

**Dumbarton Academy
West Dunbartonshire Council**

12 March 2002

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Inspection of Standards and Quality in Dumbarton Academy West Dunbartonshire Council

1. Introduction

Dumbarton Academy was inspected in November 2001 as part of a national sample of secondary education.

The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. HM Inspectors evaluated learning, teaching and attainment, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. The subjects included in the inspection were English, mathematics, physics and S1/S2 science, technical education, and religious and moral education. HM Inspectors also evaluated the quality of support for pupils, including arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils and child protection, and aspects of guidance and support for learning. In evaluating how well the school and departments were managed, HM Inspectors assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning.

Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents. They met the Chairperson of the School Board and a group of parents.

2. The school

Dumbarton Academy is a non-denominational secondary school which serves the town of Dumbarton and the village of Milton. At the time of the inspection the roll was 788. Nine pupils had a Record of Needs.

Parents' views

Parents who responded to the questionnaire were mostly positive about the work of the school.

Almost all felt that:

- their children enjoyed being at school and were fairly treated by their teachers;
- the school had a good reputation in the community;
- the school gave them helpful information on their children's progress;
- staff showed concern for the care and welfare of children; and
- the school was well led.

Some parents felt that the school could give them a clearer idea of its priorities for improving the quality of its education. A small number felt that the school should consult them more.

Ethos

The school had a good ethos. The majority of pupils were positive about the school. In their support for younger pupils, both within and outwith the curriculum, senior pupils showed particular levels of commitment. The school was building on the generally good relationships between pupils and its hard-working staff. However, at times there was some disruption to learning and teaching, which the school was attempting to overcome in various ways. The school had encouraged and recognised pupils' achievements in the areas of sport, music, drama, dance and outdoor pursuits. The 'discipline for learning' programme contained a rewards system which recognised pupils' good work and behaviour. Regular assemblies provided further opportunities for the celebration of success. The school had established pupil councils to encourage pupils to express their views. Many pupils took part in a wide

range of extra-curricular activities, educational visits and events organised by the parent teacher association. The school should proceed with its intention to provide opportunities for religious observance. The school needed to develop its main entrance to promote its work and to provide a more welcoming environment for parents and visitors. Attendance was below the national average.

School and community

The school had very good links with parents and the local community. Features included:

- a strong and supportive School Board and parent teacher association;
- regular written reports and meetings with parents to discuss pupils' progress;
- surveys of parents' views as part of planning for improvement;
- productive links with local businesses; and
- strong links with local primary schools and various community-based projects.

The school needed to involve parents more in their children's learning, for example through better use of homework diaries.

Accommodation

The quality of accommodation was fair overall. Some departments were split across two sites. Some rooms had been refurbished to a high standard, but other areas, including toilets, required upgrading. There was a lack of social areas for pupils. Dampness, leaking roofs and rusting window frames badly affected the school. The surfaces of the playground and of some stairs and floors in corridors, the games hall and assembly hall were in poor condition and needed to be improved. The authority's sensory impairment service base was located

in the school. However, the school's accommodation had not been adapted to meet the needs of pupils with visual impairment. The school shared common entrances to other local services. This allowed open access to the school grounds. The education authority and school should therefore review the effectiveness of security arrangements in the school.

Staffing and resources

The school was well staffed. It had a good range of experience and expertise for most areas of the curriculum. Teachers from the sensory impairment service base and ancillary staff made important contributions to the school. Technicians provided good support to the science and technical education departments.

Overall, the school had good resources. However, the range of resources in religious and moral education was limited. Teachers had good access to computers, but the range of software to support pupils' learning was limited. Staff managed the school's budget very effectively. Senior staff consulted teachers fully on financial arrangements.

3. How well are pupils performing?

Overall quality of attainment

The overall quality of pupils' attainment was fair at S1/S2 and S5/S6 and good at S3/S4. Most pupils performed well in their coursework, although there were marked differences in performance from class to class. Some teachers did not match work closely enough to meet pupils' differing needs.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Awards

The following comments are based on SQA awards for the period 1999-2001.

- The proportion of S4 pupils achieving five or more Standard Grade awards was below the national

average. The proportion achieving five or more Credit awards was around the national average.

- At Higher, the proportion of pupils achieving three or more A-C grades in S5 was around the national average. The proportion achieving five or more A-C grades had fallen to below the national average in 2001.
- The proportion of pupils achieving three or more Higher A-C grades by the end of S6 had risen to above the national average. The number of pupils presented for Advanced Higher or Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS) and gaining awards was generally well below the national average.

Information on attainment in the subjects inspected is given later in the report. Significant features of attainment in the subjects not inspected were as follows.

- At Standard Grade, pupils achieved consistently better results in French than in their other subjects. They performed relatively less well in home economics.
- The proportion of S4 pupils achieving Standard Grade Credit awards was above the national average in art and design and in music and below the national average in chemistry and history.
- In business management, at Standard Grade, Intermediate 2 and Higher, pupils consistently performed better than in their other subjects.
- The proportion of pupils in S5/S6 achieving A-C grades in Higher geography was well above the national average in 2000 and 2001.

Information and communications technology

The following were notable features of pupils' proficiency in information and communications technology (ICT).

- In some departments, pupils were skilled in using computers for word processing and handling information.
- Pupils in S1/S2 made effective use of computer programmes to develop their language and mathematical skills.
- A number of pupils who had difficulties with reading used computers well to develop their understanding of science.
- Some pupils were competent in using the Internet to obtain information about subjects they were studying.
- Pupils made good use of computers to enhance their learning in physics and technical education.

Overall, pupils should have more opportunities to develop and apply their ICT skills across a wider range of subjects.

4. How well are the inspected departments performing?

English

Attainment

The overall quality of attainment was fair in S1/S2 and S5/S6, and good in S3/S4. Most pupils performed well in their coursework. In S1/S2, the majority of pupils achieved appropriate levels in talking and reading and about half did so in writing. There was no reliable evidence of pupils' attainment in listening. The proportion of pupils gaining credit awards at Standard Grade and Band A-C awards at Higher was around the national average. Performance at Intermediate level was below the national average, with too many pupils gaining no award. The majority of pupils presented for National

Units had achieved full success. Most of the small number of pupils presented for CSYS achieved success.

Courses

The S1/S2 course was fair. There was a need for more planned discussion and more formal listening activities. Courses at S3 to S6 were good.

Learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. Teachers provided effective direct teaching, but pupils were not always sufficiently attentive. Generally, staff knew pupils' needs and provided helpful support, but the pace of some lessons was too slow and some tasks did not challenge pupils sufficiently. Teachers paid good attention to recording pupils' attainment and the next steps necessary in their learning. They needed to be more rigorous at times in assessing pupils' understanding in class through more precise questioning.

Management and quality assurance

The highly dedicated principal teacher led the department well and gave good support to colleagues. The department had made a good start to delivering National Qualification (NQ) courses but needed to progress more speedily in raising standards of attainment. Approaches to quality assurance needed further development.

Priorities for action

The department should seek to raise attainment in national targets and examinations. Teachers should increase the pace and challenge of lessons. The principal teacher, in collaboration with the assistant principal teacher, should improve self-evaluation in the department. The department should develop its S1/S2 course to incorporate more interactive and listening activities.

Mathematics

Attainment

The overall quality of attainment was fair at S1/S2 and good at S3 to S6. Most pupils performed well in their classwork. At S2, less than half were attaining appropriate national levels. The proportions of pupils

achieving a Credit award at Standard Grade and an A-C at Higher were around national averages. Less than half of the small number presented for Intermediate 1 achieved an A-C award. Pupils performed better at Intermediate 2 than was expected from their Standard Grade results and the proportion of A awards was well above national averages. Most of the small number presented for CSYS achieved an A-C award.

Courses	The quality of courses was good at S1 to S4. The S5/S6 course was fair, with insufficient written advice for teachers on learning and teaching.
Learning and teaching	The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. Teachers questioned pupils very effectively to check understanding and used homework well. There was not enough use of ICT to improve the quality of pupils' learning. Arrangements for assessment were well organised.
Management and quality assurance	The principal teacher provided good leadership. He gave the staff good support and had developed teamwork within the department. The department's approach to self-evaluation was fair. Staff had undertaken some development activities which were linked to the school priorities. They had made good progress with the priorities contained in the previous development plan.
Priorities for action	Teachers should make more use of ICT in their lessons. Course guidelines should provide more advice on learning and teaching. The principal teacher should develop more systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the department.
Physics and S1/S2 science	
Attainment	The overall quality of attainment was good in physics and fair in S1/S2 science. The majority of S1/S2 pupils had a secure knowledge of recent work. In physics most pupils

performed well in classwork. The proportions of pupils achieving Credit in Standard Grade physics and A-C grades in Higher physics were above the national average. Around half of those presented for Advanced Higher or CSYS achieved A-C grades.

Courses

The S1/S2 course provided good coverage of the main areas of science. However, further work was needed to take more account of pupils' prior experience and provide suitably challenging activities for all. The quality of physics courses was very good.

Learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. Teachers generally explained ideas clearly, used questioning well, and set regular homework. In physics, lessons were often very good and included effective use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning. Some science lessons relied too much on textbooks. Sometimes pupils spent too long copying information. Most pupils participated well in practical work. Class teachers often gave good support to pupils experiencing difficulty, but tasks did not always take enough account of pupils' differing needs. Assessment procedures in physics were well organised. Assessment and reporting in S1/S2 science was not matched clearly enough to what pupils were expected to learn.

Management and quality assurance

The principal teacher managed the physics department very well and had given a good lead in developing the S1/S2 course. He had successfully promoted a good team approach among physics staff, who used an appropriate range of approaches to evaluate their work. Quality assurance in science was mainly informal. Departmental development plans included suitable priorities but did not give enough detail about associated tasks. Teachers had participated in relevant staff development activities.

Priorities for action

Staff should make further improvements to the S1/S2 course and assessment procedures. They should provide appropriate challenge for all pupils, taking account of

their prior learning. The science department should develop more rigorous quality assurance procedures.

Technical education

Attainment

The overall quality of pupils' attainment was good. Most pupils at S1 to S4 achieved good standards in coursework in craft and graphics. Generally, knowledge and understanding was underdeveloped. Also their skills in design were not well enough developed. Almost all pupils at S5/S6 were achieving good standards in coursework. Pupils' performance at Standard Grade, Intermediate and Higher levels was generally below national averages. Pupils achieved poorer results than in their other subjects.

Courses

Courses were good at all stages. At S1 to S4, programmes needed to provide more thorough coverage of designing, and of knowledge and understanding.

Learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good at S1 to S4, and very good at S5/S6. Teachers provided clear explanations and gave pupils good support. They made good use of ICT to enhance learning and teaching. Almost all pupils were well motivated and attentive. At S1 to S4, many pupils needed more challenging tasks. Staff assessed and recorded pupils' progress carefully, and reported clearly to parents.

Management and quality assurance

The thoughtful and perceptive principal teacher provided very good leadership. He organised the department well and was a very strong role model through his teaching. He had encouraged effective teamwork and provided staff with good support and guidance. However, he needed to lead staff in a more effective analysis of pupils' performance in external examinations with a view to raising attainment. The department's development plan lacked detail in some important respects.

Priorities for action	Staff should give more appropriate emphasis to designing and to knowledge and understanding. With a view to raising attainment, the department should provide more challenging tasks for pupils in S1-S4 and should analyse more closely its results in external examinations.
Religious and moral education	
Attainment	The overall quality of attainment was fair at all stages. The majority of pupils were making good progress in their coursework. At S3/S4, less than half of pupils had completed an SQA Short Course successfully.
Courses	Courses at all levels were unsatisfactory. The only course guidelines were for those classes following the SQA Short Course.
Learning and teaching	The quality of teaching was good. Teachers' explanations and instructions were clear. However, they did not share clear learning outcomes with pupils. Most pupils at S1 and S2 worked conscientiously and co-operated with their teachers. At S3 and S4, many pupils lacked motivation. Teachers did not give homework and assessment was limited to those classes studying SQA Short courses.
Management and quality assurance	At the time of the inspection, the school was in the process of appointing a permanent teacher of religious and moral education. However, senior managers had not been fully successful in ensuring that the department developed courses, learning and teaching approaches and assessment. They had not supported the development of rigorous procedures for evaluating the work of the department.
Priorities for action	The department should develop courses for each year group with clear learning outcomes. Senior managers should ensure that the department is given appropriate

support in developing learning and teaching approaches and assessment.

5. How good is the curriculum?

The overall quality of the curriculum was good.

At S1/S2, the school provided a broad and balanced range of courses. In some subjects, courses did not take enough account of the work pupils had done in primary school.

Most pupils in S3/S4 followed a balanced programme of eight Standard Grade subjects. A small number of pupils took seven Standard Grades and used the remaining time to enhance their literacy, numeracy and study skills.

In S5/S6, the school offered a good range of NQ courses. All departments provided courses at least at two levels. In several subjects, four levels, including Advanced Higher, were available. The school had also started to give pupils opportunities to gain awards at Intermediate 2 and Higher levels in the core skill of working with others. It should include an element of religious and moral education within the S5/S6 social education programme.

6. How good is learning and teaching?

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. Most lessons seen were very good or good. Further information about lesson evaluations is given in the appendix.

Teachers used a good range of teaching approaches and gave appropriate emphasis to homework. They generally provided clear explanations and instructions. In some lessons, pupils needed more opportunity to think about and develop their ideas through discussion. Staff

generally organised assessment well to monitor pupils' attainment. However, teachers needed to be more consistent in recording the next steps pupils had to take in

their learning. Most staff met pupils' needs well. Some provided additional learning opportunities in the supported study programme.

The school had agreed ways of encouraging and recognising achievement, but staff needed to be more consistent in promoting positive behaviour. Most pupils were motivated and interested in their lessons. At times, however, there was some disruption to learning and teaching and pupils were not always sufficiently attentive. Many pupils had difficulty in taking responsibility for their own learning without close supervision by the teachers. Classroom tasks did not always take sufficient account of pupils' differing needs and many were unchallenging, particularly in S1/S2. Teachers' expectations of learning outcomes were not always shared with pupils and the pace of pupils' learning varied too widely.

7. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare	Procedures for the care and welfare of pupils were good. The school had very effective approaches to combating bullying. It had put in place sound policies and practices for child protection. The health education programme put appropriate emphasis on drug and alcohol education as well as promoting pupils' health and fitness. Staff were not consistent in implementing the school's procedures for promoting pupils' positive behaviour.
Guidance	<p>The overall quality of guidance and pastoral care was very good. Positive features included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the commitment and sensitivity of guidance staff;• effective approaches to supporting pupils at key transition stages;

- very good arrangements for communicating with parents and staff about individual pupils' progress from S3 to S6; and
- involvement of pupils in the anti-bullying programme.

Guidance staff regularly interviewed pupils. They monitored carefully pupils' progress and attainment from S3 to S6. The school needed to extend this monitoring system to S1/S2.

The personal and social education programme was good. However, the school needed to review the programme to ensure more progression from S1 to S6. Non-guidance staff needed training and support to deliver the personal and social education programme.

The quality of curricular and vocational guidance was very good. Pupils in S4 learned important information about the world of work and higher education through the work experience programme, enterprise education projects, education for work conferences and visits to further and higher education establishments.

The deputy headteacher managed guidance well as part of a substantial remit. He had developed good relationships with staff and was hard working. He now needed to provide a clearer vision and direction to staff, and to develop a more systematic approach to planning for development and to monitoring progress.

Support for learning

The overall quality of support for learning was good. Strong features included the following:

- high quality learning and teaching;
- the mutual respect between staff and pupils;

- the range of initiatives in S1/S2 to improve pupils' basic skills and raise expectations; and
- involvement of senior pupils in supporting younger pupils to improve skills.

The progress of pupils with a Record of Needs was reviewed at regular intervals. Learning support staff had produced appropriate individualised educational programmes. However, pupils and parents were not closely enough involved in the setting of targets.

The principal teacher of learning support managed the department well. She was successfully extending the roles of learning support within the school. She promoted effectively a strong team approach within the department. The department had good approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of its work in supporting learning. All staff were involved in identifying and implementing the department's development priorities.

The school's approaches to behaviour support were inconsistent. There was insufficient guidance to staff on how to improve the quality of services to pupils in this area.

Priorities for action Guidance staff should extend the effective system for monitoring progress to pupils in S1 to S3. They should also improve the personal and social education programme. The school should review its approaches to behaviour support and develop clear guidance on how to improve the quality of services to pupils in this area. Learning support staff recognised the need to involve parents and pupils more closely in the setting of targets in individualised educational programmes.

8. How well is the school managed?

Overall management and leadership

The very committed headteacher provided good leadership. She had gained the confidence of staff and had developed a team spirit among them. She consulted them fully and involved them effectively in the development of policy. She had very good relationships with pupils and parents and had worked hard to establish positive attitudes to learning. Along with her senior management team, she needed to focus more on improving quality assurance, on raising attainment and ensuring a more consistent application of the 'discipline for learning' policy across the school.

Together, members of the senior management team provided good management support to the headteacher. They now needed to focus more clearly on school improvement. Heads of department provided good or very good leadership. Senior teachers carried out their duties well.

Staff development and review

The school's approaches to staff development and review had important weaknesses. The identification of the professional development needs of staff was limited. The headteacher had not been fully reviewed. There were plans, however, to review all other staff. Teachers experienced some useful staff development, including an identification of needs in ICT. The school had established appropriate ways of evaluating this.

School development planning

The school had established good quality approaches to development planning procedures. Staff had identified priorities for development through self-evaluation. The school had also sought the views of parents and pupils. The development plan included an appropriate statement of aims. It gave good attention to improving learning and teaching and to raising attainment. However, tasks and measures for judging success in meeting these were not

clear enough. Departmental plans linked to school priorities but generally lacked detail. Staff had made good progress in implementing plans.

Approaches to improving quality

The school's approaches to self-evaluation were fair. Members of the senior management team attended department meetings and monitored reports to parents. Standard agendas for departmental meetings enabled link members of the senior management team to have an overview of departmental progress in meeting identified priorities. However, these agendas were not always consistently followed. The headteacher met annually with principal teachers to carry out departmental reviews, including performance in SQA examinations and departmental development plans. These reviews needed to have a clearer record of agreed action points to inform the department's future planning. Overall, the school needed to monitor and evaluate its work more systematically and set out clear responsibilities for senior management in the quality assurance process.

9. How well does the school perform overall?

Dumbarton Academy provided a good quality of education. Staff provided good care and support for pupils. A more systematic approach to self-evaluation would help to ensure continuing improvement of standards. The headteacher had made a positive start to this process by ensuring that pupils, parents and staff were all involved in evaluating and improving various aspects of the work of the school. She now needed to increase the overall pace of development.

Key strengths

- The very positive links between the School Board and the headteacher.
- Good information on the curriculum to pupils and parents.

- The quality of the curriculum in S5/S6.
- The strong sense of community among staff.
- The school's links with other schools and the wider community, including its links with industry.
- The school's management of its finances in developing the education it provided.
- The contributions of senior pupils to the life and work of the school.

Main points for action

In addition to addressing the priorities for action identified in this report, the school and education authority should act on the following recommendations.

- The education authority and the school should address the accommodation issues identified in this report.
- The school should improve attainment, particularly in S1/S2 and S5/S6.
- The school should include religious and moral education within its programme for pupils' personal and social education in S5/S6.
- With the support of senior management, staff should raise expectations of pupils' attainment and attitudes to learning.
- The school should implement its proposals for the professional review and development of all staff.
- The headteacher should establish a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation. She should ensure that the senior management team focus more on quality assurance.

HM Inspectors will return between one and two years after the publication of this report to assess progress in meeting these recommendations. The school and education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main points for action in the report and to share that plan with parents.

Bill Stevenson
HM Inspector
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector
Western Division

12 March 2002

See Performance Indicator data overleaf.

Appendix

Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be *very good*

- Partnership with parents and the School Board
- The school's management of devolved finances
- Quality of curricular and vocational guidance

We judged the following to be *good*

- The school's ethos
- Communication with parents
- Provision of staff, their qualifications and experience
- Provision of materials and equipment
- Organisation and use of resources and space
- The structure of the curriculum
- Effectiveness of the learning support
- Implementation of Special Educational Needs legislation
- Guidance role in monitoring pupils' progress and attainment
- Quality of pastoral care
- Effectiveness of leadership of the school
- Effectiveness of promoted staff and senior teachers
- The school development plan
- Implementing the school development plan

We judged the following to be *fair*

- Provision of accommodation and facilities
- The school's approach to evaluating its own work
- The school's arrangements for development and review of its staff

We judged the following to be *unsatisfactory*

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Quality of lessons observed

HMI also evaluated the quality of the lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 29% of cases, good in 56% and fair in 15%. There were no unsatisfactory lessons.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education and Cultural Services, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the office at the address below or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. Copies are also available on our web site:
www.scotland.gov.uk/hmie

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI whose address is given below. If you are unhappy with the response, you will be told in writing what further steps you may take.

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