



**Braes High School
Falkirk Council
25 August 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

Braes High School is a non-denominational school which serves the Reddingmuirhead area of Falkirk and neighbouring villages. The roll was 1049 when the inspection was carried out in June 2009. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- A strongly improving school due to the hard work of staff under the effective leadership of the senior managers.
- Young people's commitment to developing a positive school ethos.
- The school's progress in developing leadership opportunities for young people.
- Partnership working with a range of external agencies to support young people's learning.
- Support from specialist staff for particular learning needs.

3. Examples of good practice

- Building ethos and values.
- Leadership through House Activities.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Almost all young people are motivated well to learn. They have increasingly high-quality and interesting learning experiences which encourage them to participate actively and independently in their learning. Most young people are confident in learning and respond well to opportunities to work together and express their views. From S3 onwards, they have clear learning targets and are beginning to use these to improve their work. In several subjects, young people value

the very helpful feedback they receive about their learning. This feedback needs to be further developed and adopted more widely across the school.

Young people achieve success and develop additional skills through a wide range of out-of-class learning experiences. A significant number show responsibility, citizenship and leadership skills by taking on extra duties in school. Junior prefects at S1 to S3 organise fundraising events and support staff at parents' evenings. At S3, those young people who go on the Columba 1400 or 'Common Purpose' programme gain valuable leadership skills. Young people at S5/S6 act as class mentors to their younger peers across the school. They take the initiative to lead fundraising activities and to provide varied opportunities for their younger peers to explore their talents in inter-house challenges. As a result, young people feel a sense of personal achievement and increased self-confidence. Large numbers also participate in residential experiences, school performances and visits to cultural and other special events to broaden their learning. Individuals and groups have achieved considerable success at local and national level in basketball, music and debating competitions. The school is well placed to build on the success of these opportunities and increase their reach as it begins to record young people's achievements more formally.

Most young people at S1/S2 achieve appropriate national standards in mathematics, and the majority do so in reading and writing. Young people's skills in listening, talking and writing are improving. The school does not have a consistent approach to measuring progress by the end of S2 in other subjects. From S4 to S6, results in national examinations are in line with or below national averages. At S4 attainment varies from less well to better than that of schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. At S5/S6, results are in line with or better than schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Those studying vocational courses and a range of units at college are not having enough success. Young people who require additional support are making

very good progress. Most young people leave school to continue their education or to go into employment.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The school's vision and values provide a sound basis for the curriculum. Young people study a broad range of subjects from S1 to S6. The school has improved the curriculum to prepare young people well for life and to meet their learning needs. At S3/S4, staff have successfully introduced the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). At S5/S6, effective new courses include dance, sport leadership and an industry-recognised course in computing networking. The school has widened the choice of courses through effective links with other local schools, colleges and community groups. Staff have still to provide opportunities for young people to develop their skills in cross-curricular projects. At S1 to S4 young people receive two hours of physical education each week in line with national advice. At S5/S6, they do not benefit from a continuing experience in physical education or religious and moral education. Across the school, staff are at the early stages of developing the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*.

The majority of teachers use assessment well to adapt work, including homework, to meet the different needs and interests of young people. In a few classes, tasks and activities are not challenging enough to ensure that all young people make good progress. Many teachers need to build more directly on what young people have learned at primary school. Specialist support for learning staff are highly skilled and effective at meeting the pastoral and specific learning needs of young people who require additional support.

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

Strong partnerships with local businesses and community groups are improving young people's achievement and citizenship skills. For example, a recent youth fair has improved young people's participation

in local youth clubs and activities. Parents receive helpful information about the school's work, including sensitive health education issues, and informative reports on their children's progress. The school responds appropriately to concerns and complaints. The active Parent Council is working with the school to find ways of involving parents more in young people's learning. Arrangements for children at P7 moving to S1 help them to transfer with confidence. From S4 onwards, a strong transition programme prepares young people well for leaving school. Staff work very well with support services to help young people who require additional support.

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

Morale is high in the school. Staff and young people are working well to improve the school community. Many young people take the lead by organising year assemblies and fundraising activities, and by addressing environmental issues. The pupil council has helped to improve a social area and to establish junior prefects. Increasingly, staff collect young people's views on their learning experiences. Young people would like more of a say in improving the school, particularly their learning. Many staff contribute well to working groups and lead school developments. These duties develop their professional skills and help to improve learning and teaching. Many teachers and the senior management team are making good progress in developing ways to improve the quality of the school's work, for example by evaluating learning and teaching and, increasingly, through sharing good practice with colleagues. Teachers use examination results to help target improvements to courses and programmes. The school now needs to be more consistent in building on these examples of good practice and evaluating its work to achieve sustained improvement across all subjects.

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

The school promotes a strong culture of achievement and sets high standards for young people's behaviour and attendance. The use of 'restorative' practice is having a positive impact on reducing exclusions and improving attendance. Young people feel that they are treated fairly. They enjoy school and feel safe and well looked after. A number of ancillary staff have still to be trained in child protection. Staff and young people show an ethos of mutual respect. Young people are becoming increasingly proud of their school and the wider community. Young people's successes are celebrated through assemblies, newsletters and displays of their work around the school. Staff encourage young people to lead healthy lives. Large numbers of young people help staff to run school clubs and lunchtime activities such as badminton and football. The school, supported by local chaplains, is working towards providing sufficient religious observance. Young people are developing an appropriate understanding of equality, and respect for other cultures and faiths.

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

The school has been strongly led. Staff have a clear sense of common purpose and direction under the leadership of the headteacher and senior managers. This leadership of the school is highly regarded by staff and the community. Most faculty leaders are driving important improvements to learning in their departments. Other staff take on leadership roles in school improvement. For example through involvement in working groups and in their roles as 'lead' teachers as part of an authority initiative. The school is well placed to continue to improve.

9. What happens next?

We are confident that the school will be able to make the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. As a result, 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 improve attainment.
- Further improve the impact of self-evaluation on learning and teaching.
- Meet the learning needs of all young people consistently well across the curriculum.

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 Braes High School.

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

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

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	good

HM Inspector: Fiona Robertson

25 August 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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