



**Bell Baxter High School
Cupar
Fife Council
5 May 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school. We describe how young people benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents¹ and services which support young people. We also comment on how well staff and young people work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the 'ethos' of the school. By 'ethos' we mean the relationships in the school, how well young people are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school's aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school's success in achieving these 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 and details about young people's examination performance. 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.

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1. The school

Bell Baxter High School is a non-denominational school which serves the town of Cupar and the surrounding villages. The roll was 1820 when the inspection was carried out in February 2009. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Young people's wider achievements.
- Strong partnerships within and beyond the school to enrich young people's learning and achievement and meet their needs.
- The school's positive climate and the ways young people interact with one another and with staff.
- The headteacher's commitment to maintain and improve the quality of learning across the school.

3. Examples of good practice

- *Waulking Songs*, a creative collaborative production involving drama, music and enterprise.
- *Science Screencasting*.
- Department/Faculty Supported Review Programme.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Young people are very well behaved and friendly. They are polite and considerate towards others. They feel safe and well cared for in school and are treated fairly by staff. They work confidently on individual and group tasks and readily discuss new topics with their teachers and each other. As they progress through the school, they improve their learning and social skills. In many lessons, teachers give young people very helpful feedback on their learning. They also set learning targets which help young people to progress further. In a number of subjects, teachers use young people's views to improve

learning and teaching. The school needs to build on this good practice and spread it more widely across the school.

Young people achieve success, develop informed attitudes and become self confident through a wide range of activities in the school and community. In S1 and S2, young people have learnt responsibility through mentoring P7 children during transition visits. Almost all develop their citizenship and leadership skills by leading or taking part in fundraising activities or community environment projects. Many young people benefit from being involved in the wide range of sporting activities provided by the school including gymnastics, cricket, karate, football and rugby. The senior boys' rugby team has achieved significant success in local and national competitions. The charities group has raised significant funds for local and international charities. Foreign trips have raised young people's awareness of cultural diversity. Those taking part in the World Challenge Project helped build a science classroom in a school in Tanzania. Young people at the senior stage express themselves well and demonstrate the ability to take the initiative and lead. The school is aware of young people's levels of involvement in wider activities and is now ready to track what they achieve more formally.

At S1/S2, many teachers build very effectively on young people's previous learning, with strong progress being made in a number of subjects. The majority of young people in S1/S2 achieve appropriate national standards in writing and mathematics, and most do so in reading. Young people's skills in writing and mathematics are improving. Young people's results in national examinations in S4 to S6 have been maintained over a number of years at a consistently high level, above the national average. Results are in line with or below those in other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Young people undertaking project work in the community and attending college are making good progress. Almost all young people are successful when leaving school in finding places at university, college or employment.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum has major strengths and offers young people a very good choice of courses and out-of-class activities. Teachers plan well together to provide good opportunities for young people to develop their interpersonal, enterprise and teamworking skills. Recent examples of such opportunities include a food and drink technology challenge in S2 and a cross-curricular Fair Trade project. The school works very effectively with the local college and community partners to increase learning and career opportunities for young people. These arrangements add to the other very effective work which teachers do to help young people leave school and prepare for employment. Almost all young people receive sufficient physical education through the school curriculum. The school is taking steps to monitor the extent to which out of school physical activity contributes to young people's health and well being. Young people have too little time for religious and moral education at S5/S6. The school has strong pastoral and improving curricular links with local primary schools. The school is well placed to continue to develop its curriculum in line with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence.

The school is very successful at meeting young people's learning needs. Most staff pitch tasks and activities well to meet individual needs. They are working to improve the level of challenge in learning further at S1/S2. A few teachers are using innovative ways to provide young people with feedback on their learning, for example by using technology to provide helpful oral feedback on progress. Specialist teachers, including guidance and support for learning staff, identify young people's learning, social and behavioural needs very well. They provide very useful information to class teachers to help them support young people's learning. Very effective additional support is provided to young people and their families by the multi-agency group. In addition, young people in S6 provide valuable support as mentors to their younger peers. As a result of these successful approaches, those who require support for their learning, including those who are vulnerable, make good progress and achieve well.

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

Strong partnerships with local businesses, Elmwood College, Kilmaron School and local community groups are improving young people's achievement and citizenship skills. Young people benefit well from these partnerships. The Community Safety Group works closely with the school to improve young people's awareness of safe driving. The school consults parents about school priorities through the parent council, newsletters, questionnaires and parent evenings. It has very positive relationships with its parent council and it involves them in improving the school. The school is examining actively new ways to seek parents' views and involve them further in improving the school. The school has effective arrangements in place for addressing the small number of complaints it receives.

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

Staff and young people are very successful in improving the school community. Staff are committed to improving the quality of learning and gather regularly the views of young people and their parents. They use this and other information to help them improve the school. For example, target-setting and mentoring for young people at S5 is having a significant impact on attainment. Staff and community partners actively plan and review the impact of their joint work on improving young people's personal and social development. Young people speak very highly of the valuable contributions these community partners make to their learning in school and in the community. For example, young people involved with the Cupar Fairtrade group apply learning gained from this community initiative to lead school Fairtrade events. Young people take the lead in school activities by organising year assemblies, fundraising activities and weekly reports on school life for the local newspaper. The student council makes a good contribution and has been successful in achieving improvements to social areas around the school, including the dining hall. The wide range of staff development opportunities

both in and out of school are used well to share practice and further improve effective approaches to learning and teaching across the school. Staff have developed an innovative approach to supporting improvement across the school. This approach involves a range of staff and young people in reviewing the quality of learning and teaching in departments and agreeing steps for improvement.

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

Relationships between staff and young people are positive and founded on an ethos of mutual respect. Almost all young people think that teachers encourage them to work to the best of their ability and to improve their health and wellbeing. The school celebrates young people's successes in a range of ways including through the school magazine, praise awards and the weekly article in the local newspaper. School assemblies, led by young people, regularly feature examples of achievement. Teachers celebrate successful learning by displaying examples of work in classrooms and around the school. Young people are motivated by these displays. Young people would like more opportunities to put forward their views and be more involved in decision making. They have appropriate opportunities for religious observance. The school recognises the need to develop further opportunities for young people to explore equality and diversity.

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

The school is very well led. In the two years since the headteacher took up post, he has provided strong and visionary leadership. This leadership sets high ambitions and expectations for young people's achievement. The senior leadership team support the headteacher well and have worked hard to improve learning for young people. Teamwork among the new curriculum leaders and other staff is achieving important improvements across the school. Staff have a shared understanding of effective learning and teaching. They have reviewed the curriculum at whole school and subject level, and are now planning to use the principles of Curriculum for Excellence to improve achievement for all young people and equip them better for

the future. The school needs to continue to increase the role of young people, parents, staff and community partners in school improvement.

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

- Continue to involve young people, parents, staff and community partners in improving the school.
- Build further on best practice in learning and teaching across the school to improve all young people's learning experiences.

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 Bell Baxter High School.

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

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

The curriculum	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

HM Inspector: Fiona Robertson

5 May 2009

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

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

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