



Follow-through Inspection Report

Abercorn School

May 2008

The Inspection

Abercorn School was inspected in February 2006 as part of a national sample of provision for young people of secondary school age with additional support needs. HMIe's report was published on 16 May 2006. Working with the education authority the school prepared an action plan to address the main points for action identified in the report.

Continuous Improvement

The headteacher and depute headteachers had provided very strong and effective leadership and worked with their staff and with the Education Authority to prepare an action plan to address the main points for action in the report. In addition, the school had continued to improve other aspects of its work.

All staff had been given opportunities to take forward aspects of the action plan and to extend their skills and experience. They were fully committed to working together to bring about improvements. Several staff had given presentations to student teachers on aspects of their work. One member of staff had taught in Spain and this experience was being used to enrich the curriculum. One member of staff was accompanying two young people from the upper school taking part in a community project in Ecuador. A teacher had been given the responsibility of taking forward the development of information and communications technology (ICT), and its effective use to support teaching and learning, throughout the school. Another teacher had very effectively taken forward values education throughout the school.

The senior management team, under the direction of the headteacher, had worked to improve attainment and achievement while building on the school's strengths in supporting young people. A principal teacher with responsibility for raising attainment had been appointed. The school was more effectively supporting young people as they moved into the world of work. DHTs had effectively taken forward planning to meet young people's additional support needs. In addition, the school had developed a programme of leadership for young people. Working with psychological services, they had provided training for young people in the upper stages to help them carry out their responsibilities as mentors for children in S1 and S2. A young man from the senior school had given presentations to all city headteachers about the school's approach to new curriculum developments and about his participation in a trip to Ecuador.

The school had very successfully extended opportunities for young people to achieve success in national examinations. Several were now undertaking additional Standard Grade courses. The school was increasingly using national assessments to track young people's progress at S1/S2. A Finance Day provided a relevant context for learners to develop their skills in handling money. Young people now had the opportunity to choose subjects at the end of S2.

The school had extended the opportunities young people had to achieve in a wide range of areas. Young people were participating in a link with schools in France and Belgium. An alternative work experience project had been set up to give those young people with

more complex and significant difficulties appropriate opportunities to experience work environments. A new school band had been formed and two more CDs released, taking the total to three.

The school had achieved a Diamond Enterprise award. ICT was now available within the music department and was helping learners to develop their skills in new ways. The school's music teacher was runner up in the national music teacher of the year competition.

Community links had been strengthened through an art project with Lansdowne Church and a Nursery Eco Project and the school had achieved the Eco Schools Green Flag.

The 2008-2009 Special Olympics programme is to involve 32 young people. Several current students and young people who had formerly attended the school gained gold and silver medals in the World Special Olympics.

Curriculum for Excellence afternoons every Friday were giving learners opportunities to take part in a wide range of carefully planned activities. Young people were able to discuss their progress in becoming more confident individuals, successful learners, responsible citizens and effective contributors. They were also benefiting from taking part in a wider range of lunchtime and after school clubs, including the highly successful social club for senior pupils and those who had formerly attended the school.

The school had more successfully involved young people in their learning. All teachers were making good use of strategies and approaches that helped learners understand their progress and their next steps. Learning passports had been developed for all learners to ensure that all staff had a clearer understanding of their needs and supported them more effectively. Learners were involved in setting targets and in monitoring progress within their personal learning plans. All subjects now had curricular plans in place and these were clearly linked to the planned outcomes for individual learners.

The school had developed and further improved its approaches to monitoring teaching and learning under the direction of the head teacher and the principal teacher with responsibility for raising attainment. The results of classroom monitoring were used to decide on the priorities for further development and this had brought about further improvements for all learners.

Support for young people was identified in the inspection as a strength of the school. The staff had, however, continued to develop their approaches to support. The anti-bullying programme had been extended, including the introduction of an anti-bullying week. The school achieved excellent in six areas and very good in five during its recent review by the local authority as a health promoting school. In response to requests from young people, and following consultation, the school uniform had been changed. The school had completed audits on Child Protection, and Looked After Children. As a result, there had been a focus on particularly vulnerable learners. Their attendance and progress was carefully tracked. They were also benefiting from support through the transition group which, by involving them in a wide range of social and leisure activities, was helping prepare them for independence.

The school had worked to increase parental involvement. More parents were attending parents' surgeries and some parents and children had benefited from involvement in a project to develop healthier life styles for young people and their parents and promote more positive relationships. Guidance interview procedures had been updated and developed. There was now a stronger emphasis on providing personal support for learners. Tutors carried out interviews twice a year and linked as necessary with Pastoral Care year heads. School staff were working very effectively with other professionals to prioritise and plan support for young people with very significant difficulties.

Progress Towards the Main Points for Action

The initial inspection report published in May 2006 identified two main points for action. This section evaluates the progress made with each of the action points and the resulting improvements for young people and other stakeholders.

Main point for action 1

Extend the length of the school week in line with that of mainstream schools.

The local authority is carrying out a review of staffing and of the length of the school day in all ASL schools with a view to bringing provision into line with that in mainstream schools.

Main point for action 2

Address the accommodation issues raised within the report

The school, with the support of the education authority, has made good progress towards meeting this point for action.

Together, they had identified, planned for and put into practice ways in which existing accommodation could be developed and used more effectively to meet the needs of learners.

There were now smartboards and computers in all departments. The computer resource room had been upgraded and several new computers had been installed. The music room had been completely refurbished and changing rooms and almost all teaching areas had now been painted and upgraded. Shutters had been provided to improve security and, in response to requests from the Pupil Council, lockers had been provided for all young people and staff.

Bicycles and kayaks had been purchased to extend physical education resources and facilities. Part of the playground had been resurfaced and outdoor games and equipment provided. An outdoor classroom had been established with moveable seats and access to a whiteboard.

All learners were increasingly proud of their school and its facilities and cared for resources, equipment and buildings very well.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The school had continued to build on its strengths and had effectively improved the ways in which accommodation was used to support teaching and learning. The outstanding leadership of the head teacher and her senior managers remained a key strength of the school. They worked together very effectively with their staff, and with learners and their parents and carers, to sustain the very high standards they had achieved and to take forward their vision for the school.



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