



**Elgin Academy
The Moray Council
17 November 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.

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1. The school

Elgin Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the north area of Elgin. The roll was 979 when the inspection was carried out in September 2009. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008. Two new depute headteachers had recently been appointed.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Young people who are well behaved, polite and keen to learn.
- The care and concern shown towards young people by staff.
- Involvement of young people in voluntary and community work.

3. Example of good practice

- Innovative approaches to improving travel to school and road safety.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Across the school young people are willing to learn and work well with each other and with staff. They are becoming more confident learners by working in groups and using information and communications technology to research tasks and present findings. The majority of teachers help young people to understand how to improve their work. Young people readily take on roles of responsibility within the school, such as the new house captains. Most young people enjoy learning, are happy and feel staff encourage them to do the best they can. Teachers should give more consideration to the views of young people when planning tasks and activities which help them to learn.

Many young people achieve well in a range of activities. For

example, they have successfully encouraged more people to cycle to school, and developed their confidence through presentations to adults and children in primary schools. They contribute to the school and wider community by displaying their work in Moray Arts Centre, Elgin Library and at the annual school art exhibition. Other cultural achievements include participating in orchestras and choirs, including the new African choir. They develop their social skills well through residential trips to places such as Holland and Germany. They work together effectively by participating in a range of sporting activities such as trampolining, football, netball and surfing. The successful school show 'Noises Off' encouraged many young people to take part in the life of the school. A few young people have developed their understanding of global citizenship through a residential visit and a lasting link with a school in South Africa.

By the end of S2, the majority of young people achieve appropriate national standards in reading, writing and mathematics. A few do not make sufficient progress from prior levels of attainment. The school does not have sufficient information on how well young people in S1 and S2 progress in their learning. In recent years, the success of young people in S4, S5 and S6 in national examinations has generally been in line with or above national averages. There has been an improving trend. In S4, the school performs generally in line with other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. It performs less well than such schools at S5/S6 but there is an improving trend in this area. Most young people leave school for university, college, employment or training.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Staff offer a good range of activities and courses for young people to take part in, including innovative approaches such as the S2 Learning Challenge, Smartskills and International Week. The school is improving its links with local primary schools to help young people make better progress in their learning as they move from P7 to S1. From S3, young people choose from an appropriately wide range of options to build on their prior learning. At S5 and S6 young

people broaden their education further. A number of young people have the opportunity to gain valuable skills for work through courses delivered at Moray College. Staff are in the early stages of planning for *Curriculum for Excellence*. They are improving how young people develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the school. They offer opportunities for young people to improve their health and wellbeing through activities such as an innovative approach to encouraging cycling to school. At S3 to S6 the school does not provide sufficient physical education. At S5/S6 the school does not provide sufficient religious and moral education.

Most teachers identify the learning needs of young people well. However, too often teachers provide all young people with the same activity and need to take more account of the range of learning needs in their classes. In particular, they need to provide tasks and activities set at the right level for the highest achieving young people. Teachers and support staff do not work well enough together, or use an appropriate range of approaches and skills, to help young people to learn and make progress. Individual and small group tutorials do not have sufficient impact on the learning and progress of the young people who take part in them. The school should review how it uses information about young people's needs to plan their next steps in learning more effectively.

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

The school works well with the Parent Council in order to improve learning for young people. It deals with parental concerns effectively. Local partner organisations, such as Skill Force, feel increasingly welcomed and contribute well to young people's learning. The school is developing effective partnerships with local businesses to help young people improve their skills for work. Most young people know about wider opportunities to achieve offered within the community. The school is reviewing its approaches to homework to make sure parents have regular opportunities to help

their children learn at home. The school is increasing its range of partnerships. It would be helpful to consider how this can be used to best meet the needs of all young people.

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

Most staff reflect on how they teach and what improvements they can make. They are involved in improving the school through working groups, departmental and staff meetings. The new senior leadership team should continue to work closely with teachers to identify improvements and spread good practice. The school uses a number of methods to gather the views of staff, young people and parents. Staff should continue to use this information further to bring about improvements. Young people need more effective opportunities to have their say on how the school is improved. The pupil councils are not yet effective in making a difference to how young people learn and achieve. Lesson observations should be better planned and focus more on priorities identified by the whole school. Teachers and principal teachers need to make better use of a range of information, including tracking of attainment in S1 and S2, to help them to decide where improvements to learning and teaching are needed. All staff need to make sure that any improvements are monitored carefully and have a clear and measurable impact on teaching, learning and achievement.

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

The school ethos supports hard work, care and welfare. Young people behave very well and are proud of their achievements. They respect different cultures and have a good sense of equality and fairness. The new house assemblies are helping young people to share in each other's achievements well. The changes to uniform and the way senior pupils contribute to the school have increased

young people's pride in the school. Expectations for higher attaining young people and those with additional support needs should be higher. Young people feel safe in school and know they can discuss issues worrying them with a member of staff.

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

The headteacher has worked well with young people, parents and staff to develop an understanding of what the school wants to achieve. She is committed to improving the school and there have been some important developments to teaching and learning. She now needs to ensure improvements have a positive impact across the school. Young people have increasing opportunities to lead through being house captains, organising fundraising events and taking part in school working groups. Staff take up opportunities to lead in areas such as charring working groups and developing Teacher Learning Communities. The new senior leadership team should now involve everyone in the school and community to make sure the school achieves its aims and vision. Senior managers are becoming more effective in supporting departments to improve aspects of teaching and learning. They should now ensure that improvements are monitored carefully by all principal teachers and that they make a difference to teaching and learning.

9. What happens next?

We will carry out a follow-through inspection visit within one year of publication of this report and will report to parents on the extent to which the school has improved. Following that visit, we may continue to check the improvements the school has made. We may also carry out a second follow-through inspection within two years of the original inspection report. If a second follow-through inspection visit is necessary then it will result in another report to parents on the extent of improvement that the school has made.

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

- Improve self-evaluation to ensure it has a positive impact on teaching, learning and achievement across the school.
- Build team working across the school to meet the learning needs of all young people more effectively.
- Develop the skills and confidence of young people and staff to help them take a stronger role in school improvement.
- Develop partnership working to broaden young people's learning experiences and opportunities to achieve.

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 Elgin Academy.

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

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

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak

HM Inspector: David Gregory

17 November 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

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