

**Mintlaw Academy
Aberdeenshire Council**

21 March 2000

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Inspection of Standards and Quality in Mintlaw Academy Aberdeenshire

1. Introduction

Mintlaw Academy was inspected in November 1999 as part of a national sample of secondary education.

The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. HM Inspectors evaluated learning, teaching and attainment, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. The subjects included in the inspection were: English, mathematics, modern languages, business education and physical education. HM Inspectors also evaluated key aspects of the quality of support for pupils, including arrangements for care and welfare and child protection. In evaluating how well the school and departments were managed, HM Inspectors assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning.

Members of the inspection team took account of responses to questionnaires sent to a sample of parents. They met the chairperson of the School Board and a group of parents.

2. The school

The school serves the village of Mintlaw and the rural community of central Buchan. At the time of the inspection the roll was 947.

Parents' views

Parents who responded to the questionnaire survey were very positive about most aspects of the work of the school. Nearly all felt that:

- their children enjoyed school and were well supported and encouraged in their work;
- their children found the work stimulating and challenging;
- their children were treated fairly, and teachers responded well to parental concerns;
- the school was well led; and
- the school had a very good reputation in the community, was well resourced and had clean, well-kept accommodation.

A significant minority of parents thought that the school could do more to provide parents with information on their children's progress and on the part that they could play in their child's education. Some also expressed concern about pupils' behaviour on the buses and outwith the school.

Ethos

The school had a good ethos overall. Pupils were polite and well behaved throughout the school. They were approachable and confident in their dealings with adults. Relationships between staff and pupils were generally very positive. Almost all teachers had high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Discipline in classrooms was very good overall. The behaviour of some pupils travelling to and from school on contract buses was unsatisfactory. In most cases staff generally worked well together and relationships were good. However, significant tensions between some members of staff were adversely affecting staff morale and working relationships across the staff as a whole.

Pupils made good use of opportunities to take on responsibilities, for example through participating in the pupil council, fund-raising

for charity, and organising school events. Many took part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, with good representation in inter-school competitions. Pupils also benefited from a range of activities arranged by the School Sports Co-ordinator. Foreign trips added an enriching European dimension to pupils' experiences. Appropriate opportunities were provided for religious observance. Attendance was in line with national levels.

School and community

The school had built very good links with the local and wider community. Notable features included:

- good co-operation with support agencies both within and outwith the school;
- very good links with associated primary schools; and
- very good contacts with local employers who made significant contributions to pupils' work experience placements.

Good features of links with parents included:

- a very supportive School Board and enthusiastic parent-teacher association;
- an attractive prospectus and informative booklets for pupils and parents about the provision made at each stage in the school;
- well-organised and helpful information evenings to discuss pupils' progress; and
- good school events on aspects such as course choice and drug awareness.

Some aspects of the school's communication with parents should be developed further. The school should provide clearer and more specific information about pupils' progress in its written reports for parents. They should also indicate more clearly to parents the part they could play in their child's education.

Accommodation

Accommodation was good overall. It was very good in English, mathematics and modern languages. However, there were some notable deficiencies. Storage space was inadequate in a number of departments. Accommodation needed to be extended in art and design to cater adequately for new courses at S5/S6. The preparation area for science was cramped. Some specific aspects of health and safety needed attention in a number of departments. Security systems for monitoring entry into the school were ineffective.

Staffing and resources

The school was very well staffed. Many members of staff had served in the school for a considerable period of time. Non-teaching staff made a significant contribution to the life of the school. The provision of resources was very good overall. The library was very well provided with fiction and reference books and had a very good supply of computers appropriately linked to the Internet. The headteacher managed devolved finances effectively to the benefit of the school.

3. How well does the school perform overall?

Overall quality of attainment

The overall quality of attainment was good in S1/S2. To improve attainment further teachers needed to take full account of 5-14 national advice and ensure that pupils are set sufficiently high standards. In S3/S4 the overall quality of attainment was very good. Attainment in national examinations in S4 was a major strength. In S5/S6 attainment was good overall, and very good in some respects.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Awards

At Standard Grade the percentage of pupils who achieved five or more Credit awards was consistently well above the national

average for the last five years. Some departments performed significantly better than others at Standard Grade.

Presentations for Higher Grade examinations in S5 had been around the national average over the last five years. The proportion of S5 and S6 pupils achieving band A and band A-C awards was consistently above national averages over the last five years.

Most pupils presented for Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS) awards gained passes at bands A-C.

The percentage of S5/S6 pupils gaining three or more awards in SQA modules had decreased and was well below the national average.

Information on attainment in the subjects inspected is given later in this report. Significant features of attainment in subjects not inspected were as follows.

- At Standard Grade the number of Credit awards in craft and design, graphic communication, modern studies and technological studies was consistently well above the national average in the last five years.
- At Standard Grade pupils consistently achieved notably better results in craft and design, graphic communication, modern studies and technological studies than in their other subjects. That was also the case in graphic communication at Higher Grade.
- In modern studies the number of band A awards at Higher Grade was consistently well above the national average over the last five years.

Curriculum

The structure of the curriculum was very good in S1/S2 and at S5/S6. It was good at S3/S4.

The curriculum in S1/S2 offered a broad and well-balanced range of subjects, in line with national guidelines.

The curriculum in S3/S4 included all areas recommended in national advice. Pupils had the opportunity to take up to eight Standard Grade courses. While a good choice of subjects was offered, too many pupils did not take a balanced set of courses as recommended in national and authority guidelines, and in the school's own advice. In particular, too many pupils did not take the opportunity to develop their creative and aesthetic skills.

The school provided a very good range of certificate subjects at S5/S6. They were well supplemented by courses in physical education and personal and social education. Almost all departments had introduced new courses at Higher level. Appropriate provision below Higher level included modules and some Intermediate 2 units and courses. The school offered a very good range of CSYS courses.

Learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. A significant number of lessons observed were very good. Teachers generally introduced lessons well, set out their objectives clearly and questioned pupils effectively to check their understanding. On occasion, some teachers did not always set sufficiently high standards for pupils. Pupils were generally well motivated and almost all concentrated well on their tasks in class. When required to do so, they took responsibility for their own learning. Homework was a regular and well-organised feature in most departments. While some departments had very good procedures for assessment, others needed to give better feedback to pupils to help them to improve their performance. Assessment procedures in S1/S2 were not yet fully in line with national advice.

Proficiency in applying information and communications technology (ICT) skills

The following were notable features of pupils' proficiency in ICT skills.

- Most pupils in S1 were developing good skills in keyboarding and elementary word processing.

- Most pupils had good opportunities to develop their skills in word processing in English.
- In business studies and computing courses in S3/S4 and S5/S6 pupils showed good attainment in word processing, using spreadsheets and programming.
- In personal and social education classes pupils used computer technology effectively to search for careers and post-school educational opportunities.
- In S5/S6 some pupils were skilled in using the Internet to gather information relevant to their topics of study.

Overall, there was a need for pupils in S1/S2 to develop their skills in using computers in a wider range of subjects. There was also a need for the school to ensure that pupils were able to build systematically on the ICT skills that they had already acquired in primary school.

4. How well are the inspected departments performing?

English

Attainment

The overall quality of attainment in English was fair at S1/S2 and good from S3 to S6. At S1/S2 the course did not provide sufficient challenge, especially in writing, and teachers' expectations of pupils' work was sometimes too low. The majority of pupils in S1/S2 and most pupils from S3 to S6 performed well in their coursework.

Specific features of attainment were as follows.

- Although the majority of pupils in S1/S2 talked and listened well during class discussions. The majority had a good understanding of texts studied in class, and most were

responding well to new materials designed to increase their appreciation of the writer's craft.

- While some pupils wrote very good stories, many did not write regularly enough at length. Too many had difficulties in spelling and punctuating their writing accurately.
- The majority of pupils in S1/S2 were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in talking and reading. Less than half of them were achieving appropriate levels in writing. The school was unable to report accurately on pupils' attainment in listening.
- At S3/S4 the proportion of pupils achieving Credit awards at Standard Grade was broadly in line with the national average.
- At S5/S6 the proportion of S5 pupils achieving Higher Grade awards at band A and bands A-C was broadly in line with the national average.
- Most pupils who had been presented for CSYS had achieved awards at bands A-C.
- Success rates in SQA modules were above the national average.

Courses

Courses in S1/S2 and S3/S6 took good account of national 5-14 guidelines and SQA requirements. The S1/S2 course included recent improvements to the reading programme. However, teachers did not have sufficient guidance about the range of activities to be covered in class and through homework. Courses from S3 to S6, including the new Intermediate 2 course, were well designed.

Learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching was consistently good. Teachers explained new work clearly, varied their methods and sustained good discussions with their classes. Appropriate homework was not set often enough. At all stages most pupils were well motivated and worked hard on their assignments. At S1/S2

some teachers did not always set sufficiently high standards for pupils. Some very good methods of assessing and recording pupils' progress were used well at all stages to give pupils good feedback on their achievements. Teachers had begun to use assessment information to evaluate learning and teaching. They did not yet, however, assess or report upon pupils' achievements in listening in S1/S2. Teachers used National Tests appropriately to confirm their judgements of pupils' attainment.

Management and quality assurance

The principal teacher provided very good leadership. He was highly organised and had developed very strong teamwork within the department. He had managed change very well, successfully introducing a new Higher course and a range of very good assessment and recording methods. He had ensured some very good uses of ICT. The assistant principal teacher provided very good support to the principal teacher. The principal teacher had participated in training linked to the development of the new National Qualifications at S5/S6 and had organised good staff development for his colleagues on these courses and on the uses of ICT. No member of the department had been involved in staff review.

Staff discussed the quality of course materials and had begun to use national performance indicators to evaluate their work. The principal teacher and the assistant principal teacher monitored teachers' plans and records of work to ensure consistent curriculum coverage. However, departmental self-evaluation did not focus sharply enough on specific attainment issues. The department's development plan contained appropriate and manageable priorities. Some key development targets were not planned in sufficient detail to ensure their effective implementation. The audit section of the plan was incomplete. Good progress had been made in taking forward the majority of current development projects.

Priorities for action

Guidance for teachers on the S1/S2 course should be reviewed to help them provide pupils with a sufficiently demanding programme in writing. Steps should be taken to ensure that teachers expect

consistently high standards in pupils' written work at S1/S2. Appropriately challenging homework should be set regularly at all stages.

Mathematics

Attainment

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Pupils generally performed well in their coursework, although many could reach higher standards in S1/S2 if the course was improved.

Specific features of attainment in mathematics were as follows.

- The school had yet to establish a fully reliable assessment system for S1/S2 in line with national advice. The evidence available indicated that most pupils were coping well with work which was generally appropriate to their stage.
- At S3/S4 pupils normally performed as well in Standard Grade mathematics as in their other subjects. The proportion of pupils achieving a Credit award was above the national average.
- At S5/S6 the proportion of pupils presented for Higher Grade was below the national average. Most pupils who were presented achieved band A-C awards.
- All pupils presented for CSYS in 1999 gained A-C awards.
- The majority of pupils taking SQA modules achieved full success.

Courses

The S1/S2 course took insufficient account of national guidelines and was only fair. It included work which was broadly appropriate for most pupils, but was not well balanced at each stage and did not allow all pupils to progress at a pace appropriate to their prior attainment. Courses from S3 to S6 were well planned and were suitably broad and balanced.

Learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching was good overall, and on some occasions, very good. Teachers gave clear, helpful explanations to classes and individual pupils. Homework was set and marked regularly, and was used to good effect. Teachers generally questioned pupils skilfully. However, at times their questioning did not encourage pupils to think for themselves. Lessons were generally well planned, but at times the pace of learning and the degree of challenge in lessons were too low. Pupils were generally well motivated and worked diligently. Teachers carried out assessment and recording of pupils' progress very thoroughly from S3 to S6. Overall, pupils' needs were well met at these stages. Tasks and activities were not always well matched to pupils' needs in S1/S2 classes. Teachers used National Tests appropriately to confirm their judgements of pupils' attainment.

Management and quality assurance

The principal teacher provided generally good leadership to the department on most curriculum and assessment matters. However, he and the assistant principal teacher had not worked together effectively to bring the S1/S2 course and assessment into line with national advice. Staff were hard-working and competent, and had undertaken some effective development activities. The principal teacher and the assistant principal teacher had not systematically identified and spread good practice in learning and teaching, including the use of ICT. No members of staff had participated in a formal process of staff review.

The department was developing its approaches to quality assurance. Assessment results were analysed systematically, and a start had been made to using national performance indicators to evaluate aspects of the department's work. Procedures for monitoring the quality of learning and teaching in the department were not yet systematic enough. The department's development plan contained a number of appropriate projects, but it did not focus clearly on some of the key aspects of the department's work that needed to be improved. Implementation of planned projects was generally effective.

Priorities for action

Provision in S1/S2, including assessment, should be improved to bring it fully into line with 5-14 national guidelines and HMI advice in *Improving Mathematics Education 5-14*. The department should introduce more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, and should share good practice in a systematic way. The development plan should be improved to reflect the department's key priorities more accurately and set out criteria for judging the success of projects more clearly.

Modern languages

Attainment

The overall quality of attainment in modern languages was very good.

Specific features of attainment were as follows.

- At S1/S2 almost all pupils achieved appropriate standards in their coursework in listening, reading, speaking and writing. Some pupils could give very good extended responses in their speaking tasks.
- At S3/S4 Standard Grade results in French had steadily improved in comparison with other subjects. Although those in German had weakened slightly they were still well above the national average. Overall, the combined number of Credit awards was above the national average.
- At S5/S6 the proportion of pupils presented for Higher Grade French and German was well above national figures. In both languages, pupils performed very well in comparison with other subjects. The proportion of pupils achieving Higher Grade awards at bands A-C in German was well above the national average.

Courses

The S1/S2 courses had been appropriately developed to build upon pupils' experience of modern language in the primary school. From S3 to S6 courses were well planned and took very good account of SQA requirements. The department had made good efforts to provide appropriately demanding reading materials at all levels in their Standard Grade courses. New National Qualification courses at S5/S6 were of very good quality.

Learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good, and sometimes very good. Teachers gave good, clear indications of what they expected pupils to learn. They effectively used a good variety of approaches in class. Some teaching was innovative and challenging. Teachers related very well to their pupils and had appropriate expectations of their work. They planned their lessons well and ensured a good pace in their teaching. Almost all pupils worked very well, showing good concentration and application to the tasks that they were set. However, in some cases, there was scope for greater involvement of pupils in lessons.

Management and quality assurance

The principal teacher led the department well. He was well organised and provided very good support for his colleagues. He was very well acquainted with national curricular initiatives, and had skilfully overseen their introduction. However, he needed to ensure that all members of the department were consulted fully on future developments. The senior teacher was committed and hard-working and gave valuable assistance. She was fully involved in the day-to-day running of the department and in developing courses. All members of the department had undertaken appropriate staff development. None had participated in a formal process of review.

The department collectively scrutinised test results. The principal teacher met annually with the headteacher and thoroughly analysed national examination results. Teachers regularly evaluated the courses offered at each stage. Commendably, pupils were invited to

give their reactions to each topic when they had completed it. A member of the senior management team regularly attended departmental meetings and observed teaching and learning. It would now be appropriate to use nationally produced performance indicators to focus his observation of classes and to provide a meaningful agenda for discussion and development.

The departmental development plan was not based on a clear audit. Timescales and criteria for success should be stated more clearly to allow more effective monitoring of success in meeting targets. Staff were making good progress in implementing the development plan.

Priorities for action

After discussion and a thorough audit of provision, the department should produce a more detailed development plan. The plan should give indications of responsibilities and criteria for success and make reference to national performance indicators. The department should strive to maintain the high standards already achieved.

Business education

Attainment

The overall quality of attainment in business education was good at all stages. Most pupils performed well in their coursework. At times the pace of work and levels of teachers' expectations were not sufficiently demanding. There was scope for further improvement in attainment if these issues were addressed.

Specific features of attainment were as follows.

- In S1 almost all pupils attained appropriate standards in their coursework.
- At S3/S4 the proportion of pupils presented for Standard Grade office and information studies was half the national average. However, most pupils who were presented achieved Credit awards. The proportion achieving Credit awards in accounting and finance was in line with the national average.

- At S5/S6 the proportion of pupils achieving Higher Grade awards at band A and bands A-C in secretarial studies was above the national average in 1997 and 1999. Attainment in management and information studies was in line with national averages.
- Success rates in SQA modules were above the national average.

Courses

The recently introduced ICT course in S1 was generally well designed in so far as it gave pupils a good introduction to a range of ICT skills. However, it did not take account of pupils' prior experience of ICT or of its applications in other curricular areas. Courses from S3 to S6 took full account of the requirements of the SQA and were of very good quality.

Learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching was generally good, and sometimes very good. Explanations were clear, and there were many good examples of direct teaching. Homework was used effectively in Standard Grade and Higher Grade courses. Most pupils responded very well to their teachers and were making good progress. They used equipment responsibly, maintained tidy workstations, and took pride in achieving good standards of accuracy and presentation in their work. However, staff expectations of work rate and attainment for some pupils were not sufficiently high. Procedures for assessment and recording at S1 were not yet in line with national advice. Very good assessment procedures from S3 to S6 provided regular and helpful feedback to pupils on their performance.

Management and quality assurance

The principal teacher generally managed the department effectively. All members of the department were hard-working and effectively deployed. All had undertaken appropriate staff development. None had participated in a formal process of staff review.

Some positive steps had been taken to develop approaches to self-evaluation. These included a critical analysis of pupils' performance in internal assessment and national examinations. A member of the senior management team regularly attended departmental meetings, and also visited classes to observe teaching and learning. It would now be appropriate to use nationally produced performance indicators to focus his observation of classes and to provide a meaningful agenda for discussion and development. The department's development plan was based on a generally effective audit of its work and contained a range of appropriate priorities. However, the action plan did not give sufficient detail of timescales or criteria for judging the success of projects. Good progress had been made in implementing previous plans.

Priorities for action

The ICT course in S1 should be reviewed to ensure that it takes full account of pupils' prior learning. Attainment from S3 to S6 should be improved by taking steps to increase the pace of work and by raising teachers' expectations of pupils' performance. The department should revise its development plan to provide more specific information on individual targets and clearer criteria against which to measure success.

Physical education

Attainment

Overall attainment in physical education was very good. At all stages pupils performed well in their coursework. The best work was of high quality. While some pupils were capable of undertaking more creative work, many were highly motivated to take part in physical activities and achieved good standards.

Specific features of attainment were as follows.

- In S1/S2 most pupils showed confidence in a good range of controlled movement and co-operated well together. They were less skilled at developing their own ideas and evaluating their own and others' performances.

- In the school-based course for S3/S4 almost all pupils showed good skill levels in a number of activities.
- In the Standard Grade physical education course the proportion of pupils achieving Credit awards was well above the national average.
- In Higher Grade physical education the proportion of pupils achieving awards at bands A-C was well above the national average.
- Most pupils presented for SQA modules had achieved full success.

Courses

Courses at all stages were well planned and took good account of national advice. The range of courses catered very well for the interests of most pupils and took good account of their prior experiences. The S1/S2 course had been recently revised to bring it into line with national advice. In S3/S4 all pupils followed a broad course, which gave good scope for choice. The good quality Standard Grade course attracted a large number of pupils. Pupils in S5/S6 could choose from Higher Grade, modular or school-based provision. A commendable emphasis on practical performance characterised all courses.

Learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good, and sometimes very good. Teachers related well to pupils and gave clear explanations. The department had made progress in establishing a good range of learning and teaching approaches. In some lessons, however, particularly at S1/S2, teachers needed to ensure that pupils had more opportunities to develop their own ideas and to work independently. Teachers' planning was thorough, and pupils were provided with a range of suitable resources to support their learning. Written homework was used well in certificate classes. Assessment and recording in certificate courses was used effectively to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses. This good practice should be extended to core courses in S3 to S6.

In certificate courses tasks were well matched to pupils' needs. A wider range of strategies should be used to meet individual needs in S1/S2 and to plan next steps in learning.

Management and quality assurance

The leadership provided by the principal teacher had major strengths. He was a very good teacher and had established a strong sense of teamwork. He communicated information promptly to colleagues and involved them actively in the development of courses and supporting materials. The senior teachers and other members of the department fulfilled their remits very well and showed a strong sense of commitment to the pupils. The principal teacher had attended appropriate staff development courses linked to the development of new provision at S5/S6. However, departmental meetings and planned activity time were not always used effectively for staff development activities. No teachers had been involved in a formal process of staff review.

Procedures for self-evaluation were limited and did not provide an effective basis for development planning. Formal links with the senior management team needed to be more purposeful. In line with school priorities, the department had drawn up a brief development plan for the introduction of new courses, but more detail was needed on how the projects would be managed and evaluated. The development plan priorities that had been identified had been implemented well, including curriculum development for S1/S2 using the 5-14 national guidelines.

Priorities for action

The departmental development plan should be more detailed and should be based on a more thorough review of development needs. Opportunities for creating and designing, and for self-assessment by pupils, should be increased in S1/S2. Teachers should increase their use of appropriate teaching strategies such as problem solving, exploration and guided discovery at these stages. Staff should report to parents on appropriate aspects of pupils' attainment in school-based courses in S3 to S6.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare

The school had very good arrangements for promoting the care and welfare of pupils. A range of positive steps had been taken to minimise the occurrence of bullying and to ensure an effective response when such incidents did occur. Senior pupils played a significant role through participating in an anti-bullying committee and running a lunchtime support centre for younger pupils. Appropriate procedures were in place for managing child protection issues and dealing with incidents in which children's health might be at risk. There was a good emphasis on health promotion in the school. It was supported by activities within the personal and social education programme and occasional whole-school events.

Guidance

Good provision was made for the pastoral care of pupils. Guidance staff knew pupils well as individuals and responded sensitively to their particular needs. Good support was provided for pupils experiencing emotional and social difficulties. This support had included collaborative group work, jointly with the social work department, to help improve the social skills and relationships of particular pupils. Individual medical needs were carefully monitored and appropriately addressed.

Very good provision was made for curricular and vocational guidance. Pupils were given clear information and good opportunities to discuss course choices at appropriate stages. Effective use was made of computerised resources to explore personal interests and aptitudes, and to access information about careers and post-school educational opportunities. Guidance staff worked closely with a specialist career adviser, who made a very valuable contribution to the school's provision.

The monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment had a number of strengths, and was good overall.

- Very well developed arrangements were in place for gathering information about pupils from their primary schools and passing it to subject departments at the start of S1. This could be further improved by integrating the different types of information collected.
- Good steps had been taken to make systematic use of information about pupils' success in Standard Grade to help ensure that they selected appropriate programmes in S5.
- Individual pupil progress files were being established as a framework for pupils to review their own progress and set targets for development at all stages. The school was involved in innovative work with other local schools to extend this approach to the primary stages.
- With a view to raising attainment, guidance staff were negotiating individual targets for pupil success in their S5 courses, and monitoring progress towards their anticipated grades.
- A good programme of individual interviews supported the monitoring of pupils' progress by guidance teachers at the upper stages of the school. Arrangements for monitoring individual progress were weaker at the earlier stages, however.

The personal and social education programme was good and had recently been extended to cover all stages. It covered an appropriate range of topics at each stage, and included good arrangements for evaluation of the course by pupils. Visiting speakers made a significant contribution to the programme. Assessment of aspects of the course should be extended and certification of aspects of the course considered.

The overall management of guidance was good. Strong leadership was provided for the guidance team by an assistant headteacher. Guidance staff were deployed effectively to help them undertake their role effectively and to provide continuity for pupils.

Appropriate steps were being taken to delegate further aspects of responsibility to principal teachers. The department had developed good approaches towards self-evaluation through auditing key aspects of its provision. The development plan for the guidance department contained an appropriate set of priorities. More specific criteria should be identified for judging the successful implementation of projects.

Support for learning

The effectiveness of provision for supporting pupils who were experiencing learning difficulties was good overall.

Features of support for learning included the following.

- Learning support teachers worked well with class teachers to support pupils experiencing learning difficulties in a wide range of subject departments.
- Good individual and small group tuition was provided for some pupils in the learning support department. This included good use of a computer-based learning system.
- A well-designed 'life skills' course enhanced curricular provision for a selected group of pupils. Pupils were making good progress in this course. Development work was underway to adapt it to new National Qualifications at Access level.
- Good arrangements were in place for supporting pupils who required special arrangements in examinations.
- Learning support staff had helped subject departments to adapt programmes and courses to meet the needs of pupils with special needs in a number of areas.

An appropriate system was in place through which subject departments made bids for input from the support for learning department. In some cases these bids were not sufficiently specific. While support was provided to a wide range of subjects, the deployment of staff to support mainstream classes was not always

effectively targeted on classes where it was most needed. Good links were maintained with a range of external support agencies.

Procedures were in place to ensure that the progress of pupils with Records of Needs was kept under review. The school worked effectively to ensure that the special needs of these pupils were well catered for. The contents of Records of Needs were not always appropriately updated, however, and some of the Records held in the school were not complete.

Learning support staff kept records of their work in supporting individual pupils. However, the school lacked appropriate procedures for drawing up individualised educational programmes for pupils.

Priorities for action

More effective procedures for monitoring the attainment of pupils in S1/S2 should be established, building on the effective approaches being developed at later stages. Individual interviews of pupils in each year group should be built into an annual calendar of guidance activities. Learning support staff should develop individualised educational programmes for pupils with significant special educational needs, in line with national advice. Procedures for the allocation of learning support staff to support mainstream classes should be reviewed to ensure that support is as efficiently targeted as possible.

6. How well is the school managed?

Overall management and leadership

The school was well managed. The rector provided good leadership. In his five years in post he had successfully introduced systematic management procedures and important policy initiatives. Under his direction the school had recently improved its approaches to development planning and was currently extending its strategies for effective quality assurance.

In addition to the rector, the senior management team comprised the depute and three assistant rectors. They worked very well and effectively as a team. They carried out their individual and collective remits conscientiously and energetically, providing good support to the rector. They were making important contributions in leading policy initiatives. In general, principal teachers led their departments well. There were some difficulties however, in relationships between senior management and a few members of staff at middle management level, particularly about their respective management roles. These difficulties were impeding the full implementation of well-conceived whole-school developments. They needed to be resolved so that all promoted staff made a constructive and positive contribution to helping the school move forward on key priorities. Senior teachers and assistant principal teachers fulfilled their roles effectively.

Staff had been fully involved in formulating a wide range of well-planned school policies and procedures, which covered the main aspects of the school's work. Parents and pupils had been consulted where appropriate. Policies gave staff a clear framework in which to work. They were generally well implemented throughout the school.

Staff development and review

The school offered a good range of opportunities for staff development. These included well-planned in-service days and participation in whole-school development groups and committees. Some staff had participated in staff development related to national initiatives and had briefed their colleagues effectively on their return to school. No member of the school staff had been through a process of formal staff review, although the local authority scheme was at an early stage of being implemented. All members of senior management were to be reviewed before the end of the school year.

School development planning

The quality of development planning was fair overall. The planning of whole-school initiative by senior management was good. It was clearly focused on raising attainment. Departmental development plans varied too much in quality and degree of detail. In many of

these plans, descriptions of activities were imprecise. They did not include sufficiently clear information about implementation strategies, resource requirements, staff development needs and how the effects of activities would result in improvements in pupils' experience and progress. Members of the senior management team, through their links with departments, worked hard to support the process of development planning. They needed to ensure that at departmental level the process was appropriately focused and made effective use of performance indicators in auditing provision. They also needed to ensure that departmental targets were specific, measurable and achievable in the given time-scale.

Approaches to improving quality

The school had a number of mechanisms in place to address some important aspects of quality assurance. The rector, senior management link and individual principal teachers annually reviewed performance at all stages. Principal teachers were required to identify specific measures aimed at raising attainment in their departments. Using performance indicators, some departments had successfully identified specific aspects of their provision for more focused audit. In other departments the process of self-evaluation was less well developed. Members of the senior management team visited classrooms but had not yet evaluated the quality of learning and teaching in the classes visited. Few departments had begun to evaluate the quality of their own learning and teaching.

Overall, the school provided a good standard of education. Its targets for improving attainment reflected an appropriate level of expectation. The senior management team and staff demonstrated a clear commitment to further improving the school's effectiveness. They were giving high priority to raising attainment and had identified a range of appropriate strategies for achieving that aim. As a priority, the school should ensure more consistent and effective implementation of national 5-14 guidelines.

7. What are the school's key strengths?

- High levels of attainment at Standard Grade.
- Very good provision of resources and staff and effective organisation and use of resources and space.
- The quality of curricular and vocational guidance.
- The high quality of pastoral care.
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities available to pupils.
- The very supportive School Board and parent-teacher association.
- The broad and well-balanced curriculum offered in S1/S2 and S5/S6.
- Very good teamwork within the senior management team.

8. Main points for action

In addition to addressing the priorities for action identified in this report, the school and education authority should act on the following recommendations.

- The education authority and the school should address the accommodation issues identified in this report and improve security arrangements for managing entry to the school.
- The school should improve the quality and content of information in written reports to parents.
- The school should implement more effective procedures to ensure that pupils in S3/S4 follow a curriculum fully in keeping with national guidance.

- The school should establish procedures whereby senior managers and principal teachers systematically monitor and report on the quality of learning and teaching in classes.
- The school should improve its development planning by incorporating more rigorous and systematic procedures for auditing the work of all departments.
- The rector, with support from the authority, should take the lead in developing more effective working relationships between senior and middle management, ensuring that all promoted staff make a constructive and positive contribution to helping the school move forward in the direction identified by the senior management team.

HM Inspectors will return between one and two years after the publication of this report to assess progress in meeting these recommendations.

Copies of this report have been sent to the rector and school staff, the Director of Education, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the office at the address below or by telephoning 01224 642544. Copies are also available on our web site: www.scotland.gov.uk/hmis.

Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Ian Boyes, HMCI whose address is given below. If you are unhappy with the response, you will be told in writing what further steps you may take.

HM Inspectors of Schools
Greyfriars House
Gallowgate
Aberdeen
AB10 1LQ

David M Martin
HM Inspector of Schools
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector of Schools
Northern Division

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21 March 2000

HM Inspectors use published criteria when making judgements about the work of a school. These performance indicators relate judgements to four levels of performance. This report uses the following word scale to make clear the judgements made by Inspectors:

<i>very good</i>	major strengths
<i>good</i>	more strengths than weaknesses
<i>fair</i>	some important weaknesses
<i>unsatisfactory</i>	major weaknesses

This report also uses the following words to describe numbers and proportions:

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-75%
less than half	15-50%
few	up to 15%

We ensure that inspection activities give due regard, without unfair discrimination, to disability, gender, religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.

Appendix

We judged the following to be *very good*

- Partnership with parents and the School Board
- Provision of staff, their qualifications and experience
- Provision of materials and equipment
- Organisation and use of resources and space
- The school's management of devolved finances
- Quality of curricular and vocational guidance

We judged the following to be *good*

- The school's ethos
- Communication with parents
- Provision of accommodation and facilities
- The structure of the curriculum
- Effectiveness of learning support
- Implementation of Special Educational Needs legislation
- Pastoral Care
- Guidance role in monitoring progress and attainment
- Effectiveness of leadership of the school
- Effectiveness of promoted staff and senior teachers
- Implementing the school development plan

We judged the following to be *fair*

- The school development plan
- The school's approach to evaluating its own work
- The school's arrangements for development and review of its staff

We judged the following to be *unsatisfactory*

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Quality of lessons observed

HMI also evaluated the quality of the lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 31% of cases, good in 62% and fair in 7%. There were no unsatisfactory lessons.