

Dunoon, Scotland, UK

Dunoon Grammar School

Skilling students to reverse a
“brain drain”



WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
Community
Collaboration

FUNDAÇÃO
Lemann



WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES

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Introduction

Founded in 1641, Dunoon Grammar School is a co-educational, state-financed, comprehensive school with around 750 pupils. The school is the only secondary school serving the Cowal peninsula, a region of Argyll and Bute in Scotland, United Kingdom, which has a predominately rural demographic. The school works hard to ensure students reach their destinations post-school and connects them to regular work placements to bolster their career chances after they graduate. The school also develops entrepreneurial skills in its young people, allowing them to establish their own local enterprises or to effectively contribute to regeneration projects. It is using its skill-based courses and experiential learning to turn around the fortunes of its community, which has seen an exodus of young people lacking opportunities.



Profile:



Country:

United Kingdom



Region:

Dunoon, Scotland



School type:

Public school



Location area:

Rural



Student population:

501 to 1000



Prize Category:

Community Collaboration

“To strive for excellence for all our young people and the community: that is at the heart of every single thing we do at our school. Over the last 10 years, we live that vision and it absolutely drives our ethos. It drives everything we do around our curriculum and pedagogy, everything that relates to that vision statement.”

**- David Mitchell,
Headteacher of
Dunoon Grammar
School**



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Due to its rural location, traditionally young people living in the area would have to leave the community to pursue further study and careers elsewhere. The lack of prospects has negatively impacted the local economy, ongoing community development and future sustainability.

“For a long time now, those in the area suffered from the ‘brain drain,’” Paul Gallanagh, Principal Teacher of Computing Science says. “Young people have had no real option but to pack up and leave the town to further their education or to find employment”. To try and reverse the brain drain, Dunoon Grammar School evaluated the community’s needs and gaps in the workplace and facilitated over

50 skill-based courses to empower students to work in a range of different vital professions. Courses are diverse, offering students the chance to learn more about travel and tourism, design, or maritime studies.

The school’s community collaboration efforts have seen it develop entrepreneurial skills in its students, allowing them to establish their own local enterprises. A continuous drive to ‘raise the bar’ and better meet the needs of young people has been the key challenge of the school and a core motivation to enhance and augment its community collaboration. It was necessary to break from traditional pedagogy.



A level of risk-taking was required by all stakeholders to transition from widely accepted practices that are rooted in theory, lore, and intuition, and shift the focus to actively include wider members of the community in the school's educational model. The global pandemic raised a number of challenges that required Dunoon Grammar School to adapt how it chose to

collaborate with community members also granted students an opportunity to take the lead in community recovery.







“Since first being elected to parliament in 2015, I’ve been amazed at how deeply embedded the school is in the local community, not just the school as an institution but the pupils themselves.”

- Brendan O’Hara, Member of UK Parliament for Argyll and Bute



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

Dunoon Grammar School fully involves its community stakeholders in all aspects of its planning, giving community members a voice in shaping its service provision to ensure faculty meet their existing and future needs. Regular meetings are established with all partners and an individual Child's Plan was created, detailing the support strategies unique to that individual.

Vital community projects have been woven into the school curriculum, enabling students to gain a unique and hands-on experience in their learning; creating new skills that they can apply for the benefit of the local community in Dunoon. “I definitely love community-based learning,” one student says. “There are real people that will benefit from the results of your project and you want to do it then – not flip a page in a textbook”.

The school threw itself into the ‘Dunoon Project’, which sought to revitalise the area and bring investment back into the local community by building a large cable car system that will reach the top of the nearby hills. A rollercoaster and a zip line almost four kilometres long will be installed to attract tourists and build more jobs in the local area. The school was initially approached by the Board of Directors to ask if students would be interested in supporting the initiative. Together, a Junior Advisory board was set up. “[The students] are really at the centre of this,” David Mitchell, Headteacher of Dunoon Grammar School says, explaining how students acted as key consultants in how the Dunoon Project would best serve their interests and bring life back into the town.



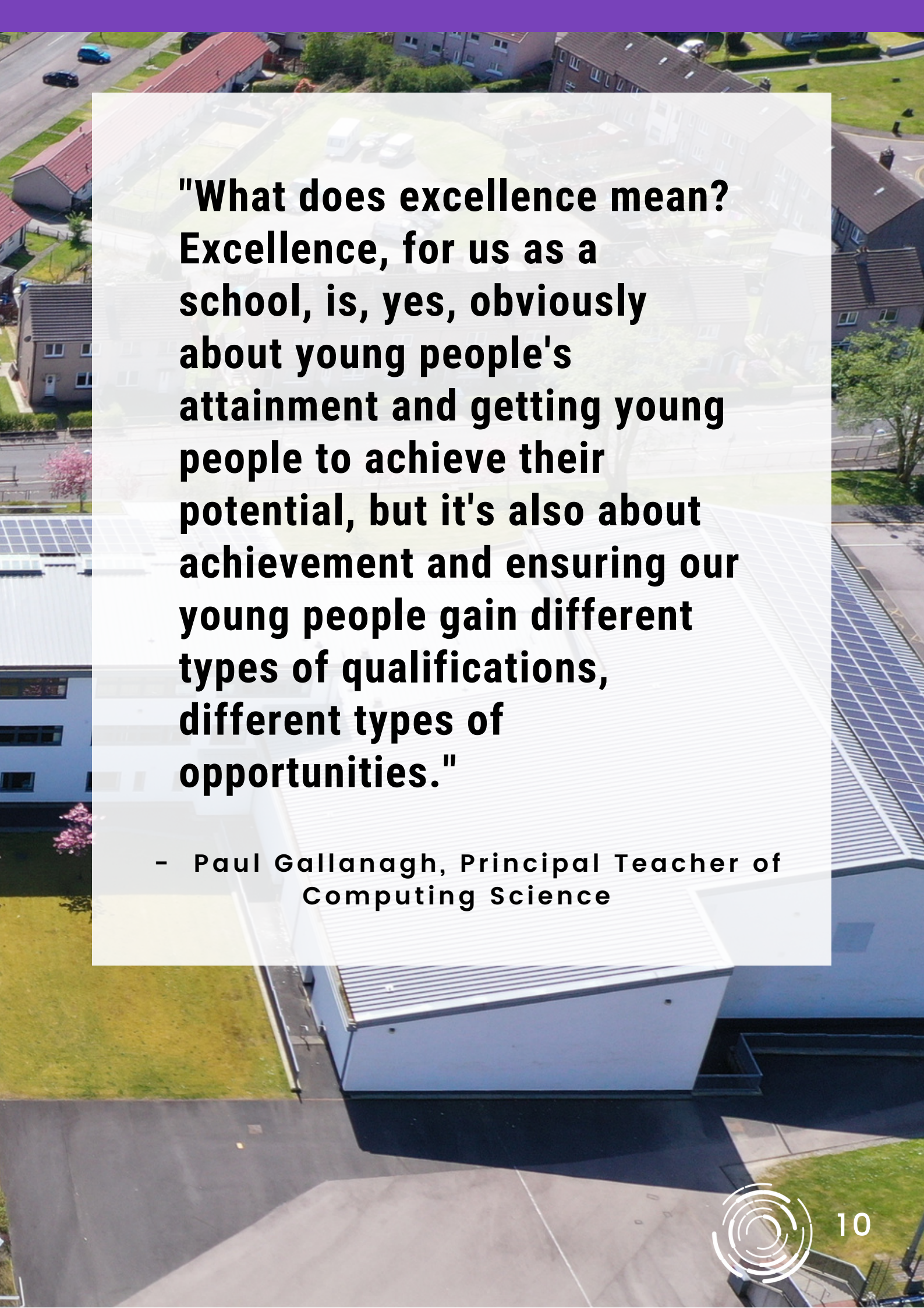
The project contributes to the school's wider objectives of giving students the opportunity to remain in Dunoon with jobs in engineering, marketing and other forms of employment.

Students have also made meaningful contributions to a wide range of important global events, often accessing the expertise of high-end people in the industry. For example, working with Apps for Good – an educational charity app that promotes coding skills – students were pivotal in generating ideas and coded prototype apps and Machine Learning solutions to benefit society. Natalie Moore, CEO of Apps for Good, stated that Dunoon goes far to make sure that their students don't miss out on important opportunities – “We are proud to be working with Dunoon Grammar School for seven years now,” she said. “Since coming aboard as a partner, Dunoon Grammar school has gone above and beyond to deliver the best to deliver the best experience possible for their students.”

In the run-up to COP26, students built an app that aimed to benefit the global community, which compares who can reduce food waste the most. Users take photos of their food plates daily and the app tallies up how much food has been wasted in comparison to other online users.

The school has also formed a number of partnerships with local and national community members to help its students with a range of community projects, such as a food bank and holding bingo nights in care homes. “It just showed that our young people care about our community,” Mitchell says.





"What does excellence mean? Excellence, for us as a school, is, yes, obviously about young people's attainment and getting young people to achieve their potential, but it's also about achievement and ensuring our young people gain different types of qualifications, different types of opportunities."

- Paul Gallanagh, Principal Teacher of Computing Science



OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The school's inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Scotland identified Dunoon Grammar School's progress as best practice and announced plans to share the school's approaches across the country stating, "...the school has developed relevant, real-life contexts to support and frame young people's learning and teaching. This has involved working with an extensive range of partners, including local, national and international businesses and charities."

Its Community Collaboration work has also been celebrated through a number of Early Day motions in the UK Parliament and in the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood.

The school's students have also been provided with the opportunity to lead innovative

initiatives, not only allowing them to develop real-world skills for the future, but gaining vital experiences that help them shape their lives beyond, all while making a difference to their community. There is a close collaboration with the families of students as well, with a Parent Council being created that allows parents to participate as key influencers in the school's long-term strategies and goal planning. The school has a range of diverse partner agencies. Often these partners are proactive in offering rich learning experiences and industry insight that helps it continuously review its curriculum. This process includes students discussing their ideas with industry specialists - including experts from MasterCard, Spotify and Salesforce.

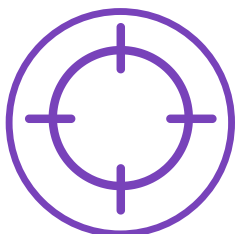


Key Steps



AUDIT

An appraisal was conducted regarding current community collaboration efforts – via quantitative and qualitative means – through a root and branch review involving all stakeholders – learners, parents/carers, staff, external partners, businesses and wider community. This identified areas of strength and informed areas for development. Information was gathered via a range of primary and secondary sources – including questionnaires, focus groups, observations and literature reviews – often using technology to gather, analyse and share.

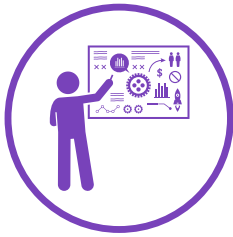


TARGET SETTING

Working with local community partners, the school devised and shared objectives that provided a direction of travel for its improvement agenda.



This gave all stakeholders a clear focus which aided the adoption of community engagement and learning. This target setting acted as a key catalyst for action – turning ideas into actual community collaboration.



PLANNING AND IDEA GENERATION

At all levels, community learning was an integral part of the school's plans. The school established creative forums that allowed all stakeholders, particularly young people, to generate ideas for the achievement of set targets. Doing so increased their ownership of such projects, which in turn increased their commitment to success.



IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

Support and guidance were provided by the school and department leaders to support the implementation of community collaboration initiatives. Time and financial support were allocated for this discrete purpose.

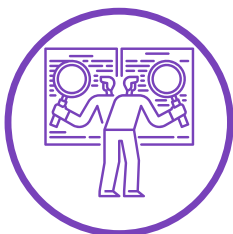


Regular reviews of ongoing progress allowed swift corrective action if there was any variance from plans, which helped reinforce the school's commitment to community collaboration.



COURAGE AND INNOVATION

Staff were empowered to make connections with community partners and were invited to innovate with their curricular offer to their young people. This helped revolutionise various aspects of the former curriculum – for example, in the Computing Science department there was a seismic shift from dry, theory-heavy learning experiences to active learning approaches which engaged students and led to performance in academic results.

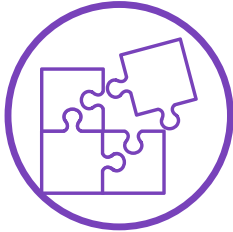


BENCHMARKING

The school benchmarked its efforts against best school practices in Scotland and further abroad. This gave an insight into techniques that were having a positive impact on young people and communities, which then inspired the school to adapt its own educational model.



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UPSKILLING

Continued provisional learning opportunities are regularly offered to staff as part of staff development to ensure all members have the skills and confidence to engage with community partners and to facilitate rich experiential learning for students.



CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Finally, the school continuously sought to showcase success with its community collaboration work. This gave stakeholders the recognition that their work and impact deserved. The school utilised a variety of communication channels – from newsletters, websites, social media, vlogs, assemblies, award ceremonies and parent’s evenings, as well as external channels such as local newspapers, Local Authority publications, national TV/Radio broadcasts and a range of partner social media platforms.



Advice and Guidance

Do take risks, even if that does alter the pedagogy or the current educational model of the school, even when such a risk ends in failure. It's important that staff, stakeholders and parents make the time and effort to nurture the feelings of community and encourage it within everyday school life. This includes being actively involved with wider community members even at the cost of staff's personal time.

More information

-  [@dunoongs](#)
-  [Dunoon Grammar School](#)
-  [Dunoon Grammar](#)
-  <http://www.dunoongrammar.argyll-bute.sch.uk/>

Watch this [school's video](#)

