

Agenda item	<b>6</b>
Report no	<b>RC/027/17</b>

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Ross and Cromarty Committee

**Date:** 31 October 2017

**Report Title:** **Report on Education Scotland activity in Alness Academy and Tain Royal Academy during session 2016-17**

**Report By:** Steph Wood, Education Quality Improvement Manager, Mid Area

### 1. **Purpose/Executive Summary**

1.1 This report summarises the outcomes of the visits by Her Majesty's Inspectorate to Alness Academy and Tain Royal Academy during session 2016-17. In both instances these were return visits following earlier full inspection reports published in May 2015 in the case of Alness Academy and November 2013 in the case of Tain Royal Academy. Tain Royal Academy also received a joint Highland Council/Education Scotland follow-up visit in 2015, with the report published in June of that year.

### 2. **Recommendations**

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report.

### **3. Alness Academy**

- 3.1 A team from HMIE (Education Scotland) visited Alness Academy during week beginning 5 December 2016. The full report of this visit was published on 14 March 2017 and is [available](#) on the Education Scotland website.
- 3.2 During the visit, members from the visiting team surveyed, talked to and met pupils, parents, staff and the Senior Management Team (SMT), focusing on areas for improvement identified in the original full inspection.
- 3.3 The HMI team found that learning and teaching in the school had improved, with more collaborative and active learning. Consequently they found that pupils were more motivated and engaged. It was recommended that the school should develop more ways to encourage children to reflect on their learning and progress. Tracking and monitoring of pupil progress has improved in the school and this knowledge should now be used to ensure that learning meets the differing needs of young people. Some teachers still need to have higher expectations of what young people can achieve, especially in the first three years. Staff should work together to ensure consistency of pupil experience in the classroom.
- 3.4 The SMT have introduced new approaches to tracking and monitoring and this should now be used to allow a greater overview of progress in the first three years. Attainment in the Senior Phase (S4-6) shows signs of improvement in some areas, though it remains below that of young people with similar needs and backgrounds across Scotland. Continuing the improvement in attainment remains a focus for the school. The school has increased the number of young people moving to positive post-school destinations. There is still scope to increase the number of young people entering Higher Education.
- 3.5 Some progress has been made in developing the school curriculum. In the Broad General Education (S1-3), the curriculum is well planned with a focus on skills development and inter-disciplinary learning. Pace and challenge could increase in these year groups. In the Senior Phase, there has not been sufficient choice available to young people. The school was encouraged to increase choice and provide a wider range of learning pathways. SMT have developed greater links with local businesses and other partners, allowing young people to develop skills for work. The school provides very positive experiences for young people through activities like Rock Challenge and the Geoscience club.
- 3.6 The school has continued to develop approaches to self-evaluation, and these are focused on improving outcomes for young people. Staff are working together to improve learning and teaching. Staff and SMT have identified good practice in other schools and used this to improve their own practice. There are increased opportunities for young people to offer their views, though there is scope to give them more influence in developing the direction the school is taking.
- 3.7 The HMI team found that, across the school, there is a strong sense of staff working together to improve the school. Staff have opportunities to take on leadership roles. The report observes that the Head Teacher, Laura Gordon, continues to provide clear direction and leadership and has responded

positively to the original inspection findings. The recently appointed Depute Head Teachers were found to be supporting the Head Teacher well in their new roles. The report recommends that more should be done to improve communication and joint working to increase confidence in leadership at all levels. There is a need for senior leadership to provide more direction to ensure that health & wellbeing and inclusion underpin the work of the school.

- 3.8 Surveys were carried out as part of the HMI visit and the full details can be found on the Education Scotland website [here](#). The following are some of the key findings of the surveys.
- 3.9 From the parent survey, 83% of respondents said that their child enjoys learning at the school. 70% said that their child's learning was progressing well. 58% said that their child is stretched at school, and the same percentage said that the school keeps them well informed about their child's progress. 29% said that the school takes their views into account. 52% said that they believed the school was well led. 57% said that overall they were happy with the school.
- 3.10 From the pupil survey, 70% said that they enjoy learning at school. 75% said that staff encourage them to do the best they can. 49% said that they feel they have a say in making the way they learn better. 74% said that they are treated fairly and with respect. 71% said that staff make sure pupils behave well. 41% said they felt the school dealt well with bullying behaviour.
- 3.11 From the teaching staff survey, 91% said that they regularly discuss how to improve achievement in the school. 74% said that pupils are regularly asked for their views on how learning experiences could be improved. 68% said that staff and pupils respect each other. 85% said that support for pupils with additional support needs is effective. 50% said that they are actively involved in setting the school's improvement priorities. 47% said that leadership at all levels in the school is effective. 85% said that staff across the school share good practice.
- 3.12 From the non-teaching staff survey, 50% said that staff and pupils respect each other. 75% said that they have good opportunities to be involved in making decisions. 50% said that support for pupils with additional support needs is effective. 67% said that leadership at all levels in the school is effective.
- 3.13 The HMI report concluded that the school has made some progress since the original inspection in 2015. Education Scotland staff will work alongside Highland Council staff to support ongoing improvements, with findings about such improvements shared 12 months from the current report. At that point a further report by HMI/Education Scotland will be published and shared with the school community.

#### **4. Tain Royal Academy**

- 4.1 A team from HMle (Education Scotland) visited Tain Royal Academy during week beginning 28 November 2016. The full report of this visit was published on 21 February 2017 and is [available](#) on the Education Scotland website.

- 4.2 During the visit members from the visiting team surveyed, talked to and met pupils, parents, staff and the Senior Management Team, focusing on areas for improvement identified in the original full inspection.
- 4.3 The HMI team found that there are now more opportunities for young people to express their views on school improvement and the school's vision and values. Many staff have engaged in professional learning to introduce more cooperative learning approaches into lessons and in a few lessons these are used well. The school's leadership team needs now to monitor the impact of this to ensure consistency of experience for all young people. Learning conversations between teachers and young people are increasingly supporting learners to understand their strengths and next steps and young people often receive high quality feedback. Leadership opportunities for young people are increasing.
- 4.4 The Head Teacher, Mark Jones, has set out a vision for increased expectations of effective learning and teaching, and this is starting to bring higher levels of challenge in a few curriculum areas. This is not yet consistently strong across the school. Staff should further develop differentiation of learning to meet the needs of all young people and young people should be encouraged to develop problem solving and other creativity skills in order to increase their resilience.
- 4.5 Gaelic is now integrated into the S1-3 curriculum and there are developing links with the local primary schools and other partners. Plans to include Geography in the Gaelic Medium curriculum are in place. There is a need for further strategic planning to ensure improvements in Gaelic continue, and to embed Gaelic within the school's vision, values and aims.
- 4.6 There have been some improvements in the school curriculum across S1-6 and there are better progression pathways in the Senior Phase. Partnership working to broaden the curriculum (including engagement with colleges and online programmes) has improved. There is greater commitment to developing skills for learning, life and work, including work placements. Further work is needed to ensure that young people's experience of physical education and religious & moral education is in line with national expectations in the Senior Phase. A clearer rationale for religious observance is needed.
- 4.7 Robust arrangements for self-evaluation are now established. Most staff have an understanding of their responsibilities in contributing to school improvement. The SMT have a sound grasp of the school's strengths and aspects still requiring improvement and the Head Teacher has used this information effectively to create an appropriate improvement plan. Tracking and monitoring of young people's progress are much improved and this data should now be more taken into account in staff planning for learning.
- 4.8 The school benefits from strong partnership with the Parent Council. Young people feel that SMT and most staff respond to their concerns and value their ideas. The school has begun to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy and there is improvement in attainment across some curriculum areas. The percentage of young people achieving at SCQF levels 5 and 6 has increased. SMT should increasingly challenge all staff to ensure that there are consistent improvements in learning and teaching and subsequent improvements in attainment.

- 4.9 Surveys were carried out as part of the HMI visit and the full details can be found on the Education Scotland website [here](#). The following are some of the key findings of the surveys.
- 4.10 From the parent survey, 90% of respondents said that their child enjoys learning at the school. 73% said that their child's learning was progressing well. 60% said that their child is stretched at school, and 65% said that the school keeps them well informed about their child's progress. 53% said that the school takes their views into account. 83% said that they believed the school was well led. 73% said that overall they were happy with the school.
- 4.11 From the pupil survey, 74% said that they enjoy learning at school. 74% said that staff encourage them to do the best they can. 41% said that they feel they have a say in making the way they learn better. 73% said that they are treated fairly and with respect. 76% said that staff make sure pupils behave well. 49% said they felt the school dealt well with bullying behaviour.
- 4.12 From the teaching staff survey, 93% said that they regularly discuss how to improve achievement in the school. 87% said that pupils are regularly asked for their views on how learning experiences could be improved. 87% said that staff and pupils respect each other. 87% said that support for pupils with additional support needs is effective. 87% said that they are actively involved in setting the school's improvement priorities. 87% said that leadership at all levels in the school is effective. 93% said that staff across the school share good practice.
- 4.13 From the non-teaching staff survey, 53% said that staff and pupils respect each other. 67% said that they have good opportunities to be involved in making decisions. 87% said that support for pupils with additional support needs is effective. 87% said that leadership at all levels in the school is effective.
- 4.14 In summary, the HMI team found that the school has continued to make progress since the original inspection. HMI are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve. Education Scotland staff will work alongside Highland Council staff to support ongoing improvements, with findings about such improvements shared 12 months from the current report. At that point a further report by HMI/Education Scotland will be published and shared with the school community.

## **5. Implications**

5.1 Resource – none beyond existing school budgetary allocations

Legal - none

Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - none

Climate Change/Carbon Clever - none

Risk – none

Gaelic – Tain Royal Academy is a Gaelic Medium school and the report provides comment on improvement in provision (see above).

Designation:

Date: 6 October 2017

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Background Papers: Education Scotland reports on visits to Alness Academy, which can be found [here](#) and Tain Royal Academy, which can be found [here](#).