

13 November 2012

Dear Parent/Carer

**Banchory Academy
Aberdeenshire Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well young people learn and achieve and how well the school supports young people to do their best. The headteacher and senior staff shared with us the school's view of its successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work. This included considering the school's progress in developing the curriculum and how the school ensures all young people feel included and achieve their best. We also considered the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for engaging with and involving parents, staff and young people in improving the school. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving young people's education.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

The school enables young people to develop a wide range of skills and attributes. Relationships between young people and staff are very positive. Overall, teachers provide an interesting, caring and positive classroom environment. Almost all young people are well motivated and have a positive attitude to learning. When teachers give young people opportunities to work in pairs and groups, young people respond very positively. They cooperate, support and interact with each other very effectively. They use these opportunities very well to develop their ideas and express and explain their understanding. A few lessons are too teacher-led and in these lessons young people's learning is too passive. In some classes, teachers give high quality feedback to young people about their learning and progress. As a result, young people have a clear understanding of their next steps in learning. This good practice is not yet consistent enough across the school. By the senior stages, young people demonstrate a wide range of very well developed learning skills.

Throughout the school, there is a very strong ethos of achievement. Young people contribute very effectively to the life of the school, particularly in the senior stages. They develop their leadership and enterprise skills very well through work such as the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative and participation in leadership and citizenship programmes. A significant number of young people participate actively in outdoor learning activities. They develop their skills and attributes very well through participation in activities such as the John Muir Award, Young Ambassadors

Programme, Grampian Leaders Programme, the Alaska Expedition and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. At S1 to S3, young people are making good progress overall. The school needs to improve its approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's achievements at these stages. At S4 to S6, young people perform consistently better, or much better, in national qualifications than schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. By the end of S6, young people's attainment in national examinations is outstanding.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Young people benefit from access to a rich and varied range of activities and experiences both within and outwith the classroom. Within the totality of their experience, the school meets young people's needs very well. In almost all classes, tasks and activities are well matched to the needs of learners. Increasingly, young people are involved in discussions with teachers about their learning and are helped to set targets for their learning and development. There is scope to improve these approaches further, to ensure all young people understand fully what they need to do to improve. Specialist staff give high quality support to the many young people in the school who have a range of needs and require additional support with their learning. The school identifies potential barriers to learning very well and takes effective steps to overcome them. Other agencies such as social work and the educational psychologist are positively engaged in discussing the needs of groups and individuals and how to give them effective support.

Overall, the school has planned the curriculum to provide a broad and progressive learning experience for young people. Staff from local primary schools and the school have worked together effectively in developing approaches to support young people as they move from primary school. Teachers have developed courses from S1 to S2 that take good account of Curriculum for Excellence guidance. However, the design of the current S3 curriculum is not providing all young people with their full entitlement to a broad general education. From S4 to S6 young people have access to a diverse range of subjects, including enrichment activities and other areas of study. Staff need to monitor and evaluate the impact of curricular changes more effectively to ensure that all young people make appropriate progress from their prior learning and continue to experience high levels of achievement.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The school has a good range of approaches for improving its work. Almost all staff contribute positively to improving the school through membership of working groups. Faculty heads across the school complete an annual self-evaluation. The outcomes of this process inform future developments at both faculty and school level. The school publishes an annual standards and quality report which provides you with a helpful overview of the work of the school. The school now needs to ensure that its approaches for improving its work through self-evaluation are more coordinated across the school. The school has a range of approaches for seeking the views of parents, staff and learners. There is scope for the school to improve these arrangements further, to involve you, young people and staff more fully in agreeing priorities and taking the school forward.

This inspection of the school found the following key strengths.

- The quality of young people's learning experiences.
- Young people's achievements, including outstanding levels of attainment in national examinations by the end of S6.
- The rich and varied range of learning opportunities provided for young people by staff and partners.
- Very positive relationships between staff and young people.
- The support provided to young people requiring additional support with their learning.

We discussed with staff and the education authority how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to develop the curriculum and ensure that young people continue to achieve to the highest levels while experiencing their full entitlements.
- Ensure the school's approaches for improving its work through self-evaluation are more coordinated and rigorous and focus on tracking young people's progress.
- Involve parents, young people and staff more effectively in the school's arrangements for improving its work.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are very satisfied with the overall quality of education provided by the school. We are confident that with greater rigour and coordination the school's self-evaluation processes will lead to further improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The local authority and school will inform you about the school's progress as part of their arrangements for reporting to you on the quality of the school's work.

Chris Webb
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/BanchoryAcademyAberdeenshire.asp>.

Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation. You can contact us at enquiries@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us at BMCT, Education Scotland, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact 01506 600200, or write to us at the above address or e-mail: feedback@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk.