



**Alloa Academy
Clackmannanshire Council
8 December 2009**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents¹, young people and the local community know whether their school provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with school staff how they can improve the quality of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the headteacher and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities which young people are involved in. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well young people are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and young people work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support young people. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from young people, parents and staff, and details about young people's examination performance. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school and a report on the learning community surrounding the school.

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

Contents

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. Example of good practice
4. How well do young people learn and achieve?
5. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?
6. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?
7. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?
8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
9. What happens next?

1. The school

Alloa Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the town of Alloa. The roll was 824 when the inspection was carried out in October 2009. The school recently opened an enhanced provision to cater for 21 young people with additional support needs who moved to the school when Fairfield School was closed. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Courteous, friendly young people who cooperate well with each other in learning.
- Young people's success in developing confidence and contributing to the life of the school.
- Flexible and effective approaches to encourage all young people to engage positively with learning.
- Well planned and coordinated approaches of the integrated pupil support department to meeting the needs of young people, including those with additional support needs.
- Commitment of the management team and the staff's active contribution to school improvement.

3. Example of good practice

- Alternative Curriculum Education (ACE).

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Young people have positive attitudes to work and behave well. They respond well to teachers' questions and demonstrate good knowledge in many subjects. Many are confident and skilled in using information and communications technology (ICT) in their learning. They respond very well to regular opportunities to work independently or together in groups. In a growing number of subjects, young people give helpful comments to each other on how to improve aspects of their learning and coursework. In many classes and activities, young people are encouraged to share their ideas, opinions and take responsibility for their learning. Relationships between staff and young people are very

positive. Across the school, young people are treated with equality, fairness and respect. Young people from the enhanced provision have settled well into the school and along with the other young people feel safe and well cared for.

Young people are developing their confidence, interpersonal and organisational skills through teamwork, practical problem solving and helping others. They have many opportunities to gain confidence and take on responsibilities through, for example, involvement in trips to places of interest including the First World War battlefields and Brussels. In addition, many are involved in eco groups, citizenship, and sporting events including the highly successful Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Young people in S1 demonstrated their skills for learning, life and work through their organisation of and involvement in the learning festival involving children from local primary schools. Young people in S5/S6 showed their commitment to the school and wider community through buddying, peer mediation, community service and sports leadership with P2 and P5 children. The school has recognised the need to track the involvement and achievement of all young people to increase progress and the impact of their wider achievements on their learning.

In the last two years, a number of young people have entered S1 with lower attainment levels than in the past. However, most make appropriate progress in reading and writing by the end of S2. The majority make appropriate progress in mathematics. Attainment overall has improved, although levels are still below national expectations. There is scope to improve how effectively the school tracks their progress in other areas of the curriculum from P7 to S2. Those who have additional support needs are making very good progress. Young people's examination results in S4, S5 and S6 are generally in line with those in schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Over the last three years, the achievement of young people at S6 who gain three or more Highers and one or more Advanced Highers has improved. The school has clear plans to raise attainment at all levels.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum has important strengths which enable young people to acquire a broad range of skills and to develop these progressively from stage to stage. Most young people's needs are well met by the range of courses offered. Teachers have worked with other subject departments, particularly at S1/S2, to successfully develop joint approaches in taking forward *Curriculum for Excellence*. These included, amongst others, a 'Scottish Day', 'Environmental Day' and 'Disaster Day'. Staff have made a good start in looking at how young people's skills in literacy and numeracy are being developed across their areas of study. The time allocated to good quality physical education from S1 to S4 is nearly in line with the national expectation but is insufficient in S5/S6. Provision for religious education and personal and social education at S5/S6 is insufficient. A small number of young people at S3/S4 develop important skills for work through attendance at college and by undertaking a range of non-SQA courses in their curriculum. All young people involved in the Alternative Curriculum Education (ACE) programme enjoyed success and went on to positive destinations. Teachers within the enhanced provision are making good use of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), Duke of Edinburgh and SQA Access qualifications to accredit the achievements of the young people they work with.

Staff know young people very well and successfully adapt the curriculum to ensure good progress in learning. Classwork is well matched to meet the needs of almost all learners including young people in the enhanced provision. Most teachers set clear learning targets for individual pupils and these are reviewed on a regular basis. Overall, teachers give clear instructions and explanations and the pace of learning is appropriate. Staff responsible for supporting learning provide teachers with very helpful information and advice about meeting the additional support needs of individual learners. The support for learning staff and pastoral care staff work very successfully together. They know young people and their families very well and are very responsive to their needs. Staff in the support base are working

very well with young people who are at risk of missing out. A range of well-planned initiatives ensure that young people having difficulties, and young people with English as an additional language, get the support they need. Young people working on specific learning targets within individualised educational programmes are making very good progress in their learning. Young people in the enhanced provision are supported by a wide range of specialist resources to help their communication. Across the school and in the enhanced provision, classroom and support assistants give young people with a wide range of difficulties, well measured and targeted help.

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

The school has successfully integrated young people from Fairfield School and involved their parents in the life of Alloa Academy. Staff work well with a wide range of partner agencies to enable young people to make successful progress in their learning. Most parents are happy with the school and feel they are kept well informed about the progress of their child. Parent focus groups have successfully contributed their views to help the school review aspects of its work. The school works closely with the Parent Council to ensure it is fully involved in all aspects of the life and work of the school. The school has effective arrangements for dealing with complaints.

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

Young people are very positive about the range of opportunities they have to be involved in the school community. Since August 2007, young people have been involved in focus groups which give important feedback to teachers on their learning experiences and aspects of courses. Teachers regularly visit colleagues' classes and are effective in sharing good practice. Good systems are in place to evaluate the quality of learning, teaching and young people's progress. These are helping directly to improve the school. The school recognises that it should continue to focus on ensuring improvements in attainment.

Many members of staff and young people have enthusiastically taken on leadership roles to develop aspects of the work of the school. These include a strong culture of volunteering with young people contributing to the enhanced provision, the support base and the highly successful Health Spot initiative.

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

Alloa Academy is very welcoming and staff provide a high standard of care. Young people respond well to the staff's high expectations of their learning and behaviour. They feel that teachers encourage them to work to the best of their ability and treat them fairly. All members of staff have very positive relationships with young people and show care and concern for their wellbeing, dealing well with any incidents which may occur. The school actively promotes healthy living. Many young people take part in out-of-class activities and school clubs. School lunches encourage them to make healthy choices in eating. Staff are very active in promoting equality through raising awareness of global citizenship and of the rights and responsibilities of young people. The school has appropriate arrangements for religious observance. Young people understand the importance of respect for others and value the sense of community in the school.

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

Senior managers are very committed to the school and make it clear that they expect all young people to achieve the best they can. Working as a team, they have been very effective in bringing about recent improvements. Senior managers, faculty heads and principal teachers have worked successfully with staff and young people across the school to improve achievement and relationships, attendance and behaviour. All members of the school community are clear about the next steps necessary to fulfil the vision they have for the school. The school is well placed to continue to improve.

9. What happens next?

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The education authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its school.

We have agreed the following area for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Continue to improve young people's attainment and further develop arrangements for progressing their wider achievements.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How good is our school?*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Alloa Academy.

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Improvements in performance | good |
| Learners' experiences | very good |
| Meeting learning needs | very good |

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

| | |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------|
| The curriculum | good |
| Improvement through self-evaluation | very good |

HM Inspector: David M Martin

8 December 2009

When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

| | | |
|----------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| excellent | means | outstanding, sector leading |
| very good | means | major strengths |
| good | means | important strengths with some areas for improvement |
| satisfactory | means | strengths just outweigh weaknesses |
| weak | means | important weaknesses |
| unsatisfactory | means | major weaknesses |

If you would like to find out more about our inspections or get an electronic copy of this report, please go to www.hmie.gov.uk.

Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation, or if you wish to comment about any aspect of our inspections. You can contact us at HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk or write to us at BMCT, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Text phone users can contact us on 01506 600 236. This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as the line will not connect you to a member of staff.

You can find our complaints procedure on our website www.hmie.gov.uk or alternatively you can contact our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

Crown Copyright 2009
HM Inspectorate of Education