



**Westhill Academy  
Aberdeenshire Council  
8 June 2010**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents<sup>1</sup>, 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](http://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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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**

Westhill Academy is a non-denominational school which serves Westhill, Kirkton of Skene and the surrounding rural area. The roll was 907 when the inspection was carried out in April 2010. Young people's attendance was above the national average in 2008/2009.

## **2. Particular strengths of the school**

- Young people's attainment and achievement.
- The positive and inclusive ethos.
- Confident and successful young people and their positive relationships with staff.
- The commitment of staff in providing interesting, high-quality learning experiences for young people.
- Strong links with local businesses and other partners to improve young people's learning.
- The supportive leadership of the headteacher and his senior team.

## **3. How well do young people learn and achieve?**

### **Learning and achievement**

Almost all young people are highly motivated and keen to do well. They respond enthusiastically to being actively involved in their learning and use information and communications technology confidently for research and presentations. Increasingly, they are using GLOW, for example, to access teachers' notes, revision materials and homework. Young people work well individually and enjoy working collaboratively in almost all subjects. Almost all feel safe, well cared for and enjoy learning in the school's relaxed but purposeful atmosphere. Relationships between young people and staff are very positive. Young people are not involved consistently enough in discussing and evaluating their own learning.

Large numbers of young people benefit from a good range of

out-of-hours activities and excursions. As a result, they are developing confidence and effective personal and social skills. Across the stages, many young people work well together by taking part in a wide range of music and drama performances. Young people are developing their skills of teamwork well in sports and acquiring new skills during activity days and foreign trips. Young people contribute positively to the school and its community. They raise significant sums of money for various charities, demonstrating a strong commitment to helping others. Young people at the upper stages provide support for younger learners in classes and in coaching sports. Staff do not yet gather information consistently about young people's achievements in and out of school.

At S1/S2, the majority of young people reach appropriate standards in reading and many exceed these standards. Around half achieve appropriate levels in writing. Most young people listen and talk well in class and group discussions. Attainment in mathematics is consistently strong and most young people achieve at an appropriate level. Many exceed this standard. By the end of S4, young people's attainment is well above the national average. It is better than in schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Young people with additional support needs make good progress in their learning. At S5/S6, young people's attainment remains consistently well above national averages and is better than in schools serving those with similar needs and backgrounds. Young people consistently achieve very well in graphic communication and mathematics. At S6, young people are successful at Advanced Higher in a wide range of subjects. A sizeable number have successfully completed courses through the Open University.

### **Curriculum and meeting learning needs**

Across the stages, the school offers a wide choice of stimulating courses and activities to meet young people's needs. As a result, young people have very good opportunities to develop appropriate skills. At S3/S4, young people, including those with additional support needs, have good opportunities to learn skills for work during work

experience placements and at a local college. At S5/S6, community partnerships enable young people to benefit from a wide range of courses, including those provided through an adult education programme. Activities, such as the recent diversity week, encourage young people to develop a good awareness of religious and cultural issues. Staff have made very positive progress in planning courses in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. They should ensure that these positive steps link to a clear and shared vision for the curriculum which builds effectively on young people's earlier learning. The school does not yet provide all young people with two hours of high-quality physical education.

Staff use a broad range of successful strategies to meet the learning needs of young people. Most adapt their teaching approaches effectively to meet young people's needs. In most classes, the pace and level of work is appropriate. Teachers explain work well, giving clear explanations and instructions. Most share the aims of lessons with young people and involve them in reviewing learning at the end of lessons. This good practice is not yet consistent across the school. Teachers make good use of questions to check young people's understanding and to extend their learning further. Support staff, including classroom auxiliaries, provide young people with helpful support and are very responsive to their pastoral needs. Staff are beginning to improve arrangements for the overall management of support for young people. Young people with additional support needs are involved in setting their own individualised learning targets. Support staff and teachers do not yet plan and review young people's targets consistently well.

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

Staff have worked very effectively to develop highly successful links with a wide range of local businesses. These links provide young people with very good opportunities to develop a greater knowledge of local industries and prepare them well for employment. The school works well with many partner agencies who provide very good support.

Police and fire services, local colleges, chaplains and community learning staff make a strong contribution to the curriculum. Educational psychologists, social workers and health services provide young people with valuable support. Partnerships with parents are very positive. Almost all parents are happy with the school and feel that their children are making good progress. The active Parent Council provides helpful support in raising funds, arranging helpful information evenings for parents and in preparing high-quality newsletters. Parents organise activities for large numbers of young people in the successful Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. A sizeable minority of parents would like to have better opportunities to give their views. Staff do not involve parents and partners sufficiently in setting improvement priorities.

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

Young people across the stages improve the school community by taking part in many voluntary and charitable events. Large numbers of young people help staff organise activities, including the very successful Rock Challenge. Many staff contribute positively to out-of-hours clubs and activities. Staff are very willing to take additional responsibility, for example, by participating in working groups. A few staff work very well together in the Teacher Learning Community to share good practice in teaching and learning. Teachers are committed to improving young people's learning experiences. They regularly review young people's progress and provide appropriate support to improve attainment. Approaches for identifying strengths and areas for improvement across the school are not yet sufficiently rigorous or consistent.

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

Parents, staff and young people share high expectations of success. Almost all young people are highly motivated to do well and feel strongly encouraged by staff. Behaviour across the school is very positive and young people act responsibly and show consideration for

others. Staff have reintroduced pupil councils. Young people would benefit from further planned opportunities to take responsibility and show leadership. Staff celebrate young people's successes well at assemblies, performances and in displays and newsletters. Staff should look to build on existing arrangements to accredit young people's many achievements using national award programmes. Young people feel that the school helps them, for example, through sports activities, to make healthy lifestyle choices. School chaplains contribute strongly to the regular opportunities for religious observance.

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

The headteacher provides strong leadership. He is highly respected by parents, partners and young people. Staff value his supportive leadership which has helped to build their confidence and to encourage inclusion, ambition and innovation. Depute headteachers provide positive support and commitment to the school. Most principal teachers, and many other teachers across the school, lead important improvements to young people's learning experiences. Staff respond very positively to opportunities to take responsibility at school, local and national levels. Staff and young people work well together and the school has a very positive and inclusive ethos. Young people enjoy their learning and respond very well to the wide range of learning opportunities. Their attainment has been consistently very positive. The school has a strong capacity for continued improvement.

## **8. What happens next?**

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The education authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its schools.

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

- Develop approaches to self-evaluation at all levels by sharing and applying existing good practice more consistently.
- Involve young people more in making improvements to the school and to their learning experiences.
- Continue to improve arrangements for managing support for young people, including planning and reviewing individual targets.

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 Westhill Academy.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>good</b>

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

<b>The curriculum</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>good</b>

**HM Inspector:** Alistair Brown  
8 June 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

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