

**Kincorth Academy
Aberdeen City Council**

24 June 2003

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Inspection of Standards and Quality in Kincorth Academy Aberdeen City Council

1. Introduction

Kincorth Academy was inspected in February 2003 as part of a national sample of secondary education.

The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. HM Inspectors evaluated learning, teaching and attainment, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. The subjects included in the inspection were English, mathematics, chemistry and science, business education and computing studies. HM Inspectors also evaluated the quality of support for pupils, including arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils and child protection, and aspects of guidance and support for learning. In evaluating how well the school and departments were managed, HM Inspectors assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning.

Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all staff and to samples of parents and pupils. They met the chairperson of the School Board and a group of parents.

2. The school

Kincorth Academy is a non-denominational secondary school which serves the Kincorth, Altens and Cove areas of south Aberdeen. At the time of the inspection the roll was 820.

Parents' views

Parents who responded to the questionnaire were positive about most aspects of the school's provision. Almost all thought that:

- staff made them feel welcome in the school;
- parents' evenings were helpful and informative; and
- staff treated their children fairly and showed concern for their care and welfare.

More than one third, however, felt that the school did not provide sufficient information on their children's strengths and weaknesses, or on how they could support their children with their homework. Nearly half felt that they did not have a clear idea of the school's priorities for improving pupils' education.

Ethos

Most pupils enjoyed being at the school. They had good opportunities to contribute to school decision-making through pupil councils, and they raised considerable funds for charity. Most teachers worked hard to encourage pupils and set appropriate expectations of them. Provision to challenge higher-achieving pupils was being improved. The school had introduced, with varying success, a wide range of strategies to try to raise pupils' expectations of themselves and to reward effort and good behaviour. Pupils' achievements were very well celebrated and publicised. Pupils from different cultural backgrounds or with special educational needs were generally integrated well. Regular opportunities were provided for religious observance. Attendance was in line with national levels.

The majority of pupils behaved well, but in some lessons the misbehaviour of a minority of pupils disrupted the learning of others. The control of pupils at morning intervals was lax. Pupils were freely allowed to leave the school and some caused a nuisance to members of the public. The morale of many staff members was low, and

School and community

a significant minority of pupils felt that pupils were treated unfairly. Many staff felt that the headteacher and the senior management team were not tackling the misbehaviour of a challenging minority of pupils with sufficient vigour and consistency. There were also inconsistent approaches to discipline within some departments.

Links with the community and a wide range of support agencies were very well developed. The school's efforts to promote partnership with parents were good overall. More could be done to encourage parents to become involved in their children's learning. Notable features of the school's links included:

- effective procedures for communicating with parents, including an informative prospectus and school newsletters;
- very good support from the School Board and the parents' association;
- very good support from a local oil and gas service company in terms of resourcing, supporting pupils and promoting their achievement;
- good links with Aberdeen College to broaden the curriculum for senior pupils;
- participation in the University for Children and Communities initiative to help raise pupils' interest in post-school education; and
- a very successful business enterprise project, organised by the business education department, that had involved senior pupils in linking with a school in the USA.

Induction arrangements for pupils entering S1 from primary school were very good. Some good curricular

links existed with the associated primary schools. However, these links were too limited to ensure that pupils made steady progress in all subjects when they moved to the secondary. The education authority had regular contacts with the headteacher and a well-developed awareness of the school's strengths. It did not, however, have sufficient awareness of the school's development needs.

Accommodation

The quality of accommodation was good overall. School buildings were well maintained and in good order. Positive features included the high-quality indoor and outdoor sports facilities and an attractive library. Most departments had a suitable number of appropriately-sized rooms which were generally well furnished. Most science laboratories were in need of refurbishment, and accommodation for support for learning, including behaviour support, was too cramped. The school had to use a drama studio for assemblies and part of the dining area for examinations. Social areas for pupils were limited. Improvements to the dining areas and the school's security system were shortly to be carried out.

Staffing and resources

The school was well staffed and had good resources. There were a few shortages of available specialist staff, but almost all departments had an appropriate allocation of teachers. Auxiliary, ancillary and janitorial staff made valuable contributions to the work of the school. The librarian was developing the library effectively as a learning resource centre to support pupils and staff. The headteacher managed devolved funds very effectively and had been able to augment some aspects of the school's information and communications technology (ICT) equipment. Further improvement was needed to extend and update this equipment. Resources were generally well organised and well used. In most departments, there was only limited use of ICT to enhance the quality of learning and teaching.

3. How well are pupils performing?

Overall quality of attainment

The overall quality of attainment was fair at all stages. The main factor restricting attainment was the quality of pupils' learning experiences. In a significant number of lessons, pupils were not sufficiently encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, and the pace of progress was slow. Progress was best at S5/S6 where pupils' motivation tended to be greatest.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Awards

The following comments are based on SQA data for the period 2000 to 2002.

- The proportion of pupils gaining five or more awards at Standard Grades 1-4 or their equivalent was consistently in line with national averages. The proportion gaining five or more Credit awards was well below national averages.
- The number of presentations at Higher was below or well below national averages in most subjects. The proportion of S5/S6 pupils gaining three or more Higher awards at A-C was consistently well below national averages.
- In S5/S6 the numbers of presentations at Intermediate I and Intermediate 2 were above national averages in a number of subjects. A majority of pupils presented gained awards at A-C.
- At S6 a majority of the small numbers of pupils presented for Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS) or Advanced Higher gained awards at A-C.

Information on the subjects inspected is given later in the report. Significant features of attainment in the subjects not inspected were as follows.

- At Standard Grade pupils consistently performed better in craft and design than in their other subjects.
- Pupils also generally performed better in physical education than in their other Standard Grade subjects.

4. How well are the inspected departments performing?

English

Attainment

The overall quality of attainment was fair at all stages. The majority of pupils were progressing well in their classwork. The majority in S1/S2 were attaining appropriate national levels in listening and talking, but less than half of them were doing so in reading and writing. At Standard Grade in S3/S4, pupils' completion of folio work was variable, and the proportion achieving Credit awards was well below national averages. In S5/S6 the proportion gaining A-C awards was below national averages at Intermediate 2 level, and well below at Higher level. A majority of pupils presented at Intermediate 1 had gained A-C awards.

Courses

Courses at S1/S2 and S5/S6 were good. The Standard Grade course in S3/S4 was very good. The principal teacher needed to provide fuller guidance for staff to ensure more consistent approaches in planning the S1/S2 course.

Learning and teaching

Learning and teaching had some strengths, but there were also some important aspects that needed to be improved. The quality of teaching was good overall, with some effective interactions with pupils. In some cases, however, teachers did not use direct teaching methods enough or challenge pupils sufficiently to justify their

ideas during discussions. Explanations were not always clear. The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences was fair. Pupils sometimes responded very positively and enthusiastically, but in other cases they were poorly motivated. The pace of learning varied too widely, with a considerable number of pupils finding it difficult to learn independently. Pupils required more opportunities to interact with one another during reading activities. Teachers met pupils' needs well overall. However, some did not set clear enough learning objectives for pupils and check whether these objectives had been met. Approaches to assessment were generally good. Teachers corrected pupils' written work regularly, although the quality of feedback to pupils was variable.

Management and quality assurance

The leadership of the principal teacher was fair. She showed some good leadership qualities but needed to develop aspects of her management of staff. She related well to pupils but had yet to gain the confidence of all staff and ensure fully effective teamwork. Procedures for self-evaluation and planning for improvement were fair. Some developments had been planned and implemented well. However, procedures for teacher self-evaluation and monitoring by the principal teacher were not yet rigorous enough to identify further ways of raising attainment. None of the staff had yet undergone a formal review of their staff development needs.

Priorities for action

The principal teacher should strive to improve teamwork and departmental self-evaluation. In doing so, she should obtain the full co-operation of every member of the department and receive full support from senior managers. The department should raise attainment at all stages by improving aspects of pupils' learning.

Mathematics

Attainment

The overall quality of attainment was fair at all stages. There were signs of improvement at S1/S2 and S5/S6. As a result of weaknesses in the quality of learning, a

significant minority of pupils, particularly in S3/S4, were not making enough progress. In S1/S2 the proportion of pupils reaching appropriate national levels of attainment had risen steadily but was still below half. At S3/S4 the proportions of pupils gaining Standard Grade awards at Grades 1-2 and 1-4 were well below the national averages. At S5/S6 the proportions of pupils gaining awards at Intermediate levels 1 or 2 had improved and were above or well above the national average in 2002. At Higher level, while performance had improved, and pupils performed as well in mathematics as in their other subjects in 2002, the proportion gaining A-C awards was consistently well below the national average.

Courses

Courses at all stages were good. Teachers required further advice on key aspects such as the use of ICT and developing pupils' problem-solving skills.

Learning and teaching

The quality of teaching was good. Teachers generally gave clear explanations. They did not always employ direct, interactive teaching approaches effectively. Homework was used well in most classes, and pupils' progress was generally assessed effectively. Pupils' needs were, on the whole, met well. There were some important weaknesses in the quality of learning at S1 to S4. Teachers needed to improve the pace of learning and ensure that pupils consistently completed an appropriate amount of neat and accurate written work. The quality of pupils' motivation and learning was better at S5/S6.

Management and quality assurance

The principal teacher provided good leadership. He had successfully developed teamwork in the department. He was given good support by an assistant principal teacher. Planning for improvement was effective, and new courses were being implemented well. Staff had undertaken a good range of training activities although none had yet participated in a formal review of their work. The principal teacher now needed to ensure that departmental self-evaluation was carried out more effectively.

Priorities for action The department should improve attainment, particularly in S3/S4 and at Higher level. Arrangements for quality assurance should be improved to ensure more consistency in the quality of learning and teaching.

**Chemistry and science
Attainment**

The overall quality of attainment was fair in chemistry and science. A majority of pupils were performing well in their classwork. Attainment was limited in S1/S2 science and in S3/S4 chemistry because some tasks were not well matched to pupils' needs. In some science classes at S1 to S4, progress was also limited by the behaviour of some poorly-motivated pupils. In Standard Grade science, the proportion of awards at General level was above the national average. However, many pupils underachieved because they were not well motivated to learn independently. In Standard Grade chemistry the proportion of awards at Grades 1-4 had declined to below the national average, although performance in classwork at S3 was showing signs of improvement. In S5/S6 chemistry, the proportion gaining A-C awards tended to be well below the national average at Higher, but was in line with national averages at Intermediate 2. A few pupils had taken Intermediate 1 chemistry, the majority gaining A to C awards.

Courses

Courses were very good in chemistry, and the Standard Grade science course was good. The S1/S2 science course was fair. It gave too little attention to developing practical investigation skills, and required further development to allow for the variation in pupils' needs in different classes.

Learning and teaching

Whilst there was some very good teaching in chemistry, pupils' needs were not always well met. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour and work-rate were generally high, and most pupils responded well. In science the quality of learning and teaching varied widely. Teaching was good overall and most teachers

supported pupils well. In a minority of science lessons, however, pupils were poorly focused on their work and little effective learning took place. Approaches to assessment were very good in chemistry at S5/S6, and good in chemistry and science at S3/S4. In S1/S2 science and in S3/S4 chemistry, assessment evidence needed to be better used to set appropriate targets for pupils.

Management and quality assurance

While the principal teachers of biology, chemistry and physics had developed good teamwork and ensured that science courses were well organised, the overall quality of leadership in science was fair. There were some important weaknesses in departmental self-evaluation and planning for improvement. The principal teacher of chemistry provided good leadership in her department. She had a good knowledge of departmental development needs and ensured that planned improvements were implemented effectively. Individual staff development needs in chemistry and science had not been formally reviewed.

Priorities for action

In S1/S2 science and Standard Grade chemistry, learning targets set for pupils should be better matched to their needs. In science procedures for monitoring the quality of classroom practice and for development planning should be improved.

Business education Attainment

The overall quality of attainment was good. Some very good teaching and some very well planned courses ensured that most pupils made effective progress in their learning. Pupils generally performed better in administration than in their other Standard Grade courses. However, the proportion gaining Credit awards in accounting and finance had steadily declined in recent years and were now below national averages. Most pupils presented for Higher administration and Higher accounting and finance had achieved A-C awards.

Courses	Courses at all stages were very good.
Learning and teaching	The overall quality of teaching was very good. There were many instances of very good direct, interactive teaching with high quality dialogue between teachers and pupils. Homework was used effectively. The quality of pupils' learning experiences was good. Pupils were well motivated and worked steadily, although they were not always ready to take responsibility for their own learning. Pupils' needs were well met overall, although a few at S3/S4 were not following the most appropriate courses. Approaches to assessment were good at S3/S4 and very good at S5/S6. Teachers were adept at helping pupils to evaluate and improve their work.
Management and quality assurance	The principal teacher led the department very effectively. Teamwork was well established and all staff made a strong contribution to course development. Approaches to departmental self-evaluation were good overall, but a little lacking in rigour. The department was taking well-considered steps to raise attainment and had introduced new courses to meet the specific needs of some pupils. Planning for improvement, however, had some important weaknesses. Staff kept up-to-date with their subject and commented on one another's teaching, but they had still to be involved in formal reviews of their work.
Priorities for action	Staff should continue to offer opportunities for pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning. The department should improve its procedures for development planning.
Computing studies	
Attainment	The overall quality of attainment was good at S1/2 and fair at S3 to S6. By the end of S2, the majority of pupils could use general-purpose software well. At S3 to S6, the majority worked well, but low levels of motivation amongst some pupils affected overall attainment. Staff

absence had also affected attainment. Examination results at Standard Grade had declined in recent years. The proportion of Credit awards was well below national averages. Only half of the S5/S6 pupils presented for Higher, and less than half presented for Intermediate 2, achieved A-C awards. Too many pupils in S5/S6 gained no award.

Courses

All courses were of good quality. They developed pupils' practical skills and associated knowledge well. The S1/2 course did not sufficiently develop pupils' understanding of the use of computers in control, or of their impact on society.

Learning and teaching

Standards of teaching and the quality of pupils' learning experiences were good overall. Teachers explained new work clearly and made good choices of topical contexts to engage pupils' interest. They used practical work effectively to illustrate concepts and develop pupils' skills. Pupils had good opportunities to be actively involved in their learning and most responded well. Some found it difficult to take responsibility for their own learning and further efforts were needed to improve their motivation. Teachers were supportive and generally chose activities well to suit pupils' varying needs and interests. Homework was not given systematically enough in some classes, and in others the completion rate was low. At all stages teachers gave regular feedback to pupils and made good use of assessment information to monitor progress and identify next steps for individual pupils.

Management and quality assurance

The principal teacher provided good leadership overall. She carried out reflective and systematic evaluation of aspects of the department's work, including careful analysis of examination performance. Good practice was identified and shared among staff. Teachers had some good opportunities for staff development, and had helped to train other staff in the school in using ICT. However, none of the staff had yet participated in a formal review

of their work. Most action plans for improvement did not clearly identify targets or provide detail on how objectives would be met, making it difficult to monitor progress. Actions to try to raise attainment had not yet been successful.

Priorities for action The department should review its S1/S2 course. It should continue to develop and implement strategies to raise pupils' attainment. It should make more explicit linkages between its evaluations of its work and its planned actions for improvement.

5. How good is the curriculum?

The overall structure of the curriculum was good at all stages. Pupils were able to follow broad and well-balanced programmes of study and to make progress from stage to stage. The school had taken some good steps to develop the curriculum to take account of local circumstances and to meet the needs of particular groups of pupils.

In S1 pupils were organised into classes on the basis of their prior attainment, and in S2 some departments had opportunities to set pupils by prior attainment in S1. Departments had still to take full advantage of these arrangements to provide appropriate challenge for all pupils.

In S3/S4 pupils had good opportunities to study eight subjects at Standard Grade level or equivalent. Some departments were making good use of new National Qualifications (NQ) to meet the needs of some pupils more effectively. Pupils could specialise in areas such as science, technology or modern languages, although those who specialised in two such areas often had to omit a creative and aesthetic subject. Core religious and moral education was provided in S3 but not in S4. A small number of pupils benefited from opportunities to gain a

NQ in the core skill of working with others. The school had plans to extend its partnership with Aberdeen College in developing further core skills and vocational courses.

In S5/S6 pupils were able to build on their achievements in S4. Almost all pupils in S5 chose five courses from a good range of subjects at Higher, Intermediate 2 or Intermediate 1 levels. Some studied four subjects and took a qualification in ICT. The number of courses at Advanced Higher level was growing. To help to provide breadth and progression in pupils' learning, the school allowed courses to run with small classes. This benefited pupils by providing more choice.

6. How good is learning and teaching?

Teachers generally worked hard and with good success to deliver well-planned lessons, particularly at S5/S6. Nearly a third of the lessons observed were of very good quality. Teachers generally used resources well and gave clear explanations. On the whole they matched tasks appropriately to pupils' needs and assessed their progress effectively, particularly at S3 to S6. However, there were some important weaknesses in the quality of pupils' learning. The pace of lessons was often too slow and sometimes tasks lacked challenge. In some cases poor behaviour by a minority of pupils was a contributory factor in the slow pace of progress. The extent to which pupils were involved in and motivated by their classwork and homework was inconsistent across the school. While pupils at S5/S6 were better motivated than at other stages, they had insufficient opportunities to be independent in their learning.

Reports to parents were well structured and generally informative. Attainment levels assigned to pupils in S1/S2, however, were not always based on reliable assessments. In some reports the advice given on how pupils could improve their work was too general.

7. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare The school's arrangements for promoting care and welfare of pupils were good. Staff provided good pastoral care, with pupils having access to helpful and supportive guidance staff when they required help or advice. There were clear and comprehensive guidelines for dealing with child protection and situations where pupils' health and safety might be at risk. Staff had received appropriate training in child protection. However, there was a need to ensure that sensitive materials were stored appropriately.

Guidance Positive features of guidance and pastoral care included the following:

- a hard working guidance staff with a very strong commitment to pupils' pastoral care;
- sensitivity to pupils' individual circumstances, and very effective support for those who needed additional help;
- strong links with learning support, the local community, and external support services;
- very well established and successful procedures for work experience; and
- well organised procedures for supporting pupils during transition from primary and between stages within the secondary school.

Guidance staff and the home-school liaison officer were strongly committed to monitoring and ensuring pupils' attendance. However, the school needed to review its approaches to dealing with the high levels of late-coming and absence amongst some pupils. Current arrangements

placed too heavy a load upon guidance staff and were having an adverse impact on the overall quality of pastoral care in the school.

The quality of curricular and vocational guidance was very good overall. Clear and relevant advice was provided for pupils and parents on course choices available to them at the main transition stages. Advice given to pupils entering S5 took good account of their overall performance at Standard Grade.

The school's arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress and attainment were fair. Guidance staff interviewed pupils individually, and took good account of situations where teachers or parents raised concerns about pupils' progress. They worked hard to encourage pupils to review their own progress and set targets for improvement. However, the school had yet to develop an efficient system for tracking pupils' progress. The use of attainment information in setting appropriate targets for pupils required further development.

Guidance staff were redesigning the school's programme for personal and social education (PSE), and had made generally good progress. The revised programme covered an appropriate range of topics, including drugs education and responsible personal relationships. The quality of teaching was good overall and visiting speakers, including some from local businesses, made valued contributions. However, the programme did not take sufficient account of pupils' prior experiences in primary school, nor did it ensure appropriate progression from S1 to S4. Parents and carers had not yet been fully consulted on the health education aspects of this programme. S5 and S6 pupils were given a choice of activities designed to develop their personal and social skills. These activities were not always delivered effectively. There was no systematic approach to assessing and recording pupils' progress and attainment in PSE.

The headteacher led the guidance team and was strongly committed to responding to pupils' needs. There were, however, weaknesses in monitoring and evaluating the work of the department and in the direction given to staff. The principal teachers of guidance worked effectively together and fulfilled their individual remits well. They had begun to evaluate aspects of guidance provision using national quality indicators. Overall, however, approaches to self-evaluation lacked rigour. Planning for improvement did not fully reflect the range of tasks being undertaken and action plans were not always sufficiently detailed. Planned improvements were generally implemented effectively. Opportunities for guidance staff to participate in appropriate staff development activities were good. Only a minority of staff had had their work formally reviewed.

Support for learning

Staff as a whole supported pupils well. Provision for supporting pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties was very good. Support was provided within mainstream classes and in specialist units within the school.

Strong features of support for learning included the following:

- the quality of pupils' individualised educational programmes (IEPs);
- flexible responses by staff in supporting a wide range of pupils, including some experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- effective procedures to support pupils with special educational needs in the move from primary to secondary school, and to provide subject departments with key information about their attainment;
- very good curriculum development, particularly in relation to NQ courses at Access level; and
- very strong links with guidance staff and outside agencies.

The department was committed to supporting pupils in mainstream classes wherever appropriate. Some pupils also benefited from individual or small group support out of class. Good use was made of ICT to support learning. Support for learning staff had developed very good IEPs across the curriculum for pupils with a range of needs. They had worked closely with subject teachers to try to ensure that they were aware of pupils' targets.

Pupils with significant special educational needs were very well supported in the special unit as well as in mainstream classes. Their curricular programmes were carefully tailored to their individual needs, and they had very good access to nationally certificated courses and awards. Pupils with significant behavioural needs received intensive support in the support centre. They followed very good programmes to develop their self-esteem and improve their basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Support for learning teachers worked hard to ensure that pupils' behavioural targets were met.

Records of Needs were regularly reviewed in full consultation with parents. The very good links with a wide range of external agencies ensured comprehensive assessment and review of pupils' progress. Overall, arrangements for the implementation of statutory requirements for special educational needs were very good.

The principal teacher of support for learning provided very good leadership. She was well supported by the assistant principal teacher with responsibility for the special unit, and by the assistant headteacher who was linked with the department. Her wide remit included the management of support for learning teachers in the associated primary schools. Guidelines for staff were generally very well developed. However, the policy for support for learning required to be updated to describe the very good inclusive practice, and to clarify more fully the role of the behaviour support centre. Good arrangements

were in place for monitoring the effectiveness of the department and for planning for improvement. All staff had benefited from a good range of staff development activities.

Priorities for action Arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress and attainment in PSE, and for reporting them to parents, should be improved. The school should review its arrangements for dealing with absence and late-coming, including the level of involvement of guidance staff within these arrangements. In conjunction with senior managers, the support for learning department should update its policy on support for learning.

8. How well is the school managed?

Overall management and leadership

Overall, leadership of the school was fair. Strengths of the headteacher's leadership included his up-to-date knowledge which enabled him to guide staff effectively on educational matters, including curricular changes. He was influential in building a range of very good links with the community to help to raise pupils' aspirations and sense of achievement. Staff found him approachable. He had not, however, properly identified and addressed feelings of low morale amongst many staff. This had created a climate that was not conducive to building teamwork throughout the school. He now needed to provide stronger leadership in setting higher standards of pupil behaviour. Although he had actively encouraged departments to evaluate their own practices, a fully effective quality assurance system had still to be implemented.

The depute headteacher timetabled classes effectively. She had made valuable contributions to planning the curriculum and appropriate procedures for monitoring classroom practice. However, she required to improve her skills in working with other staff. One of the assistant headteachers contributed very well to the management of various aspects of provision in S1/S2 and to support for

learning. He had not yet, however, played a strong enough role in co-ordinating 5-14 developments. The other assistant headteacher had made a good start in his new acting position and was showing initiative in managing pupils' behaviour.

Each member of the senior management team (SMT), including the headteacher, was responsible for overseeing the work of a group of departments. Whilst principal teachers, in general, viewed these links as helpful and supportive, their impact on improving pupils' attainment was too limited. The individual remits of the SMT did not provide an appropriate distribution of workloads. The deputy headteacher did not have a great enough share of the responsibility for promoting high standards of discipline in the school. Relationships and teamwork within the SMT required to be improved, including a more active and consistent approach to improving standards of discipline.

A majority of principal teachers led their departments effectively. Some had given too little attention to 5-14 developments in S1/S2, and most needed to monitor the quality of pupils' learning experiences more systematically. Senior teachers fulfilled their remits well.

The aims of the school required updating. Staff were not familiar with them and they did not give enough importance to creating a positive climate for learning and to raising standards of attainment. The school had a wide range of high-quality policies to guide its work. Staff had appropriate opportunities to be involved in policy-making committees. The majority of them felt, however, that they did have sufficient opportunities at staff meetings to communicate their views about the school to the SMT.

Staff review and development

The overall quality of staff review and development was fair. Only a minority of staff had undergone reviews of their work as part of the education authority's formal scheme. Some departments had instituted their own

informal arrangements for staff review. Most teachers had been involved in a range of development activities which took account of priorities in school and departmental development plans. Staff were increasingly benefiting from training in the use of ICT. A few teachers required to improve their techniques for classroom management and promoting positive behaviour, but their needs in this respect had not yet been fully identified and addressed. On the whole, staff review and development needed to be taken forward more vigorously by the education authority and SMT to improve the quality of provision in the school.

Planning for improvement

Staff were well involved in development planning. Parents and pupils had been informed about the school's main priorities. The school development plan was generally well set out, with clear links to national priorities for education. In some departmental plans, targets, tasks and criteria for evaluating success were not set out appropriately. The SMT met principal teachers regularly to review progress with developments. However, the impact of planning was variable. New National Qualification courses had often been implemented very well, but progress on 5-14 developments varied too much across departments. Little progress had been made in implementing plans for staff review, and for monitoring classroom practice.

Approaches to improving quality

The headteacher and other members of the SMT carried out departmental reviews with principal teachers. Discussions were based on audits of the departments' work using national quality indicators. Some principal teachers provided very good analyses of examination results. While these reviews were helpful, the audits were not sufficiently informed by direct monitoring of pupils' classroom experiences. Some staff had objected to the SMT's well-planned proposals for monitoring the quality of learning and teaching, and so far only the physical education department had been included in the

initiative. Action points agreed with SMT as a result of the departmental reviews were not clear enough. The views of staff, pupils and parents had been usefully sought in helping to evaluate certain aspects of the school's work. This process, however, had been too restricted to help provide a full and accurate picture of the school. The school's standards and quality report set out the school's achievements and future priorities clearly but did not sufficiently identify weaknesses in ethos and pupils' attainment. Overall, procedures for self-evaluation were fair.

9. How well does the school perform overall?

Kincorth Academy was a school with a number of strengths, although it also had some important weaknesses which were constraining pupils' attainment. Many staff worked hard to support pupils in their studies and to provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities for them. Good work had been done to try to raise pupils' self-esteem and sense of achievement, and to design the curriculum to meet the range in pupils' needs. Despite these efforts, however, there had been no overall improvement in pupils' attainment over the last three years. There were important weaknesses in the climate for learning which had not yet been properly addressed through the school's quality assurance procedures. The headteacher needed to provide stronger leadership in setting higher standards of pupil behaviour and improving the climate for learning.

Key strengths

- The commitment of many staff to supporting and providing good experiences for pupils.
- A broad curriculum, including good use of NQ courses and units to meet pupils' needs, and good overall standards of teaching.

- High-quality provision for pupils with a range of additional support needs.
- The quality of sports facilities and activities, and the organisation and use of the school library.
- The wide range of valuable links developed with outside agencies to support pupils and promote their achievements.
- A range of well-developed policies to guide staff in their work.

Main points for action

In addition to addressing the priorities for action identified in this report, the school and education authority should act on the following recommendations.

- The weaknesses identified in accommodation in science and support for learning should be addressed.
- The overall provision and use of ICT facilities should be improved.
- The school should strive to raise attainment by:
 - working with the education authority and associated primary schools to improve the continuity and development of pupils' learning between primary and secondary school;
 - continuing to develop its curriculum and courses to help motivate and challenge pupils, particularly those who are disaffected with school; and
 - improving the overall quality of pupils' learning experiences to ensure an appropriate pace of progress in all classes.

- The headteacher should provide stronger leadership in improving the climate for learning throughout the school by setting clear and appropriate expectations of pupils' behaviour. He should also ensure that all staff make effective and consistent contributions to implementing the school's policy on promoting positive behaviour.
- The work of the senior management team should be reviewed to provide a more appropriate division of duties, better teamworking and a higher profile throughout the school, particularly in improving standards of pupil behaviour.
- The school should improve its approaches to quality assurance by taking fuller account of the views of staff and pupils, and by implementing its well-planned procedures for monitoring classroom practice.
- The education authority should work with the school to implement fully the authority's scheme for staff review.

HM Inspectors have asked the school and education authority to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents and carers. In liaison with the education authority, HM Inspectors will monitor progress to ensure improvements in line with the main findings of the report. They will arrange for further progress reports and visits to the school if necessary and will inform parents and carers of the outcomes of these when they occur.

Tom Straiton
HM Inspector
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector
Northern Division

24 June 2003

See Quality Indicator data overleaf.

Appendix

Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be *very good*

- School management of finances
- Curricular and vocational guidance
- Learning support
- Implementation of legislation relating to SEN and disabilities

We judged the following to be *good*

- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community
- Reporting pupils' progress
- Accommodation and facilities
- Staffing
- Provision of resources
- Organisation and use of resources and space
- Structure of the curriculum
- Pastoral care

We judged the following to be *fair*

- Climate and relationships
- Leadership
- Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities
- Self-evaluation
- Planning for improvement
- Staff review and development
- Monitoring progress and achievement

We judged the following to be *unsatisfactory*

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Quality of lessons observed

HMI also evaluated the quality of the lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 30% of cases, good in 53%, fair in 13% and unsatisfactory in 4%.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Corporate Director of Learning and Leisure, 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, Greyfriars House, Gallowgate, Aberdeen AB10 1LQ or by telephoning 01224 642544. Copies are also available on our web site: www.hmie.gov.uk

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Bill Maxwell, HMCI at HM Inspectorate of Education, Wellgate House (Level 5), The Wellgate, Dundee DD1 2DB. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from that office and on our website.

If you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman directly or through your member of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. She will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, she will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right if we can.

Complaints to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman must be submitted within 12 months of the date of publication of this report.

The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Professor Alice Brown
The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
23 Walker Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7HX

Telephone number: 0870 011 5378

e-mail: enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk

More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website:

www.ombudsmanscotland.org.uk

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