

**Lochaber High School
Fort William
The Highland Council
4 December 2007**

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1. The inspection

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published a report on the inspection of Lochaber High School in January 2006. Working with the school, the education authority prepared an action plan indicating how they would address the main points for action identified in the original HMIE inspection report.

HM Inspectors revisited the school in November 2006 and in September 2007 to assess the extent to which the school was continuing to improve the quality of its work, and to evaluate progress made in responding to the main points for action in the initial report.

2. Continuous improvement

The school's senior management team (SMT) had undergone significant change. In April 2006, the education authority had seconded the headteacher of another local secondary school to lead the school in an acting capacity, and he took up post in May 2006. Two deputy headteachers retired in June 2006. The SMT had been reduced from four deputy headteachers to three. A new deputy headteacher took up post in October 2006.

In his 16 months in post, the acting headteacher had brought about considerable improvements in communicating and consulting with staff, pupils and parents. The SMT was now working together well with the faculty heads and principal teachers. As an improved team, all were now well placed to take the school forward. The curriculum, teaching approaches and pupils' learning were now better. There had been signs of significant increases in attainment at S4 in 2007. The morale of all staff and pupils had improved. Staff and pupils were working together more effectively to improve the work of the school.

3. Progress towards meeting the main points for action

The initial inspection report published in January 2006 identified seven main points for action. This section evaluates the progress made with each of the action points and the resulting improvements for pupils and other stakeholders.

3.1 Ensure that curriculum flexibility arrangements meet the needs and provide clear education gain for all pupils.

The school had made good progress towards meeting this main point for action.

The acting headteacher had set up a helpful staff focus group to look at aspects of the curriculum. Points raised by the group were taken forward to a faculty heads' and principal teachers' meeting. Staff then drew up detailed curriculum plans, and all staff were consulted effectively, prior to the construction of the 2007/2008 timetable. Class sizes in English language and mathematics in S1 and S2 had been reduced to a maximum of 20 per class as part of the implementation of a national initiative. Language option choices for pupils moving into S2 from S1 had been widened and improved.

S2 pupils moving into S3 were given a free choice of subjects and successful timetabling ensured all achieved their preferred choices. S3 and S4 pupils were able to undertake

vocational pathways including courses in sport and recreation and rural skills. School staff had sought the views of pupils moving into S5 and S6 and had responded effectively. They had reorganised subject choice combinations to provide the best possible fit for all pupils. The school did not yet have an effective programme for personal and social education in S5 and S6. New courses had been introduced in economics and drama and a number of pupils were now studying Spanish and geology through open and distance learning. As a result of the improvements made, pupils' learning needs were now met more effectively.

3.2 Continue to improve attainment and achievement especially at S3/S4.

The school had made good progress in addressing this main point for action.

The school had appointed two temporary principal teachers of pupil support to work with pupils identified as requiring additional support in S3 and S4. Initial analysis of attainment for 2007 indicated significant improvements in S4. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 3¹ had improved significantly to produce the best results over the last 5 years. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 4 had improved to equal the best results over the last 5 years. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more awards at SCQF level 5 or better had improved slightly. In S5 the percentages of pupils gaining three or more awards at SCQF level 6 had dipped slightly and the percentages gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 6 had remained steady. The headteacher and staff recognised that work still needed to be done to ensure that the attainment of all pupils continued to improve. Planned improvements in setting targets, tracking and monitoring pupils' progress had not yet been fully implemented. The school continued to promote achievement for all pupils through a very wide range of helpful activities. The school shinty team had been very successful and many pupils had benefited from participating in a range of musical events. Pupils had gained significant successes in national Gaelic competitions. Overall, as a result of the improvements made, pupils were attaining better results in examinations and achieving more in broader pursuits.

3.3 Improve learning and teaching as outlined in the January 2006 report, especially in French.

The school had made good progress in addressing this main point for action.

There had been staffing changes within the languages faculty. The quality of learning and teaching had improved. Relationships with pupils had moved forward and the atmosphere within classrooms was settled and pupils were working at a good pace. In May 2006, the acting headteacher had set up a staff working group to review whole school learning and teaching, under the leadership of a deputy headteacher. The deputy had effectively involved almost all staff in discussion about the quality of their learning and teaching. The group had been well focused on developing a culture of personal reflection and improvement. Staff had been involved in high quality in-service training involving an appropriate range of speakers.

¹ Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels:

7: Advanced Higher at A-C/CSYS at A-C

6: Higher at A-C

5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2

4: Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4

3: Access 3 cluster; Standard Grade at 5-6

All staff had undertaken an evaluation of the quality of their own teaching and a few staff had observed other teachers. Staff had consulted pupils about the quality of their learning experiences, using written questionnaires. Teachers were now providing more opportunities for pupils to be more actively involved in their learning. In some classes, teachers were extending the use of interactive whiteboards to enhance pupils' learning. The SMT had not yet ensured that all faculty and departmental heads promoted high quality learning and teaching within their departments. As a result of the improvements made, the quality of learning and teaching had improved in most departments.

3.4 Introduce robust arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of pupils and recording of child protection incidents.

The school had made very good progress in meeting this main point for action.

School staff had effectively reviewed procedures to ensure secure and accurate recording of child protection incidents. The staff handbook now gave clear and helpful advice on appropriate procedures to be adopted in the event of an incident occurring. All staff had received specific training on child protection. A significant number of staff members had successfully undertaken training in physical intervention techniques approved for use in Highland Council educational establishments. Staff had improved the school's policy in relation to work experience to ensure the safety of all pupils undertaking this aspect of the school's work. Senior managers were now more actively involved in ensuring pupils' care and welfare around the school. This included at break times and when pupils were boarding buses at the end of the school day. As a result of the improvements made, pupils were now safer and looked after more effectively while in school.

3.5 Ensure that the major refurbishment programme takes place as planned.

The school and education authority had made weak progress towards meeting this main point for action.

School staff had continued to take effective steps to improve display and the internal appearance of the building. Large television screens had been installed in pupils' social areas. These displayed information and pictures of school trips and events, and had been particularly successful in improving communication and ethos. School staff, education authority staff and the architects had agreed helpful changes to the original plans for extensive refurbishment of the school building. The education authority had secured further funding and work was now due to begin in April 2008. The school did not yet have an effective secure entry system. More remained to be done to ensure that the school's accommodation and facilities were of an appropriate standard.

3.6 Improve the effectiveness of leadership.

The school had made very good progress in addressing this main point for action.

The acting headteacher and his restructured SMT were providing effective leadership. They worked well as a team and their work had had a positive impact on the school. There was now a much improved culture focusing on praise, encouragement and the recognition of achievement. Communication within the school was now much better and included a whole staff daily briefing. All members of the SMT were prominent throughout the school at key

times of the day. They set an excellent example in their interactions with pupils, supporting and challenging them as necessary. The SMT responded effectively to requests for support from staff and planned to enhance their links with their associated departments. As a result of the improvements made, the school was now led more effectively.

3.7 Ensure greater consistency and rigour in the school's approaches to improving its work.

The school had made adequate progress in addressing this main point for action.

The acting headteacher and the SMT knew the school well. They had sought the views of staff and pupils in evaluating the quality of their leadership and its impact on the school. Senior managers had made some effective use of information from evaluations of learning and teaching to determine the requirements for continuing professional development. Principal teachers had been provided with helpful training to assist them in evaluating the Scottish Qualifications Authority examination results within their departments. The school had not yet established rigorous review meetings between principal teachers and senior staff to discuss examination results and decide key points for action. Some class observation was taking place, but the school had not yet developed a systematic programme of class visits involving senior managers and principal teachers. More remained to be done to ensure the spread of good practice and to evaluate progress in improving learning, teaching and attainment.

4. Conclusion

The school and education authority had made good or very good progress in meeting five of the main points for action. They had made adequate or weak progress in addressing two main points for action. The acting headteacher had improved the leadership of the school significantly. Working with staff, and with the continuing assistance of the education authority, he had the capacity to improve the school further. HMIE have asked the education authority to provide, in September 2008, a report on progress in improving the school's accommodation and quality assurance arrangements. Parents will be informed of the progress made by the school.

David M Martin
HM Inspector

4 December 2007

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

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If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management and Communications Team, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail HMIEcomplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: ask@spsa.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsa.org.uk.

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