



**Perth Academy
Perth and Kinross Council
27 April 2010**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents¹, young people and the local community know whether their school provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with school staff how they can improve the quality of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the headteacher and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities which young people are involved in. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well young people are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and young people work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support young people. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its 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 from young people, parents and staff, and details about young people's examination performance. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals. Where applicable there will also be 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

Perth Academy is a non-denominational school which serves part of the city of Perth and the surrounding rural area. The roll was 1002 when the inspection was carried out in March 2010. The school supports young people with autistic spectrum disorders from across the whole of Perth and Kinross. The roll was six when the inspection was carried out. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2008/2009. The headteacher had been in post since August 2009.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Work with partners to increase opportunities for learning.
- The start made by the headteacher to develop a culture of continuous improvement.
- Commitment of staff to the care and welfare of young people.
- The development of young people's confidence through their achievements in a wide range of activities.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Almost all young people are keen to learn and eager to take part in lessons. Almost all are well behaved and feel that the school is helping them to become confident learners. They respect each other and their teachers. In S5/S6, young people show leadership skills and contribute to school life by helping younger pupils in classes or as paired readers. Staff are working to develop such skills and attributes more consistently across the school. Most teachers are building on the good start made to discussing and agreeing learning targets with young people. Young people, particularly at S1/S2, should be made more aware of the levels they are working at and how to improve their learning. Almost half feel they would like to discuss their learning with teachers more regularly. Young people in H1 recognise their strengths and work well with their peers across the school. In a few subjects, young people regularly participate actively in lessons. In these lessons, they respond very well when working in groups and planning their work together. Teachers should build on existing good practice in using information and communications technology in, for example, Music to contribute more consistently to young people's learning

experiences. Young people respond very well to opportunities to learn outside the classroom, for example, by raising funds for charities selected by young people themselves. Young people in the personal learning centre contribute well to the Streetsports initiative for children at primary schools. Almost all young people, including those with additional support needs and those who receive support in H1, feel safe and well cared for. Almost a third of young people feel that the school could do more to encourage them to make healthy food choices.

Many young people are successful in a range of sporting, cultural and social activities. They gain confidence and improve their social skills through the ambitious rugby and hockey tours to places such as Canada and Barcelona, and residential experiences through World Challenge. They develop business skills through activities such as the Food and Drink Challenge and Business Dynamics. A majority of young people improve their skills for work through work experience in local businesses. Young people participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme have considerable success, whether supported in school or through the North Perth Community School area. Cultural achievements include entering the National Galleries of Scotland art competition for schools; and participating in various successful musical groups. These include the orchestra, brass band and choirs. The senior pupils have won active citizen group awards and personal achievements include coaching children with additional support needs in a range of sports. Young people achieve a number of awards through their work in the local community. The school is starting to ensure all achievements are accredited whenever possible.

Overall, the pattern of attainment over the last five years has been inconsistent. By the end of S2, most young people reach appropriate national levels in reading and the majority in writing. There are improving trends in both areas. The majority of young people reach appropriate national levels in mathematics. However, there is a declining trend. The systems to monitor progress from primary school to S2 are not rigorous enough, particularly in English

and mathematics. By the end of S4, the success of young people in national examinations, is generally in line with national averages but below other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Attainment in the senior school is stronger. By the end of S5, the school performs above the national average at all levels. Young people perform in line with other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. By the end of S6, the school performs above the national average. Notably, a few departments, such as computing, perform consistently very well in national examinations. Young people with additional support needs are making good progress. Young people with autistic spectrum disorders are making good progress towards their learning targets. The targets, however, need to be improved. Most young people leave school for college, university, work or a training opportunity.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Staff work hard to achieve the school's aims for the curriculum. They provide a broad experience for most young people. Staff provide strong pastoral support for young people as they move into S1 and this is enhanced with curricular links in a few subjects. Young people with autistic spectrum disorders access the curriculum well across the school. At S3/S4 a range of vocational courses are provided to develop young people's skills for work. These increase choice and prepare young people for life after school. At S5 and S6, the school is planning to broaden options for progression further. Staff are responding positively to opportunities to build on existing effective practice and improve the curriculum. As part of the school's implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*, planned activities are increasingly designed to challenge young people and engage them fully in their learning. The literacy group has worked well to raise awareness of aspects of literacy. Almost all young people receive two hours of high quality physical education. The school supports young people well to make the next step after school. Young people attending college during the school day are losing time from other coursework. More innovative

timetabling is necessary to prevent this. The curriculum should be further reviewed, building on the emerging improvements made.

Across the school, most tasks and activities meet the learning needs of young people, including those with an autistic spectrum disorder. In a few classes, there is a need to challenge young people more and maximise their progress. In a majority of classes, the pace of learning is appropriate. The support department provides useful strategies and helpful information to meet young people's needs. The recent development of linking a support teacher with each department is helping to provide more effective support. Class teachers are using these strategies and information effectively to support young people with additional needs. Staff working in H1 support the needs of young people with autistic spectrum disorders very well. Effective links exist with associated primary schools so that the needs of young people are well known on entry to the academy. Enhanced transition programmes allow vulnerable young people to make a successful start in S1. The school needs to monitor young people more systematically to identify those requiring additional support as soon as possible.

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

Partnership between school staff, partner agencies, such as youth workers, and local businesses are very effective. Partners feel valued and included in many aspects of the work of the school. Commendably, many staff and parents volunteer to support a range of out-of-school hours activities. The school works with partners very well to enhance the social education programme. For example, the school has developed strong partnerships with a number of services and community organisations including the police, educational psychologist and young carers organisations to support a wide range of learning opportunities for young people. Partnerships are extended into the community. For example, a few young people volunteer to help at Perth's City Base. Partnerships with local businesses are very productive and help young people to

develop enterprising attitudes and experience the world of work. The headteacher has made a good start to working with the Parent Council to promote the school and improve learning and teaching.

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

Most staff and many young people work hard to improve the school community. Staff participate in working groups which take forward a range of improvements. Their impact on learning and teaching needs to be monitored more effectively. There is an increasing level of consultation and staff are encouraged to develop new ideas. Young people have been consulted on changes to uniform and health programmes. They participate well on the pupil council. The school gathered the views of young people through a survey on learning and teaching. This type of activity should become part of a clear strategy to gather the views of a range of people involved with the school and act on the findings. Almost all staff reflect on their practice and adjust it to improve learning and teaching. The recent changes made by the headteacher have focused on improving young people's successes and achievements. The senior leadership team knows the school well and now needs to provide more support and challenge to key departments, such as English and mathematics, to make further improvements. At departmental level, improvements are too variable. However, the recent increased focus on continuous improvement is impacting positively on learning and teaching.

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

Almost all young people are proud of the school, behave very well and treat each other and staff with respect and understanding. Almost all teachers have high expectations of attitude and effort. Most staff use praise well to encourage young people to achieve their full potential. Staff help to raise young people's aspirations by celebrating their successes in school, in the local press and with

displays and information on notice boards and plasma screens. Where staff have high expectations of young people's involvement they rise to the challenge, for example in the S2 Peer Education Tobacco Project. Equality and diversity is discussed and promoted in a number of ways, including a joint celebration of Scottish and Chinese culture through the 'Chinese Burns' event. Across the school, young people are well cared for but some arrangements for pastoral care need to be reviewed. The few complaints the school receives are generally dealt with effectively.

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

The new headteacher provides clear direction to the school. His energetic team approach has been well received by young people, parents and staff. He quickly evaluated the strengths and aspects for development and is working well with staff to prioritise these to improve learning and teaching. The depute headteachers support the headteacher very well. This new team is working together more consistently to support and challenge the work of departments. A few principal teachers are effective leaders and the school should share this effective practice. There are increasing opportunities for teachers to take the lead in a number of initiatives. They continue to lead in developing enterprise and out-of-school hours activities. There are good opportunities for senior pupils to lead. The senior pupil leadership team is outstanding. It leads charity fundraising and promotes the school very well. Leadership opportunities for younger pupils should continue to be developed. Under the leadership of the new headteacher the school is demonstrating a capacity to improve.

8. What happens next?

We are confident that the school will be able to make the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The school and the education authority will inform parents about the school's progress in improving the quality of education.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Monitor and evaluate the work of the school more rigorously to ensure developments impact on learning and teaching.
- Continue to improve leadership at all levels, particularly in key departments such as English and mathematics.
- Provide consistently high quality learning and teaching.
- Improve the attainment of young people.

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 Perth Academy.

Improvements in performance	satisfactory
Learners' experiences	good
Meeting learning needs	good

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

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

HM Inspector: David Gregory
27 April 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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