



**The Gordonstoun Schools
Elgin
9 June 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school¹. 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 parents² and services which support young people. We also comment on how well staff, young people work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report also 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. You will also find descriptions of good practice in the school.

¹ The term 'school' is used to include the work of the junior and senior departments.

² Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, and carers who are relatives or friends.

Contents

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. Examples of good practice
4. How well do children and young people learn and achieve?
5. How well do staff work with others to support the learning of children and young people?
6. Are staff, children and young people actively involved in improving their school community?
7. Does the school have high expectations of all children and young people?
8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
9. What happens next?

1. The school

The Gordonstoun Schools provide independent, co educational, non-denominational education for young people aged between 8 and 13 years in Aberlour House junior school, and between 13 and 18 years in the senior school. A small number of international students in the senior school are 19-20 years of age. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 608, with 117 in the junior school and 491 in the senior school.

The integrated inspection of the residential accommodation by HMIE and the Care Commission took place at the same time. Five hundred young people were also boarders. The Gordonstoun Schools serve Scotland and many other countries.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Young people's well-developed confidence and their readiness to take on challenges in a wide range of situations.
- The quality of leadership and responsibility shown by young people in and beyond the classroom, and their wider achievements.
- The contributions young people make to the local and wider community through their service activities.
- Staff commitment to providing a broad and enriching education across all aspects of the school's work.
- The responsiveness of staff across the school to young people's individual strengths, needs and aspirations, and the quality of pastoral care.
- The lead given by the headmaster in encouraging a sense of community, where staff and young people collaborate very effectively across a broad range of activities.

3. Examples of good practice

- International and spiritual citizenship (ISC).
- Student Development Scheme.

4. How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

An outstanding feature of young people's learning is their readiness to engage in increasingly challenging situations, in and beyond the classroom. At all stages, young people are highly motivated and actively involved in their learning. They are hard working and respond very well to many teachers' enthusiasm for learning. They express their opinions and ideas confidently and are developing very effective skills in negotiation and decision making. Young people readily take responsibility for aspects of their learning and lead and contribute to group tasks very ably. A strong feature of their independent work is the creative and confident way they go beyond the initial outline of tasks and take their learning further. Across the stages, young people take the lead in stimulating, demanding and interesting activities which enhance their achievements, in and outwith the school. They feel valued, respected and very well cared for as individuals, by staff and each other.

Young people are developing very effective personal and social skills from their participation in an extensive range of sporting, cultural, outdoor and leisure activities. At all stages, young people are confident and articulate, exhibit responsible attitudes and play an active role in their boarding houses. Their wider achievements are of exceptional quality. The work done by young people to improve the environment, led by the *Aberlour Green Group*, has helped the school achieve silver status in the Eco-Schools Scotland scheme. Annual productions by students in the senior school demonstrate an impressive range of skills in drama, music and dance. Young people in the senior school show commendable reliability and commitment to community service, locally and on international projects. In addition, sail training expeditions develop confidence, team working, specific seamanship skills, and a high level of problem solving skills.

In Aberlour House, young people are making very good progress and are achieving well across their learning. Their language skills are

developing very well and they achieve high standards in written and oral work. They are making similarly good progress in mathematics and frequently use their well-established skills in calculation across the curriculum. In the senior school, standards in class work are high and young people perform very strongly in external examinations, especially at GCSE. At GCSE, most attain A* to C grades, and over a quarter of these awards are at A* or A. At A-level, almost all presentations lead to at least a pass with around half of these being A or B grades.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum provides outstanding opportunities for all young people to achieve success and develop strong moral values. The school uses young people's experiences of learning and boarding very effectively to develop them as well-rounded individuals, ready for the next stage of their life. The curriculum provides a very well-coordinated range of experiences across the day, evening and weekend. Young people have responsibility for making decisions and choices, to help them manage their commitments within a busy and varied curriculum. Staff review and adapt activities regularly to meet young people's needs. Each aspect of young people's experiences is well planned to consolidate and extend their learning. There are very effective transition arrangements to support young people as they progress through the school.

Activities and resources match the needs of almost all learners very well. Teachers are very responsive to young people's learning needs and develop and support young people sensitively and effectively. They help them to build on previous learning by talking to them about what and how they learn. The Student Development Scheme helps young people to identify their individual strengths and needs. Teachers are involving young people increasingly in deciding how to improve their learning and achievements and to set personal targets. A broad range of experiences across school life meets the emotional, physical, learning and social needs of young people very well. Staff in the support for learning and English as an Additional Language

departments help those with specific learning needs very effectively. Staff are very good at ensuring young people feel well supported when they start school and boarding.

5. How well do staff work with others to support the learning of children and young people?

Partnerships with the wider and international community extend young people's learning significantly, and their skills in creative problem solving, team working and enterprise. For example, the school has developed very productive links with other schools in the north of Scotland and further afield, to share good practice and develop leadership and mentoring skills. A distinctive feature of the school's partnerships is the breadth of experience which comes from involvement in local and international projects. For example, young people at Aberlour House are involved in hosting a Highland Games event and sporting events for local primary schools. The school is involved in a considerable number of projects to support communities in Africa. These include work done in Rwanda by young people in Year 12 and links to communities in Botswana and Uganda by young people in Year 10.

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

Young people's well-developed citizenship skills help them to make a positive impact on important aspects of the school. Staff value the views represented by council members, colour bearers, members of the 'eco' group and house committees. Informal discussions with teachers and more formal surveys by senior staff gather young people's views on learning and teaching, which help support improvements. A significant minority of young people would like more of a say in how to make their learning better. Staff give a commendable amount of time to developing young people's learning through wider experiences. The school benefits from the quality of

ideas for improvement which develop from the work young people and staff do together in wide-ranging activities. In the boarding houses, young people and staff regularly discuss and make improvements. Across the school, most staff feel actively involved in setting priorities to improve the school. Staff are highly committed to continuous improvement. Teachers use the findings of lesson visits by senior staff to build on effective practice or discuss improvements with young people. Senior staff now need to support teachers to share good practice more widely across the school. The refectory manager responds very positively to young people's views on how to improve menus and the presentation of food.

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

Young people and staff have high expectations of themselves and each other. They appreciate and celebrate successes and are proud of their schools. They benefit from the very high quality of teamwork and mutual support and respect across activities and in the boarding houses. Young people and staff gain from working together on challenges and in services which support wide achievement for all. Staff plan well to meet young people's health, social and emotional needs and clearly understand their responsibilities for child protection. The Student Development Scheme and the diaries used in Aberlour House help young people and staff to monitor progress and to plan improvements.

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

The school has a very clear vision which is shared very effectively with young people, parents and staff. It focuses on preparing young people to take a full and active role as international citizens in a changing world. Staff across the school help young people to achieve this aim by providing numerous opportunities to develop their talents and potential, experience challenges and to develop as rounded, confident

individuals. The headmaster provides inspiring leadership and is highly respected. He encourages staff and young people to take the lead and show initiative in a variety of situations and values their contributions to school life. Staff ensure their professional development helps them take action on priorities identified for improvement.

9. What happens next?

The school's self-evaluation is leading to improvement in children's learning. As a result, the inspection team was able to change its focus during the inspection to help the school plan to improve even more.

The school provides a very good quality of education. Therefore, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The Board of Governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of their arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of the school.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and Board of Governors.

- Continue with plans to share effective practice in learning and teaching.
- Build on existing arrangements and involve young people further in reviewing their progress and planning next steps in their learning.

Quality indicators help schools and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How good is our school?*.

Here are the evaluations for The Gordonstoun Schools.

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

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

The curriculum	excellent
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

Managing Inspector: Mary Ritchie
9 June 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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