

**Balwearie High School
Kirkcaldy
Fife Council
10 June 2008**

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1. Background

Balwearie High School was inspected in February 2008 as part of a national sample of secondary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the school's work at all stages. HM Inspectors evaluated how well the school was raising achievement for all pupils, taking into account the extent to which pupils' learning needs were met by the curriculum and teaching. They analysed pupils' achievement in national examinations (see Appendix 3) and other areas, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement. Inspectors invited the school to identify examples of good practice and have provided examples of these in Appendix 4. HM Inspectors focused particularly on English, mathematics, modern languages, and physical education. The inspection team also evaluated aspects of the school's progress in implementing national recommendations related to improving aspects of school meals provision, and the quality of the school's links with community learning and development.

HM Inspectors observed teaching, learning and achievement in lessons and other contexts and examined pupils' work. They analysed responses to questionnaires¹ issued to a sample of parents² and pupils and to all staff. They interviewed groups of pupils, including representatives of pupil councils, and staff. Members of the inspection team met the chairpersons of the Parent Council, a group of parents and one of the school chaplains. They also met representatives from partner agencies, the local community and Adam Smith College.

Balwearie High School is a non-denominational school serving the western side of Kirkcaldy. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 1550, including 67 pupils in the Department of Special Education (DSE). The DSE provided support for secondary-aged pupils with a very wide range of additional support needs. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average. Around 20% of pupils attended the school as a result of placing requests. Almost 30 new staff joined the school in August 2007 as a result of staffing retirements and changes arising from secondments, career breaks and promotions outwith the school.

¹ See Appendix 2

² Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The strong culture of inclusion, including the quality of support for the most vulnerable pupils and those with complex support needs.
- The positive impact of the headteacher's leadership and that of his senior leadership team in promoting and sustaining improvement.
- A strong sense of community and the engagement of staff and pupils in the life and work of the school.
- The priority given to improving the achievement of all pupils including high levels of attainment in SQA examinations.
- Confident, enthusiastic and well behaved pupils, who engaged very positively with their learning.
- Highly effective multi-agency working resulting in positive outcomes for pupils.

3. How well does the school raise achievement for all?

To evaluate how well the school was raising achievement for all, HM Inspectors considered the extent to which the learning needs of all pupils were met through the curriculum and teaching. They evaluated the impact of the school on the learning and personal development of all pupils in lessons and in other, broader contexts. They also considered pupils' achievement in examinations and other areas, and the school's overall success in sustaining improvements in performance.

Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum was very good. The school had a clear rationale for the development of the curriculum and had taken forward well-considered changes. These included a reduction in class sizes at S1/S2 to allow English, mathematics and personal and social education (PSE) to be taught in groups of 15 to 20, to good effect. The school had demonstrated very effective partnership working in developing innovative programmes for pupils at risk of missing out. Particular features of the curriculum included the following.

- The school had established effective pastoral links with its associated primary schools and was extending its curricular links to ensure continuity in pupils' learning.
- An information and communications technology (ICT) course helped S1 and S2 pupils develop relevant skills to support their learning in other curricular areas.

- The additional time allocated to literacy in S2 had resulted in recent improvements in talking and writing. More detailed planning would ensure that the additional time allocated to numeracy was used as effectively.
- The school provided a range of vocational options in S3 and S4 designed to develop pupils' skills for work and prepare them for life after school. These included well-planned courses offered in partnership with Adam Smith College. Most S4 pupils participated appropriately in work experience.
- After consultation with parents, a number of S3/S4 pupils followed flexible curriculum courses including ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) and an enhanced curriculum programme. These provided valuable opportunities which were building pupils' confidence and self-esteem.
- Pupils had opportunities to develop their enterprise skills through a wide range of activities and events. These included workshops for S1 pupils which were confidently delivered by senior pupils.
- Provision for physical education was appropriate at S1-S4, but limited at S5/S6.
- At S5/S6, pupils could choose from a wide range of courses at Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher levels. Curricular pathways took account of pupils' prior attainment on entering S5/S6. There were fewer opportunities for pupils to access vocational courses.
- Pupils followed a comprehensive programme of PSE from S1 to S4. At S5/S6, the programme would benefit from a wider range of topics. Pupils received very effective curricular and vocational guidance which helped them make appropriate course choices.
- The curriculum in the Department of Special Education (DSE) met the range of pupils' needs very well. Individualised planning effectively identified an appropriate range of learning experiences for all pupils, including those with severe and complex needs.

Teaching and meeting learning needs

The overall quality of teaching was good. Some was excellent. Teachers responded sensitively to pupils in class and established very positive relationships within lessons. There was some very effective use of demonstration in practically-based subjects. The pace of lessons was mostly brisk. Some teachers skilfully shared and reinforced learning intentions with pupils and reviewed these at the end of lessons. However, this was not yet fully embedded across the school. In the best practice, teachers planned stimulating activities that actively engaged pupils and developed their abilities to think for themselves. Examples included ASDAN activities, science investigations, research-based work in modern studies and English and school-based programmes linked to Skills for Work. Almost all teachers used questioning effectively to check for understanding. At times, however, the dialogue with learners was overly teacher-led and did not engage pupils effectively in their learning. Across the school, and within some departments, there was still too much variability in the quality of teaching.

The quality of teaching in the DSE was very good. Lessons were well-planned to take

account of the age, interests and personal and social needs of pupils. Staff used clear, simple language when providing pupils with direction and gave them time to think for themselves. They made good use of pictorial symbols to help pupils understand learning activities. Within the DSE and across the school, greater use should be made of technology and ICT to support pupils and encourage a more interactive approach to learning.

The quality of arrangements for meeting pupils' learning needs was very good. The school had recently revised its approaches to meeting the needs of all pupils by reviewing the deployment of specialist staff. Learning support staff spent a higher proportion of their time working with teachers to prepare appropriate learning materials to meet all pupils' needs. Class teachers had taken part in extensive training on supporting pupils with additional support needs. Teachers were beginning to make very effective use of a computer-based Tracking, Reporting, Improvement and Monitoring system (*TRIM*). This contained an extensive range of information on pupils' support needs, learning styles and achievements. Teachers were using the information very well to track attainment and identify barriers to learning. Plans were in place to build on this good practice and use the data to inform the planning of lessons. In a minority of lessons, teachers did not provide a suitable range of tasks to meet pupils' learning needs. Higher attaining pupils had a more variable experience across subjects. The school made outstanding arrangements to meet the needs of pupils who required significant additional support with their learning or behaviour. Staff had put in place additional arrangements for early identification of and support for these pupils. Along with their teachers and parents, these pupils were fully involved in identifying areas where improvement was needed and agreeing the most appropriate strategies. The headteacher had made very effective use of resources to create unique staffing posts to support the most vulnerable learners. Other arrangements included effective primary-secondary transition arrangements, individual support for disengaged pupils and their families and high-quality provision in the behaviour support base and DSE. The support for learning team knew their pupils well and provided high quality support to teachers. Learning assistants provided good in-class support for identified pupils. Bilingual pupils and those with dyslexia benefited from high quality group tuition and well organised peer-support. The school's highly effective partnership working with a wide range of partner professionals had made a significant impact on identifying and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable pupils.

Within the DSE, staff planned each pupil's learning carefully and identified appropriately challenging tasks. They made very good use of pupil profiles to ensure that all staff involved with pupils made valuable contributions to promoting their learning and development. Pupils used pictorial symbols well to make their own decisions about learning activities and to indicate when they required support. They were effectively encouraged to become independent, successful learners.

Impact on learners

The following sections provide an evaluation of the extent to which the school was successful in raising achievement for all pupils. They refer to pupils' learning experiences, personal development and aspects of their achievement in examinations and other areas.

Learners' experiences and personal development

The overall quality of learners' experiences was very good. Pupils liked most subjects and felt that there was a positive climate for learning across the school. They worked very well without close supervision and were capable of working independently. Increasingly, pupils assessed their own and one another's progress in learning. In the best practice, staff made very good use of pupil planners to assist pupils to understand what they needed to do to improve. In a few classes, pupils' learning had been hindered by lack of regular, ongoing feedback. Across the school, pupils talked positively about, and made very good use of, the stimulating school information centre. The librarian ran a very good range of courses within the centre, including a Fife library induction course and an Advanced Information Skills course for senior pupils in partnership with Napier University. Groups of pupils in S1/S2 and S3/S4 felt that the lunchtime Reading Cafe and book club had stimulated their interest in reading. Pupils on flexible curriculum courses had motivating practical experiences. Groups of higher attaining pupils at S5/S6 benefitted from input by motivational external speakers.

Within the DSE, pupils experienced high-quality personal development activities which addressed their emotional needs. They interacted very positively with staff and peers and were learning to make choices and take responsibility. They gained confidence from being actively involved in evaluating their own progress in personal development. A range of partner agencies prepared pupils well for adulthood and helped them develop the skills for independence. Staff used the local community well for pupils' learning through everyday experiences.

The school and wider partner agencies offered pupils an extensive range of opportunities for personal and leadership development within and beyond the school day. Pupils talked very positively about their PSE programme which covered an appropriate range of topics including health issues, careers, course choices and personal safety. It was appropriately being reviewed at S5/S6. Almost all pupils involved in the extensive out-of-school-hours learning programme achieved personal success. Some were developing their talents at local, national and international events. Thirty senior pupils were preparing for a demanding World Challenge trip to India which involved team building and high levels of individual responsibility. Many subject departments, especially history, modern languages, drama and music offered a range of trips and events to enhance pupils' learning. These included trips abroad to the battlefields of World War 1 and to the prison camps at Auschwitz. The Auschwitz experience had had a powerful impact on pupils and staff and was used as a stimulus for whole school reflection. Pupils and their parents talked positively about the impact of such trips on pupils' confidence, self-esteem and personal and social development. Those pupils who served on the pupil council had made important improvements to the school, and senior pupils developed their leadership skills through their work as buddies, mentors and volunteers. The school community was currently in the process of raising funds to support a school in Sierra Leone where an ex-teacher was currently working. Some pupils from all year groups made active contributions to health promotion and raising awareness of environmental issues. Senior pupils would have welcomed more opportunities to take part in physical activities within their curriculum. Overall, pupils felt safe, valued and secure and were highly appreciative of the opportunities provided to them to develop as confident young people.

English

In English, the quality of teaching and approaches to meeting pupils' learning needs was very good. The quality of learners' experiences was excellent and pupils' performance had improved.

Teachers consistently shared the purposes of lessons with pupils. They explained new work clearly and varied their teaching approaches very effectively to sustain pupils' motivation. Teachers questioned pupils very skilfully to enhance their understanding. In several classes, the quality of interactive teaching with classes and groups was excellent. Teachers made some effective use of ICT to develop pupils' research and presentation skills. Homework was used well. Teachers met pupils' learning needs very effectively. Higher achieving pupils were appropriately challenged. Pupils received high-quality feedback which helped them become effective contributors and successful learners during lessons.

Pupils were making very good progress from their previous levels of attainment. At S1/S2, most in reading and the majority in writing, listening and talking achieved appropriate national levels of attainment. At S3/S4, the proportion of pupils gaining Credit passes was well above the national average. At S5/S6, the proportions gaining A-C and A awards at Higher were well above national averages. The proportions gaining A-C awards at Intermediate 1 and 2 were above the national averages. At Advanced Higher, almost all pupils achieved A-C awards.

Mathematics

In mathematics, the quality of teaching, arrangements for meeting learning needs and learners' experiences was good. Improvement in pupils' performance was encouraging.

Teachers gave good explanations and interacted positively with pupils. In many lessons they shared with pupils what they were expected to learn and reviewed and reinforced learning throughout lessons. Overall, pupils had too few opportunities to take responsibility for their learning and the pace of lessons was often too slow. Arrangements for grouping classes by prior attainment helped teachers to provide appropriate support for most pupils.

At S1/S2, most pupils were making good progress in their coursework and reached appropriate national levels of attainment by the end of S2. Almost all S3 pupils presented at SCQF level 3 achieved success. At S3/S4, the proportion of pupils gaining Credit passes at Standard Grade was above the national average. At S5/S6, the majority of pupils gained an A-C award at Higher. Pupils performed less well in Higher mathematics than in their other subjects. Most of the small number of pupils presented at Advanced Higher gained an A-C award.

Modern languages

In modern languages, the quality of teaching, arrangements for meeting pupils' needs and learners' experiences was good. There had been limited improvements in pupils' performance, especially in French.

Teachers used a variety of teaching approaches and made very good use of ICT to engage pupils' interest. In many lessons, tasks were well-chosen and the activities provided appropriate challenge for higher achieving pupils. However, in some classes, pupils were spending too long on straightforward tasks from textbooks. In S2, French teachers were linking effectively with the home economics department to broaden pupils' achievements across these subjects.

At S1/S2, pupils were coping with classwork but more able pupils would have benefited from additional challenge. At S3/S4, the proportions of pupils gaining Credit passes in French and German were above national averages. At S5/S6 in French, the proportions gaining A-C awards at Higher were well below the national average. In German, they were in line with national averages.

Physical education

In physical education, the quality of teaching and learners' experiences was very good. The quality of arrangements for meeting pupils' needs was good. There had been limited improvements in pupils' performance.

Teachers planned their lessons very well and provided a variety of tasks which encouraged maximum involvement and active learning by pupils. Almost all pupils responded positively and worked well both independently and with their peers. Pupils worked purposefully, behaved well and remained on task. Their levels of participation were high. From S2 onwards, they were grouped effectively according to prior ability to better meet their needs. The curriculum could be further developed to meet the needs of those pupils whose interests lay in more creative activities such as dance.

At S1 to S4, most pupils demonstrated appropriate levels of practical performance in core physical education. At S3/S4, the proportion of pupils attaining Credit passes at Standard Grade was above the national average but was declining. At S5/S6, the proportion of pupils gaining an A-C award at Higher was below the national average. All of the small number of pupils presented at Intermediate 2 gained an A-C award. Levels of presentations in all certificated classes were below or well below national averages. A low number of girls opted to study physical education.

Achievement in national assessments, examinations and other areas

Information about the subjects inspected has been given earlier in the report. Across the school, particular features of pupils' progress, results in examinations and other qualifications, including those awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)³ for the three year period 2005-2007, are included below.

Particular features of achievement in national assessments and other areas by the end of S2 included the following.

- Most pupils attained appropriate national levels in mathematics and reading. Pupils were making good progress from their prior levels of attainment. The majority attained appropriate national levels in listening, talking and writing. A focus on writing had ensured all pupils were making good progress from prior levels of attainment.
- Most pupils were making good and, at times, very good progress in class work across a range of subjects.
- Within the DSE, pupils at S1/S2 were developing their interpersonal skills through well designed personalised learning planning arrangements.

Particular features of achievement in examinations and other areas by the end of S4 included the following.

- At S3/S4, those pupils who were following course options such as ASDAN, Skills for Work, and the Enhanced Curriculum were making very good progress. Thirty three pupils were working successfully towards an ASDAN Bronze award. Access to certificated courses such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) met the needs of higher attaining pupils. Significant numbers had been successful in overcoming barriers and moving on to higher education.
- The proportions of pupils attaining English and mathematics at SCQF level 3 or above were in line with national averages.
- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more SCQF awards at level 3 was in line with national average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more SCQF awards at level 5 was above the national average and much better than schools with similar characteristics.
- In 2007 across all SCQF levels, boys performed particularly well.

³ 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

- The proportion of pupils gaining Credit awards was much higher than the national average in computing studies, physics and science. Pupils performed better in science, biology and physics than in their other subjects. They performed less well in home economics.
- Almost all pupils presented for National Qualification (NQ) awards at Access level achieved success. Most of the small number of pupils presented for NQ Intermediate 1 awards achieved success.
- At S3 to S6, most pupils working in the DSE were gaining SQA units at Access 1 and 2 and some were undertaking units at Access 3.

Particular features of achievement in examinations and other areas by the end of S6 included the following.

- At S5/S6, the proportion of pupils gaining one or more or five or more awards at SCQF level 6 was above the national averages and better than schools with similar characteristics. The proportion gaining three or more awards at this level was well above the national average and much better than schools with similar characteristics.
- The proportion of pupils attaining one or more awards at SCQF level 7 was well above the national average and much better than schools with similar characteristics.
- Pupils performed better in art and design, modern studies and computing at Higher than in their other subjects. They performed less well in history and geography. Pupils made better progress in art and design, computing, human biology and modern studies than their prior attainment indicated.
- At Intermediate 2, pupils performed better in biology, physics and woodworking skills than in their other subjects. They made notably better progress in biology than their prior attainment indicated.
- At S5/S6, most pupils working in the DSE took part in work experience and college placements. Some school leavers developed their confidence and skills through attending a Business Dynamics conference and taking part successfully in an Ethos of Work programme. Commendably, the programme included attendance at college one day per week, a week's work experience placement and recognition through Lifeskills unit Awards at Access 2 level.

Across the school, the proportion of pupils who entered higher and further education was significantly above national averages. Substantial numbers represented the school across a range of sporting competitions and musical and drama performances. Individual pupils achieved success at national and international levels in athletics, swimming, boxing and gymnastics. Considerable numbers of pupils from S3 to S6 were involved in volunteering within the school and the community. The school was working in partnership with the CLD service and wider partners to provide accreditation for the high levels of pupils who were developing their citizenship through voluntary work. Levels of pupil exclusions were low and there had been a reduction in behaviour referrals. Pupils' attendance was above the national average. Overall, the school was very successfully raising pupils' performance at all stages.

4. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The quality of care, welfare and development was excellent. Pupils felt that staff, particularly guidance teachers, resolved problems quickly, effectively and sensitively. Every pupil had regular contact with their guidance teacher in addition to several planned interviews, helping to promote their personal development and achievement. Guidance staff employed rigorous procedures for tracking pupils and collaborated extensively with teaching staff. As a result, pupils experiencing difficulties were identified promptly and supported effectively. Bullying was rare and very well dealt with. Pupils were very positive about the quality of school lunches and the atmosphere in dining rooms. The school had well-understood approaches for preventing and dealing with incidents of child protection, racism, violence and substance misuse. A group of pupils had produced a thought-provoking short film on the dangers of binge drinking. Staff had involved parents and outside agencies well in promoting pupils' wellbeing. They had led informative sessions on issues such as cyber-bullying, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and parenting. Staff made highly effective arrangements to support pupils at risk of missing out on education, for example through poor attendance or exclusion. They supervised their progress and had achieved considerable success in engaging these young people back into learning. The senior leadership team had very effective arrangements in place to supervise pupils arriving and leaving on school buses to ensure their care and welfare.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>Management and use of resources and space for learning</p>	<p>The management and use of resources and space for learning was good overall. A rolling programme of improvements was creating more effective environments for pupils' learning. Particular features included the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The refurbishment to a high standard of a number of staff bases, well-organised administrative offices and a re-designed technology room. • High-quality astro turf pitches with flood lighting, which were very well used by the school and community. Effective use of school premises which met a good range of community and learning needs outwith school hours. • A well-resourced and well-organised school information centre with very good access for pupils. • Very effective management of accommodation and facilities by the business manager to ensure maximum usage of available rooms and ICT suites. • The quality of display in classrooms and corridors, signage and the entrance to the school could be improved. The staffroom, S6 common room, changing rooms in physical education and pupil toilets required refurbishment. • The small number of loaders for the lunch swipe-card system created long queues for pupils. There was no obvious space in the school for lockers where pupils could store their belongings. • The school and education authority needed to continue with plans to review vehicle safety and aspects of security.

Aspect	Comment
<p>Equalities, expectations and engagement</p>	<p>The school's expectation and arrangements for promoting achievements were very good. The school had developed a range of effective strategies to promote and celebrate pupils' achievements. Teachers worked collaboratively with pupils in a major whole-school exercise to develop classroom values. Almost all staff had high expectations of pupils' attendance and behaviour. Most had similarly high expectations of work rate and attainment. A wide range of initiatives including innovative programmes with staff from community learning and development (CLD) were helping to raise pupils' expectations of themselves. The school's approaches to equality and fairness were excellent. All parents felt that their child was treated fairly and almost all pupils agreed. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and those with additional and complex learning needs were fully included in school life. Pupils were particularly proud of their contribution to Comenius projects. Their involvement in these projects and a range of charity work raised awareness of cultural differences and their responsibilities as world citizens. The school chaplains had strong links with the school and helped to provide planned opportunities for religious observance. Appropriate prayer arrangements were made for Muslim pupils. The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school was outstanding. Almost all staff reported that they had regular discussions about how to achieve the school's priorities and were consulted about improvements and changes to the school. They were highly motivated and felt valued by senior staff. At all levels, staff appreciated the collegiate approach that had been established by the headteacher and his senior leadership team. Many shared their expertise to lead and support a highly effective programme of continuous professional development (CPD). Probationer teachers as well as those in their first three years of teaching, valued the impact on their teaching of the additional CPD sessions that had been organised for them. Most staff gave willingly of their time and experience to support a wide range of school events, out-of-school activities and international trips. These made an extremely valuable contribution to the wider culture of the school and enhanced the quality of pupils' learning and development.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>The school's success in involving parents, carers and families</p>	<p>The school's success in involving parents, carers and families was excellent. Parents expressed high satisfaction with the school and the way it looked after their children. The school organised meetings of parental focus groups and issued regular surveys to parents to seek their views. The actions arising from these were shared appropriately in newsletters. Commendably, the school had established a database of over 60 parents who were willing to share their expertise in supporting pupils' learning. Some had contributed successfully to a World of Work week and addressed assemblies and conferences. A high percentage of parents attended parents' evenings and those who were unable to attend were contacted by the school and visited at home if necessary. Language interpreters were available at these and other meetings to support the parents of bilingual pupils. The parents of those pupils who were following alternative curriculum programmes were fully involved in decision-making arrangements. The school was working with CLD staff to promote adult learning opportunities with parents attending formal and informal events. Parents of pupils in the DSE were fully involved in identifying learning targets within personal learning planning arrangements. The new parent council had a more representative cross-section of parents than before. Staff dealt promptly with parental enquiries as reflected in their Charter Mark status. Each year, the school ran five parent information evenings on a variety of topics and these had been very well attended. The links between parents and pupils attending the DSE as well as with guidance staff were excellent.</p>

5. Leading and improving the school

Balwearie High School was a highly successful school which served its pupils and community particularly well. It was very successfully raising pupils' achievement. The headteacher and his senior leadership team had created a strong culture of improvement and were committed to improving further standards of achievement, from an already high base. Pupils benefited from the wide range of opportunities to excel in sporting, cultural and community activities and displayed a strong pride in the school. They were well behaved, responsible citizens. Parents and community partners expressed high levels of satisfaction and confidence in the work of the school. Staff had built on this strong foundation of partnership working to take forward well-planned innovation in the curriculum to meet the needs of the most vulnerable learners. The care and welfare of pupils was outstanding and there was a strong sense of belonging. Links with the Department of Special Education (DSE) were excellent. Staff were regularly sharing best practice in learning and teaching, linked to a well-planned programme of CPD. Further developments were planned. Overall, the school demonstrated a high capacity for improvement.

The headteacher was a dynamic, influential leader who inspired confidence in staff, pupils and parents. He had a comprehensive knowledge of the school, its pupils and their families. He had succeeded in creating a culture of high expectations and a sustained focus on attainment, achievement and ambition. His high profile leadership style and empowering approach was appreciated by staff and the wider community. The headteacher led by example and met regularly with his highly effective senior leadership team (SLT). Together, they worked as a cohesive team to promote and further improve the work of the school. The senior depute, along with other members of the team, took strategic responsibility for major areas of work which had resulted in positive benefits for learners. The principal teacher of the DSE provided very effective leadership and had communicated her vision to all staff for inclusion across the whole school. A number of principal teachers provided very effective leadership of improvement and shared best practice at whole school and optional training events. Almost all staff, including support staff, contributed positively to working groups. Pupils and parents were increasingly involved in these. The senior team was encouraging staff to build up CPD portfolios to support future career development. The quality of partnerships, particularly with community partners, was outstanding. These included links between guidance staff in relation to multi-agency working as well as innovative provision for bilingual learners and their parents, and pupils at risk of missing out on education. As a result of these and other partnerships, young people were benefitting from a suitably broad and enriching range of experiences.

The headteacher and his SLT actively promoted improvement through self-evaluation. They worked tirelessly with staff and partner agencies to review and evaluate provision and make necessary improvements. They had established a wide range of effective measures to identify strengths, areas for improvement and strategic approaches to change. These included visits to classes to evaluate the quality of pupils' classroom experiences. *TRIM* was proving to be a powerful tool for self-evaluation across a range of measures. The headteacher and his SLT reviewed departmental attainment on a regular and ongoing basis. The collation and sharing of information from class visits would help to ensure more consistent, high-quality teaching across the school. The school consulted widely with staff, parents and pupils through questionnaires and the systematic use of nationally recognised quality indicators. Some principal teachers had developed very effective approaches to self-evaluation and these had led to improvements in pupils' experiences and achievement. The school had very effective systems in place to track the progress of groups of pupils.

Development work linked to Charter Mark accreditation had led to significant improvements in the in-house programme of CPD which involved school staff and external speakers. Work to simplify and streamline improvement planning was ongoing.

As well as building on the strengths and addressing the issues raised throughout this report, the school and the education authority should address the following main points for action.

Main point for action

Continue to improve achievement by:

- promoting further the sharing of good practice in teaching to ensure more consistent high-quality experiences for all pupils.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Fiona Carlisle
HM Inspector

10 June 2008

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The following quality indicators have been used in the inspection process to contribute to the evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school in raising achievement for all pupils.

Section 3. How well does the school raise achievement for all?	
The curriculum	very good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Meeting learning needs	very good
Learners' experiences	very good
Improvements in performance: S1/S2	very good
Improvements in performance: S3/S4	very good
Improvements in performance: S5/S6	very good

Section 4. How good is the environment for learning?	
Care, welfare and development	excellent
Management and use of resources and space for learning	good
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	excellent
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	excellent
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	excellent

Section 5. Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	excellent
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	excellent
Leadership of improvement and change (across the school)	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

This report uses the following word scale to make clear the judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

The following provides a summary of questionnaire responses. Key issues from the questionnaires have been considered in the inspection and comments are included as appropriate throughout the report.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school was well led and had a very good reputation in the community. • Staff made them feel welcome, showed care and concern for their children and had strong arrangements for ensuring their children’s care and welfare. • The school encouraged their children to work to the best of their ability and school reports gave helpful information on their children’s progress. • Their children were treated fairly and encouraged to work to the best of their ability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers helped them when they were having difficulties and expected them to work to the best of their ability. • They felt safe and healthy and knew what to do if they had any concerns. • At least one teacher knew them well and pupil success was celebrated regularly. • Teachers were good at letting them know how their learning could be improved. • The behaviour of other pupils was good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school was well led. • The school dealt effectively with any instances of bullying. • They liked working in the school and worked hard to promote and maintain good relations in the local community. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and communicated clearly to parents the standard of work expected from pupils. • Time for continuous professional development was used effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around a third of support staff felt that there could be greater opportunities to be involved in decision making.

Appendix 3 Performance in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications

This data is used alongside evaluations of teaching for effective learning, meeting learning needs, expectations and promoting achievement, and the overall quality of learners' achievement, to inform the overall evaluation of improvements in performance.

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

Percentage of relevant S4 roll gaining awards by end of S4

		2005	2006	2007
English and Mathematics @ Level 3	Balwearie High School	92	94	93
	Comparator schools ⁴	95	94	93
	National	90	91	92
5+ @ Level 3 or better	Balwearie High School	91	92	93
	Comparator schools	94	94	94
	National	90	91	91
5+ @ Level 4 or better	Balwearie High School	86	86	82
	Comparator schools	81	84	81
	National	76	77	76
5+ @ Level 5 or better	Balwearie High School	51	42	43
	Comparator schools	39	39	36
	National	34	35	33

Percentage of relevant S4 roll gaining awards by end of S5

		2005	2006	2007
5+ @ Level 4 or better	Balwearie High School	86	87	86
	Comparator schools ⁴	83	83	85
	National	78	78	79
5+ @ Level 5 or better	Balwearie High School	61	60	55
	Comparator schools	51	50	49
	National	45	45	46
1+ @ Level 6 or better	Balwearie High School	51	47	42
	Comparator schools	44	42	43
	National	39	38	39
3+ @ Level 6 or better	Balwearie High School	34	32	26
	Comparator schools	26	25	25
	National	23	22	22
5+ @ Level 6 or better	Balwearie High School	13	14	9
	Comparator schools	12	11	11
	National	10	10	10

Percentage of relevant S4 roll gaining awards by end of S6

		2005	2006	2007
5+ @ Level 5 or better	Balwearie High School	58	62	61
	Comparator schools⁴	49	52	52
	National	47	48	47
1+ @ Level 6 or better	Balwearie High School	53	53	50
	Comparator schools	47	48	47
	National	43	43	42
3+ @ Level 6 or better	Balwearie High School	38	41	39
	Comparator schools	32	35	33
	National	30	30	29
5+ @ Level 6 or better	Balwearie High School	24	26	30
	Comparator schools	22	24	24
	National	19	20	19
1+ @ Level 7 or better	Balwearie High School	18	19	18
	Comparator schools	15	14	15
	National	12	13	12

⁴ Comparator schools are the 20 schools statistically closest to the school being inspected in terms of the five socio-economic characteristics of the school population and surrounding areas.

Appendix 4 Good practice

In the course of the inspection, the following aspects of innovative and effective practice were evaluated as being worthy of wider dissemination.

4.1 Multi agency working

The school identified the need to work in partnership with a wide range of agencies to best serve the interests of individual pupils. Partner agencies provided a high level of support and an expertise that transformed the lives of the most vulnerable pupils. The school co-ordinated the inputs of various agencies through a dynamic, team approach within the Support for Learning Group. All partners were seen as an integral part of the school staff by teachers and parents and attended whole-staff meetings. Partners delivered aspects of the curriculum such as *ASDAN* and the personal and social education programme. The school was working with partner agencies to present information evenings to parents on issues of concern including drugs and cyber-bullying. There were high levels of effective communication across agencies. Partners provided continuous professional development for school staff to ensure that each had a good understanding of their respective roles. Links with community learning and development (CLD) were helping the school to accredit the work of the high levels of volunteering amongst pupils. Staff were working together to develop youth achievement awards. The school regularly surveyed the views of partners and used the results to improve partnership working. Identified parents were being supported to develop Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) whilst their children and young people were attending swimming and football.

4.2 TRIM – Tracking, Reporting, Informing, Monitoring

TRIM was a computer-based system which provided staff with easy access to a ‘single point’ of access and information about pupils. It allowed better use of existing pupil information by combining it in a form that was easy to access. Staff had been using the system to regularly track pupils’ progress and identify quickly any pupil who was underperforming. It had also been used by teachers to produce reports for parents. In addition, up-to-date information could be quickly accessed and used to support parental enquiries and discussions with parents. *TRIM* provided teachers with quick and easy access to key information about the pupils they taught. This included information about pupils’ additional support needs, key strategies that others had found effective to improve their learning, medical needs, progress across subjects and ongoing achievements. It was updated on an ongoing basis by both teachers and administrative staff. The advantage of the system was that it provided every teacher with a detailed, all-round picture of his/her pupils. *TRIM* also allowed the headteacher, his senior leadership team and guidance staff to monitor and address low-level concerns at an early stage. This had resulted in a reduction in the number of behaviour referrals and pupil exclusions. It facilitated the sharing of good practice strategies relating to individual pupils amongst staff. Individual teachers can input what has worked well with pupils or with classes. A group of teaching and support staff worked as part of a *Systems Committee* to oversee the development of the system. This had ensured that the system was practical and workable and that any difficulties were identified and sorted out early.

4.3 Supporting bilingual learners and their families

In session 2006-07, a number of pupils with little or no English to enable them to access the curriculum, enrolled at the school. Whilst initial calls were made upon the Bilingual Support Service to help meet the needs of these pupils, it became clear that the school had to build its capacity to support these pupils through its own efforts.

The following strategies were put in place and resulted in significant benefits to learners and the school as a whole.

- Senior staff offered two voluntary professional training sessions on strategies that teachers could use in the classroom to help bilingual learners. These sessions had been very well supported by teachers across all departments.
- A whole school in-service day which focused on catering effectively for pupils with additional support needs included a session on the particular needs of bilingual learners.
- The school developed clear procedures for enrolment, including the use of interpreters to support parents and their children. Letters to parents were translated in the home language before being sent out from the school.
- Arrangements were made to link bilingual learners with other similar groups of learners across Kirkcaldy schools. Learners and their parents met on a Saturday at an agreed venue. This provided a helpful meeting place where learners could share experiences and expertise.
- The school introduced a successful and well-attended, “*Getting To Know Your School*” evening for bilingual learners and their parents. This helped parents and their children to feel welcomed at the school and to meet staff whom they could contact directly.
- S6 volunteer students worked with small groups of bilingual learners, including those at the associate primary schools. This provided important development opportunities for the senior pupils and their groups of learners.
- The school introduced Access 3 and Intermediate 1/2 ESOL classes to provide bilingual learners with opportunities to gain accreditation for English as a second language. These classes were timetabled and staffed flexibly.
- Time was also allocated to a class teacher to support and monitor the work of bilingual learners. This provided one member of staff with responsibility for monitoring pupils’ progress and for reporting progress and any concerns quickly to guidance and senior promoted staff.

As a result of these strategies, bilingual learners have become active members of the learning community and an asset to the school.

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