



**Northfield Academy
Aberdeen City Council
7 December 2010**

We published a report on Northfield Academy in August 2009. That report set out key strengths of the school and main points for action.

This follow-through report is based on an inspection visit which was carried out in September 2010. It tells you about improvements since the original inspection in the quality of education which the school provides. It also comments on how the school is getting on with the main points for action. First we focus on changes in the core work of the school. We explain how the school has got better at helping children to learn and benefit from being at the school. Next we look at the key processes which enable this to happen, including the involvement of parents¹. Our report also describes developments in the 'ethos' of the school, by which we mean how well young people are cared for and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally we comment on improvements in leadership to help the school achieve its aims.

A copy of this report has been placed on the HMIE website www.hmie.gov.uk. Where applicable, you will also find analyses of questionnaire returns.

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

Contents

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. How well do young people learn and achieve?
4. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?
5. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?
6. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?
7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
8. What happens next?

1. The school

Northfield Academy serves an area in the northwest of Aberdeen. Since the original inspection was carried out in June 2009, the school roll has fallen from 767 to 675. There has been a high turnover of staff owing to the falling roll and changes to school management systems. There are now three depute headteachers with newly revised remits. A new faculty structure has been put in place, and seven faculty heads have been appointed.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The increased focus on sharing good practice in learning and teaching, leading to improvements in young people's learning experiences.
- The development of young people's literacy skills during the S1-S3 lunchtime reading club.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Young people continue to be motivated and keen to learn and are now benefiting from more stimulating learning experiences across the school. They cooperate well with their teachers and work well in class. In the majority of lessons across the school, young people understand the purpose of the activities they are working on. They do not always get enough feedback from teachers to help them improve. There is scope for young people to work more in pairs and in groups so they have more opportunities for discussion and teamwork. Young people in S5/S6 feel that their learning experiences have improved recently, and that they get more relevant homework. Attainment by the end of S2 has improved. The majority of young people now attain appropriate national levels in reading and mathematics. However, less than half attain appropriate levels in writing. By the end of S4, the proportion of young people attaining at least five Standard Grade foundation awards, or the equivalent, has improved. From S4 to S6, examination results have improved in a number of subjects. Overall, attainment continues to be notably poorer than in schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Too many young people leave school without basic literacy and numeracy qualifications.

Young people continue to achieve in a range of areas. Through working successfully towards the John Muir Award, almost all young people in the current S2 have developed their sense of responsibility for the natural environment. Senior pupils have developed their leadership skills through opportunities to support young people in S1 during their residential visit to Loch Eil, and the Columba 1400 project. More formal monitoring and recording of individual young people's achievements remains a priority for development. The number of vocational college courses on offer has increased. Young people in S5/S6 now have one period of religious and moral education and one of physical education per week. The school needs to continue to broaden the range of courses on offer in order to meet the needs of all young people. More discussion is needed on how to improve the structure and content of the curriculum, taking account of all aspects of *Curriculum for Excellence*. The S1-S3 lunchtime reading club helps young people improve their literacy skills. The school has been successful in improving transition arrangements for young people moving from P7 into S1.

In the majority of lessons, teachers provide appropriate tasks and activities for young people. However, some tasks are not relevant or interesting enough. Too many lessons are overly teacher-led, and as a result young people do not get the chance to think for themselves. Teachers' questioning does not always ensure that young people understand key issues, or help young people develop their learning. The school is planning a full review of its approaches to supporting pupils, including the roles of support for learning and guidance staff.

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

The school has increased its partnership working with community learning and development (CLD) staff to enhance young people's experiences. CLD staff have provided courses on money management for a group of young people in S4, and a lunch time community information service. A local businessman has helped

young people develop their employability skills, for example preparing for interviews.

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

Supported by the education authority, the school has provided a number of high-quality training opportunities for teachers. These have supported teachers in reflecting on, improving and sharing their practice. Teachers have worked effectively to improve young people's learning experiences across the school. They recognise that there is still work to be done to ensure consistently high quality learning and teaching across the school. When promoted staff observe lessons, they now identify good practice and aspects for improvement more clearly.

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

In almost all classes, teachers have high expectations for young people's effort and behaviour. The school has reviewed its policy to ensure more positive approaches to managing pupils' behaviour. The number of temporary exclusions has fallen. There remains some work to be done to ensure that good behaviour is rewarded in a consistent manner across the school. Target-setting has helped improve attainment in mathematics and English in S1/S2. The school is working with the home-school liaison officer to continue to improve levels of attendance and systems for tracking absence.

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

Overall, teachers now have a better understanding of their role in ensuring high standards of learning and behaviour across the school. The headteacher, working with her depute headteachers and education authority staff, has taken some effective steps to improve

the school. These include a review of its vision and values, and a major, and successful, focus on improving learning and teaching. *Curriculum for Excellence* can now provide a focus for her to lead continued improvement.

8. What happens next?

Since the original inspection, the school has improved in a number of areas, leading to better learning experiences for young people. However, there remain important weaknesses in key areas of the school's work. Young people's attainment in national assessments and examinations is still not at a satisfactory level. We will carry out a further follow-through visit to the school within one year of publication of this report. We will report to parents on the extent of improvement that has been made.

HM Inspector: Jane B Renton
7 December 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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