can evidence extensive staff engagement with ACEL via Planning, Moderation and Assessment work undertaken across the school and with associated primary schools. The correlation between S3 data from 2023/24 and SQA data in 2024/25 is noteworthy on two counts. Firstly, the initial ACEL data is much higher than pre-inspection, secondly, subsequent SCQF5 attainment when in S4 is significantly much greater than pre-inspection. This also acts as evidence of a culture of ambition and increased motivation as referenced earlier in this report.

INSIGHT Evidence

INSIGHT data was released in September 2026 and evidences the following improvements over time.

Improving Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy

S4 Based on S4 – Literacy

At SCQF3, Literacy attainment reached a four year high of 97.9% in 2026. SCQF4 Literacy has improved for the second successive year, with an increase from 80.4% in 2024 to 89.4% in 2026. Strong progress since inspection is also evident at SCQF5, whereby improvement from 41.2% in 2024 was followed by returns of 63.6% in 2025, and 68.1% in 2026.

S5 Based on S4 – Literacy

SCQF6 attainment in 2026 increased by 25.5% to 57.6%, which is also the highest return at Higher or equivalent across a five-year period and is 23.9% greater than the Virtual Comparator. At SCQF4 and SCQF5 there were year on year improvements between 2025 and 2026, with SCQF4 rising from 84.3% to 93.9% and SCQF5 rising from 45.1% to 66.7%.

S5 Based on S5 – Literacy

At SCQF4, attainment increased by 6% year on year to 96.55%, and is now 9% above the VC. There is a substantial increase of 17.65% at SCQF5 year to year with 72.41% of learners attaining SCQF5 in Literacy. At SCQF6, the highest return over a five-year period delivered a 25.5% gap from the VC at 40% to a school return of 65.52%. S5 attainment demonstrates strengthening of school data at SCQF4, 5 and 6, as well as maintenance of high levels of SCQF3 data.

S6 Based on S6 – Literacy

By the end of S6, SCQF6 attainment in 2026 was the highest over a five-year period, and 19.4% greater than the Virtual Comparator. SCQF6 literacy rose from 57.1% in 2025 to 88.9% in 2026.

S4 Based on S4 Numeracy

At SCQF4, Numeracy data pre-inspection was 73.6% in both 2022 and 2023. This has increased to 76.6% in 2026. At SCQF5 Qualifications Scotland has confirmed to the local authority that a further twenty-one learners did successfully attain SCQF5 awards in Numeracy last session, with certification to follow. East Ayrshire Council can provide evidence of this to HMIE. When accounting for late certification, 68% of S4 learners attained SCQF5 Numeracy, which is a five-year high against pre-inspection figures of 23%, 28% and 20%.

S5 Based on S4 Numeracy

SCQF6 attainment has increased substantially in 2026 to 42.4% and is now 24.8% higher than the VC. This follows returns of 4.08%, 5.56% and 7.55% pre-inspection. At SCQF5, pupils returned a five-year high of 63.6% in 2026. SCQF4 attainment was also the highest across a five-year period at 63.6%, 7% above the VC.

S5 Based on S5 Numeracy

SCQF4 attainment reached a five year high of 93.1%, which was also a 5% increase on the previous high recorded in 2025. SCQF5 attainment at 72.5% is also a five-year high, an 18% improvement on 2025 and 9% above the VC. SCQF6 in 2026 is 26.2% above the VC, at 48.4% and is four times greater than attainment in the previous year, which was already a four year high against pre-inspection returns.

S6 Based on S6 Numeracy

Over time, SCQF4 attainment in Numeracy has improved significantly, with 76.2% of S6 pupils attaining SCQF4 Numeracy in 2022, compared to 100% attaining SCQF4 in both 2025 and 2026. At SCQF5, school returns are above the VC this year, and the figure of 88.9% is a five-year high from a starting point of 42.86% in 2022. At SCQF6, data has improved over time from 0% in 2022, to now outperforming the VC in 2026, where 50% of S6 pupils attained SCQF6 Numeracy.

Increasing Participation

Positive destinations for S6 leavers remain consistently high, with 95.2% entering a positive destination in 2024/25, above the Virtual Comparator of 94.3%. This follows 100% in 2023/24 and continues a pattern of high positive-destination outcomes for S6 leavers.

Within S6, there has been increased progression to both employment and Further Education. The proportion progressing to employment increased from 10.3% in 2023/24 to 19.1% in 2024/25, while progression to Further Education increased from 41.4% to 47.6%. Both outcomes are above their respective Virtual Comparators in the most recent session.

Increased progression to Further Education is also evident more widely. Among S5 leavers, the proportion entering Further Education increased from 38.9% to 54.2%, while across S5 and S6 combined, it increased from 40.4% to 51.1%. Across all S4–S6 leavers, progression to Further Education also increased from 44.6% to 49.0%.

Progression to employment has also increased across the overall leaver cohort, rising from 14.3% in 2023/24 to 22.5% in 2024/25. The latest outcome is above the Virtual Comparator of 18.0%.

Attainment for All

At S5, improvement is particularly evident among the middle 60% of learners. Substantial increases are recorded across both Annual and Cumulative measures, with the middle 60% improving across all four S5 measures and performing above the Virtual Comparator in 2025/26. Improvement is also evident among the highest-attaining 20% across these measures.

At S6, improvement is evident across all attainment groups. Both Annual Total and Annual Complementary Tariff show substantial improvement across the lowest 20%, middle 60% and highest 20% in 2025/26. This is reinforced by the Cumulative Total and Complementary measures, which also show improvement across all three.

The progress of the lowest attaining 20% at S6 is a key strength. Attainment improved across both Annual and Cumulative measures, with outcomes above Virtual Comparators. The middle 60% also demonstrates substantial improvement, including increases of around 200 tariff points across the S6 Annual measures.

The consistency of improvement across Total and Complementary Tariff measures provides further evidence that the positive pattern is not confined to a single attainment measure. There is also evidence of improvement among the highest-attaining 20%, demonstrating progress at the upper end of the attainment distribution alongside gains for lower and middle attaining learners.

Overall, the most recent Attainment for All data provides positive evidence of broad-based improvement rather than improvement being concentrated among the highest-attaining learners, with particularly encouraging progress among the middle 60% at S5 and across the attainment in S6 for all three groups.

Attainment versus Deprivation

There is positive evidence of improving attainment for young people living in the most deprived areas, which in context, is the majority of learners within Doon Academy.

At S5, substantial improvement is evident across SIMD 1 and SIMD 2, which together account for most of the cohort. This pattern is consistent across both Annual and Cumulative measures and across Total and Complementary Tariffs. For SIMD 1, improvement is particularly consistent, with attainment increasing across each of the last two sessions in both Cumulative Total and Cumulative Complementary Tariff. SIMD 2 also demonstrates substantial improvement in the most recent session across all four S5 measures. Outcomes for both groups are also numerically above their respective Virtual Comparators across these measures in 2025/26.

A similarly strong pattern is evident at S6. SIMD 1 and SIMD 2 together represent 83.3% of the cohort, and both groups demonstrate substantial improvement across Annual Total, Annual Complementary, Cumulative Total and Cumulative Complementary Tariff in 2025/26. SIMD 1 shows sustained improvement across the last two sessions in both Annual measures, while SIMD 2 records particularly substantial improvement in the most recent session.

The Cumulative measures provide further evidence of improvement at S6. Cumulative Total Tariff increased by 306 points for SIMD 1 and 260 points for SIMD 2 in 2025/26, while Cumulative Complementary Tariff increased by 197 and 181 points respectively. In Cumulative Complementary Tariff, both groups also surpassed their 2023/24 outcomes, with SIMD 2 achieving its highest outcome across the five-year period.

At S4, the strongest improvement occurred in 2024/25. Attainment for SIMD 1 remains above the earlier 2022/23 and 2023/24 position across both Annual Total and Annual Complementary Tariff measures.

Overall, the most recent data provides encouraging evidence that improvement in attainment is clear for the majority of young people attending Doon Academy. For learners in S5 and S6, substantial improvement is repeated across multiple attainment measures and accounts for the large majority of each cohort.

Breadth and Depth

S4 Attainment

There is clear evidence of improvement in the breadth and quality of attainment by the end of S4 since the original inspection visit. The percentage of learners achieving five or more awards at SCQF3 increased from 60.8% in 2024 to 84.9% in 2025 and 85.1% in 2026. Similar improvement is evident across the wider SCQF3 measures, with 93.6% of learners achieving three or more and four or more awards in 2026.

Improvement is also evident at SCQF4. In 2024, 52.9% of learners achieved five or more awards at SCQF4, this increased to 69.7% in 2025 and remains substantially higher than the original position at 66.0% in 2026. This provides strong evidence that the significant gains made following the original inspection visit have been sustained across successive cohorts, with substantially more young people achieving a wider range of qualifications by the end of S4.

Importantly, there is also clear evidence of improvement in the quality of attainment at National 5. In 2024, 47.1% of learners achieved at least one National 5 award at A–C; this increased to 75.8% in 2025 and remains significantly higher at 70.2% in 2026. The proportion achieving two or more National 5 awards at A–C increased from 29.4% in 2024 to 69.7% in 2025 and 59.6% in 2026. A similar pattern is evident at A–B, with the percentage achieving at least one award increasing from 27.5% in 2024 to 60.6% in 2025 and 59.6% in 2026.

Overall, there is now clear evidence across successive cohorts that both the breadth and quality of attainment by the end of S4 have improved since the original inspection visit. The significant improvement first evident in 2025 has been sustained across key measures in 2026, supporting our assertion that more young people are achieving a broader range of qualifications and that substantially more are achieving National 5 qualifications at A–C and A–B.

S5 Attainment

There is clear evidence of improvement in both the breadth and depth of attainment by the end of S5. The percentage of learners attaining five or more awards at SCQF5 increased from 45% in 2024 to 52.4% in 2025 and 69% in 2026. The same pattern of improvement is evident at greater breadth, with the percentage achieving six or more awards at SCQF5 increasing from 35% in 2024 to 38.1% in 2025 and 62.1% in 2026.

There is also strong evidence of increased depth of attainment at SCQF6. The percentage of learners achieving three or more awards at SCQF6 increased from 17.5% in 2024 and 19.1% in 2025 to 48.3% in 2026. Four or more awards increased from 5% to 16.7% and then 37.9%, while five or more increased from 2.5% in 2024 to 14.3% in 2025 and 27.6% in 2026. The 2026 outcomes are numerically above the Virtual Comparator across each of these measures.

Importantly, improvement is also evident in the quality of attainment. By the end of S5, the percentage of learners achieving at least one National 5 award at A–C increased from 62.5% in 2024 to 82.8% in 2026, while two or more increased from 62.5% to 79.3%. At A–B, the percentage achieving at least one National 5 increased from 45% to 75.9%, with two or more increasing from 25% to 58.6%. The 2026 outcomes across each of these measures are also numerically above the respective Virtual Comparators.

Overall, there is now strong evidence of significant cohort v cohort gains in both the breadth and depth of attainment by the end of S5. More learners are achieving a wider range of qualifications, substantially more are accumulating multiple awards at SCQF6, and there is clear evidence of improvement in the quality of National 5 attainment. This supports our assertion that the breadth, depth and quality of attainment at Doon Academy have improved significantly since the original inspection visit.

S6 Attainment

There is strong evidence of improvement in the breadth, depth and quality of attainment by the end of S6. In 2025, 42.9% of learners achieved three or more awards at SCQF6; this increased to 83.3% in 2026. Similarly, the percentage achieving four or more awards at SCQF6 increased from 23.8% to 66.7%, while those achieving five or more increased from 14.3% to 55.6%.

These gains are not limited to comparison with the previous cohort. The 2026 outcomes for three or more, four or more and five or more awards at SCQF6 are the highest across the five-year period. The percentage of learners achieving three or more and four or more awards at SCQF6 is also numerically above the Virtual Comparator, while five or more is broadly in line. There is also evidence of increased breadth of attainment, with 100% of S6 learners achieving five or more awards at SCQF5 in 2026, compared with 76.2% in 2025. In addition, all S6 learners achieved at least one award at SCQF6.

Importantly, there is also evidence of improvement in the quality of attainment. The SQA/QS measures demonstrate increased attainment at A–C and A–B by the end of S6 when compared with the position in 2024. This improvement in the quality of awards, alongside the substantial increase in the number of SCQF6 qualifications being accumulated, provides further evidence that improvement is evident not only in breadth, but also in the level and quality of attainment achieved by young people.

Overall, the consistency of improvement across the range of measures provides strong evidence that more learners are achieving a greater number of qualifications, at a higher level and with improved quality by the end of S6. This supports the wider evidence from S4 and S5 that the breadth, depth and quality of attainment at Doon Academy have improved significantly since the original inspection visit.

Triangulation

While published ACEL, SQA/QS and INSIGHT data provides a strong evidence base for significant improvements relative to the time since inspection, school level and local authority quality assurance provides further reassurance by way of interrogation of revised approaches to tracking and monitoring. Work to embed the Moderation Cycle in Planning Learning, Teaching and Assessment has led to the development of Progression Frameworks that relate to the curriculum offered at Doon Academy. These frameworks act as a reference point for formal calendared tracking three times per session.

SLT calendar regular review meetings with each Principal Teacher whereby cohort level analysis of progress is reviewed. There are cohort level targets across curricular areas, which has helped ensure that staff consider the extent to which the BGE curriculum is progressive. Tracking the progress of individuals sits at department level, and all departments track progress across the session. This data informs that which is submitted via the whole school system. The processes and systems are well utilised, and cohort progress over time is evident from subject to subject.

In addition, all staff have regular learner conversations with young people to identify their strengths, development needs and the Meta Skills they have been developing across the curriculum. These are recorded in Learner Conversation booklets which are retained by the pupils to ensure that they are aware of their working levels, targets and how to achieve their targets. As a result, young people are aware of the level they are working at, their target grades and how to achieve them. This gives young people the confidence to support improvements in attainment. This is further supported by an extensive mentoring programme for learners in the Senior Phase, whereby key staff meet learners at specified intervals to provide advice and guidance as courses progress.

Senior leaders and teachers should ensure that they are offering suitable programmes of learning, with a stronger focus on senior phase options. These programmes should allow all young people to maximise their learning and so improve outcomes for all.

In the letter issued by HM Inspectors in August 2025, it was recognised that overall, staff had already made good progress in this area. It was acknowledged that the SLT had led staff to undertake an extensive audit of the BGE curriculum and pathways. BGE courses were mapped to reflect national standards. Progression pathways have been created for all curricular areas. This supports staff to have a clearer understanding of the next steps in learning for all young people. This work has been enhanced by the development of project-based learning and electives within S1 and S2. Personalisation and Choice takes place in S3, whereby learners receive their entitlement to a Broad General Education, but can exercise a greater degree of choice as to specialisms within curricular areas. Pupils have indicated increased enjoyment and engagement in subjects and have clear curricular pathways available to them from S1 to the Senior phase. This supports pupils' ambitions and improved attainment.

The visiting HMI team noted that Senior Phase options had been extended to include clearer pathways and that the school had adopted a revised presentation policy. At the time of the revisit, supporting attainment data was not yet sufficient in terms of the number of cohorts to complete qualifications. The attainment across 2026 supports the view that gains have been maintained relative to pre-inspection returns. Pathways available to young people have been further refined to ensure that young people recognise the value of their improved attainment in pursuing a route beyond school into employment, education or training. This can be exemplified by the introduction of Engineering, Childcare and Hospitality, which will lead to Foundation Apprenticeships. Progression pathways are also increasingly varied, with, for example, the introduction of Scottish Studies as a pathway from English. Young people are directly benefiting from a range of well-considered pathways that both prepare them for their next step after school and have resulted in improved attainment at SCQF3-6. Pathways take full account of local employment opportunities and align with the aspirations of the Ayrshire Growth deal.

Triangulation

During the local authority visit, the Pupil Support team provided evidence that BGE and Senior phase tracking is used well when considering the progress and engagement of young people. There is extensive support for all young people during the options planning process for transitions and pathways. This includes individual meetings for all young people, which parents and carers attend. In addition, Senior Phase Parents' Nights now occur twice per academic year, a change designed specifically to ensure that Parents/Carers benefit from discussion around pathway progression as the academic year unfolds.

Young people report that they have personalisation and choice built into their options. In focus groups young people moving into senior phase confirm that they can take forward the options they desire.

Tracking of young people who are at risk of not attaining is detailed. There is evidence that most of the young people in this group are on target to achieve or exceed projections.

Record of Local Authority Engagement

The table below outlines all formal local authority engagement since the date of the last HMI letter.

Date	Activity
04/03/2025	Mid-year SIP Review Meeting
31/03/2025	SQA INSIGHT Review Meeting
13/05/2025	QIM/HT Modelling – SIP Rationale and Priorities
04/06/2025	ACEL, Tracking period 3 and Standards and Qualities Review Meeting
26/08/2025	SIP Review
20/11/2025	HMIE Action Plan and SIP Review
12/02/2026	Pre Learning Visit Meeting
31/03/2026	SQA INSIGHT Attainment Review
05/05/2026	Local Authority Learning Visit
06/05/2026	Local Authority Learning Visit
21/05/2026	Secondary Performance Improvement Manager – PT Training: DIP and QA
02/06/2026	Destinations Review Meeting

Local Authority Statement

The Local Authority judges that the school has made significant progress in addressing the areas identified by HM Inspectors, with the already noted good progress in respect of learning and teaching and programmes of learning sustained, and significant improvements in attainment. We therefore consider that the school now meets the expectations required for closure of ongoing engagement.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Linda McAulay-Griffiths', with a small flourish at the end.

LINDA McAULAY-GRIFFITHS
Director of Education and Skills and Chief Education Officer