



**Wick High School
The Highland Council
16 December 2008**

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.

Contents

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

1. The school

Wick High School is a non-denominational school which serves the town of Wick and the surrounding area of East Caithness. The inspection was carried out in September 2008 at which time the roll was 838. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average during 2006/07.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Polite, well-behaved and considerate young people.
- The commitment by staff and the community to develop a wider range of activities for young people.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

In the best lessons almost all young people are motivated and enthusiastic about learning. In some subjects young people work well together in groups and express their opinions confidently when given the opportunity to do so. Staff sometimes use information and communications technology (ICT) well as a whole-class resource to motivate and engage young people. Across the school young people's experiences as learners vary. In too many classes they are not given enough opportunities to be actively involved in their learning. In some classes, they do not receive regular, helpful advice on how to improve their work. Young people's learning skills are not improving consistently across the curriculum.

Young people are experiencing increased opportunities to learn from a range of activities for personal achievement. More young people now take part in activities related to sports and the arts. Many are committed to improving the quality of the environment and a group recently participated in a debate on the environment at the Scottish Parliament. Young people contribute effectively through charity fundraising and involvement in the 'Caithness Heritage Fair'. They are becoming more confident as a result of their experiences in a range of foreign visits. All young people across the school need to be given the chance to get involved, take the lead and be responsible for activities.

In reading, writing and mathematics pupils in S1/S2 are not making sufficient progress and attainment has not improved. In recent years, the performance of young people in S4 to S6 in national examinations has been below or well below the national average and much weaker than in other schools whose young people have similar needs and backgrounds. In a few subjects young people perform well, but results in key measures of attainment for S4 to S6 across the school show no signs of improvement. Most young people with additional support needs are progressing well. Poor attendance prevents a few young people from achieving their best.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

In S1/S2, young people study a suitable range of subjects. In a few subjects, teachers ensure that young people can build well on what they have already learned in primary school, for example, through joint science projects. The school should ensure that this kind of good practice is in place in all departments. The school has worked hard to increase the provision for young people to take part in a range of vocational courses from S3 onwards. A few young people feel these experiences are helping them to understand their school work better. The majority really enjoy these courses. However, some choose vocational courses as a way of avoiding other subjects, leading to a lack of real enjoyment and motivation. Better planning between staff would enable teachers to support young people with additional needs more effectively in mainstream subjects. A few pupils with additional support needs attend off-site provision where they have too limited a curriculum to meet their needs. Most courses across the stages allow young people to progress in their learning but the choice in S5/S6 for a few young people is too narrow. A wide range of enterprise projects provides some young people with useful experiences, for example in the various “challenge” activities. A few departments have begun to consider how to introduce the national *Curriculum for Excellence* initiative, with some organising interesting inter-disciplinary projects. Guidance staff need to be more consistent in the way they discuss subject choices with young people.

The majority of tasks set by teachers meet young people's learning needs. Those with additional and complex needs are well supported in their learning. The particular needs of a few young people attending off-site provision have not been well met. Across the school, tasks need to be more challenging and better linked to real life situations. In most lessons, teachers explain the work well and get on with young people. In the best lessons, teachers make the purpose of the lesson clear. Across the school the quality of learning and teaching varies too much. Teachers do not always ask questions in a way that makes pupils think about their learning or gives them enough feedback on how to improve. Courses and programmes across the school need to be better matched to the individual learning needs of all young people.

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

Parents would like more information about the progress of their individual children. They would like the school to be more active in seeking out their views and taking account of these. Parents are supportive of the school and are keen to see it improve. Parents and school staff together work hard to raise funds to support out-of-school learning activities and to attract speakers from the world of work. The very active Parent Council is committed to improving the quality of the school accommodation in order to improve learners' experiences. Members have voiced their concerns that the school building is not fit for purpose. Staff have worked hard to improve the environment in public and dining areas. However, the school building as a whole is not yet a welcoming, secure or positive environment for learning. We discussed aspects relating to health and safety with the school and authority. The authority has committed resources within the current year to deal with the most pressing accommodation issues.

The school has strong links with North Highland College and local businesses. These increase opportunities for young people to broaden their learning, for example in childcare, psychology and through learning in the world of work. The staff work well with a range of partners such as counsellors, children's services worker and

educational psychologists. The 'Pulteney People's Project' is very successful in helping to develop the personal and social skills of some young people. Some of these links need to be better planned to become more effective. The school is finding it difficult to gain regular access to necessary services for young people with complex needs. The police liaison officer is developing positive relationships with young people, which is benefiting the school community.

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

Staff are very active in the life and work of the community. For example, they take part in groups linked to school improvement and give of their own time to organise activities and support for young people outside school hours. The pupil council is beginning to involve fellow pupils in decision making. Responses to questionnaires show that young people would like more of a say in how to improve the school, including how they learn. Pupils now have a strong sense of belonging and pride in their school through the introduction of uniform and positive approaches to encouraging good behaviour. Staff and young people have been very successful at improving the overall atmosphere in the school. Existing arrangements to identify the school's strengths and areas for improvement have had little impact on improving overall attainment. As the school starts to use a wider range of approaches, staff need to ensure that these are consistently applied and lead to improvement. They need to check that young people are progressing and assess how well they are learning in lessons, so that senior staff can identify and share good practice. Everyone in the school community needs to be more fully consulted about, and involved in school improvement planning.

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

The school has high expectations of young people's behaviour. Staff are applying the behaviour policy well in class and around the school. Staff with pastoral responsibilities give strong support. The climate for learning within the school has notably improved in recent years. Most

young people enjoy being at school, feel safe and know those they can speak to if they are upset about something. The school celebrates success through the use of awards at assemblies, display boards in the corridors and articles in the local press. The school has recently made use of outside speakers to help raise attainment and young people's expectations overall. The school should now make more use of those young people who have achieved success to share their experiences more widely with others. Young people feel that some activities on offer encourage them to make healthy lifestyle choices, for example, the strong focus on physical activity and the healthier lunchtime options. The school needs to work more closely with pupils to ensure that all approaches to health promotion are well organised and worthwhile. A few staff are still not committed enough to improving the school.

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

The headteacher sets a positive tone through his commitment and pride in the school. He has worked hard and successfully with staff, young people and the wider community to build morale in the school. They recognise that the school atmosphere is considerably calmer and more settled. The headteacher must now ensure his vision for improving the school is clear and shared with all staff. All staff need to demonstrate their commitment to improving the school. They should adopt consistent and carefully planned approaches to improving learning in order to drive up standards of attainment. They should also ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all young people and supports them in achieving their best. The school should continue to develop work with partners to ensure a more joined-up approach.

8. What happens next?

We will carry out a follow-through inspection visit within one year of publication of this report and will report to parents on the extent to which the school has improved. Following that visit, we may continue to check the improvements the school has made. We may also carry out a second follow-through inspection within two years of the original

inspection report. If a second follow-through inspection visit is necessary then it will result in another report to parents on the extent of improvement that the school has made.

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

- Make better use of self-evaluation to raise attainment, and ensure that all young people experience learning activities which challenge them appropriately.
- Improve communication with parents and involve them more fully in supporting their children's learning.
- Improve the quality of the school building.

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 Wick High School.

Improvements in performance	weak
Learners' experiences	satisfactory
Meeting learning needs	satisfactory

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak

HM Inspector: Laura JS Welford

16 December 2008

To find out more about inspections or get an electronic copy of this report go to www.hmie.gov.uk. Please contact the Business Management and Communications Team (BMCT) if you wish to enquire about our arrangements for translated or other appropriate versions.

If you wish to comment about any of our inspections, contact us at HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk or alternatively you should write in the first instance to BMCT, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Our complaints procedure is available from our website www.hmie.gov.uk or alternatively you can write to our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330, fax 0800 377 7331 or e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website at www.spsso.org.uk.

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

Crown Copyright 2008
HM Inspectorate of Education.