

**Peebles High School  
Scottish Borders Council**

**6 March 2001**

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# Inspection of Standards and Quality in Peebles High School Scottish Borders Council

## 1. Introduction

Peebles High School was inspected in October/ November 2000 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, music, religious and moral education, science (S1/S2) and chemistry. HM Inspectors also evaluated the quality of support for pupils, including arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils and child protection, and aspects of guidance and support for learning. 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 analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents. They met members of the School Board and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

## 2. The school

Peebles High School is a non-denominational secondary school which serves the town of Peebles and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 1034.

### Parents' views

Parents who responded to the questionnaire were positive about most aspects of the work of the school.

Almost all felt that:

- their children enjoyed school and were encouraged to work to the best of their ability;
- children were treated fairly and would receive help with any difficulties;
- pupils were well behaved; and
- the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community.

About a quarter of the parents who responded felt that aspects of the school's communications, including reports on their children's progress, could be improved. Half thought that accommodation was poor.

## **Ethos**

The school had a very positive ethos, with high expectations of pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievements. Staff morale was generally high and many staff were committed to supporting a wide range of extra-curricular activities, foreign exchanges and adventure expeditions. Staff-pupil relationships were mostly good and pupils behaved well. A classroom code of behaviour had been agreed and was prominently displayed in every room. Pupils had opportunities for undertaking responsibilities such as helping younger pupils, and they could make their views about the school known through house arrangements and the pupil council. Regular year group assemblies contributed to school ethos and provided opportunities for religious observance, although the normal frequency of these occasions had been disrupted by the current building programme. Attendance at school was in line with national levels.

## **School and community**

The school had established very good links with parents and the community. Notable features included:

- strong support from the School Board and PTA;
- regular reports to parents, sometimes twice a year, and meetings to discuss pupils' progress;
- very good information on school policies on health matters;
- good communications about learning or behavioural difficulties; and
- regular articles about the school in the local press.

## **Accommodation**

The school buildings were a combination of original nineteenth century construction and later extensions and additions. Overall, the provision had a number of significant weaknesses. Some departments were dispersed over different floors and in temporary hatted classrooms. There was a general shortage of staff bases, storage space and social areas for pupils. Some teaching areas were cramped, drab and in need of refurbishment. There were problems with heating, ventilation and general standards of cleanliness. However, the first phase of a major new building programme was due for completion shortly and this should alleviate the problems for at least some departments.

## **Staffing and resources**

The level of staffing was very good. Many staff had been in post for a long time. This contributed to stability and continuity but sometimes led to difficulties in the management of change. Administrative and library staff provided a very good service to the school.

The provision of resources was good overall but there were significant problems with computer networking and services which remained to be resolved. Devolved finances were very

effectively managed to provide additional resources, staffing and staff development opportunities.

### **3. How well are pupils performing?**

#### **Overall quality of attainment**

The overall quality of attainment was good at S1 to S4 and very good in S5/S6. In S1 and S2 there had been significant improvements in pupils' attainment of national 5-14 levels in English language and mathematics. At all stages and in most classes seen pupils were making good progress in suitably challenging course work.

#### **Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Awards**

At Standard Grade, in 1997-99, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more Credit awards was significantly above the national average. The proportion gaining overall awards had declined but was in line with national averages.

At Higher Grade the proportion of S5 pupils achieving three or more band A-C awards in 1997-99 was significantly above the national average. The percentage of pupils gaining band A awards was twice the national average in 1997 and 1999.

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

Presentations and performance in National Certificate (NC) modules were above the national averages in S3/S4 and below the national averages in S5/S6.

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

- At Standard Grade, over the five years to 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving Credit awards was well above the national average in biology, history and physical education.

- Pupils achieved consistently better Standard Grade results in biology and history than in their other subjects. They performed relatively less well in graphic communication.
- At Higher Grade in 1997-99 presentations and performance in biology and history were several times the national average, including the number of band A awards.
- Pupils achieved consistently better Higher Grade results in art and design and in history than in their other subjects. They performed relatively less well in geography and physics.

### **Information and communications technology**

The following were notable features of pupils' proficiency in information and communications technology [ICT].

- S1/S2 pupils demonstrated skills in word processing and desktop publishing.
- In mathematics, pupils from S4 to S6 used graphic calculators.
- In the sciences, pupils used CD-Roms to research information.
- S5/S6 pupils made good use of the computer for musical invention.
- In personal and social education, pupils demonstrated their ability to carry out an internet search for information on topical issues.

There were plans to develop the use of ICT across the curriculum as facilities and staff development improved.

## **4. How well are the inspected departments performing?**

## **English**

### **Attainment**

At all stages, the overall quality of attainment and coursework were good. At S2, appropriate national standards were achieved by most pupils in reading and by the majority in writing. The school could not yet provide reliable assessments of pupils' standards in listening and talking. There was evidence of strong recent improvements in pupils' performance at all stages. Between 1997 and 1999, the majority of pupils achieved Standard Grade Credit awards consistently above the national average. The proportion and quality of Higher Grade results were above the national average in 1998 and well above in 1997 and 1999. However, a significant number of candidates failed to achieve a Band C award. Pupils enrolled for NC and CSYS courses generally achieved a good level of success.

### **Courses**

Programmes were broad and included provision for S1 drama and S6 media studies. S1 to S4 courses were being strengthened to provide pupils with more consistent opportunities to achieve to their potential. Courses leading to the new National Qualifications were very well designed.

### **Learning and teaching**

The quality of learning and teaching was good overall and often very good at S5/S6. Teachers were well organised, gave clear explanations and used an appropriate range of approaches. The most effective lessons set high expectations and helped pupils focus on achieving and enjoying learning. Homework was used well at S1/S2 and S5/S6 but unsystematic at S3/S4. Teachers were supportive but required more developed arrangements for meeting the needs of pupils with different abilities, particularly in S3/S4. At all stages, teachers conscientiously corrected pupils' work and used national criteria for assessment. A good start had been made to using national tests in reading and writing effectively, but assessment of listening and talking skills needed to be developed further.

**Management and quality assurance**

The principal teacher, well supported by her able assistant principal and senior teacher, was a very effective leader. In post for only a year, she had developed a strategic view of the department's needs and established a shared commitment to taking forward key priorities successfully. A very good range of approaches to self-evaluation and staff development was being used effectively to support learning and teaching. Appropriate arrangements for professional review were being put in place. The reflective development planning process had enabled teachers to make significant improvements to pupils' attainment and experience.

**Priorities for action**

The department should continue with its plans to strengthen S1 to S4 courses and provide teachers with more practical advice on adapting learning to meet the needs of different abilities. The department should strengthen the use of assessment at S1/S2 to provide a reliable basis for monitoring pupils' progress.

**Mathematics****Attainment**

Overall attainment was good from S1 to S4 and very good in S5/S6. Attainment in coursework was good at S3/S4 and very good at other stages. The majority of pupils in S1/S2 attained appropriate national levels of attainment. The proportions achieving a Credit award at Standard Grade were consistently above national averages. At Higher Grade, the proportion achieving an A-C award was well above national averages with a high number of A awards. At CSYS, the majority of pupils achieved an A-C award.

**Courses**

From S1 to S4, courses were well designed, but needed to put more emphasis on non-calculator work and, in S1/S2, on skills in mental calculation. Courses at S5/S6 were very good. Teachers were given very good advice on the delivery of courses.

**Learning and teaching**

The overall quality of learning and teaching was very good. Teachers' use of questioning to develop pupils' understanding was very effective. Pupils responded well and often with enthusiasm. Homework was used regularly with almost all classes. Pupils' needs were very well met at all stages. Arrangements for assessment were very well organised. However, in S1/S2, assessment procedures needed further development to improve the match with pupils' levels of attainment and to allow more secure monitoring of pupils' progress through national 5-14 levels.

**Management and quality assurance**

The principal teacher led the department very well. He had succeeded in establishing a high level of teamwork amongst staff and promoting very effective teaching approaches throughout the department. He was well supported by an able and highly organised assistant principal teacher. Teachers' collaboration in departmental development work had contributed well to their staff development.

The principal teacher had established procedures which allowed staff to engage in effective and systematic evaluation of the work of the department. The development plan, which had appropriate priorities for action, was being implemented very well.

**Priorities for action**

Courses and assessment procedures from S1 to S4 should take more account of the need to develop and monitor pupils' skills in mental and written calculations without the use of calculators. In S1/S2, assessment procedures needed further development to improve the match with pupils' attainment and to allow more secure monitoring of progress through national 5-14 levels.

**Chemistry and S1/S2 science****Attainment**

Overall attainment was very good in both S1/S2 science and chemistry. Generally, attainment in coursework at all stages for most pupils was very good, but some pupils in S5/S6

were finding parts of the work difficult. The proportions of pupils achieving Credit awards at Standard Grade, and A or A-C awards at Higher Grade, were high when compared with national averages. Most pupils presented for CSYS gained A-C awards.

## **Courses**

The science course in S1/S2 was well designed to address the knowledge and understanding and practical skills described in national guidelines. The Standard Grade course was very good. S5/S6 courses leading to new National Qualifications and CSYS Chemistry were also well designed.

## **Learning and teaching**

In science in S1/S2 and in chemistry from S3 to S6, the quality of learning and teaching was very good overall. Teachers gave clear explanations and used homework well. They used a variety of questioning techniques to encourage pupils to think for themselves and work at an appropriate pace. Careful attention was given to the needs of individuals or groups of pupils. Assessment arrangements in S1/S2 were developing well in line with national advice. The arrangements for chemistry courses fully met requirements and internal recording of pupils' results was well organised.

## **Management and quality assurance**

In S1/S2 science, the departments were working very well as a team to share the workload in developing and implementing the course. The principal teacher of chemistry was a very good leader whose professional commitment inspired pupils and staff to develop a positive, confident attitude to their work. Staff in science and in chemistry were well deployed to maximise the effectiveness of their contributions. Commendably, promoted staff played a significant role in S1/S2 science.

Staff were involved in careful evaluation and discussion of the delivery of science and chemistry courses. The chemistry department had also explored pupils' views on their courses through a questionnaire. The development plans for science in S1/2 and for chemistry were addressing important priorities

and the implementation of the plan, including reviewing progress, was well done.

**Priorities for action** In S1/S2 science, the departments should continue to refine the course and associated assessment to provide a learning and teaching experience which best meets the needs of pupils. Due account should be taken of national advice.

## **Music**

**Attainment** The overall quality of attainment was good from S1 to S4 and very good in S5/S6. Pupils generally coped very well with coursework. At S1-S4, inventing tasks required to be more closely matched to pupils' needs. Across the school, pupils played and sang to a high standard. They could identify key ideas in music they heard. At Standard Grade, the proportion of pupils achieving Credit awards was consistently around the national average. In recent years, at Higher Grade and CSYS, all pupils presented had attained A-C awards.

**Courses** Courses at S1-S4 were good. Some further refinement was required to improve continuity and progression in pupils' inventing skills and to increase the use of ICT. At S5/S6, the Higher and CSYS courses were very well planned.

**Learning and teaching** The overall quality of teaching was good from S1 to S4 and very good at S5/S6. Teachers gave clear, purposeful explanations and made effective use of questioning. Homework was well organised. Pupils showed high levels of motivation and worked enthusiastically at a brisk pace in group and individual activities. Teachers generally supported pupils well, particularly in S5/S6. Arrangements for assessing pupils' progress were very thorough. Teachers gave pupils regular constructive feedback on their work.

**Management and quality assurance** The principal teacher provided very good leadership. She successfully promoted strong teamwork amongst staff to ensure consistency across the department's work. Teachers were making very good progress in implementing identified

priorities for improvement. The department's rigorous approaches to quality assurance included direct evaluation of learning and teaching. Recent staff development opportunities had been well targeted.

**Priorities for action** The department should improve the inventing course at S1-S4 by matching the associated tasks more closely to pupils' needs. They should also continue to develop the use of ICT to further enhance the quality of learning and teaching and pupils' attainment.

## **Religious and moral education**

**Attainment** The overall quality of pupils' attainment was good in S1/S2 and fair in S3/S4. Most pupils in S1/S2 achieved good standards in course work. Pupils' performance in S3/S4 was very variable. The majority performed well in the SQA short course in S4 but there was room for improvement in overall results. Of the small number of presentations for Higher Grade religious studies in previous years, a majority had obtained C passes.

**Courses** The S1/S2 course was generally well designed but needed to take more account of pupils' previous experience and attainment. The S4 short course was well designed to meet SQA requirements. There was currently no provision in S5/S6 but the department planned to offer units in philosophy as part of new National Qualifications.

**Learning and teaching** The quality of learning and teaching was generally good in S1/S2 but very variable in S3/S4, where some pupils were poorly motivated and insufficiently engaged in dialogue. Assessment in S1/S2 was not sufficiently related to course objectives. In the S4 short course, assessment procedures adopted by the two teachers needed greater consistency.

**Management and quality assurance** Arrangements for reviewing the work of the department and planning future developments were generally good. The

principal teacher needed to give a stronger lead in evaluating and improving the quality of learning and teaching and raising standards of attainment.

**Priorities for action** The S1/S2 course should be further developed to meet the differing needs of pupils arising from their previous experience and attainments. The department should carry out its plans to develop appropriate courses for S5/S6 pupils. Staff should take steps to improve consistency in the quality of learning and teaching to raise overall standards of attainment.

## **5. How good is the curriculum?**

The quality of the curriculum was good at all stages. The S1/S2 curriculum had appropriate breadth and balance but there was scope for further reducing the number of subjects and teachers encountered by pupils at any one time. At S3/S4, most pupils took eight Standard Grade courses and a rotation of short courses in other subjects, in order to achieve a balanced experience overall. However, the short courses did not always offer a sufficiently high quality of experience. At S5/S6, the school offered a broad range of Higher Grade subjects, with opportunities for study at Advanced Higher or CSYS level in the majority of them. The number of Intermediate courses being offered under the new National Qualifications arrangements was developing well but did not yet have the breadth of Higher courses.

## **6. How good is the learning and teaching?**

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. Most of the lessons seen were good or very good. A few had significant weaknesses. Further information about lesson evaluations is given in the appendix.

In the great majority of lessons seen, teachers employed whole class direct teaching effectively and provided good support to individuals. They gave clear explanations, used questioning well and often used praise and humour to

motivate pupils. In almost all classes pupils worked purposefully and applied themselves well. Teachers marked class and homework conscientiously and gave pupils constructive feedback. In the less satisfactory lessons there were sometimes problems of class control, a lack of clear explanation, slow pace and challenge and a failure to engage pupils' minds actively.

## **7. How well are pupils supported?**

### **Care and welfare**

Arrangements for promoting the care and welfare of pupils were very good. Well thought out procedures were in place for managing child protection issues and other incidents, such as bullying, which put pupils' well-being at risk. Effective monitoring of attendance, homework and punctuality encouraged pupils to achieve their potential. Senior pupils helped younger pupils in both classrooms and the playground.

### **Guidance**

Positive features of guidance and pastoral care included the following features:

- very good support for pupils' transfer between primary and secondary school;
- appropriate procedures for identifying concerns, involving staff and parents and taking well-judged action to meet pupils' needs;
- commendable work with pupils to enable them to set targets and take responsibility for their next steps in learning;
- very good links with employers, the careers service and other support agencies; and
- very well designed help for vulnerable pupils.

Curriculum and vocational guidance was very good. Well-structured arrangements ensured that pupils had the same guidance and form teachers throughout their schooling and regular individual opportunities to discuss their progress. Pupils were very well prepared for key choices of subjects and careers. Learning about the world of work included productive work experience as well as challenges such as interview simulations with feedback from employers.

The personal and social education programme was very well designed to build on pupils' prior learning and skills in working with others. There was an appropriate focus on informed decision-making and self-assessment. The health education programme gave very good attention to issues such as positive relationships, responsible sexuality and responses to drug misuse. The good support for study skills was being further developed and materials for careers education were being refined. Particular strengths were the provision of practical advice for teachers and increasing use of well-chosen ICT resources to promote independent learning.

A very effective assistant headteacher provided strategic and supportive leadership. Guidance teachers worked as a very committed and highly professional team. Together they shared good practice and had very good opportunities for professional development and contributing to the further development of guidance provision.

**Support for learning** Provision for supporting pupils experiencing learning difficulties was very good.

Strong features of support for learning included the following:

- well-organised individual programmes of study for pupils with Records of Needs;
- effective individual and small group tuition for pupils who required additional supported study for SQA courses and examinations;

- the range of specialist groups available for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- the variety of contacts with external agencies; and
- the quality of tutorial and co-operative teaching.

There was an effective system in place for regularly reviewing the progress of pupils receiving tutorial support. The implementation of Special Education Needs legislation was good. Assessments of pupils' future needs were carried out appropriately but some minor adjustments to reports were required.

Staff had made a good start to producing individualised educational programmes (IEPs) for pupils who faced significant barriers to learning. These IEPs could be further improved by ensuring that more specific targets for learning are set.

The overall management of learning support was very good. The principal teacher led the department effectively. The department was well organised and there was a strong sense of teamwork among staff. The senior teacher with responsibilities for pupils with behavioural difficulties provided effective support to staff and pupils. Staff had made a start to evaluating their work. However, there was scope for more direct monitoring of learning and teaching, and for obtaining the views of pupils, parents and subject departments about the services provided by the department. Most of the department's work focused on tutorial support and co-operative teaching, and there was a need to increase curriculum development in consultation with departments. The department had a very good development plan and was making very good progress towards meeting its priorities.

**Priorities for action**

The guidance department should further develop the use of ICT facilities, as they become available, for record keeping

and for learning and teaching. Learning support staff should review their IEPs to ensure that targets set are more specific. Further steps should be taken to evaluate the work of the department and to increase the amount of curriculum development provided.

## **8. How well is the school managed**

### **Overall management and leadership**

The headteacher provided very good leadership. He had a clear view of the school's strengths and development needs and a wide knowledge of current educational developments. He had gained the respect of staff, pupils and parents. He consulted widely and encouraged a spirit of self-evaluation throughout the school. His professional awareness and commitment provided a clear sense of strategic direction in the drive to improve learning and teaching and raise standards of attainment.

The headteacher was well supported by a strong senior management team. The newly appointed depute headteacher had brought fresh ideas which were already beginning to have an impact on the school. The four assistant headteachers had well-defined remits, which they fulfilled effectively. There were some highly effective principal teachers who gave good support to their staff and responded well to new initiatives in departmental monitoring and development planning. Senior teachers carried out their remits with energy and commitment.

### **Staff development and review**

There were good arrangements in place for staff development, including a well-organised programme of planned activities and in-service training. The school was alert to the benefits of sharing good practice internally and made good use of the education authority's advisory service. New guidelines for staff review were being implemented gradually. All teaching staff had agreed job descriptions and the process of interviews for review purposes was under way.

### **School development planning**

The school development plan comprehensively reflected national, education authority and school priorities. Tasks, responsibilities and target dates were clearly set out. Success criteria were linked to the school's aims and national performance indicators. In some cases, and particularly at departmental level, the criteria needed to be more specific about the impact on the quality of pupils' learning experience and attainment. The school had made very good progress in implementing current priorities.

### **Approaches to improving quality**

A number of very good measures were in place for quality assurance and improving school performance. The senior management team carried out their responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the work of departments effectively. The measures used included a thorough analysis of examination results and annual review of departmental planning. The headteacher was directly involved in monitoring the experience of first year pupils by observing lessons. He had also monitored lessons in some departments where particular needs had been identified. There was a clear commitment to involving principal teachers in directly monitoring the quality of learning and teaching in their departments. Some departments had tried useful measures such as pupil questionnaires and teachers evaluating one another's lessons. Departments were encouraged to share such good practice. There was a high level of staff involvement in working groups, dealing with such important aspects as attainment, ethos, curriculum development, learning and teaching, and pupil behaviour. All staff had been involved in the use of performance indicators for self-evaluation.

## **9. How well does the school perform overall?**

Overall, the school provided a very good standard of education. Teachers had appropriately high expectations of pupils and worked hard to enable them to fulfil their potential. The strong focus on self-evaluation and development planning reflected a determination to constantly improve the quality of

provision. The school's targets for attainment, agreed with the education authority, were consistent with this aim.

### **Key strengths**

- The ethos of achievement and levels of support for pupils with varying needs and abilities.
- Links with parents and the community.
- The commitment of staff to providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- High levels of attainment at Standard Grade Credit level and Higher Grade.
- Good and often very good teaching.
- Strategies for self-evaluation and planning for improvement.
- The leadership of the headteacher, including the very effective management of devolved finances.

### **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 should continue to improve the quality of accommodation and facilities, and monitor how well they meet the needs of staff and pupils.
- The school should carry out its plans to review the curriculum at each stage with a view to further improving standards of attainment, particularly for pupils of average and below average levels of achievement.
- The school and education authority should continue to work together to bring about improvements in the provision and use of ICT for administration and teaching.

HM Inspectors will return between one and two years after the publication of this report to assess progress in meeting these recommendations. The school and education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main points for action in the report and to share that plan with parents.

Allan Hawke  
HM Inspector of Schools  
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector of Schools  
Eastern Division

6 March 2001

See Performance Indicator data overleaf.

## Appendix

### Indicators of quality

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

- The school's ethos
- Partnership with parents and the School Board
- The school's management of devolved finances
- Effectiveness of the learning support
- Guidance role in monitoring pupils' progress and attainment
- Quality of pastoral care
- Quality of curricular and vocational guidance
- Effectiveness of leadership of the school
- The school's approach to evaluating its own work
- The school development plan
- Implementing the school development plan

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

- Communication with parents
- Provision of staff
- Provision of materials and equipment
- Organisation and use of resources and space
- The structure of the curriculum
- Implementation of Special Educational Needs legislation
- Effectiveness of promoted staff and senior teachers
- The school's arrangements for development and review of its staff

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

- Provision of accommodation and facilities

#### **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 48% of cases, good in 41%, fair in 9% and unsatisfactory in 2%.

## How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher 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 0131 244 8437. Copies are also available on our web site: [www.scotland.gov.uk/hmis](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/hmis)

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Dr Gill Robinson, 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.

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