



**Nairn Academy
The Highland Council
28 April 2009**

We published a report on Nairn Academy in June 2007. That report set out key strengths of the school and main points for action.

This follow-through report is based on an inspection visit which was carried out in February 2009. It tells you about improvements since the original inspection in the quality of education which the school provides. It also comments on how the school is getting on with the main points for action. First we focus on changes in the core work of the school. We explain how the school has got better at helping children to learn and benefit from being at the school. Next we look at the key processes which enable this to happen, including the involvement of parents¹. Our report also describes developments in the 'ethos' of the school, by which we mean how well young people are cared for and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally we comment on improvements in leadership to help the school achieve its aims.

A copy of this report has been placed on the HMIE website www.hmie.gov.uk. Where applicable, you will also find descriptions of good practice in the school and analyses of questionnaire returns.

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

Nairn Academy serves the town of Nairn and surrounding rural communities. In June 2008 the headteacher resigned. A headteacher from another school within the education authority has led the school as acting headteacher since August 2008. He will return to lead his previous school upon the appointment of a new headteacher.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- An improved school ethos.
- Clearer direction in the leadership of the school and stronger morale and teamwork amongst staff.
- Continuing efforts to broaden young people's achievements and responsibilities out of class.
- The consultation with staff and young people, and increasing partnership with parents.

3. Example of good practice

- The work of Nairn Academy Girls' Club in improving the participation of girls in physical activity.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

The atmosphere in classes is more positive. Most teachers engage well with young people and many are using new interactive whiteboards effectively to enliven their teaching. Young people are still not consistently active and independent enough in their learning. They need to be challenged more through effective questioning and receive better feedback on their work. Attainment in S1/S2 has steadily improved in reading, writing and mathematics. At S3/S4, there is no definite improvement in attainment yet, but examination results improved in the majority of courses in 2008. Pupils sitting Credit exams in S4 and Highers in S5/S6 are performing better overall

than pupils in similar schools. Lower-attaining pupils have been under-performing. The school continues to promote young people's broader achievements and self-esteem. Senior pupils are acting as sports leaders and as "buddies" to younger pupils.

The school has been improving the curriculum to meet young people's learning needs. At S1, several subjects are linking more effectively with pupils' learning at primary school. The school has still to provide physical education and religious and moral education for all pupils at S5/S6. Young people do not find courses in personal and social education stimulating enough. Staff are just beginning to consider the implications of the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. Staff in all departments are providing additional study support for young people during breaks and after school. Some subjects, like mathematics, are meeting the learning needs of different groups better. Support staff are giving teachers helpful advice on the learning needs of individual pupils.

5. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?

Staff are continuing to strengthen links with the local community. The acting headteacher has involved parents closely in improving the school's ethos by communicating clear expectations on pupils' behaviour, dress code and homework. At S4 to S6, parents now receive additional reports on their children's progress. Parents' views about the school's improvement are positive. Vocational education has been improved through effective links with Moray and Inverness Colleges. The school has strengthened links with external agencies to support young people who may be at risk of missing out on their education. The school is developing a system to monitor and track young people's progress. Staff are beginning to use this system to identify particular groups and individuals who require additional challenge and support. In the class for young people with additional support needs, the quality of learning is benefiting from the much-improved accommodation.

6. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?

The views of staff, young people and parents are being well used to judge how the school is improving. Increasingly, subject departments are gathering young people's views on how learning and teaching might be improved. Teachers are reflecting more on their own work and all are observing and commenting on each other's lessons. This is having a positive effect on the sharing of ideas and good practice. Staff's evaluations are not yet focused or thorough enough to improve young people's learning and attainment significantly. Senior promoted staff are looking at examination results more closely. They need to support this with more regular monitoring and intervention to ensure consistent quality in learning and teaching across the school. The school has begun to take a closer look at its work. It now needs to ensure that key findings are consistently shared and lead to improvements.

7. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?

Young people are pleased with improvements made to the appearance of the building, particularly the entrance. They have greater pride in their school. There are plans for a new library and new science laboratories. Senior pupils lack good study facilities. Behaviour has improved significantly and staff have begun to set higher expectations of young people's study habits and attainment. A few subjects have introduced target-setting to help young people improve their work. In a few classes, high-achieving pupils are still not challenged enough. Assemblies are being used effectively to raise young people's expectations of themselves. Staff have introduced helpful awards for good attendance.

8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

The acting headteacher has worked very effectively to improve the school's ethos and raise young people's expectations. He has been well supported by staff and the education authority. Morale in the school has improved. Staff feel a clearer sense of direction and are more willing to become involved in improving the school. Senior promoted staff are working much more effectively as a team. More staff are volunteering for additional duties. Many have joined working groups focused on school improvement, including important aspects of learning and teaching. Staff now need to strive to improve the overall quality of young people's learning and attainment, building on the very good practice that already exists in a few departments.

9. What happens next?

The school has improved some key areas of its work since the inspection in March 2007. The acting headteacher has ensured that the school is better placed to improve further. The atmosphere for learning and staff teamwork are substantially better. There is no definite improvement yet in attainment at S3/S4. As a result of the uncertainty about the future leadership of the school, we will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress. We will carry out a further follow-through visit to the school and will report to parents, within one year of the publication of this report, on the extent of the improvement that has been achieved.

HM Inspector: Tom Straiton

28 April 2008

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