

**Dumbarton Academy
West Dunbartonshire Council
24 January 2006**

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1. The inspection

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published a report on Standards and Quality in Dumbarton Academy in March 2002. An inspection team visited the school in January 2004 to assess the extent to which the school was continuing to improve the quality of its work, and to evaluate progress made in responding to the main points for action in the initial report. Following that visit, HMIE reported that the school had made good progress in addressing most aspects of four of the six main points for action in the original report. However, HM Inspectors judged that progress in improving attainment and in implementing a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation had been fair and more required to be done.

In December 2004, the education authority submitted a report to HMIE on further progress with these outstanding action points. An inspection team revisited the school in October 2005 to assess the extent to which the school had continued to improve the quality of its work, and to evaluate progress made in improving attainment and approaches to self-evaluation.

2. Continuous improvement

Overall, progress in addressing the outstanding main points for action of the original inspection report had been slower than would have been expected. Following receipt of the progress report from the education authority in December 2004, HMIE continued to engage with the school and the education authority to monitor the school's capacity for continuous improvement. A key outcome of this engagement was a set of proposals for action required to achieve further improvement. The education authority and school took account of these proposals in preparing an action plan. This action is being implemented in the current session.

Education authority officers have continued to work with the school and there have been improvements in attainment in some subjects. Staff had increased expectations in relation to pupils' attendance, punctuality and behaviour, and also for completion of homework. Levels of pupils' attendance had improved and fewer pupils were excluded. The school's work in combating bullying had achieved national recognition. Other aspects of pupils' achievements included successful involvement in the Encouraging Dynamic Global Entrepreneurs programme. Pupils were able to work on enterprise education activities with students from the University of Glasgow and from Columbia University in New York. There had been a few changes in staffing since the last follow-through inspection. Work to address the structural problems in the games hall had been completed.

3. Progress towards meeting the main points for action

This section evaluates the progress made with the two outstanding main points for action identified in the follow-through report of March 2004, and the resulting improvements for pupils and other stakeholders.

3.1 The school should improve attainment, particularly at S1/S2 and S5/S6.

While attainment had improved in some subjects at some stages, the school had made limited progress in improving overall attainment at S3 to S6. The overall quality of attainment at these stages was weak.

Targets set for attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at S2 had been exceeded. The school had worked effectively with pupils who were under-achieving at S4. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more awards at SCQF levels 3 and 4¹ or better had improved and was now above the average for West Dunbartonshire schools. While the proportion of pupils achieving five or more awards at level 5 or better had also improved, it remained low in comparison to schools with similar characteristics.

Attainment at S5/S6 had shown little overall improvement in the last two years. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more awards at level 6 or better had improved slightly, but was still below the education authority average and well below performance in similar schools. The proportions of pupils achieving one or more awards or three or more awards at level 6 or better had declined. While aspects of boys' performance had improved slightly, girls' performance had declined. The proportion of pupils achieving one or more awards at level 7 had fallen and was well below that of similar schools.

Features of improvement in attainment in specific subjects in 2005 were as follows.

- At Standard Grade, there had been improvements in attainment in administration, art and design, craft and design, French, history and physics.
- At Higher, there had been encouraging performance in administration, art and design, chemistry and French.

The school and education authority action plan identified a range of strategies to achieve more sustained improvements in attainment. These strategies included:

- a review of the school's values and aims to place more emphasis on setting high expectations and celebrating achievement;
- changes in the remits of senior managers to increase the focus on working with departments to evaluate learning, teaching and attainment;
- closer monitoring of pupils' progress through an extension of target-setting and mentoring initiatives; and
- increased involvement of parents in discussing pupils' progress.

¹ **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels:**

7: Advanced Higher at A-C/CSYS at A-C

6: Higher at A-C

5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2

4: Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4

3: Access 3 Cluster; Standard Grade at 5-6

The school had introduced more opportunities for staff to identify and share good practice, as well as a programme of staff development for senior managers and principal teachers. All departments now had more focused discussion on examination results and had identified priorities for action as part of the school's overall strategy to improve attainment. At the time of this follow-through inspection, the full impact of these initiatives was not yet evident. Education authority officers were working closely with the school to monitor progress.

3.2 The headteacher should establish a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation. She should ensure that the senior management team focus more on quality assurance.

The headteacher had taken steps to improve the school's approach to self-evaluation, and there were examples of strengths in practice. However, some developments were relatively recent and unacceptable variations in the effectiveness of practice at school and department level remained. Overall progress with this main point for action, since the last follow-through inspection, had been adequate.

The school's policy on quality assurance had been finalised and was being implemented. The policy included a stronger focus on regular self-evaluation using national indicators of quality. All departments were now undertaking more rigorous review and analysis of pupils' progress and attainment. Several principal teachers had well-established and effective procedures for self-evaluation, and were using opportunities for team teaching and lesson observation within departments to identify and share good practice in learning and teaching. The headteacher was collating and sharing good practice identified through monthly self-evaluation within departments.

The headteacher had set clearer expectations of the priority to be given to discussing learning, teaching and achievement at departmental and senior management team meetings. Continuity in senior managers' links with departments had been achieved. This had resulted in, for example, the development of productive collaborative working among some principal teachers. There was still scope for senior managers to ensure that they were using consistently rigorous approaches when working with their respective departments. Senior managers required to further develop procedures for evaluating learning and teaching in order to become fully effective. The recently completed school policy on learning and teaching should help to provide a clear set of expectations against which improvements can be measured.

4. Conclusion

Since the previous follow-through inspection in January 2004, the overall pace of progress in addressing the aspects which HM Inspectors had identified as requiring further improvement had been too slow. However, with a range of focused support from the education authority, in recent months staff had shown increased commitment to securing improvement. The most recent work undertaken by the school, supported by education authority officers, in continuing to address the outstanding main points for action had not had sufficient impact on improving pupils' attainment.

Through on-going contact with education authority officers, HMIE will continue to monitor progress with the school's current action plan. To confirm that the school's continuing work to share good practice in learning and teaching and raise standards of attainment and

achievement is fully effective, the education authority should submit a further progress report to HMIE by September 2006.

Marjory Robertson, HMI
District Inspector

24 January 2006

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