



**Graeme High School
Falkirk Council
20 January 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

Graeme High School is a non-denominational school which serves an area of Falkirk and the adjacent communities of Polmont, Hallglen, Westquarter and Laurieston. The inspection was carried out in November 2008 at which time the roll was 1078. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2006/07.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Well-motivated and enthusiastic young people.
- A very positive ethos in classes and across the school.
- Effective support for young people with additional learning needs.
- Improving tracking and monitoring of young people's progress to help them achieve.
- Systematic and effective arrangements for self-evaluation.
- Strong leadership from the headteacher and good support from staff towards improving the school.

3. Examples of good practice

- Partnerships with local businesses and the wider community.
- The "Masterclass in the Marquee" community event.
- Study skills and support for young people at risk of under-achieving.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Young people in the school are confident, responsible and well motivated. They are very responsive to good teaching and take part enthusiastically in lessons, particularly when given the opportunity to work with each other. Most are performing well in classwork across the school. The positive ethos in classes encourages young people to be confident in asking questions about their learning and sharing their views on important issues. In some courses, they need to be given

more responsibility for their work and be more aware of how to improve their learning. In some areas they have evaluated their own success in learning and that of others. The school should build further on this good practice.

Many young people perform exceptionally well in the wide range of sporting, cultural and community-based activities offered by the school. Those who are members of the Scottish Football Association Academy are progressing well in their school work. Young people participating in the Skillforce initiative are improving their self-confidence and gaining skills for life and work. A high number of young people are volunteering and taking part in a wide range of community activities, including community sports leadership and working towards an Eco-Schools Scotland green flag award. The continuing priority for the school is to increase further the numbers who participate in them.

Overall attainment at S1 and S2 is improving. The majority of young people are achieving national targets in reading, writing and mathematics. Most are progressing well from their prior attainment. Those who have additional support needs are making steady progress from their previous levels of achievement. Young people's examination results at S4 have improved over the last three years, particularly in relation to those gaining Credit level awards. They compare favourably with those in other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. The school's priority is to improve the proportion gaining Higher awards at S5/S6. The school has clear plans to raise attainment through its effective study skills programme and by continuing to strengthen how it tracks young people's progress.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum offers suitable breadth and balance for most at S1 to S4. The core programmes in physical education and religious and moral education are very thoughtfully planned and meet young people's needs particularly well. The curriculum at S5/S6 has

improved with the introduction of a number of practical options, including community sports leadership, first aid and cooking for independent living. However, efforts should be made to provide more opportunities for young people in S5/S6 to gain access to physical education, religious and moral education and personal and social development. The school has sound plans for reviewing the curriculum in the light of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Staff have introduced a number of very successful innovations, such as the “Masterclass in the Marquee” community event, the Salon Services on-site vocational learning and the partnerships with Cala Homes and other local businesses. Many young people are benefiting from the well-judged approach used to develop practical and vocational skills.

Most teachers ensure an appropriate pace of learning and that tasks and resources meet young people’s learning needs. However, more challenging work needs to be given to higher-attaining young people. Those entering S1 are supported well by pupil support staff. Those with additional support needs are benefiting from the recent initiatives which are helping to improve their learning, attendance and behaviour. Support for learning teachers and classroom assistants are very good at helping individuals and groups, including those who attend the Pupil Support Base. Potentially vulnerable young people and their families also have very effective support from a range of partners, including the Barnardo’s Cluaran Service. There is a strong commitment from staff and the Integrated Learning Community partners towards promoting healthy lifestyles and a clear emphasis on healthy living across the school, including at the transition from primary school.

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

Staff work constructively with other agencies to support young people’s learning. The pupil support and support for learning teams communicate well with class teachers about strategies to support individual young people’s learning. In addition, the Integrated Learning Community Team and Active School’s co-ordinator work well with the school to help young people and their families. The links with Forth

Valley College and local businesses have provided more opportunities for young people. The school youth fair was a particularly successful event which helped young people to meet a wide variety of partner organisations. The school is improving and extending its partnership with parents and seeks their views on the school. The new headteacher is establishing a positive relationship with the Parent Council. The new style of standards and quality report has been well received by parents and presents the school's achievements and future priorities very clearly. Overall, parents feel that the school is a welcoming place and are confident about contacting staff if issues should arise. Parents are satisfied with the information they receive about the school, but would like to have a clearer understanding of the school's priorities for improving their children's education.

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

Young people and staff are highly committed to improving the school community. The pupil council works well across the year groups and is linked into the Falkirk pupil council. School and House captains and prefects have great pride in their work and provide informal support and pastoral care. Senior buddies provide support for younger learners through the house system. The school chaplaincy team is in regular contact with the school.

The school knows itself very well. There is an annual cycle of self-evaluation, including well-focused surveys of young people's views about their learning. Young people evaluate the quality of pastoral care, including their experience of form tutors, target-setting and the guidance system. Staff analyse attainment information well and regularly observe learning and teaching in faculties. Staff use the tracking and monitoring system well to check the progress of individuals and groups at risk of under achieving. Many staff observe each other teaching as part of building a directory of good practice. Evidence from surveys and analyses is used to set priorities in the school improvement plan and for teachers' continuing professional development. These arrangements have had a positive impact on

young people's attitudes to the school. This has resulted in an inclusive learning environment with reduced exclusions, improved attendance and increased attainment in S1 to S4.

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

The ethos of the school is very positive, with high staff expectations of young people's behaviour and attendance. The school's initiatives to promote positive behaviour, improve attendance and re-introduce school uniform are each having a beneficial impact on young people's motivation and self-confidence. A few staff now need to have higher expectations of young people's capacity to take responsibility.

Relationships between young people and teachers are very positive and constructive. Most young people feel they are treated fairly and with respect. A number of subjects including English, social subjects, modern foreign languages, and religious and moral education promote race equality and respect for cultural diversity very well. The school has suitable arrangements for religious observance involving its team of chaplains. Most young people feel safe and well cared for within the school. The school is accessible to users with restricted mobility.

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

In only six months in post, the headteacher has succeeded in developing good teamwork with staff and has provided very effective leadership. She has been well supported by the senior management team, principal teachers and other staff. The headteacher and staff have agreed suitable priorities for future improvement which build well on earlier work. These are set out well in the school improvement plan. The standards and quality report is clear and accurate, reflecting the very good arrangements for self-evaluation and quality assurance.

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 more visits in connection with this inspection. The school

and the education authority will inform parents about the school's progress in improving the quality of education. We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Continue to develop strategies to raise levels of attainment, particularly at S5/S6.
- Continue to develop the curriculum to meet young people's learning needs more effectively, particularly at S5/S6.
- Provide more challenging work across the school for higher attaining young people.

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 Graeme High School.

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

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

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

HM Inspector: Lachlan MacCallum 20 January 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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