

**Stranraer Academy
Dumfries & Galloway Council
22 January 2008**

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1. The inspection

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published a report on the inspection of Stranraer Academy 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 carried out an interim inspection visit in October 2006 and published an interim inspection report in February 2007. HM Inspectors revisited the school in October 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, with the support of the education authority, had made a number of significant improvements since the original inspection of September 2005. These improvements were beginning to impact positively on pupils' learning. More remained to be done, but there had been progress in each of the main points for action. The interim follow-through inspection report indicated that the education manager, appointed by the education authority immediately after the original inspection, had been decisive in addressing weaknesses in organisation and management. She had established an overall commitment to change and improvement within the school. Progress had subsequently been maintained in most areas. The curriculum, the quality of learning and teaching and the effectiveness of quality assurance had continued to improve. There had been some improvements in pupils' attainment, particularly in comparison to schools with similar characteristics. Pupils and staff were more positive about the school. A new headteacher had recently taken up post.

The school and education authority recognised that more remained to be done to repair the reputation of the school within the local community and to secure continuous improvement. Despite support from the education authority, current staffing difficulties in a number of subjects, including those of getting suitably qualified supply staff, were impacting adversely on pupils' learning, the quality of the curriculum offered and on staff morale. The education authority had finalised its plans to rebuild parts of the school within its PPP initiative. However, some health and safety issues remained a concern for pupils, parents and staff. In particular, nothing had been done to improve school entrance security.

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 Improve the quality of the curriculum from S1 to S6, including the provision of religious and moral education for all pupils.

There had been good progress since the original inspection in relation to this main point for action.

There was now suitable breadth and balance across the curriculum. The reorganisation of the school day in the previous session had facilitated the provision at all stages of religious and moral education, personal and social education and, recently, two periods per week of physical education. There were now more appropriate opportunities for vocational education through links with Dumfries and Galloway College, although information about pupils' progress required to improve. Links with associated primary schools had developed further, although more remained to be done to build fully on pupils' prior learning across the curriculum. A curriculum working group had been established to consider the potential of the national programme *A Curriculum for Excellence* for the pupils of Stranraer Academy. The school recognised the continued need to establish a clear and coherent strategic direction for its future curriculum.

3.2 Improve standards of attainment at each stage by improving the quality of learning and teaching.

There had been good progress with this point for action.

There was continued significant improvement in the overall quality of learning and teaching across the school, since the original inspection and the interim follow through inspection. The systematic approach to staff development was beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning. There was now consistent emphasis on sharing the intentions of lessons with pupils and recapping what had been learned. The range of teaching approaches was being extended, with some good examples of collaborative learning and class discussion in English, mathematics and the social subjects. There was increasingly effective use of information and communications technology as a medium of learning and teaching. Overall, pupils were responding well to the improvements and most were enthusiastic learners. The school had recognised through its monitoring the need for increased pace and challenge in some subjects. Homework was still not consistently well planned, nor was there enough feedback to pupils on how they needed to improve. The quality of pupils' learning and their work ethic had been affected adversely in a number of subjects by staff absence and shortage of suitably skilled supply staff.

There were indications of some improvements in pupils' attainment in 2007, particularly in relation to schools with similar characteristics, although there were still inconsistencies across subjects and a need for continued improvement. S1/S2 attainment levels remained variable, although there were improving trends in reading and mathematics from 2005. The proportions of pupils in 2007 gaining five or more SCQF awards at levels 3, 4 and 5 by the end of S4 remained below the national average. However, the proportion gaining awards at levels 3 and 5 had improved considerably from 2005, the latter now being above schools with similar characteristics. The proportions gaining three and five or more awards at Higher in S5 remained just below the national average, but the gap had closed from 2005. The proportions gaining three awards at Higher by the end of S6 had improved in 2007, both in relation to the national average and schools with similar characteristics.

3.3 Improve the effectiveness of pupil support, in particular the arrangements for supporting pupils with additional support needs.

There had been good progress overall in improving the arrangements for pupil support. More remained to be done to maximise their impact.

The organisation of support for pupils had been simplified since the original inspection, to improve communication and teamwork and to support better pupils' learning, social and behavioural needs. The improved policies and procedures, evident at the interim follow-through inspection, were now more fully established. Pupils were clearer about their guidance and register teachers and knew how to access support if it was required. Senior pupils had assumed a valuable role in supporting pupils at the earlier stages. There were now appropriate priorities for accessing learning and behaviour support and suitable individual programmes for supporting vulnerable pupils. Transition procedures for pupils from primary to secondary had continued to develop. Approaches to the promotion of positive behaviour were being implemented more consistently across the school and most pupils were responding well. There were clearer procedures for identifying and supporting pupils with additional needs related to behaviour. The arrangements for the support of pupils had continued to improve overall. The school now needed to evaluate their impact in addressing the needs of all pupils and to plan strategically for the future, particularly in the light of impending reductions in the promoted post structure.

3.4 Improve the opportunities for religious observance.

There had been good progress since the original inspection.

After discussion with representatives of local churches, the school had produced a balanced programme of assemblies to allow pupils in all years the opportunity to consider religious issues and moral values. The school was now in the process of implementing the programme fully and making clear its nature to parents.

3.5 Improve communication and consultation with staff and parents.

There had been good progress since the original inspection in addressing this point for action. More remained to be done.

Internal and external communication had improved significantly. The School Board, and subsequently the Parent Council, had been involved in discussing priorities for action in response to the inspection and had received regular updates on progress. Newsletters continued to inform parents about school activities and priorities for improvement. Within the school, communication had continued to improve and most staff felt more involved in the process of school improvement. The improved teamwork among the principal teachers was proving to be important in taking forward whole school initiatives. Staff meetings were more regular and better organised than at the time of the original inspection. The school's information system was now more effective. The school was using a range of approaches, including staff meetings and assemblies to reinforce the importance of consistent standards and expectations. Parents accepted that there had been improvements overall, but remained concerned about the reputation of the school and its effectiveness in communicating with them. Specifically, they still required better information about their role in supporting

homework and better communication about ongoing changes in the organisation and staffing of classes, particularly where there had been staffing problems.

3.6 Improve the school's approaches to quality assurance.

The school had made good progress overall since the original inspection.

Approaches to quality assurance had improved steadily, with clear and necessary emphasis on developing the quality of learning and teaching. Management meetings continued to be better organised and more clearly focused. Systematic observation of learning and teaching across the curriculum had been established, with suitable plans for extending the sharing of good practice. There was now a clearer quality assurance cycle with standards and quality reports and development plans for faculties, which fed in to the overall school improvement plan. The procedures for analysing examination results were being well supported by the education authority, but now required increased momentum within the school to maximise their impact throughout the session. The overall impact of these improvements was beginning to take effect through the improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' learning and in some aspects of attainment. More effective tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress was still a priority for further development.

3.7 Improve the effectiveness of leadership at all levels.

There had been good progress in addressing this point for action.

The education manager appointed by the education authority after the original inspection had provided a much clearer sense of direction for the school, including the sequence of steps necessary for ensuring continuous improvement. The new headteacher had very recently taken up post and was in the process of establishing constructive teamwork with staff. He now faced the challenge of maintaining the momentum for change and establishing continued strategic direction. Most staff felt that communication and teamwork with the senior management team had improved since the original inspection. They felt more involved in the decision making process. They accepted and understood the priority accorded to improving learning and teaching. Overall, staff were positive about the future of the school, but recognised the continued challenge in achieving continuous improvement.

4. Conclusion

There had been clear progress in addressing each of the main points for action since the original inspection of September 2005 and the interim follow through inspection of October 2006. In particular, there had been significant improvement in the overall quality of learning and teaching. There had also been some improvements in pupils' attainment, relative to schools with similar characteristics. More now remained to be done to rebuild the

school's reputation in the community, improve attainment levels, address staffing difficulties and deal with outstanding health and safety issues. The education authority has been asked to provide to HMIE a progress report within a year from the publication of this report on the degree to which these issues had been addressed. On the basis of that report, HMIE will determine whether a further follow-through inspection will be necessary. Parents will be informed about the progress made.

Lachlan MacCallum
District Inspector

22 January 2008

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Service Director for Schools Services, 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, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8079. Copies are also available on our website: www.hmie.gov.uk.

HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of follow-through inspections, you should write in the first instance to Annette Bruton, HMCI, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

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@sps.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.sps.org.uk.

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