

**Inspection of the learning community  
surrounding Blairgowrie High School  
Perth and Kinross Council  
22 January 2013**

## 1. Context

The learning community surrounding Blairgowrie High School is located within Eastern Perthshire and has a population of around 17,500. It covers the towns of Blairgowrie, Alyth and Coupar Angus as well as a number of small settlements. Rattray which is close to Blairgowrie has been identified by the Community Planning Partnership as a priority area for regeneration. Local health practitioners have identified concerns about lower life expectancy than the rest of Perth and Kinross, a higher percentage of teenage pregnancies and high suicide and self-harm rates. School leavers destinations in 2011 showed that less young people from Blairgowrie High School went on to Higher and Further Education than the rest of Perth and Kinross. However, a higher percentage of young people from the school moved to employment or training than compared to the rest of Perth and Kinross.

Community and Learning Development (CLD) partners within the area of Blairgowrie High School were inspected by Education Scotland during November 2012. During the visit, Education Scotland staff talked to children, young people and adults. We worked closely with local CLD managers, CLD providers, partners, paid staff and volunteers. We wanted to find out how well partners are improving the life chances of people living in the community through learning, building stronger more resilient communities and improving the quality of services and provision. We also looked at how well, paid staff and volunteers are developing their own practices and how well partners, including schools are working together. We looked at some particular aspects of recent work which were identified by partners including.

- The effectiveness of partnership working across the learning community.

## 2. How well are partners improving learning, increasing life chances, promoting and securing wellbeing?

CLD providers target their resources very well and are improving outcomes for learners. The number of literacy and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners is increasing. Young people are achieving well through a good range of accredited programmes such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Youth Achievement Awards, and Community Sports Leaders awards. Some participants are gaining employment and others are going on to volunteering. This approach could helpfully be extended to other youth provision, for example the *Coupar Angus Youth Activities Group* (CAYAG). Measures relating to community health are improving. Sports development staff are successfully engaging more adults and young people in sports activities. This is helping to improve wellbeing. Young people completing the *Tobacco and Safe Choices* project are now more aware of the dangers of smoking. Parents of the young people involved noted a positive impact on their own smoking habits. Older people, some with dementia who took part in sports taster evenings are now more active. New jobs are being created through the work of Growbiz which effectively targets individuals and supports them to set up new businesses. CLD staff are routinely using their management information system

to target and plan their work. They now need to interrogate the data more clearly at learning community level to demonstrate improvement. Setting joint targets with partners would help monitor performance against local outcomes. Comparing data with other local authorities could also help drive improvement.

Learners are achieving and progressing well. There is an important focus on early intervention and prevention by CLD providers. Parents completing the Handling Children's Behaviour course are now able to better manage their child's behaviour. Young people attending the 16+ LINC course are much more positive about their futures and most move on to positive destinations. Older learners in the Digital Photography group noted a significant improvement in wellbeing through attending the group. Young women in the Core Spirits Group are more now aware of the impact of alcohol on their lives. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award group aimed at young people with additional needs at Blairgowrie High School is leading to better school attendance and more positive behaviour. The lunch time drop-in at Blairgowrie High School is helping a few young people settle better into their first year. Parents attending the *Homestart PEEP* project now relate better to their children and feel less socially isolated.

Across the learning community young people and adults are gaining attributes related to the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. Learners are well supported by skilled and dedicated staff and volunteers. Young people attending the Alyth Youth Partnership (AYP) are gaining in confidence. A few are progressing to secure employment. Others are now volunteering as youth workers. ESOL learners are becoming more confident in speaking, reading and writing in English. Almost all participants in the literacy and information and communications technology groups are achieving their learning goals. There is scope for staff at Blairgowrie High School to more effectively collaborate with CLD providers to ensure improved outcomes for learners. In some cases young people are not yet clear about how learning outside school is recognised and celebrated. CLD need to now work with Blairgowrie High School to ensure that they make a full contribution to the development of the Senior Phase of Curriculum for Excellence.

Community organisations across the learning community are active, confident and skilled. Strong links exist between community groups and CLD providers. However, a strategic plan across the learning community would help ensure that all partners are working to agreed outcomes. An impressive number of groups, estimated at over 200 are serving the community well and delivering high quality services. Older people are well supported by partners to reduce isolation and improve health. A focus on community arts is increasing learning opportunities. The *stART* project is well established and gives people in rural communities access to public art and performance. One thousand four hundred people took part in 2011. Volunteers in the Blairgowrie and Rattray Genealogy group are learning research skills and helping others trace their family history. As a result social history is being recorded and celebrated. They recognise that involving younger volunteers including schools will help ensure the work continues. The *Loon Braes Parknership* is improving a neglected local park which is now being used more by the community. Community open days in the park have attracted large numbers of people.

### **3. How well are partners working together and improving the quality of services and provision?**

CLD providers use a good range of methods to gather feedback from stakeholders. Joint projects such as the *Loon Braes Parknership*, Strathmore Centre for Youth Development (SCYD), CAYAG and AYP are leading to better outcomes for the community. CLD and Perth College work together well to plan and deliver programmes such as Digital Learning in Blairgowrie. CLD and SCYD are successfully delivering 16+ LINC courses in conjunction with Skills Development Scotland. Most youth workers across partnerships contribute to experiences and outcomes for young people. Most can articulate how this fits with Curriculum for Excellence. Young people's achievements are celebrated annually at the Spirit of Youth Awards. The *Men and Kids* project was positively profiled in a Spotlight on Equality newsletter.

CLD partners plan their work well. Young people in CAYAG plan and review their activities regularly. All sports clubs have development plans that are regularly monitored by Sports Development staff. The *Loon Braes Parknership* has a well-designed plan that measures progress against objectives. Parents of young people in the *Tobacco and Safe Choices* project completed a 360 degree evaluation. CLD staff regularly reflect on their practice and self-evaluation is well established. An Improving Services group is helping staff better understand outcomes. This is helping to improve planning across CLD and partners. Learning and achievement visits conducted by managers are identifying strengths and areas for improvement. CLD providers have good access to training and development opportunities. There are increasing opportunities for volunteers to improve their skills, for example in working with young people. Joint continuous professional development with schools remain limited. There is scope for further embedding joint self-evaluation across partners.

This inspection of learning and development in the learning community surrounding Blairgowrie High School found the following key strengths.

- Strong and effective partnerships at learning community level leading to very successful outcomes for learners.
- Committed staff and volunteers.
- Very wide range of active and successful community groups delivering a wide range of provision.
- The range of highly effective learning and achievement opportunities for young people.
- Innovative practice in building community capacity, for example Growbiz and *Loon Braes Parknership*.

We discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

- Further improve joint self-evaluation and partnership planning with partners.
- Further enhance joint working with Blairgowrie High School to ensure transition from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase of Curriculum for Excellence.
- Greater interrogation of data at a local learning community level to confidently determine if performance is improving.

#### **4. What happens at the end of the inspection?**

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the learning community's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. During the inspection, we identified aspects of innovative practice which we would like to explore further. As a result we will work with the learning community and Perth and Kinross Council in order to record and share more widely the innovative practice.

Sheila Brown  
HM Inspector  
22 January 2013

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for this learning community can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/othersectors/communitylearninganddevelopment/BlairgowrieHighSchoolc.asp>.

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