



**Northfield Academy
Aberdeen City Council
25 August 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school. We describe how young people benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents¹ and services which support young people. We also comment on how well staff and young people work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school, how well young people are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns and details about young people’s examination performance. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school and a report on the learning community surrounding the school.

¹ Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

Northfield Academy is a non-denominational school which serves an area in the northwest of Aberdeen. The roll was 767 when the inspection was carried out in June 2009. Young people's attendance was below the national average in 2007/2008. Young people from S4 to S6 were on study leave at the time of the inspection.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Open, friendly young people.
- Recent improvements in the school's overall ethos.
- The work of staff on interdisciplinary and community projects which have enhanced young people's learning experiences and achievements.

3. Examples of good practice

- Contribution of the school-based police officer.
- Teacher mentoring.
- Aberlour Childcare Trust programme and its impact on young people's learning and achievement.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Young people respond well to opportunities to work and think independently. Teachers have provided such opportunities through making increasing use of group work in lessons and through a number of successful interdisciplinary and performance arts projects. In a majority of lessons across the school, teachers are not doing enough to engage and motivate young people. They need to share the aims of lessons with them more consistently and do more to ensure that they are making progress and know what they have to do to improve. Young people feel behaviour has improved recently and they now feel

safer in school. However, disruptive behaviour still has a negative effect on learning in some lessons.

Young people benefit from a range of opportunities to build their confidence, gain new skills and take on responsibilities. Those following programmes to prepare them for life after school have worked successfully in the community and with associated primary schools. Young people at risk of missing out on education are benefiting significantly from projects organised with community partners. Teachers now need to ensure that more young people achieve in a broader range of areas and that systems are in place for tracking their successes.

In S1/S2, there have been some signs of improvement in attainment in mathematics. Attainment in reading and writing at these stages has not improved in recent years. Less than half of young people attain appropriate standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The school needs to improve the extent to which young people in S1/S2 build on what they have achieved in primary school. From S3 to S6, attainment is notably poorer than in schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

In S1/S2, young people study a suitably broad range of subjects. All young people are benefiting from two hours of quality physical education per week. The school recognises the need to build more on earlier learning in primary school. It has identified the need to improve its approaches to developing young people's literacy and numeracy in S1/S2. All teachers have been involved in considering a range of possible new curriculum structures for S1/S2 in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. In S3 to S6, young people can study a suitable balance of courses and almost all can make appropriate progress in their learning. The school has increased the choices available to young people in S3 to S6 through the XL programme, community-based projects and vocational courses at Aberdeen College. There is scope to increase the range of such choices and the number of young people

able to benefit from them. Young people sometimes have to miss other lessons in order to follow these courses. The school needs to continue to work with partners to address this issue. The recent introduction of personal and social education in S5/S6 has improved the school's approaches to monitoring young people's attendance and progress at these stages. Young people from S3 to S6 do not yet have two hours of quality physical education. In S5/S6, young people do not study core religious and moral education.

In some lessons, teachers provide work which is well matched to young people's needs. This good practice was evident in less than half the lessons observed and needs to be adopted more consistently across the school. The house system allows teachers to identify individual pupils experiencing difficulties and provide them with support. Too often, the school withdraws young people from class. This interrupts their learning. The school needs to develop approaches to pupil support which focus on meeting young people's needs in class. Teachers with a responsibility for pupil support need to work more with subject departments to meet the needs of learners in lessons. Young people who are learning English as an additional language are well supported and making good progress.

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

Pupil support staff work well with parents and other agencies to meet the needs of more vulnerable pupils. Young people benefit from the support of educational psychologists, trainee social workers, the campus policeman, the school nurse and teachers who support them when they transfer from primary school. The school has developed partnerships with a range of voluntary sector projects to deliver very effective learning opportunities for some groups. It now needs to build on the success of these projects to allow more young people to benefit from these innovative and motivating learning experiences. The school has identified the need to engage parents more in the life and work of the school.

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

Training for some staff in “critical skills” methods has successfully stimulated reflection and discussion on learning and teaching across the school. A large number of staff are involved in groups to improve aspects of the school’s work. Staff have already taken action to address some aspects for improvement highlighted by young people. Senior managers now need to ensure that all staff understand their roles in ensuring continuous improvement. They need to ensure that all principal teachers are fully confident in identifying strengths and areas for improvement in their departments. In order to improve the overall quality of learning and teaching, the headteacher has recognised the need for more rigour in acting on the findings of lesson observations, and ensuring more regular sharing of good practice.

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

Following a period in late 2007 of serious indiscipline and low morale, the school, supported by the education authority, put in place a plan to improve behaviour, address staff shortages and promote an ethos of achievement. The plan has been successful in bringing about improvements in the areas identified. The school recognises young people’s successes through a high-profile annual awards ceremony. Overall, teachers need to set higher expectations of young people’s behaviour, attendance, work in lessons and overall achievements. All young people think that staff are approachable and respond quickly when they want to talk to them. Suitable arrangements are in place to protect young people. An anti-racism project has been effective in improving relationships between young people and their community.

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

Leadership at all levels needs to improve. Senior managers need to provide a stronger lead in developing a shared vision for learning and achievement across the school community. All teachers need to recognise that they are responsible for setting and maintaining high

standards. In addressing disruptive behaviour, staff need to focus less on withdrawing young people from class and give more consideration to meeting learning needs in lessons. Senior managers now need to support staff in bringing about this change of culture, and increasing the pace of improvement.

9. What happens next?

We will carry out a follow-through inspection visit within one year of publication of this report and will report to parents on the extent to which the school has improved. Following that visit, we may continue to check the improvements the school has made. We may also carry out a second follow-through inspection within two years of the original inspection report. If a second follow-through inspection visit is necessary then it will result in another report to parents on the extent of improvement that the school has made.

In order to improve young people's achievements, school and education authority staff should:

- set higher expectations for young people;
- improve the quality of young people's learning experiences across the school;
- continue to develop the curriculum, including through partnerships with community learning and development providers;
- review the work of pupil support staff to ensure the needs of all learners are fully met; and
- continue to develop approaches evaluating the quality of education and ensure that the good practice identified is shared and that action is taken to bring about improvements where necessary.

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 Northfield Academy.

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

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

The curriculum	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

HM Inspector Jane B Renton
25 August 2009

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This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses