



**St Columba's High School
Gourock
Inverclyde Council
2 February 2010**

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

St Columba's High School is a denominational school which serves the areas of Gourock, South West Greenock, Inverkip and Wemyss Bay. The roll was 631 when the inspection was carried out in December 2009. Young people's attendance was below the national average in 2007/2008. At the time of the inspection the school was relocated within temporary accommodation.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Confident, courteous young people who are keen to learn.
- A community of faith where every learner matters.
- Very positive relationships with parents, parishes and the wider community.
- High expectations and teamwork of all staff which have led to improved attainment and achievement.
- Leadership of the headteacher and senior managers.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Across the school almost all young people are engaged in and focused on learning. They feel safe in school and very well cared for by staff. Young people are friendly, courteous and well behaved. They enjoy working together and expressing their views. Young people are increasingly working well with others and thinking for themselves about tasks they are working on in classes. Most young people benefit from learning with others. Teachers encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. As young people progress through the school, their learning skills are improving. This is a result of the feedback staff provide which focuses on developing their awareness of how to achieve success in courses and programmes. Seniors have good opportunities to take responsibility as buddies, assisting with learning in classes, organising the S1/S2 merit system and leading events and assemblies.

Young people are successfully developing their confidence and skills for life through a very wide range of enterprise, cultural, musical and sporting activities. The school monitors their achievements carefully and staff are beginning to use this information to plan activities to take more account of young people's needs. A significant number of young people from S3 to S5 are gaining confidence and developing communication skills and teamwork through gaining bronze, silver and gold Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards and taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. A few young people from S3 onwards have gained 'Young Quality Scot' and 'Community Sports Leadership' awards. Others are working towards 'Foreign Language Leader' awards for services to their peers and the community. Young people are actively involved in a wide range of fundraising activities for charities and the local community. High-quality displays in classrooms and around the school celebrate young people's learning and achievement.

At S1 and S2, young people are progressing well in their learning. Most achieve appropriate national levels in reading and the majority do so in writing and mathematics. Attainment in reading and writing has improved over recent years. From S3 to S6, young people perform much better than those in other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. By the end of S4 young people's results in national exams are in line with national averages overall. Young people at risk of missing out, including those requiring additional support, are making good progress in their learning. Almost all young people go on to further study or employment on leaving school.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum both in and out of class. There are good links with primary schools which are helping teachers build more effectively on young people's prior learning in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The school now needs to do the same across other curricular areas. The school has improved courses and programmes to meet the needs of all young

people. For example, staff have developed courses at Access level and the school has widened the choice of courses through links with neighbouring schools and local colleges. All young people at S4 take part in work experience. At S1 to S4, young people receive two hours of good quality physical education each week, in line with national advice. This is not continued at S5/S6. All young people benefit from a good quality programme of religious education. All departments are involved in teaching aspects of the personal, social and health education programme. Staff should consider ways to evaluate the quality and judge the impact of this programme. Staff are working effectively within their departments and across faculties to take forward aspects of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

All staff know young people very well and are sensitive to their social emotional and learning needs. They use this knowledge well in planning tasks, activities and resources which are well matched to young people's needs. Teachers give clear instructions and explain things well. In the best lessons teachers support and challenge all learners effectively. However, in a few classes there is a need to improve approaches to meeting the needs of all learners, including higher attaining learners. Staff receive very helpful information and strategies to use in class to support individuals. Learning assistants provide well-judged support to young people. Staff with a remit for supporting learning, behaviour and pastoral care are increasingly working together to provide a single support system to involve all staff more effectively in meeting the needs of all young people. Pastoral and behaviour staff provide very high-quality support to young people and their families. Young people who have individualised educational programmes are making good progress.

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

The school has very strong partnerships with parents and parishes in the local community. Parents feel that senior managers and staff provide outstanding support to young people and they are very satisfied with the ways in which staff communicate with them. They

find that school reports give them helpful information.

Parents, including those on the Parent Council, work with the school to plan improvements and run information evenings. School staff work very closely with agencies and organisations that help provide a wide variety of support and opportunities for young people. For example, Fire and Rescue staff successfully raise young people's awareness of the impact of fire-related anti-social behaviour. A large number of partner agencies regularly attend the well-organised Joint Assessment Team which provides appropriate support for a range of young people and their families. The school-based home link worker provides high-quality support to ensure young people and families are fully included in the school and community. The school deals appropriately with complaints.

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

Through the Learner Council and Eco Committee, young people have been involved in working on school values and improving the school environment. There is a need to develop more opportunities for young people, particularly those at S1 and S2, to express their views about aspects of school life, including learning and teaching. Seniors are supporting younger peers by taking part in 'Leadership in Learning' activities. Staff organise a wide range of clubs, education visits and residential trips. Increasingly, staff seek young people's views on their learning experiences. They draw on information gathered from a range of sources to reflect on progress and help identify priorities for improvement. Approaches used by senior managers are resulting in improvements to the quality of learning and achievement across the school. Teachers visit each other's classes to share good practice. Staff readily engage in continuing professional development which is helping them to improve the quality of learning and teaching. However, in a few departments, staff are not yet using information gathered from self-evaluation effectively enough to bring about required improvements in achievement.

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

The school has a nurturing and caring ethos. Staff and young people have embraced gospel values and model these in their relationships and service to the community. Teachers set high expectations for learners' achievements and behaviour and emphasise the importance of recognising effort and participation. Young people feel that they are treated with equality and respect. They feel safe in school and confident about approaching an adult if they have a concern. The school celebrates young people's achievements through assemblies, newsletters, certificates and a well-planned and valued merit system. The curriculum enhances young people's understanding of equality and diversity. Very good arrangements are in place for religious observance. The school is monitoring attendance closely, and is taking action to improve the attendance of identified individuals and groups.

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

The headteacher has a clear vision for improving the school and provides very strong leadership. He and his senior managers are highly committed to the school and well respected by staff. Senior managers are driving forward improvements across the school effectively. Principal teachers and unpromoted staff work well together and willingly take on a range of leadership roles. Many lead developments through school improvement working groups. These include monitoring absence across the school, taking a lead in supporting behaviour and running the whole-school merit system.

8. What happens next?

The inspection team was able to rely on the school's self-evaluation to make its evaluations and the school agreed with these evaluations at an early stage of the inspection. As a result, the inspection team was able to change its focus during the inspection to help the school plan to improve even more.

The school provides a very good quality of education. Therefore, 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 build the skills of all staff to ensure that learners make good progress within *Curriculum for Excellence*.
- Improve the consistency of the use of self-evaluation across the school to ensure greater impact on attainment and achievement.

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 St Columba's High School.

Improvements in performance	very good
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	good

HM Inspector: June Orr
2 February 2010

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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