



**Strathaven Academy
South Lanarkshire Council
22 December 2009**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents¹, young people and the local community know whether their school provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with school staff how they can improve the quality of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the headteacher and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities which young people are involved in. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well young people are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and young people work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support young people. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its 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 from young people, parents and staff, and details about young people's examination performance. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals. 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

Strathaven Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the town of Strathaven and its surrounding areas. The roll was 813 when the inspection was carried out in October 2009. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008. During the past two years, the school had been using another building eight miles from the original site. The school moved back to a new building in Strathaven in August 2009.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Young people's outstanding achievements.
- Confident and respectful young people who are motivated to learn.
- High-quality learning experiences which are often imaginative and innovative.
- Staff's enthusiasm and dedication to enhancing experiences for young people.
- Very strong working relationships with external partners.
- Outstanding and inspirational leadership of the headteacher.

3. Examples of good practice

- The technical education pre-vocational club.
- The use of information and communications technology to provide innovative learning experiences.
- Strong partnership working with the Rotary Club of Strathaven.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Almost all young people are motivated to learn and engage very well with each other and their teachers. They respond very positively to the caring and supportive atmosphere provided by staff. Young people engage confidently in class and group discussions and listen attentively to each other's views and opinions. They are made aware of the aims and content of lessons by their teachers. Most young people benefit from opportunities to evaluate their own and each

other's work and to set targets for their own improvement. They are successfully developing a range of skills in their learning through their involvement in a number of stimulating classroom activities. Most young people show high-quality creative thinking and problem-solving skills and are independent in their learning. The school should draw more on the very good practice of some departments and community partners in using young people's views to influence developments in their learning.

Almost all young people in the school engage enthusiastically in an outstanding range of activities that encourage wider achievement. Staff strongly contribute to wider achievement through a range of in- and out-of-school activities and educational visits. This includes activities involving Fairtrade, charitable fundraising with the local Rotary Club and international visits, as well as sports, arts and music. Staff carefully monitor young people's broader achievements to identify and encourage those who are at risk of missing out. Young people support numerous community organisations well, such as uniformed and sports organisations. They gain a wide range of skills through their involvement in these activities, such as teamwork and taking responsibility, and they develop as young citizens. Many are involved in a wide range of award programmes, including a notable number achieving The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. As a result, many young people in S5/S6 have successfully obtained community sports leader awards.

By the end of S2, most young people attain appropriate standards in reading and writing and the majority do so in mathematics. Performance has been consistent over the past three years. At S4 to S6, young people's attainment in national qualifications is above or well above the national average. At these stages, young people are performing better or much better than those in schools serving young people with similar needs and backgrounds. The school is progressing very well with plans to improve attainment even further.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum reflects the school's vision to help young people be successful. It provides young people with appropriate opportunities for breadth, balance and progression in their learning. Staff are actively engaged in developing the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. They are working well to ensure that literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are built into the curriculum. Some staff have introduced projects to provide stimulating contexts for young people's learning. These help young people connect their learning across the curriculum. Staff should continue to extend this type of approach across the school. The school has introduced vocational programmes for a number of young people to meet their needs better. It provides almost two hours per week of physical education (PE) for young people at S1 to S4. Currently, the school is reviewing its arrangements to provide PE for all S5 and S6 young people. The school is continuing to further develop its curricular links with its associated primary schools.

The school provides young people with a very caring and nurturing learning environment. In almost all classes, young people are successful in carrying out tasks that extend their learning. Almost all teachers plan and adapt their lessons appropriately to meet the needs of young people. In some cases, they do so through helpful liaison with learning support and community learning staff. Learning support staff work effectively with young people in tutorial groups to support class work, homework and the development of essential skills. A few young people have additional support plans which identify their broad areas of need. Young people participate well in their reviews and are aware of their targets. For a few with specific learning needs, staff need to set targets more appropriately. Staff skilfully manage a pupil support blog which allows parents to communicate young people's achievements at home. A well-attended homework club assists in helping young people who have difficulty completing their homework. A few young people are withdrawn from a subject to receive different kinds of support. The school reviews this approach annually to ensure that they are able to experience a full curriculum.

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

The Parent Council is very supportive of the school and encourages parents to play an active part in their children's learning and wellbeing. Parents are kept well-informed about school issues through regular newsletters, relevant e-mails and the school website. They receive helpful progress reports about their children's work through informative written reports and parents' evenings. Parents are consulted regularly about sensitive health education issues. They are invited to workshops to inform them on how they can improve their children's learning. Staff have developed effective partnerships with a variety of organisations to support and improve young people's learning, for example Careers Scotland. Partner organisations are very positive about these links. The school works effectively with its associated primary schools to support transition from P7 to S1. The school deals promptly and effectively with any concerns and complaints.

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

Most young people are successfully developing their confidence and self esteem through their involvement in a variety of groups and committees, such as house activities. Young people have given their views frequently on a variety of school matters and have influenced the final outcome. The headteacher has provided very strong leadership in developing self-evaluation as a way of improving the school. Teachers have become more reflective about their work and are strongly committed to improving the quality of learning and teaching. Almost all staff are members of several working parties and are successful in leading and implementing school developments. Many staff are sharing good practice through the school's 'Teacher Learning Community' sessions and at departmental meetings. The librarian contributes valuably to supporting young peoples' learning by teaching them specific library skills. Senior managers and others visit classrooms to observe learning and teaching. They provide suitable feedback which helps teachers to reflect on their approaches.

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

Young people are confident, respectful of each other and very motivated to learn. They are now learning in a bright and stimulating environment with a very caring and supportive staff. Staff have high expectations for all young people to attend regularly, achieve highly and behave positively. Staff are aware of, and responsive to, the specific needs of young people. This strong pastoral support is valued by young people. They have positive relationships with staff and feel safe, secure, happy and included within the school. Staff implement child protection arrangements appropriately and address any bullying and racist incidents promptly and effectively. The school has a strong culture of achievement and for celebrating achievements both inside and outside the school. It does this successfully through award ceremonies, newsletters and the local newspapers. Young people are aware of the need for a healthy lifestyle and participate enthusiastically in a variety of related activities. The school promotes diversity of religions and cultures through religious and moral education and a range of curriculum-based programmes. It provides young people with appropriate opportunities for religious observance. Staff help young people to extend their understanding of equality and global citizenship through specific projects and class work.

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

The headteacher has a very clear vision for the school and is very successful in inspiring and motivating staff. She provides outstanding leadership for learning and all staff and young people feel highly supported and valued by her. She has very successfully led staff, parents and young people through a time of significant change. The senior management team support the headteacher very well. All staff have a clear sense of the school's direction and are fully involved in taking this vision forward. Leadership is genuinely shared across the school amongst enthusiastic and well-motivated teachers and young people.

9. What happens next?

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The education authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its school.

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

- Continue to develop the ongoing curriculum initiatives across the school.
- Continue to build on the existing strong practice in self-evaluation to ensure continuous improvement.

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 Strathaven Academy.

Improvements in performance	excellent
Learners' experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	very good

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

The curriculum	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

HM Inspector: Hakim Din

22 December 2009

When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

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

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