



**Banff Academy
Aberdeenshire Council
6 January 2009**

We published a report on Banff Academy in January 2006. That report set out key strengths of the school and main points for action. We carried out follow-through inspections in December 2006 and September 2007 and published reports on these visits in February 2007 and January 2008.

This follow-through report is based on an inspection visit which was carried out in October 2008. It tells you about improvements since the original inspection in the quality of education which the school provides. It also comments on how the school is getting on with the main points for action. First we focus on changes in the core work of the school. We explain how the school has got better at helping children to learn and benefit from being at the school. Next we look at the key processes which enable this to happen, including the involvement of parents¹. Our report also describes developments in the 'ethos' of the school, by which we mean how well young people are cared for and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally we comment on improvements in leadership to help the school achieve its aims.

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

Banff Academy serves the town of Banff and surrounding area. Since the follow-through inspection in September 2007, staffing has been much more stable.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The promising start which the school has made to setting targets for young people and to tracking their progress to raise attainment.
- The pleasant, helpful and courteous young people.
- The commitment of staff and their active involvement in school improvement.
- The more consistent quality of leadership which has led to improvements in the quality of learners' experiences.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

As part of its plans for improvement, the school has identified a number of priorities. As a result, it has taken some important steps to improve learning and achievement but has not yet been successful in raising attainment levels across the school. Across the school, teachers are working to provide young people with better learning experiences. They are successfully sharing the purposes of lessons with learners. Many are setting more challenging and interesting tasks and because of this the young people are more actively engaged in their learning. This effective practice is not used consistently throughout the school. All teachers set learning targets and share these with the young people. They are using the recently introduced tracking system to monitor how well the young people are doing. Some teachers are helping their learners to understand what they need to do to improve and to develop greater confidence in their own abilities. All teachers need to ensure that the young people clearly understand their learning targets and what they have to do to achieve these. To help improve attainment, the school recognises the need to work more closely with its associated primary schools. There is scope, for example, to improve the writing skills of learners, particularly boys.

Throughout the school, many teachers are using the additional resources for information and communications technology (ICT) well to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their lessons. In some classes learners use ICT well for research and presenting their work to others. Most young people cooperate with their teachers and work well with each other in groups. Many are attentive, answer questions and share their ideas willingly. The behaviour of a few is not always good enough and this occasionally interrupts learning.

The school promotes success for all young people through activities to develop confidence and a 'can do' approach. These activities include workshops on enterprise, motivation, leadership and exam study skills as well as a range of creative activities. A wide range of inter-house activities helps to develop team working skills. For older learners, the school has introduced a course on safe driving as part of its approaches to promoting health and wellbeing for all.

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

Staff are committed to the welfare of all young people and promote a culture of care across the school. The security of the building has been improved and young people now feel more secure. Most teachers are actively involved in working groups to change aspects of learning and teaching for the better. Where appropriate, staff work well with a number of other professionals to provide support for young people, for example in their learning and in aspects of their health and wellbeing. Young people for whom English is an additional language are benefiting from changes to the way the school supports their learning and monitors their progress. The school needs to ensure that these new approaches continue to lead to improvement for the young people. Effective links with the local college help a number of young people develop a range of skills which will help them in the world of work.

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

Young people contribute successfully to the school and wider community through a range of activities including fundraising, Eco initiatives, paired reading and buddying. As part of its approaches to helping young people develop as responsible citizens, the school is raising funding to set up an exchange programme with Alaska to promote awareness of sustainability. It has sought their views on the areas where they feel the school needs to do better. To involve young people more directly in improving the school, it has re-established the pupil representative council. It recognises that council members need to have the opportunity to discuss important issues including learning and to influence the work of the school. Throughout the school, staff are involved in reviewing the quality of teaching and learning and implementing different approaches to make it more effective.

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

Overall, there have been clear improvements in teachers' expectations of what young people can do. Teachers are involved in setting high but attainable targets for learners' attainment and tracking their progress. However, there is considerable scope for continued improvement in standards of attainment to ensure that learners are making the best possible progress in their learning. Many young people are benefiting from opportunities to take greater responsibility for their learning. All young people in S3 and S4, for example, are now linked with a teacher who discusses their progress with them and helps them develop skills to become successful learners. In the most effective lessons, teachers provide appropriately challenging tasks to engage young people actively in their learning and to develop deeper understanding. This good practice is not yet consistent across the school.

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

The headteacher and senior managers have worked together well to plan and lead the necessary changes to bring about a number of improvements to the school. The school has begun to improve the leadership capacity amongst staff at all levels and groups of pupils. Staff are committed to making learners' experiences better and are actively involved in working to do this. For example, they have observed each others teaching and have shared good practice. The school recognises that there is scope to develop more opportunities for all young people and their parents to be involved in the life and work of the school. Overall, Banff Academy shows a strong capacity to continue to improve.

8. What happens next?

There is evidence of improvement in key areas of the school's work since the inspection in September 2005. The quality of improvements in performance, improvement through self-evaluation, learners' experiences and meeting learning needs have improved and are now at a satisfactory level or better. However, attainment levels and success in national examinations is still not of a consistently high standard across all subject areas. With continued support from the education authority the school has the capacity to improve. The District Inspector will visit the school within one year of the publication of this report to review the impact of the school's tracking systems on improving attainment. At that point the school and education authority will prepare a progress report for parents.

HM Inspector: Eleanor Harkness

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