

Education Scotland, Greyfriars House, Gallowgate, Aberdeen AB10 1LQ

t 01224 642544 f 01224 625370 e aberdeen@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk

w www.educationscotland.gov.uk

Textphone 01506 600236¹

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Dear Parent/Carer

**Northfield Academy
Aberdeen City Council**

In August 2009, HM Inspectors published a report on your child's school. We returned to the school a year later to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another report in December 2010. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff how the school has continued to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in 2009 and at other aspects of the school's work, as agreed with the headteacher. As a result, we were able to find out how well young people are now learning and achieving and how the school is continuing to support them to do their best. This letter sets out what we found.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Young people worked well and showed good motivation to learn in almost all lessons seen. Their learning experiences have continued to improve since the last inspection. Young people respond well to opportunities to be actively involved in their learning. For example, in a number of subjects, they now have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. They are developing their skills in working together in pairs and in groups. Teachers recognise there is still work to be done to ensure young people's learning experiences are of a consistently high quality across the school. They are working towards ensuring this consistency. Young people on the pupil council are helping other pupils understand how Curriculum for Excellence can help them achieve their full potential.

The school continues to perform notably less well than schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. However, teachers' more focused approaches to monitoring and improving attainment are beginning to have a positive impact. Over the last three years, there has been steady improvement in young people's attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of S2. The percentage of young people attaining basic qualifications in English and mathematics by the end of S4 has increased notably. There have been slight improvements in overall attainment by the end of S4, including improved performance in national examinations in a number of subjects. Young people continue to achieve in a range of areas. For example, S1 pupils have gained valuable enterprise skills by working with business people to produce and market shortbread. A few young people cooked for the Duchess of Cornwall and 11 guests after winning a national competition to design and cook a meal based on local recipes from the past. Many young people developed confidence and team-working skills through participation and success in the 2011 Rock Challenge.

¹ This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as this will not connect.

Young people develop a range of skills and interests through the increased number of lunchtime activities.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in improving the curriculum taking account of Curriculum for Excellence. Plans are now in place which aim to ensure progression in learning for all young people from S1 to S6. Young people are benefitting from more interesting and relevant courses in S1/S2, and from teachers' improved approaches to developing literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across all subjects. Teachers are making suitable progress in developing their approaches to assessment, moderation and reporting. The school has continued to strengthen its links with primary schools through approaches such as the Reading Bus project and a successful literacy festival. Young people are benefitting from increasing opportunities to develop their skills for life and work through improved partnership working with businesses and from a wider range of courses from S3 to S6.

Most teachers provide appropriate tasks and activities for young people. In a minority of lessons seen, young people's needs were not well met, particularly when lessons were too teacher-directed or teachers' explanations were not clear enough. Teachers have continued to work towards setting higher expectations of young people's behaviour, attitudes, and achievements. Meetings to review the progress of young people with additional support needs now take place more regularly and have a more focused agenda. Lower-attaining pupils are benefitting from more effective deployment of support staff. As a result of these improvements, young people are now benefitting from improved targeting of support.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

At the time of the last inspection, the headteacher had just revised the remits of the three depute headteachers. New faculty heads had just been appointed. The positive impact of these improvements to school leadership is now very clear. The school's systems for evaluating and improving its work are notably stronger. Through the 'leaders of learning' initiative, and work in faculties, all teachers regularly reflect on, and share good practice. Regular visits to classrooms by senior managers and faculty heads result in focused discussion on learning and teaching and the identification of aspects for improvement. The school has taken effective action to address a few areas of particular weakness in learning and teaching. Teachers are taking effective steps to improve how they monitor young people's progress from S1 to S6. This helps them identify and support any pupils who are at risk of underperforming. More systematic analysis and use of statistical data from tests and national examinations is helping teachers identify areas where improvement is required. All of these developments have had a positive impact on young people's learning and achievement and on the ethos of the school.

What happens next?

While there remains considerable scope for improvement in attainment in national examinations, there have been notable improvements in learning and teaching, in support for pupils and in leadership at all levels. As a result of these improvements, and teachers' more robust systems for evaluating their own work, we are now confident that the school has the capacity to improve further. As a result, we shall make no further visits to the school relating to the 2009 inspection. Education Scotland's District Inspector will continue to engage with the education authority staff to monitor performance in national examinations at the school.

Jane B Renton
HM Inspector

Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation. You can contact us at enquiries@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us at BMCT, Education Scotland, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

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