

**Ayr Academy
South Ayrshire Council
11 October 2005**

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1. The inspection

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published a report on Standards and Quality in Ayr Academy in June 2003. 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.

An inspection team revisited the school in May 2005 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

Since the inspection report was published in June 2003, the school had clearly demonstrated its capacity to make improvements in key aspects of its provision.

The headteacher had provided very good leadership in directing and managing important changes to key aspects of the school's work. He was well supported by the senior management team and by a conscientious and committed staff. In the last year, four new principal teachers had taken up posts within the school. Senior managers had successfully promoted a stronger team approach across the school as a whole, and within departments. Staff had responded positively by working more cooperatively and sharing good practice to secure improvements to pupils' learning experiences.

Pupils had responded well to the school's approaches to promote and extend their wider achievements. A number of pupils at S3/S4 had been successful in gaining key life skills and raising self-esteem through participation in the Prince's Trust xl club programme. Pupils in various year groups had strengthened their personal and social skills through experiencing residential visits and by taking part in a variety of school events. The school had continued to build the ways in which it promoted pupils' citizenship skills. For example, pupils had developed caring attitudes towards others through working as buddies to younger pupils and on paired reading schemes with primary school pupils. The school encouraged involvement in raising money for charities and S6 pupils had gained responsible attitudes and organisational skills through their roles in the charities committee.

3. Progress towards meeting the main points for action

The initial inspection report published in June 2003 identified five 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 The local authority should work with the school and address the weaknesses in accommodation outlined in this report.

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

The programme to re-clad the exterior of the building had been completed. The removal of huts had created more playground space. New car parking arrangements had ensured improved safety for pedestrians and the installation of CCTV cameras had enhanced the security of the school buildings. The science block now had new windows and one home economics room had benefited from refurbishment. However, the science laboratories had not yet been upgraded and several areas of the school still required redecoration. The headteacher had put into place well-planned approaches to further improve accommodation. He had made effective use of available finance to establish a rolling programme of refurbishment. Commendably, he had included all departments in considering how to maximise existing resources to improve the working environment. Staff had been involved in an accommodation review group to make decisions about providing more appropriate learning space for some subjects. The final decisions on how to implement the recommendations of the review group were in the process of being made by the senior management team.

3.2 The school should continue with its efforts to improve attainment.

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

Departments had responded positively to the school focus on raising attainment. Overall, those departments which had been inspected had achieved good progress in addressing the specific action points in the report. Staff had reviewed courses for English, mathematics, science, social subjects and technical education and had successfully improved pupils' learning experiences in these subject areas. In English, at S1/S2, the programme for listening and talking now provided pupils with more appropriate balance and progression in their learning and levels of attainment had started to rise. At S2, there had also been a rise in pupils' levels of attainment in reading and writing. At Standard Grade and at S5/S6, pupils had performed better in English language than in their other subjects. There had also been improvements to pupils' attainment in mathematics at S1/S2 and at S5/S6. Staff had significantly enhanced resources to support learning and teaching. They had developed further their approaches to assessment and recording and used the information effectively to meet pupils' individual needs. The mathematics department had made good progress in developing Access courses to successfully meet the needs of a wider range of pupils. In Technical Education, pupils at S3/S4 were now allocated to classes on the basis of their prior ability levels. Pupils had individual learning targets and discussed their progress towards these targets regularly with staff. These measures had helped to motivate and support pupils and attainment, particularly in Graphic Communication, had improved. There had been a significant rise in the number of pupils presented for Higher courses.

Other important steps taken to improve attainment included:

- developing further the learning partnership with associated primary schools to promote pupils' knowledge and skills in science;
- introduction of homework packs to develop pupils' study skills;

- extending and making more rigorous the school's approaches to monitoring pupil progress and achievement; and
- using information on pupils' progress more effectively to target individuals and provide them with one-to-one support and encouragement.

There were early signs that these measures were improving pupils' achievements but the full impact had yet to be realised.

3.3 Teachers should improve pace and challenge in lessons and develop pupils' responsibility for their own learning.

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

The headteacher made very effective use of meetings with principal teachers to focus on sharing best practice in learning and teaching. Particular attention was given to the importance of assessment and involving pupils in evaluating their own progress as a means of raising pupil and teacher expectations. Reviews of curricular provision, had led some departments to extend the range of National Qualification courses to provide individuals with a more suitable level of challenge. Teachers had attended workshops and demonstrations to promote and extend more stimulating and consistently higher quality approaches to learning and teaching. Across the school, staff had made increasing use of information and communications technology (ICT) to successfully motivate pupils and engage them actively in learning. The use of homework packs had promoted pupils' independent study skills and had given them responsibility for managing tasks. A group of teachers had been given the task of preparing a school policy on learning and teaching to provide clear guidance for staff and to secure high quality learning experiences for pupils in all subject areas.

3.4 The school should ensure that arrangements for staff review and development are fully implemented.

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

The school had successfully implemented the education authority's scheme for staff review and development. All staff had been involved in the review process. Line managers had met with individual members of staff to evaluate the quality of their work and had agreed targets for further professional development. The school had given good attention to matching staff development activities to the identified needs of the individual and to those of the school. Senior managers had demonstrated a strong commitment to staff review and development and ensured that staff had access to a wide range of development opportunities to help secure improvements to key areas of the school's work.

3.5 With the support of the senior management team, departments should improve their procedures for quality assurance and development planning, as indicated in the report.

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

Senior managers had provided departments with clear guidance and models of good practice to support improvements in quality assurance. They had established a well-planned calendar of monitoring activities to evaluate key aspects of the school's work and to promote consistently rigorous approaches to self-evaluation. Activities had included focused visits to classrooms to observe learning and teaching. Departments had then produced their own calendars in line with the school calendar to ensure systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of each department. Principal teachers now visited classrooms routinely and had involved staff regularly in evaluating the quality of learning and teaching. Departments had been encouraged to write reports on good practice and to share this information across the school. Monthly meetings of principal teachers had also been used to discuss and share best practice. These measures had resulted in raised expectations of pupils' achievements, and more challenging and active educational experiences for pupils.

Senior managers had also provided very good support for principal teachers to improve approaches to planning. Principal teachers had participated in training activities for effective development planning. Senior managers had two formal meetings each session with principal teachers to focus on pupils' achievements and to identify how departments might raise standards further. All departments now had appropriate development plans with suitable priorities for improvement. Senior managers had strengthened their links with departments and now had a more active role in monitoring progress with plans for improvement. The school's improved approaches to development planning were helping to secure higher quality learning for pupils across all subjects.

4. Conclusion

The school had shown a clear commitment to improving key areas of its work in response to the main points for action in the inspection report. Senior managers and staff had successfully carried out developments in learning and teaching, courses and quality assurance that had improved the quality of pupils' educational experiences. At the time of the follow-through inspection, the full impact of measures taken to improve pupils' achievements had yet to be realised. The results of performance in Scottish Qualification Authority examinations published in August 2005, demonstrated improvements in a number of aspects.

The school was well placed to build on these key improvements and to raise standards further. As a result of the good progress achieved in addressing the main points for action, HM Inspectors will not carry out a further visit in connection with the report of June 2003.

Norma Wright HMI
District Inspector

11 October 2005

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 Director of Education, Culture and Lifelong Learning, 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, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow, G2 8LG or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. Copies are also available on our website: www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you wish to comment about follow-through inspections

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

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If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

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