



**Harlaw Academy
Aberdeen City Council
24 August 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.

Contents

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

1. The school

Harlaw Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the Ferryhill, Broomhill and Kaimhill areas of Aberdeen. The roll was 820, without the S1 cohort, when the inspection was carried out in June 2010. The school supports a high number of placing requests. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2008/2009. There is a specialist base for young people who have additional learning needs and a Mainstream Inclusion of Children on the Autistic Spectrum (MICAS) base. Places in the specialist bases are allocated by Aberdeen education service.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Overall levels of attainment in national examinations at S4 to S6.
- Well-behaved, polite and confident young people.
- The wide range of clubs and activities which enhance the learning experiences of young people.
- Positive relationships between staff and young people which create an effective climate for learning.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Almost all young people are well-behaved and ready to learn. They interact well with staff and learn through a variety of tasks which engage them in their learning. Staff use information and communications technology well to enhance lessons. Young people in the specialist bases participate very well in a range of enjoyable activities. They are very much part of the school community. Across the school, young people work well together when they have the opportunity to do so. They would benefit from more opportunities to work collaboratively on tasks which promote their thinking skills and creativity. Increasingly, young people are developing skills in evaluating their progress in learning but they are not yet clear how to improve their work. They need to develop better skills as independent learners. Most young people enjoy school. A number of trips and residential visits, as well as whole-school events such as the successful activities week, broaden their learning.

Many young people develop confidence and skills for life through a wide range of sporting and cultural activities. A few have gained

national or local recognition for academic excellence or sporting ability. Many develop their creativity by taking part in a range of successful bands and concerts for example. All young people at S3 develop their awareness of the world of work through accredited work experience. A few young people develop leadership skills through their role as form captains or through organising events such as the Forest Walk. An increasing number develop these skills through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and through being part of the Harlaw Leos. Young people are developing an awareness of good citizenship by fundraising for a range of charities. Those at S6 take part in a commitment programme which includes buddying. Young people across the stages need more opportunities to develop a range of citizenship skills. The school celebrates success very well. Staff should now find ways of assessing the impact of these achievements on young people's learning and development.

Most young people in the specialist learning bases attain well. By the end of S2, attainment across the school is improving overall and the majority of young people are attaining expected national levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The school does not have a clear view of young people's progress across other curricular areas. Almost all departments need to build more effectively on young people's work in primary school. Overall, by the end of S4, results in national examinations are in line with national averages and there is clear evidence that young people are making strong progress from previous levels of attainment. By the end of S6, performance at Higher and Advanced Higher levels is consistently above national averages. The school recognises the need to increase opportunities for young people to achieve other forms of accreditation and awards. The school should track young people's progress more rigorously to achieve a clearer view of progress across the whole curriculum.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

From S1 to S4, the school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. Young people in the specialist bases have a well-designed curriculum suited to their individual needs. Staff across the school are

increasingly providing opportunities for young people to develop skills in enterprise and citizenship. A few departments have begun to link learning across different subject areas. A significant number of young people are developing confidence and important life skills through a variety of courses at Aberdeen College. Effective links with a small number of local business partners have brought relevant skills for work into a few programmes within the curriculum. Young people do not yet have two hours of high-quality physical education per week. At S5/S6, the school provides a good number of courses at Higher level but a very limited number of courses at Intermediate level. This prevents a substantial number of young people from making suitable progress in their learning. Those who cannot study five appropriate subjects have a shortened school week. The school should take steps to work with the authority and partners to provide suitable programmes of study for all. The programme for religious and moral education should be continued into S5/S6. The school has made a good start to preparing for the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*. All departments have revised programmes of learning in place for the new S1 and the school is developing plans to build on this. All staff have considered their contribution to delivering literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

Staff provide a supportive learning environment. Most teachers provide clear explanations and use praise effectively. In most lessons, activities are pitched at an appropriate level and pace. However, in a number of classes, tasks do not match the learning needs of young people well enough. Staff do not consistently give homework to extend young people's learning. Within the specialist bases, young people are engaging in activities which are well suited to their needs and are developing skills as independent learners. Staff need to consider ways of meeting their learning needs in mainstream classes better. The pupil support base provides flexible help for young people with social, emotional or behavioural needs. Support for learning teachers and pupil support assistants work well with staff to help those who require extra support in their learning. Staff with responsibility for pastoral care know their young people very well. Support staff must ensure they all work together to deliver a fully coordinated package of

support. More children would benefit from an individual support plan.

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

The very supportive Parent Council represents the views of parents well. The headteacher keeps parents well informed about school events through helpful newsletters and information evenings. The school responds appropriately to any complaints. Parents would like more regular information on their child's progress and they welcome the introduction of personal learning planning. They would like to be more involved in the school's improvement planning. Staff have good pastoral links with their associated primary schools. The school engages positively with the local community through its charity work and has strong links with the school chaplains. The school nurse provides valuable, trusted support for young people. There is scope to involve partners and stakeholders more in promoting healthy lifestyles.

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

Form captains take young people's views on the school to the management team but many young people would like more say in how they learn. The school is aware of this and departments have started finding out the views of young people through focus groups. Young people would benefit from more opportunities to lead activities in the school. Staff are keen to support school improvement and many run well attended clubs outwith timetabled classes. The majority of staff are on working groups whose work is impacting positively on the work of the school. A few staff would welcome more opportunities to be involved in improvement planning. They have started to share good practice and this should be extended. The senior management team (SMT) and principal teachers have put in place a range of processes for finding out how the school is doing and how it can improve. The SMT must ensure procedures are sufficiently rigorous and systematic

to deliver accurate information. All staff must act upon their findings to secure improvements in young people's learning and achievements.

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

The school is committed to enabling all young people to achieve success. Staff have high expectations of behaviour and effort and celebrate all young people's achievements. However, staff need to ensure that learning activities are consistently at the right level of difficulty to support and challenge young people in their learning. Most young people behave well in class and around the school. They feel respected and are confident that staff will sort out any problems. They have a good understanding of rights and responsibilities and most feel they are treated fairly. All staff have been trained in child protection procedures. A number of young people say they do not feel safe in the building and the education authority is aware of the need to improve security.

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

The headteacher has a very clear vision for the school and has shared this very successfully with the school community. He and the senior management team work hard to support staff in their work and staff feel valued as a result. Staff are loyal to the school but many would like more say in developing the school's work. Staff in posts of responsibility are keen to deliver the best for young people. Most are ready to take on further challenges as the school moves forward with *Curriculum for Excellence*. The school now needs to involve all staff and stakeholders in drawing up the school's agenda for change and improvement.

8. What happens next?

We are confident that, with support from the education authority, 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.

- Improve the curriculum at S5/S6 to meet the needs of all young people.
- Widen the curriculum overall to offer greater opportunities for achievement at all stages.
- Adopt rigorous approaches to self-evaluation to improve outcomes for learners.
- Increase opportunities for young people to develop as leaders and have a say in the work of 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 Harlaw Academy.

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

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

The curriculum	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

HM Inspector: Fiona A Pate
24 August 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

If you would like to find out more about our inspections or get an electronic copy of this report, please go to www.hmie.gov.uk.

Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation, or if you wish to comment about any aspect of our inspections. You can contact us at HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk or write to us at BMCT, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Text phone users can contact us on 01506 600 236. This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as the line will not connect you to a member of staff.

You can find our complaints procedure on our website www.hmie.gov.uk or alternatively you can contact our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

Crown Copyright 2010
HM Inspectorate of Education