

**Falkirk High School  
Falkirk Council  
11 December 2007**

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## **1. The inspection**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published a report on the inspection of Falkirk High School in May 2005. 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 May 2006 and published an interim follow-through report in September 2006. HM Inspectors revisited the school 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**

Staff had responded positively to the challenges of improving the school. They had made effective use of professional development time, especially in relation to the national *Assessment is for Learning* (AifL) initiative and in developing pupils' critical thinking skills. As a result, they had improved significantly the quality and variety of their approaches to learning and teaching. Staff had also reviewed and improved courses to provide increased challenge for pupils and to ensure a better balance of independent and collaborative working. The school had successfully taken further steps to improve pupils' attendance. It had improved course planning at S4 to S6, to ensure appropriate progression for pupils beyond Standard Grade. It continued to provide an inclusive environment for secondary-aged deaf and hearing-impaired pupils from Windsor Park School, who made good progress in their learning. Pupils' work on improving the environment had achieved an Eco Schools Scotland green flag. Pupils demonstrated their continuing commitment to health and well-being by participating in a range of physical activities and by their uptake of healthy options at lunchtime. The school had advanced to level 2 in its health promotion work and had achieved enhanced health promoting status from the local authority accreditation team. Staff and pupils had developed international education through stronger links with Malawi, including a well-planned, cross-curricular programme for 'Malawi Week'. The school continued to experience staffing shortages in some subjects, particularly English.

## **3. Progress towards meeting the main points for action**

The initial inspection report published in May 2005 identified six 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 Improve the quality of pupils' learning experiences, particularly the extent to which they are challenged and expected to think and work independently.**

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

Across the school, pupils had more regular opportunities to think for themselves and to be actively involved in their learning. Improvements in teaching and learning approaches helped pupils to work effectively, both independently and collaboratively. Pupils benefited from greater consistency in teachers' expectations for the amount and quality of work they should produce. Additional access to information and communications technology (ICT) had enlivened pupils' experiences and broadened their skills. An imaginative range of new contexts for learning developed pupils' creativity and their responsibility for making good progress. These contexts included an anti-sectarian project in conjunction with St Mungo's High School, a competition-winning dramatisation performed at Falkirk Town Hall and a range of enterprise activities. A new feature of cross-curricular enterprise in learning was the opportunity for pupils to take part in running the school's radio station. The school had improved its arrangements for displaying pupils' work, to showcase their successes both in school and at local exhibitions and performances. Staff were well placed to continue to improve the quality of pupils' learning experiences and to embed AifL approaches further in classroom practices.

### **3.2 Improve how pupils' learning needs are met through building more systematically on pupils' prior learning.**

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

Staff had strengthened liaison across the associated schools in the cluster to improve continuity in pupils' learning on transition to S1. Initiatives such as shared primary-secondary guidelines for mathematics, 'P7 into S1' jotters in English and mathematics and work done on self- and peer-assessment in music and art, helped pupils to build on their prior learning. The support for learning transition assistant helped S1 pupils to make good progress in lessons. Staff had begun to review and improve courses at each stage, to ensure that they met pupils' needs appropriately and developed pupils' capacities. They made increasingly effective use of the school's monitoring systems to review pupils' progress and help them to set personal targets. Study Skills programmes supported pupils in identifying their strengths and how to improve. The school had established good practice in surveying pupils' views on their learning.

### **3.3 Improve pupils' attainment at all stages.**

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

Pupils' attainment had improved since the original inspection. With the support of faculty heads, staff were now engaging in more rigorous analysis of attainment information and all school development plans included actions to raise attainment. To further help pupils following college courses, the school had introduced an additional study support period. In addition, the school had extended the range of courses available, to help meet pupils' needs more appropriately and raise overall attainment. Maintaining the school's strong record in

the field of engineering, two more pupils had won the prestigious Arkwright Scholarship for their projects. A significant number of pupils had achieved awards and qualifications in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), and Community Sports Leadership.

By the end of S1, pupils had made good progress from their previous levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Particular features of pupils' progress, results in examinations and other qualifications, including those awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)<sup>1</sup> are as follows.

- The proportion of pupils attaining SCQF level 3 in English and mathematics by the end of S4 had improved and was above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more awards at SCQF level 4 by the end of S4 showed limited signs of improvement. The school continued to perform less well than similar schools at this level.
- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more awards at SCQF level 5 by the end of S4 had improved and was in line with the national average. The school did better than similar schools at this level.
- The proportion of pupils attaining one or more and three or more awards at SCQF level 6 by the end of S5 was in line with similar schools. The school performed much better than similar schools for five or more awards at level 6.
- The school performed much better than similar schools at one or more award at SCQF level 7.
- Most pupils overall studying courses at Forth Valley College in 2006-07 were successful. In Higher and Intermediate 2 Psychology and Intermediate 2 Care, almost all attained A-C grades.

### **3.4 Improve how the challenging behaviour of some pupils is addressed.**

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

As part of a wider focus on teaching for effective learning, professional development activities had helped staff to implement new approaches to promoting positive behaviour. Across the school, they had introduced a code of practice for classroom behaviour to improve the climate for learning. They used the school's monitoring and tracking system and reward schemes more effectively to record and celebrate responsible behaviour. Better tracking also helped staff to identify potential issues quickly and intervene early. Enhanced provision for vulnerable pupils and staff readiness to develop more appropriate courses to address pupils'

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<sup>1</sup> 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

disengagement from learning were making a positive impact. Discipline referrals to senior staff and exclusions had decreased.

### **3.5 Improve the quality of accommodation.**

The current buildings were scheduled to be replaced in July 2009 by a new building on an adjacent site. The education authority had given a high priority to consulting pupils and staff throughout the design and planning stages for the new school. The school had taken a number of steps to ensure that its accommodation was maintained in an acceptable condition pending the move to a new building. The school had made a significant investment in developing ICT provision to support improvements in learning and teaching.

### **3.6 Improve the involvement of all staff in rigorous and systematic self-evaluation.**

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

A strong feature of the school's improved approaches to evaluating the quality of its work was the effectiveness of termly tracking meetings. At these meetings, staff reviewed the progress of individual pupils and planned improvements in learning, teaching and meeting needs. Pupils contributed to improvements through their feedback on courses. Staff were more directly involved now in whole-school initiatives, such as development work on the national initiatives Curriculum for Excellence and the Health Promoting School. There was a stronger collegiate approach to school improvement. Staff had developed a culture of professional reflection and a readiness to share good practice. As a result of progress in this aspect, the school was now very well placed to sustain improvements in the quality of its work.

## **4. Conclusion**

The headteacher, senior managers, faculty heads, heads of house and staff had demonstrated high levels of commitment and teamwork. They had made good progress in addressing the main points for action in the initial inspection report of May 2005. The school was now providing pupils with a more motivating and suitably challenging experience to help them make appropriate progress. Staff made effective use of improved arrangements to monitor and evaluate the quality of the school's work. The overall capacity of the school for continuous improvement had increased. In view of the progress made in addressing the main points for action, HM Inspectors will not carry out any further inspection visits in connection with the report of May 2005.

Mary Ritchie  
HM Inspector

11 December 2007

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### **If you would like an additional copy of this report**

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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@sps.org.uk](mailto:ask@sps.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.sps.org.uk](http://www.sps.org.uk).

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