

**Falkirk High School
Interim follow-through
Falkirk Council
5 September 2006**

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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. The report indicated that HM Inspectors would engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress and would publish an interim 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. An inspection team carried out an interim follow-through visit to the school in May 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

In their visit to the school in May 2006, HM Inspectors found that the school had taken a number of positive steps to address the main points for action in the inspection report of May 2005. Pupils' levels of attendance had improved. A number of effective steps to deal more effectively with the challenging behaviour of a few pupils had been developed. These had resulted in a reduction in the number of exclusions. Staffing shortages identified in the original inspection report had been addressed. As part of the implementation of the national initiative *Hungry for Success* there was an increased uptake of healthy eating options in the dining hall. The school was working towards achieving a green flag as part of the Eco School initiative. The senior management team had been through a period of significant transition. A new headteacher had taken up post in August 2005 and there had been a number of significant changes at depute headteacher level. The senior management team was now more settled. Together with the faculty heads and heads of house they were working well as a team and were well placed to take the school forward. In session 2006-2007, all pupils in S2 were due to begin national qualification courses and sit national examinations in these subjects at the end of S3 in 2008. The school had yet to develop a clear strategy for this initiative to ensure that it met the needs of all pupils appropriately and ensured continuity and progression in pupils' learning from S4 onwards.

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 improved its arrangements for assessing pupils' progress. These revised approaches were beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of learning and the range of teaching approaches. This work focused on ensuring that teachers consistently shared learning intentions with pupils in lessons. Teachers were using more open questions to develop pupils' thinking and set tasks which required more independent decision-making. A

more consistent approach to homework was helping to raise pupils' expectations of what could be achieved. It also contributed to a better understanding of the purpose and value of work which consolidated and developed classwork.

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

The school had taken a series of positive steps to meet pupils' needs better by building on their prior learning. The headteacher had introduced strategic approaches to planning for improvement across the associated schools in the Falkirk High School cluster. These were helping to ensure consistency, for example in sharing effective practice, using information from assessment to support next steps in learning and tracking pupils' progress. Faculty heads for English and mathematics were working closely with primary colleagues to ensure continuity and progression in the content and delivery of courses.

3.3 Improve pupils' attainment at all stages.

In session 2005–2006, all pupils in S2 had started Standard Grade courses in English and mathematics and were due to sit their examinations in S3 in 2007. For some pupils, this resulted in improved pace and challenge in their learning. However, the school needed to monitor this arrangement to ensure that it met the needs of all pupils appropriately. In the current session, a small group of higher attaining pupils had been presented at Credit level in English at the end of S3. The school had introduced improved arrangements for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress, particularly in S4 and S5. These systems were leading to focused work with individual pupils and groups to raise their overall levels of attainment. The school planned to extend these arrangements to S2 and S3. In 2005, at S4, pupils' overall levels of attainment across all measures had improved. By the end of S5, the proportion achieving five or more awards at SCQF¹ levels 4 and 5 or better had improved. By the end of S5 and S6, there was less evidence of improved attainment at Higher. Overall, at S5/S6, the school continued to perform less well than comparator schools.

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

The school had taken a number of positive steps to address this main point for action. Staff had attended whole-school staff development on assertive discipline. The school had reviewed its behaviour strategies and had recently introduced a revised and simplified behaviour code. This was clearly displayed around the school. Further work should continue to ensure that the new system fairly recognised pupils' positive behaviour. As part of the local authority's strategy for behaviour management, a number of staff had been trained as behaviour coordinators. They were working effectively with staff in providing support to improve pupils' behaviour. This work included observing classroom practice and providing feedback to staff. The school was also piloting a customised curriculum for a small group of

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

pupils in S4. This work was proving very effective in improving pupils' overall levels of achievement and attendance, while reducing exclusions.

3.5 Improve the quality of accommodation.

A programme of maintenance and emergency repairs had been drawn up to improve provision in the physical education department and in some of the huts. While some further work remained outstanding, improvements were being managed appropriately within the context of the local authority's programme to provide a new school by August 2008. The school's additional deputy headteacher with responsibility for coordinating the building replacement programme had involved pupils, parents, staff and the wider community in a wide ranging set of consultations on the new school.

3.6 Increase the involvement of all staff in rigorous and systematic self-evaluation.

The school had developed a number of improved approaches to meeting this main point for action. A formal programme of classroom observations by senior managers and faculty heads had been introduced. The school now needed to ensure that these approaches led to consistently high quality experiences for pupils. This work included providing helpful feedback to staff. The school had also prepared advice to staff on the use of quality indicators to improve self-evaluation. There was scope to build on this work further and embed it more rigorously in practice across staff. Some faculties were actively seeking the views of pupils on courses and programmes. An external consultant engaged by the local authority to work with schools to analyse attainment in national examinations had been well used by the school. The headteacher had begun a process of target setting with individual subject departments with a view to raising expectations and improving pupils' attainment in national examinations from S4 to S6.

4. Conclusion

The school had taken a number of positive steps towards meeting the recommendations set in the inspection report of May 2005. The senior management team had been through a period of significant transition but had recently established itself as a settled team. The school was well placed to build on the promising progress made to date. It should monitor carefully the impact of the introduction of national qualification courses in S2 to ensure that pupils' needs are met appropriately. It needed to set out a clear strategy for the future development of the curriculum to ensure continuity and progression in pupils' learning. The education authority has been asked to prepare a further progress report by June 2007. HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and will undertake a follow-through inspection in September 2007. This will result in a further report to parents and carers.

Chris Webb
District Inspector
5 September 2006

How can you contact us?

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