



**Mintlaw Academy
Aberdeenshire Council
5 May 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school. We describe how young people benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents¹ and services which support young people. We also comment on how well staff and young people work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the 'ethos' of the school. By 'ethos' we mean the relationships in the school, how well young people are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school's aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school's success in achieving these 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 and details about young people's examination performance. 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.

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1. The school

Mintlaw Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the rural town of Mintlaw and the surrounding catchment area. The roll was 833 when the inspection was carried out in March 2009. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The commitment of staff to young people's learning and welfare.
- The support for young people with identified learning needs.
- The range of activities provided at lunchtime.
- The quality of young people's achievements in sport, in and beyond the school.
- The innovative use of digital and print media to celebrate young people's achievements.

3. Examples of good practice

- The use of digital examinations to support learners.
- The contribution of the Artist in Residence.
- Achievement through girls' football.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

The majority of young people enjoy learning at school and cooperate willingly with staff. Almost all are motivated and keen to learn. They respond well when given opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and would benefit from more chances to learn independently and in groups. Almost all are well behaved and most feel that staff and other young people treat them fairly and with

respect. The pace of learning is appropriate in most lessons although it needs to be increased at S1/S2. Young people need more opportunities to discuss how to improve their learning. From S4, they are beginning to develop confidence in discussing and setting targets for learning with their teachers.

Young people respond well to a wide range of activities which help improve their confidence. A wide variety of sport, music and other events provide opportunities for personal achievement. Young people benefit from a range of educational trips including field trips in geography and educational visits to Germany and Switzerland. They are developing as responsible citizens through taking part in fund-raising events for local and national charities. A significant number of young people at S6 show responsibility in helping their younger peers in their learning. Sports teams enjoy high levels of success in events at local and national level, particularly in school football. Award programmes such as Sports Leadership need to be further developed to recognise the achievements of young people at all stages in the school. The school now needs to strengthen its arrangements for tracking achievements to ensure all young people benefit.

In reading, listening, talking and mathematics, a majority of young people are reaching appropriate national levels by the end of S2. Less than half achieve these levels in writing. The school needs to improve its approaches to monitoring how well young people in S1/S2 are building on prior learning and progressing across the rest of the curriculum. In S4 and S5, attainment is in line with national averages, and overall in line with schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. By the end of S6, results are in line with national averages, but less good than results in schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Almost all young people leave school to continue their education or to go into employment.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The school provides a broad curriculum and has started to review the balance of subjects at S1/S2. Staff are engaged in reviewing the curriculum by considering how to organise learning experiences and subjects taking account of advice from the national programme *Curriculum for Excellence*. They are developing a better awareness of what children learn at primary school and building on this knowledge. They are also working with primary school colleagues on active approaches to learning. In S3 to S6 almost all young people are able to build on their prior learning when making course choices. A number of young people in S4 are benefiting from Skills for Work courses at the local college. The Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) broadens achievements for a number of young people in S3/S4. Staff work well with other professionals from Careers Scotland, health and community learning and development to engage with young people. There is scope to develop planning across these partnerships to provide young people with more opportunities for learning and achievement. The school needs to review arrangements to ensure that young people at all stages have sufficient access to high-quality physical education and to continue religious and moral education at S5/S6.

The learning needs of most young people are met effectively. Most teachers know individuals well and have high expectations of their commitment to learning. In some classes, tasks, activities and resources need to be better matched to young people's needs. Pastoral staff carefully monitor young people's progress, communicate with subject teachers and share any concerns with parents. The support for learning team communicates effectively with class teachers to ensure that individuals and groups of young people receive well-judged support. Staff in the curriculum support centre address the needs of young people skilfully and sensitively. Pastoral staff provide effective and thoughtful support to young people.

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

The school has strong pastoral links with its associated primary schools. A pilot transition programme uses drama, music and English to encourage young people to discuss their feelings and write about them. This supports their personal and social development and helps them to build confidence as they transfer to secondary school. Staff in the school work well with a range of partners to enhance the quality and breadth of learning for young people. This includes visiting artists and musicians, authors and theatre groups. A wide range of partner agencies contributes effectively to young people's progress in learning. These partners include the educational psychology service, medical support services, the fire brigade and the police. Effective partnership work with youth workers through the *What's right 4 me* programme re-engages disaffected young people with learning. This approach should be extended to younger learners. Parents regard the school as approachable and caring. Most feel the staff keep them well informed about their children's progress. The school has effective arrangements for dealing with complaints. It should now consider how to report back to the parent body on how it deals with any issues raised.

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

Staff are committed to improving the school. They take part in groups linked to school development and give of their own time to organise activities and support young people outside the classroom. The senior management team work very well together to identify areas for improvement. They have an effective programme for evaluating learning and teaching in lessons. This programme now needs to be broadened to include all staff in a consistent approach to sharing good practice in learning and teaching. Staff use rigorous analysis and discussion of examination results to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in attainment from S3 onwards, but not at S1/S2. In some subjects staff collect the views of young people on their learning

experiences. The school IT system increasingly provides staff with access to important information concerning the progress and pastoral care of all young people.

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

The ethos of the school is friendly and supportive. Young people feel welcome and safe and they make others welcome. Staff have high expectations of their motivation and behaviour and most young people respond well. The school encourages young people in their achievements. Young people make good use of local media. School pages in the local press are used imaginatively to highlight achievement. Young people have also developed the Mintlaw Academy Radio Station (MARS) to provide a lively picture of school life. Young people do not have enough opportunities to contribute to decision making in the school, particularly about learning. The school does not provide appropriate opportunities for religious observance.

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

The headteacher has the confidence and support of his staff, young people and parents. Together with his senior management team, he knows the school well and has a clear sense of what needs to be done to improve achievement. Staff are highly committed to young people's learning and welfare. Many teachers across the school are driving important improvements to learning in their departments. They value the support to their own learning provided by the school's programme of professional development. The headteacher and depute headteachers have identified the need to involve all staff in sharing good practice and identifying areas for improvement. Young people and their parents, staff, the Community School Network and partner agencies now need to develop a shared vision for improving the school, in the context of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

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

- Develop a shared vision for improving the school with parents and partners in the community in the context of *Curriculum for Excellence*.
- Further develop the curriculum.
- Continue to strengthen learning and teaching by sharing good practice across the school, taking account of the views of young people.

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 Mintlaw 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	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

HM Inspector: Carol McDonald

5 May 2009

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This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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