

---

# Standard Inspection of McLaren High School Stirling Council

---

## 1. Introduction

McLaren High School provides secondary education for Callander and the wide surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the school roll was 629. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

The inspection took place in April 1998 as part of a national sample of secondary education. It evaluated how well pupils were performing, the effectiveness of the school and how well the school was managed.

HM Inspectors assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning. They evaluated learning and teaching across all subjects and stages, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils.

The results of a questionnaire sent to a sample of parents were taken into account during the inspection. Members of the inspection team also met with the Chairperson of the School Board.

## 2. How well are pupils performing?

### *Attainment in English and mathematics at S1/S2*

In English language, most pupils in S1/S2 were attaining appropriate national targets in *reading, talking and listening*. Pupils could read effectively, although for some the range of their personal reading was too limited. Pupils expressed their views clearly in discussion. The majority attained appropriate national targets in *writing* but many relied too heavily on teacher support in editing their work.

In mathematics, most pupils were attaining appropriate national targets in *shape, position and movement* and in *information handling*. In *number, money and measurement*, the majority of pupils attained the relevant national targets. However, many pupils' understanding of the relationship between decimals and fractions was weak and their mental calculation skills needed to be improved. Some pupils demonstrated a good understanding of algebra. Pupils had been able to develop a good range of strategies for *problem-solving and enquiry*.

*Proficiency in applying ICT skills*

The following were significant features of pupils' proficiency in information and communications technology (ICT) skills.

- In computing studies and in business studies, pupils were developing a good range of skills, appropriate to their age, in word-processing and in using and constructing databases and spreadsheets.
- From S1, pupils used the computer network system in the library confidently and competently to build up personal profiles as part of their National Records of Achievement. Senior pupils accessed careers information independently from computer databases.
- In most subjects there were too few opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills or to make use of the skills which they had already acquired.

*Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Awards*

The following commentary refers to attainment in external examinations and National Certificate (NC) modules over the three years 1995- 97.

At Standard Grade, the number of Credit awards per S4 pupil was consistently above the national average.

Significant features at subject level included the following.

- Pupils consistently achieved better results in geography and history relative to the other subjects they studied.
- The proportion of Credit awards was rising steadily in mathematics, physics and craft & design and was consistently above national averages in biology, chemistry, music, accounting & finance and office & information studies.
- Pupils generally achieved poorer results in French and German relative to the other subjects they had studied. Too many gained a No Award in the optional writing paper.

At Higher Grade, the number of Band A, and also A-C, awards per S5 pupil was rising steadily and was now well above the national average. The proportion of S5 pupils gaining 3 or more A-C awards was also above national norms.

Significant features at subject level included the following.

- In English and history, pupils generally achieved better results relative to the other subjects they studied. Their results were also generally better than might have been expected on the basis of their performance at Standard Grade.

- In mathematics and modern languages, presentations were rising and were now above national averages. However, pupils were generally performing less well than in their other subjects.
- Almost all pupils presented for Higher Grade secretarial studies gained an A-C award.

The proportion of pupils gaining at least one A-C award in the Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS) had been declining steadily over the last three years. In 1997, the proportion of presentations which led to an A-C award had fallen below national averages.

Numbers of awards in NC modules were low at S3/S4 but, at S5/S6, were broadly in line with national averages.

#### *Overall quality of attainment*

The overall quality of attainment was fair. Although many pupils coped well with their classwork and overall results at Standard and Higher Grades were above national averages, there was still scope for improvement. There was a general need to increase the pace of learning. Pupils should be set tasks which provide greater and more consistent challenge.

### 3. How effective is the school?

#### *Parents' views*

A questionnaire which sought views about the school was sent to a random sample of

parents. 60% of the parents in the sample returned the questionnaire.

- Almost all parents felt the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community. They were generally content with the part they were asked to play in their children's education.
- Almost all thought that their children were generally well behaved and treated fairly by teachers.
- Most felt their children enjoyed school and were encouraged to work to the best of their ability.
- Most considered that the school was good at explaining its work and found parent-teacher meetings useful.
- Some expressed concerns about the school's accommodation and level of resourcing.

#### *Ethos*

The school had recently undertaken a major review of its ethos and had successfully involved pupils, parents and staff in the production of a new policy. Staff were now working hard to implement the new policy and procedures. Already, many features of school ethos were very good.

Pupils and staff generally took pride in the school and most pupils dressed in accordance with the new uniform code. Pupils behaved very well both in and out of classrooms, and there were generally

harmonious relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils helped raise money for charity and many participated in the very good range of extra-curricular activities provided, including musical events and educational visits.

Pupils' sense of responsibility was well developed through a good range of measures including the prefect system, a paired reading initiative and a scheme which gave pupils responsibility for their base-room at lunchtimes. They had good opportunities to discuss issues and to influence the life of the school through Pupil Councils. Pupils were encouraged to identify with the houses to which they belonged. Positive achievements were recognised through newsletters, S1/S2 class competitions, notice boards and at school assemblies, which also provided suitable opportunities for religious observance.

Although teachers used praise well to encourage and motivate pupils in lessons, further steps needed to be taken to strengthen the school's ethos of achievement and ensure that all pupils set themselves sufficiently high targets.

#### *School and community*

The school had built up excellent links with parents and the wider community:

- The well-established links with associated primary schools were being further strengthened through the development of a computer network.

- Recent consultation with parents through questionnaires and open evenings had involved them in school developments.
- The school's Parent Teacher Association was active in organising social events and fund-raising.
- The School Board was very supportive of the work of the school and had been particularly helpful in establishing the community leisure centre shortly to be opened in the school grounds.
- Parents were kept well informed about the work of the school through a well-designed school prospectus, newsletters and information booklets.

The school held regular parents' meetings and issued appropriately timed written reports on pupils' progress. However, the level of comment in written reports needed to be more consistent and, in S1/S2, the reporting format reporting should be reviewed in line with national advice.

#### *Accommodation*

The school accommodation met most of the needs of learning and teaching. There was a very good modern library and many classrooms in the main building were of good size. The general state of repair was satisfactory, despite some need for continued maintenance work. However, the accommodation also imposed a number of constraints. These included limited storage in some departments, restricted social areas for pupils, a number of ageing

temporary classrooms, and difficulties with access for school buses.

A number of improvements to the school's accommodation and facilities were planned, including a new access system to improve security, and refurbishment of the dining area. The imminent completion of the McLaren Leisure Centre will significantly improve facilities for physical education by giving the school access to a games hall, swimming pool and all weather pitch.

#### *Staffing and resources*

The education authority had staffed the school slightly above its normal level in order to support a major ICT initiative. Teachers were committed and hardworking. Most were highly experienced and many had served in the school for over 10 years. Teaching staff valued the good support they received from clerical, technical, library and ancillary staff.

Resources in several departments were limited. In some, books had to be shared or were approaching the end of their useful life. Departmental funding had remained at the same level for a number of years and improvements in the provision of textbooks, materials and equipment had been relatively slow. However, plans were in hand for necessary maintenance of a number of machines in technical education and for the provision of some additional items of equipment in physics.

The school was participating in the education authority's ICT initiative.

Improvements to computer networking arrangements within the school and with associated primary schools were being planned in order to benefit learning and teaching. The school's stock of computers had already been expanded by the provision of a suite of new machines in the business studies department. It was intended to increase further the school's stock of up-to-date computers and to upgrade the required electrical cabling.

The school had been brought into the education authority's scheme of devolved management of resources only recently.

#### *Curriculum*

The curriculum included all the areas recommended in national advice. Planned revisions to the timetable structure in session 1998/99 would reduce or remove some anomalies which had arisen over the years. In particular, plans were in hand to increase significantly the time for religious and moral education, which was currently below the nationally recommended figure.

At S1/S2, the development of environmental studies had involved fruitful collaboration with associated primary schools. Generally, however, the school required to accelerate progress in implementing elements of the 5-14 curriculum. The school should continue to have regard to advice in the recent HMI report, "*Achieving Success in S1/S2*", as it rationalises the number of subjects offered at these stages. Adjustments to the current provision of modern languages were

required, in the light of developments in teaching in the associated primary schools.

At S3/S4, nearly all pupils took 8 Standard Grades, chosen from a suitable range of courses. Almost all followed a curriculum which, with the exception of insufficient provision of religious and moral education, had appropriate breadth and balance, in line with national advice.

At S5/S6, all pupils selected from a suitable range of NC, Higher or CSYS courses. Next session, planned revisions to the curriculum structure would provide a better choice of vocational NC courses.

#### *Learning and teaching*

Most of the lessons inspected were good or very good. The following were key features of learning and teaching.

- Lessons were well organised and made good use of a suitable range of teaching approaches.
- Most teachers gave clear explanations and employed good questioning techniques.
- There was a very good level of discussion between teacher and pupils in some classes.
- Pupils generally worked conscientiously. They responded best to teachers who set them challenging tasks with high expectations of the quantity and quality of work.

- In some lessons the pace of work needed to be faster.
- There was too much variation in the attention teachers gave to the setting, completion and correction of homework.
- Assessment and reporting on pupils' progress in S1/S2 needed to be reviewed in line with national advice, and to include more systematic use of national testing in English and mathematics.

#### *Support for pupils*

The quality of support for pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties and special educational needs was good. Pupils in need of help were identified appropriately through consultation with primary school staff, standardised tests in spelling in S1, and referrals from subject departments. Learning support staff had a detailed knowledge of pupils' difficulties and gave valuable advice to subject departments on supporting key aspects of pupils' learning. They provided effective help for individuals or small groups through direct or cooperative teaching. Planning for cooperative teaching should include more specific learning targets and timescales to assist in monitoring pupils' progress more closely. Pupils with Records of Needs received appropriate support.

Guidance staff knew pupils well through teaching weekly social education lessons and regular informal contacts. The well-organised social education programme

included appropriate help for pupils in S2 and S4 when choosing subjects for the following year. Pupils were assisted in making informed decisions about their future through very good information and advice on careers and further and higher education, good access to computer databases, and work experience. From S1, pupils were encouraged to record regular personal statements about their progress, through completion of National Records of Achievement. Guidance staff interviewed pupils individually, for example at times of course choice, and generally monitored their achievements well. However, at S1 the process should be linked more closely to pupils' progress and attainment and the setting of clear individual targets.

Positive features of support for pupils were:

- some very high levels of commitment and care from guidance staff and from learning support teachers and assistants;
- a good start to establishing individualised educational programmes for pupils receiving support;
- a well-organised reading programme and a popular paired reading scheme through which S5/S6 pupils supported those in S1; and
- very good links with support agencies such as psychological and social work services.

The school's health education programme was good. It covered key issues of drugs, diet and sex education and also included special fitness programmes for S1/S2 and some promising work by the School Nutrition Action Group.

#### 4. How well is the school managed?

##### *Staff management and leadership*

The headteacher, who had been in post for 18 months, displayed very good leadership. Through an open style of management, he had successfully involved staff in considering the development needs of the school. He had ensured a good level of consultation with staff, pupils and parents in taking forward the school initiative on ethos. He had promoted effective teamwork through a revised structure within senior management and had also improved communications links with parents. By these means he had already initiated change effectively in many key aspects of the school and had prepared good foundations for further progress.

Two members of the senior management team had been appointed to their posts recently, and all were still settling in to a new set of remits. Despite these changes they had quickly formed an effective team. The smooth running of the school owed much to the efficiency of the depute headteacher. Assistant headteachers contributed well in their various areas of responsibility. They also chaired key school working groups and gave a good lead in several school developments.

Principal teachers generally managed their departments well and participated in school decision-making through regular principal teacher meetings. Some senior teachers had areas of responsibility which allowed them to contribute appropriately to school developments. However, the remits of other senior teachers were in need of adjustment to ensure postholders continued to make the most effective contribution to the work of the school.

#### *Aims and policy making*

The school's aims were appropriate. However, to provide a better basis for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, they should be revised to include more explicit reference to pupils' achievement. The school had a wide range of agreed procedures and policies on most aspects of school life. These included well considered methods for dealing with health and safety issues. To help raise expectations of pupils' performance there was a need for the further development of learning and teaching strategies at school and departmental levels.

#### *Quality assurance*

The school had produced a sound policy on quality assurance but recognised that it was not yet fully implemented.

Good features included the following.

- Annual meetings where the headteacher and principal teacher reviewed examination results and discussed future priorities.

- Regular departmental meetings which allowed staff to discuss progress.

Some additional steps required to be taken to develop quality assurance further. The roles of the senior management team and principal teachers in monitoring and evaluating the work of departments, including the quality of learning and teaching, needed to be more systematic and direct. Appropriate use should be made of performance indicators, drawing on the HMI publication "*How Good is our School?*".

#### *School development planning*

The headteacher had involved staff in identifying items for the current school development plan. As a result, staff had a good understanding of the main areas of development. Good progress was being made in bringing the plan into line with national advice but there was a need for further improvement. At school and departmental levels, audit procedures should be made more systematic. The link between the plan and the school aims should be strengthened to clarify priorities and the criteria for success. Good progress was being made in implementing the school development plan in a number of areas.

#### *Staff development and review*

The school had yet to put in place arrangements in line with the education authority's recent guidelines for staff development and review. The headteacher had been reviewed and it was intended to extend the process of review to other staff

next session. The school's arrangements for staff development had enabled many staff to benefit from attending courses and from staff development events delivered in the school. However, there needed to be a more systematic analysis and recording of staff needs in order to meet individual, departmental and school priorities more effectively.

## 5. Key strengths of the school

The school's many strengths included:

- a headteacher who displayed very good leadership and, through consultation with staff, pupils and parents, had initiated change effectively in many key aspects of the school;
- committed and hardworking teaching and support staff and an able senior management team;
- mostly well organised lessons which made good use of a suitable range of teaching approaches;
- strong support for pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties;
- very good relations with parents and with the supportive School Board; and
- a wide range of sporting, musical and other extra-curricular activities and educational visits.

## 6. Main points for action

The school and education authority should act on the following recommendations.

- At S1/S2, progress in implementing the 5-14 curriculum should be accelerated, taking account of recent HMI reports, including "*Achieving Success in S1/S2*".
- National advice on the assessment and reporting of pupils' progress in S1/S2 should be implemented, including national testing in English and mathematics.
- Further steps should be taken to strengthen the school's ethos of achievement. Pupils' levels of attainment, including examination results, should be raised through developing appropriate learning and teaching strategies at school and departmental levels.
- Revised school aims should be agreed which include more explicit reference to pupils' achievement. Whole-school and department development plans should take account of the new aims and clarify priorities and criteria for success.

- The school should take further steps to establish a quality assurance culture, making appropriate use of performance indicators in the HMI publication "*How Good is our School?*". Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of departments, including the quality of learning and teaching, should be made more systematic and direct.

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 headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education, local councillors and the Member of Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the office at the address below.

If you want to make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to the HM Chief Inspector 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  
Saughton House  
Broomhouse Drive  
EDINBURGH  
EH11 3XD

Grant Mathison  
HM Inspector  
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector of Schools  
Eastern Division

Crown Copyright 1998

The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

## Appendix

HM Inspectors use indicators of quality when making judgements about the work of a school. These indicators have been published so that schools can use them to evaluate their own work.

This appendix summarises some of the findings contained in this report about the school as a whole, including its curriculum, resources and management. In the report and this appendix we make clear the judgements we made by using these terms:

*very good* there were major strengths

*good* on balance, strengths outweighed any weaknesses

*fair* while there were some strengths, there were some important weaknesses

*unsatisfactory* there were major weaknesses

The effectiveness of the school and how well it is managed.

### **We judged the following to be *very good***

- Partnership with parents and the School Board
- Provision of staff, their qualifications and experience
- Effectiveness of leadership of the school

### **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 the learning support
- Implementation of Special Educational Needs legislation
- Quality of curricular and vocational guidance
- Effectiveness of promoted staff and senior teachers
- The school development plan
- Implementing the school development plan

### **We judged the following to be *fair***

- Provision of materials and equipment
- The school's approach to evaluating its own work

- The school's arrangements for development and appraisal 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 lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 25% of cases, good in 56%, and fair in 19%.

There were no unsatisfactory lessons.