

**Lochaber High School
Fort William
Interim follow-through
The Highland Council
6 February 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. The report indicated that HM Inspectors would engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress and would publish an interim report within one year of the publication of the original report.

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 carried out an interim follow through visit to the school in November 2006. The team assessed the extent to which the school was continuing to improve the quality of its work, and evaluated progress made in responding to the main points for action in the initial report.

2. Continuous improvement

The school's senior management team had recently 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 senior management team had been reduced from four deputy headteachers to three. A new deputy headteacher took up post in October 2006.

The education authority had worked closely with the school to prepare an action plan to bring about improvements. Quality improvement officers had provided helpful support. Overall progress towards meeting the main points for action had been slow. There were signs of improvement in attainment at S3 and S4, but much remained to be done to ensure that all pupils across the school achieved as well as they could. In his short time in post, the acting headteacher had brought about significant improvements in communicating and consulting with staff, pupils and parents. The morale of staff and pupils had improved. Staff and pupils were working together more effectively to improve the work of the school. The acting headteacher and his senior management team, with the continuing support of the education authority, had the capacity to further improve 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 a useful start to addressing this main point for action. Much remained to be done to ensure impact on pupils' learning.

School staff had established the present timetable before the acting headteacher's secondment to the school. As a result, he could not make necessary changes to ensure that the curriculum met the needs of all pupils. For example, pupils following vocational programmes continued to miss lessons in other subjects. Guidance staff now offered some helpful assistance to these pupils to catch up on the content of these lessons. These arrangements were not fully effective. The acting headteacher and staff had recognised the need to improve the structure of the curriculum offered to pupils. As a result, they had undertaken a major review of the curriculum and timetabling arrangements and intended to implement planned changes from session 2007-2008.

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

The school had made a little progress in meeting this main point for action, but more remained to be done.

There were some signs of improvement in the attainment of pupils at S4. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 4¹ at Standard Grade had improved slightly to be in line with the national average. In mathematics at level 3, attainment at S4 had improved to be in line with the national average. There were no significant improvements in English at level 3 and in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more awards at this level. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more awards at SCQF level 5 or better remained strong and above the national average and better than in schools with similar characteristics. Staff had made some progress in accrediting the courses undertaken by pupils with additional support needs. 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 learning and teaching, setting targets, tracking and monitoring pupils' progress, and in celebrating success had not yet been fully implemented.

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

The school had made a useful start to addressing this main point for action, but much remained to be done.

In May 2006, the acting headteacher set up a staff working group to review learning and teaching, under the leadership of a deputy headteacher. She 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. Some staff had undertaken reviews of their colleagues' teaching, and had in turn been reviewed by their colleagues. These promising initiatives had not yet had time to bring about significant impact on attainment and on the educational progress of pupils.

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

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

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

School procedures had been reviewed to include secure and accurate recording of child protection incidents. All staff had received specific training on child protection. The recently revised staff handbook gave them clear advice on appropriate procedures to be adopted. 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 present in the building at times when pupils' safety could be at risk. These included break times and when pupils were boarding buses at the end of the school day.

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

Almost no progress had been made in meeting this main point for action.

Some minor repairs had been carried out to water leaks and floor tiles. In all other aspects the weaknesses in accommodation remained unchanged since the inspection. The school remained insecure and fire alarm procedures had not been reviewed effectively. The education authority's plans for major alterations to the school campus had been drawn up. In recent months, the education authority had added to the funding originally set aside for this work. No work had yet begun.

3.6 Improve the effectiveness of leadership.

The school had made a promising start to addressing this main point for action.

The acting headteacher had quickly developed positive relationships with parents, pupils and staff and had promoted a supportive and purposeful working atmosphere in the school. In consultation with staff, he had reviewed and improved the school development plan. Staff were now clearer about what senior managers wanted to do to improve the work of the school. Senior management team meetings, which now included a member of the teaching staff, were carefully minuted and published promptly. Pupils were responding positively to what they saw as the acting headteacher's firm, fair and effective leadership. Since May 2006, the acting headteacher and staff had made improved progress towards meeting this main point for action. They recognised that more still remained to be done to ensure an effective impact on the work of the school.

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

The school had taken some effective steps to address this main point for action.

Most promoted staff and teachers had responded positively to the lead provided by the acting headteacher and his senior managers. The new senior management team had begun to develop a purposeful working atmosphere based upon trust and transparency. The acting headteacher and senior managers had effectively involved all staff in working parties and

groups to discuss practice. Much of this progress had only been recently established and had yet to have significant impact. The acting headteacher had recently provided all staff with helpful written guidance on evaluating their own work. Senior managers had not yet ensured that measures to improve learning and teaching were consistently implemented in all departments. The acting headteacher planned to provide further advice and guidance to ensure the agreed quality improvement measures are effective.

4. Conclusion

The school and education authority had made some progress in addressing some of the main points for action in the inspection report of January 2006. Overall, progress had been slow. Much remained to be done to improve the curriculum, attainment, learning and teaching, and the quality of the accommodation. The acting headteacher, with helpful support from senior managers and the education authority, had shown a strong commitment to improving the school. He had won the support of most staff, parents and pupils. His leadership was having a positive impact on the work of the school. HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and education authority and will provide another report on progress for parents and carers within one year of the publication of this report.

John Brown
HM Inspector

6 February 2007

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the acting headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education, Culture and Sport, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Longman House, 28 Longman Road, Inverness, IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website: www.hmie.gov.uk.

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