



**Dornoch Academy
The Highland Council
26 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

Dornoch Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the town of Dornoch and the surrounding area. The roll was 275 in March 2009 when the inspection was carried out. Young people's attendance was above the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Progress made with implementing *Curriculum for Excellence*.
- The well-planned programme for vocational education.
- Arrangements to support vulnerable young people.
- The commitment of all staff to all aspects of school life.
- Well-behaved and well-motivated young people.
- The headteacher's vision for the school and its community and his strong leadership of school improvement.

3. Examples of good practice

- Implementing *Curriculum for Excellence*.
- Vocational education.
- Partnerships to promote achievement for all and to support vulnerable young people.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Young people enjoy learning and co-operate very well with their teachers. Most think that they are treated fairly and with respect and that that they are achieving well. Young people often work successfully in pairs or in groups to develop their learning and respond well to regular opportunities to work independently. They get good feedback on their progress and strengths as learners from most teachers. In a minority of lessons, young people do not yet have enough opportunities to participate actively or think for themselves.

Young people have regular opportunities to give their views on the life and work of the school. Most feel that teachers pay attention to what they say.

Young people regularly take on responsibilities and contribute very actively to the life of the school and the wider community. They readily accept a variety of leadership roles. Across all stages, they are successfully developing personal and social skills through a wide range of well-planned activities. Almost all in S6 gain the Millennium Award for volunteering in an assortment of activities. Almost all in S3 are successfully developing new skills through participating in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Approximately half of young people in S2 successfully learned about sustainability and environmental issues in a residential event organised by the Challenger Trust. The Eco Group helps young people to understand how to maintain and improve the school and its local environment. Enterprise activities at all stages successfully give young people the chance to contribute to a wide range of charities.

In S1/S2, the majority of young people achieve appropriate standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion attaining these standards has declined over the last three years. There are signs of improvement in both reading and writing in the current session. From S3 to S6, young people's attainment is consistently above or well above the national average. Results are much better than schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Results in Standard Grade biology, geography, history and physical education and in Higher biology and mathematics are consistently well above national averages. Young people with additional support needs make very strong progress and successfully achieve their learning targets.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum is designed to enable young people to reach their full academic and personal potential. In recent years, all staff have been involved in planning and evaluating a number of new developments to

ensure that the learning needs of all young people are well met. For example, an imaginative and well-structured vocational programme enables around a quarter of young people in S4 to develop core skills and skills for work relevant to their local area. All young people in S1 to S4 study drama with the aim of developing their confidence. The school has made significant progress with introducing *Curriculum for Excellence*, including creative plans for a new curriculum structure in S1/S2, based on current strengths. Teachers have worked very effectively to develop young people's literacy across the curriculum and have begun to plan how to develop numeracy. Young people have benefited from a variety of well-planned inter-disciplinary projects. S1 follow a broad range of courses and make subject choices at the end of S1. In S2 to S4, the curriculum ensures that young people can study a suitable balance of subjects and make appropriate progress in their learning. In S5/S6, the range of Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher courses on offer is supplemented by an interesting range of distance learning and Open University options. The school has made good progress towards ensuring all young people get two hours of high quality physical education. Not all learners in S5/S6 study religious and moral education. The school recognises it needs to do more to ensure that young people build on what they have already learned when they enter S1.

Most teachers use a variety of teaching approaches and provide interesting and suitably challenging tasks to meet the needs of learners. They interact well with their pupils and give them helpful feedback to help them make progress in their learning. This good practice is not yet consistent enough across the school. Staff make outstanding arrangements for meeting the needs of the small number of young people with significant additional support needs and those at risk of missing out. As a result, these young people achieve notable success. Staff are alert to short-term barriers to learning including family circumstances and personal difficulties, and address these quickly through effective teamwork.

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

The school is held in high regard by its community and serves as an important community hub. Successful partnerships with community groups provide motivating and enriching learning experiences for young people, both during and out of school hours. For example, a youth worker from a local voluntary organisation provides support for young carers and advice to pupils on internet safety. Partners provide very effective help for young people with additional support needs. The Parent Council has played a leading role in raising funds for a new sports hall for the school and its community. The school needs to do more to consult parents on their views and to let them know how they can support their children's learning. The school is developing a complaints policy to ensure that all parents understand what to do if they wish to complain.

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

The school has regularly asked young people for their views on their learning and their opportunities within the school community and has acted upon them effectively. The pupil council has been successful in improving aspects of the well-maintained school buildings and amenities for young people. Staff make an exceptional voluntary contribution to young people's learning through lunchtime, after school, evening, weekend and residential activities. They regularly reflect on their work and take part in formal self-evaluation at department and whole-school level. They have opportunities to develop professionally and to contribute to school improvement through serving on working groups and taking on extra responsibilities. Teachers observe each other in lessons with the aim of sharing good practice. Senior staff need to carry out a more formal programme of lesson observations. This will support more effective sharing of good practice across the school and ensure that any areas of weakness are recorded and addressed. There is scope for faculty heads to be more fully involved in analysing and reporting on

examination results and taking action to ensure improvements where necessary.

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

There are positive relationships between staff and pupils, amongst staff and between the school and parents. Young people are very well behaved. In almost all cases, staff have high expectations of their standards of work and behaviour. Young people's successes are recognised and celebrated well. The school promotes healthy lifestyles effectively. Pupil support staff monitor young people's attainment and progress regularly. They follow up concerns and help young people set learning targets. They successfully identify personal support needs and respond to these effectively. Staff now need to develop more effective systems for recording, monitoring and responding to any incidents. The school has appropriate arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. The programme for personal and social education should be improved to ensure that young people have suitable opportunities to develop their understanding of equality issues.

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

The headteacher promotes a vision for the school that places young people at the centre of its work and the school as a key resource for its community. His thoughtful leadership has won him the support of staff and parents. He has provided a strong lead for curriculum development and has successfully encouraged and developed leadership amongst staff at all levels. The headteacher is ably supported by the depute headteacher who makes a very effective contribution in the areas of pupil support and health promotion. Overall, faculty heads provide effective leadership in their respective areas.

9. What happens next?

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we shall 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.

- Improve attainment in English and mathematics in S1/S2.
- Continue to improve approaches to self-evaluation to ensure consistently high quality learning and teaching across the school.

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 Dornoch Academy.

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

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

The curriculum	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	good

HM Inspector: Jane B Renton

26 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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