

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



Education, Learning & Leisure

HMIe SCHOOL INSPECTION

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FOLLOW THROUGH REPORT

**THE GORDON SCHOOLS
HUNTLY**

CONTENTS

	Page No
1. The School	2
2. Particular strengths of the school	2
3. How do young people learn and achieve?	2
4. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?	4
5. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?	4
6. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?	4
7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?	5
8. What happens next?	5

1. The school

The school serves the town of Huntly and the surrounding rural and agricultural community
The school roll at present is 797

The inspection of the school took place in January 2007. The headteacher was appointed in February 2009. During this session two new depute headteachers have been appointed to the senior management team.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The very positive and welcoming ethos of the school
- The quality and provision of support for pupils with additional support needs.
- The commitment and engagement of staff in the life of the school
- The range of wider experiences and opportunities for personal achievement offered to pupils.
- The commitment of the new senior management team and all staff to the improvement agenda
- Strong links with parents and the wider community

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Since the original inspection and through the improvement planning process the school has addressed a number of priorities to further improve the learning and achievement of pupils. Some important steps have been taken to improve learning and teaching across the school and teachers are working to provide young people with better learning experiences. The establishment of Teacher Learning Community (TLC) and the sharing of good practice is beginning to show impact and improve learners' experiences. Most teachers are now sharing the purposes of lessons with learners and are setting more challenging and interesting tasks. In almost all classes teachers set learning targets and share these with the young people. All teachers need to ensure that the young people clearly understand their learning targets and what they have to do to achieve these however the further expansion of the TLC will ensure that current best practice in this context will be more widely shared and developed. The more effective use of formative assessment strategies is beginning to impact on the quality of learners' experiences and young people are becoming more actively engaged in their learning. This effective practice is being further developed more consistently across the school. To improve attainment and to address an action point from the inspection, the school has recognised the need and continues to work more closely with its associated primary schools and has developed very successful strategies. Staff from both sectors have met to further develop and improve curricular links particularly in language and maths. Successful transition projects such as the River Project, the English department / primary staff moderation for writing exercise, the Maths Dept "How to Sheets" and the Maths Fun Roadshow have significantly improved partnership with associated primaries. Further improvement in curricular links are taking place by staff working with primary colleagues to further develop expressive arts, humanities, modern language, physical

education and science transition programmes. These strategies and the introduction of both diagnostic assessment and a focus on meeting different learning styles is beginning to impact on the appropriateness of pace and challenge for pupils at S1 and S2. The school is continuing the development of a more structured tracking system to monitor and track pupil progress and attainment at both subject and whole school level, and continues to further integrate the Seemis module and the CAT testing into the school procedures and practices. The recent establishment of the P6 – S1 Curriculum Architecture cross sectoral group has further promoted peer evaluation and the sharing of good practice between secondary and primary staff. The group are currently addressing the structure of the S1 curriculum in order to implement a more effective transition process and to produce a model of curriculum delivery which will address the aspect of pupils experiencing too many teachers at S1 and S2. An analysis has been undertaken to identify curricular areas where the number of shared classes could be reduced and the aspirations of Aberdeenshire's 3-18 Curriculum Framework are being actively pursued by reviewing curriculum structures and timetabling in order to reduce class sizes and teacher contacts across the S1 – S4 year groups. The school promotes and celebrates achievement for all young people through the Charter of Achievement, Student of the Month Awards and a formal prize giving ceremony at the end of the school year.

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

Staff are highly committed to the school and to the welfare of all young people. There are opportunities for staff to be involved in the improvement agenda and most are actively involved in working groups to change aspects of learning and teaching. The school is fully committed to the inclusion agenda and use a wide range of effective links with external agencies to meet the needs of pupils. Additional support needs are very effectively identified and are subject to regular review. Emerging policy and practice ensures appropriate deployment of support staff expertise across the network. The further development of the Community School Network partnership has resulted in very good support being provided for pupils and their families. The school has excellent features of partnerships with parents and the wider community and is held in high regard in the locality. There are excellent links with local businesses, industries and organisations which support school ventures and provide opportunities for pupils to develop enterprise skills and an understanding of the world of work. Links with Banff & Buchan and Aberdeen colleges provide support and vocational options for S3 – S6 pupils. There is very effective communication with parents and there is now a thriving Parent Forum, Parent Council and a Parent Fundraising Group which has enhanced parental representation in the life of the school.

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

Young people contribute successfully to the school and wider community through a range of activities including eco initiatives, the Huntly Heritage Project, Our Community Project, Connecting Classrooms, Community Sports Leaders and the SVS Old Folks Christmas Party. Pupils have had increasing involvement in developing and improving aspects of the school provision and their views are sought regularly. In order to involve young people more directly in improving the school, the Pupil Council has been reviewed and enhanced. It recognises that council members need to have the opportunity to discuss important issues

including learning and to influence the work of the school. Senior members of the Pupil Council play an active role in training younger members so that they can contribute more effectively to the work of the Council. Throughout the school, staff are becoming more actively involved in reviewing the quality of teaching and learning and implementing different approaches to make further improvement in provision. Almost all teaching staff are involved in a wide range of working groups and committees. They work well in teams, show leadership and are actively developing approaches to sharing good practice. Processes for reviewing performance are becoming well established and have given senior managers and teachers a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

6. Does the school have high expectations of all children?

Staff, parents and pupils have high expectations of behaviour and achievement. Pupils behave well and there is clear evidence of mutual respect and very good positive relationships with staff and as a result young people achieve well and take a pride in their school. Attendance and behaviour are monitored and information is acted on promptly. The range of wider experiences and opportunities for personal achievement offered to pupils is a particular strength of the school. Pupils' successes are celebrated at assemblies and through a range of awards. Such achievements are also recognised through prominent corridor displays, in the local press and through annual prize giving ceremonies. Teachers have become more involved in setting high but attainable targets for learners' attainment and there are high expectations of pupils' achievement at S3 to S6. However, there is scope for continued improvement in standards of attainment to ensure that learners are challenged and are making the best possible progress in their learning across all stages of the school. In order to address this, examination performance data analysis forms the basis of review meetings between principal teachers, senior management team link and the headteacher at which specific actions are outlined and agreed. Classroom observation, linked to thematic review is now well established and information is used to guide and support improvement planning. The school's developing monitoring and tracking processes provide early identification of underperformance and allow more timely interventions to support pupils' learning planning. Most departments offer regular lunchtime or after school 'catch up' sessions throughout the year and revision classes are also available during the Easter break.

The school has suitable systems of religious observance which encompasses Christianity and all other world religions and actively supports diversity. The school makes appropriate arrangements to ensure the safety of all young people. All staff are aware of child protection procedures.

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

The new head teacher and senior management team have a very strong and aspirational vision for the future of the school, it's pupils and staff. They are clear on how to build on the school's considerable strengths and further improve aspects of the school's work. As a new team they are already working well together to plan and lead the necessary changes to bring about further improvements. The headteacher is providing effective leadership and has begun to further develop leadership capacity amongst staff at all levels. Staff are becoming more fully involved in improving learning and teaching by participating in school improvement working groups and through the establishment of the Teacher Learning Community where

staff observe lessons and share good practice. The school has made good progress in improving the quality of learning and teaching across the school through a review of school self evaluation policy and procedures. A Quality Improvement Group involving a range of staff has been established and a detailed whole school self evaluation calendar is now in place. As part of this process the self evaluation strategy has been shared with staff, the headteacher met with principal teachers to determine departmental strengths and development needs and improvements have been made to the whole school / departmental improvement planning process. Departmental Standards and Quality reports have been introduced to better inform improvement planning priorities and regular meetings between the headteacher, senior management team and principal teachers have been established to address quality assurance issues. The school is fully committed to the implementation of the Aberdeenshire 3-18 Curriculum Framework and staff have contributed to and been involved in developing many aspects of the entitlements and good progress is being made in the wider context of implementing the Curriculum for Excellence.

8. What happens next?

There is very clear evidence that the school has addressed the main points for action contained in the report of the original inspection in January 2007. There has been significant improvement in all the areas identified and the commitment of the headteacher, senior management team and the staff to the improvement agenda ensures that the school's capacity for improvement can be maintained.