



**Dumbarton Academy
West Dunbartonshire
Council
27 October 2009**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMI) 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, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school and 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.

Contents

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. Examples of good practice
4. How well do young people learn and achieve?
5. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?
6. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?
7. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?
8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
9. What happens next?

1. The school

Dumbarton Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the town of Dumbarton. The roll was 659 when the inspection was carried out in September 2009. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher had been in post for less than a year. The school has had several changes of senior promoted staff in the past four years.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Polite and courteous young people who are proud of their school.
- The wide range of effective partnerships with the local community which enhance young people's learning.
- The contribution of the integrated pupil support department to meeting the needs of young people, including those with additional support needs.
- The commitment of almost all staff to school improvement and to leading projects in the school.

3. Examples of good practice

- A *More Choices, More Chances* initiative which is improving the skills of disadvantaged young people.
- The impact of a project to prevent sexual bullying which has raised awareness and increased understanding of the issues.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

The school has a positive learning environment. Most young people work well with one another and with their teachers. They are attentive, and keen to do well in their learning. They enjoy being given choices and taking responsibility for their own learning. At times, young people use technology enthusiastically and well. Not all teachers ensure that young people know how to improve in their learning. At times,

teachers' questions do not always help young people think for themselves and extend their understanding. Across the school, most young people are treated with equality, fairness and respect. They think that the school encourages and supports them to make choices that will improve their health and wellbeing.

The majority of young people achieve a range of skills through opportunities provided by the school. In S2, around a third of young people are developing important skills of communication and teamwork through attending leadership courses. Young people in S5/S6 gain important leadership and communication skills through supporting young people in S1. Young people in S1 to S3 value the activities of the Dumbarton Academy Seniors against Harassment (DASH) group which help them feel safe in school. In S1, young people's understanding of sustainability and environmental issues has increased through building a school greenhouse out of plastic bottles and growing their own vegetables. High-quality displays of artwork reflect young people's levels of achievement in art and design. The school has recognised the need to increase the range of out-of-school experiences so that all young people have the opportunity to achieve highly across a range of important skills.

The majority of young people achieve appropriate national levels in reading and mathematics by the end of S2. Slightly less than half achieve these levels in writing. The school recognises that it needs to do more to monitor the progress young people are making from the start of S1 to the end of S2. At S4, examination results are improving slightly. Overall, results are not as good as in schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. At S5, Higher examination results have been variable over the past five years. Young people's attainment by the end of S6 is showing signs of improvement. However, young people at this stage are doing less well than those in schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Overall, the curriculum based on the school's values is good. Teachers are increasingly creative in their approaches to implementing *Curriculum for Excellence*. Staff have worked well together to increase choice, relevance and enjoyment for young people. The school is developing effective links across subject areas which allow young people to make better connections across their learning. At S1/S2, young people are benefiting from the wide range of opportunities to develop creativity, work together, solve problems and direct their own learning. A notable number of young people at S3/S4 develop important skills for work through attendance at the local college. The school is successfully improving the life chances of a few young people through targeting support and offering alternative choices, for example through extended work experience. Young people benefit from two hours of high-quality physical education weekly. One of the S1 projects, *Fit4Life*, has increased young people's understanding of the importance of living a fit and healthy lifestyle.

Teachers know their pupils well and want to do the best for them. They work well with support for learning staff to provide a suitably varied and increasingly wide range of activities to meet the needs of most young people. Most activities engage young people and are at the correct level of difficulty for them. A few tasks are too easy. A few young people have an individualised educational programme (IEP). IEPs are written in very helpful language and have appropriate learning targets to ensure young people with additional support needs make appropriate progress. Commendably, targets are transferred to jotters to allow young people to benefit from using them regularly in both class and at home to support their learning. Young people are encouraged to further their learning at home, but this is not consistent across the school. Young people feel they benefit from additional help offered by their teachers, for example at lunchtimes and through supported study.

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

Pupil and family support workers work very hard and effectively to support young people with additional support needs and their families. They maintain contact with them during school holidays. Learning support assistants know the young people very well and care well for their learning and medical needs. They often work very well with the pupil and family support workers to support young people's learning. The school works very effectively with a very wide range of partners, such as Clydebank College, Tulloch Trust and *Y-Sort-it* to increase choices and improve learning for young people. Most parents are happy with the school. The Parent Council has been very supportive in promoting improvements to the school building. Its members are now keen to become more involved in all aspects of the life and work of the school. The school needs to improve how it records the action following a small number of complaints made by parents, young people and other members of the community.

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

Increasingly, teachers think about how well young people are learning and what they can do to improve their teaching. They are asking young people to give their views on teaching and learning during lessons and at the end of courses. Staff are using more effectively information from surveys of the views of young people, staff and the community to help them improve the school. Teachers share good practice with the aim of improving young people's learning experiences. Staff and young people believe that the school is improving. Following recent training and the allocation of a budget, the pupil council wants to be more involved in the running of the school.

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

Most relationships between staff and young people are positive. Young people are well behaved in class and in corridors. The school

should carefully monitor and seek to reduce the increased number of exclusions to ensure that young people are not missing out on education. Young people's achievements are recognised through weekly praise certificates from the headteacher, assemblies and award ceremonies. Parents like the letters about achievement that are sent to them. Staff are aware of the procedures in place to protect young people. The school building has recently been modified to ensure that the ground floor is accessible to wheelchair users. Other aspects of the building require improvement. The school needs to improve its arrangements for religious observance.

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

The school's shared values of honesty, equality, ambition, responsibility, respect and trust are embedded in the culture of the school. The headteacher has worked hard to build successful relationships with young people, staff and parents. Staff teamwork is developing well. The headteacher is ably supported by the deputy headteachers whose variety of experience helps to create a strong team. Staff at all levels are willing to lead important initiatives, such as the S1 short projects. The school is beginning to think about how it will take forward the leadership skills of the young people. With the school's increased focus on improving outcomes for young people, it is well placed to continue to improve.

9. 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. Our District Inspector will maintain contact with the education authority to monitor improvements in learners' achievement.

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

- Continue to improve young people's achievement.
- Ensure that more rigorous self-evaluation leads to improvement in learning and teaching.
- Review arrangements for religious observance.

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 Dumbarton 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	good

HM Inspector: Elizabeth Morrison
27 October 2009

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

If you would like to find out more about our inspections or get an electronic copy of this report, please go to www.hmie.gov.uk.

Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation, or if you wish to comment about any aspect of our inspections. You can contact us at HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk or write to us at BMCT, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Text phone users can contact us on 01506 600 236. This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as the line will not connect you to a member of staff.

You can find our complaints procedure on our website www.hmie.gov.uk or alternatively you can contact our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

Crown Copyright 2009
HM Inspectorate of Education