



**Earlston High School
Berwickshire
Scottish Borders Council
18 May 2010**

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 there will also be 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

Earlston High School is a non-denominational school which serves the town of Earlston and surrounding rural area. The roll was 898 when the inspection was carried out in March 2010. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2008/2009. The school moved into a new building in August 2009.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Young people's very positive attitudes to learning, and their genuine pride in and commitment to their school.
- The stimulating and inclusive learning environment supported by high-quality facilities.
- The consistently high standards of attainment at S4 to S6.
- The wide range of partnerships which enhance young people's learning experiences and meet their needs well.
- The capacity of staff to provide high-quality learning experiences, bring about improvement and promote a culture of ambition.
- The inspirational leadership of the headteacher who, with senior managers, sets appropriately high standards for the school.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Almost all young people are keen to learn and actively engage in tasks. They carry out research successfully, tackle practical problems well and think creatively. They work together very well. Young people often use what they have learned to develop informed views and to discuss and share ideas. Young people's confident use of information and communications technology (ICT) is helping to develop their independence and study skills. Young people make good use of helpful feedback from teachers and each other to set personal targets and plan how to improve. Staff should continue to build on the high level of this effective practice across the school. Young people would benefit from a greater say in how to improve their learning experiences further.

Many young people are developing their leadership and teamwork skills well through a wide range of activities. A significant number confidently perform and display their musical and artistic talents in school shows and community events. Many young people have been successful, individually and in teams, in local and national competitions. Young people broaden their view of the world and develop personally and socially through a range of local, national and international excursions. Young people, particularly in the upper school, take on a high level of responsibility and actively support the life and work of the school. For example, they support younger pupils in classes, participate in a range of committees and organise popular events. Personal achievements are recognised through awards such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The school is beginning to track young people's achievements and the impact of these experiences on their broader skills for life.

A majority of young people achieve appropriate national levels in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of S2. At all stages, young people have well-developed listening and talking skills. Overall, young people make good progress in their learning across their subject areas by the end of S2. From S4 to S6, attainment in national examinations has been maintained at a consistently high level over a number of years. Overall, at these stages, young people's results in national examinations are above or well above national averages. Their results are better than those in other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Young people with additional support needs are making good progress. Those participating in the Prince's Trust Award Scheme and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards are making very good progress. Most young people leave school to go to university, college, training or into employment. Over half of those who leave school enter higher education.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum is developed and reviewed regularly to offer a wide range of choices for young people to meet their needs and interests. It successfully reflects the nature of the school's population. Young people can study a broad range of subjects and make appropriate progress in their learning at a suitable pace. The school uses flexible approaches such as distance learning through on-line partnerships to meet individual needs well. It has introduced a few well-considered projects to help young people make links in their learning. For example, three departments effectively link learning through a popular "memory box" project. The school has established very effective pastoral transition arrangements for young people entering S1. It is continuing to develop curricular links to enable young people to build effectively on their prior achievements. Staff have made a start in examining how young people's skills in literacy and numeracy are being developed across their areas of study. Not all young people yet benefit from two hours of physical education after S1. The school should review its provision of religious and moral education at S5/S6.

Most tasks and activities meet a range of needs very well. Young people are highly motivated by a variety of well-planned learning approaches. Successful approaches include academic mentoring and target-setting, with a focus on improving attainment. Teachers use ICT very well across subjects to stimulate and develop learning. The increasing use of Glow, Scotland's national schools' intranet, is supporting young people's learning both in school and at home. Staff in guidance, learning and behaviour support provide very effective pastoral and curricular support for young people. Individualised educational programmes for a few young people need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that all targets are appropriate.

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

The school has many positive links with external partners to support learning and young people with additional needs. For example, members of the Borders Disability Forum work with young people in S1 to successfully raise their awareness of disability. Increased communication and planning between the school and its partners would make sharing of information more effective and ensure maximum benefit for young people. The supportive Parent Council has worked closely with the school to ensure a successful move to the new building. Parents receive helpful information through the "Bugle" newsletter, school website, local press and progress reports. They do not yet receive enough information about when sensitive aspects of relationships and health education are to be covered. Effective links with associated primaries have allowed the introduction of a very popular P7/S1 travel project involving all subject areas. This has helped young people to settle well in S1.

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

Young people enthusiastically take on roles with responsibilities for others, such as acting as buddies. The media group successfully promotes the school in the local press. The representative pupil council discusses a range of school issues. They have been the driving force behind securing new furniture and creating social areas which double well as study areas. A number of young people feel the pupil council could develop their role further to become more involved in school improvement. Staff contribute very well to the life of the school. Many run out-of-class activities, provide extra study classes and are involved in school improvement groups. They are keen to share good practice and develop their skills. Staff are involved in identifying, setting and reviewing improvement priorities. The school successfully uses a wide range of appropriate approaches to evaluate its work and uses the results to focus on improving learners' experiences. The school asks young people,

parents, staff and community partners for their views but could involve them more in planning for improvement.

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

Young people are courteous, well behaved and are genuinely proud of their school. They are learning in a bright and stimulating environment. Most feel safe, well cared for and that they are treated fairly. Relationships between staff and young people are strong in a climate of mutual respect. Staff encourage young people to make choices that support a healthier lifestyle. The school regularly celebrates achievement in a wide variety of ways. This includes a “Hall of Fame” which successfully recognises the achievements of staff and young people both in and out of school. The school has appropriate procedures in place for child protection and dealing with complaints. It needs to increase opportunities for religious observance.

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

The headteacher provides inspirational leadership through modelling strong practice and enabling others to achieve their best. She maintains very high levels of trust and respect across the school and community. Depute headteachers and the business manager have a blend of complementary skills. They work very effectively as a senior management team with the headteacher to set high standards. They each know the school well and successfully lead aspects of school improvement. Leadership is shared across the school through many enthusiastic, highly-motivated and committed staff and young people.

8. What happens next?

The inspection team was able to rely on the school’s robust self-evaluation. As a result, it was able to change its focus during the inspection to support further improvements within the school.

The school provides a very good quality of education. Therefore, 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 areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Continue to develop the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*.
- Further involve young people, parents, staff and community partners in planning for improvement.
- Review arrangements for religious observance.

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 Earlston 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: Marie McAdam
18 May 2010

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

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