

Agenda item	<b>8</b>
Report no	<b>RC/018/19</b>

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Ross and Cromarty Committee

**Date:** 1 May 2019

**Report Title:** **Report on Education Scotland activity in Dingwall Academy, December 2018 and Alness Academy, March 2019**

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

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

1.1 This report summarises the outcomes of the visit by Her Majesty's Inspectorate to Dingwall Academy, from 4 to 6 December 2018. This was a short model inspection, running across three days. The Head Teacher at Dingwall Academy is Mrs Karen Cormack.

Alness Academy had a joint Highland Council/Her Majesty's Inspectorate visit from 20 to 21 March 2019. The Head Teacher at Alness Academy is Ms Nicky Grant.

### 2. **Recommendations**

2.1 Members are asked to:

- note the content of this report.

### 3. Dingwall Academy

- 3.1 A team from HMle (Education Scotland) visited Dingwall Academy setting during week beginning 3 December 2018. The report on this visit was published on 2 April 2019 and is available [here](#), on the Education Scotland website. The report covers Gaelic provision in the school and also the Autism Unit.
- 3.2 During the visit, members from the visiting team met young people, parents and staff as well as the Head Teacher and the Depute Head Teachers, focusing on the Quality Indicators (QIs) from *How Good is Our School?*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. The visiting team also observed learning and teaching in more than 50 classrooms during the inspection. Surveys of young people, parents and staff were carried out by the inspection team and the results of these surveys can be found [here](#).
- 3.3 The inspection team found the following key strengths in the school's work:
- The positive and respectful relationships across the school, which have been fostered by the headteacher. These provide an inclusive and supportive environment, in which young people can learn and achieve. Staff are now ready to build on these relationships to further improve the school.
  - Polite and well behaved young people, whose positive attitudes to their learning are a credit to the school and its community.
  - Young people and specialist staff for Gaelic enjoy positive relationships and mutual respect. Over time, specialist staff for Gaelic have driven developments in Gaelic Education in which young people are attaining very well in National Qualifications for Gàidhlig and Gaelic (Learners).
  - The school works well with the wider community to offer a considerable range of opportunities for young people to enhance their skills and attributes. The school rightly prides itself on being one with a strong sense of vibrant community.
- 3.4 At the end of the inspection activity, a feedback session (attended by the Head Teacher, the Depute Head Teachers, the school's Quality Improvement Officer, Mr Donald Paterson, and the Area Education Quality Improvement Manager, Mrs Stephanie Wood) was held, where the inspection team described the school's strengths, as listed above, and identified some key areas for the school to work on. These areas were identified as follows:
- Focus more purposefully on the development of a shared understanding across the school of what high-quality learning, teaching and assessment look like. This should include ensuring that all staff, including senior leaders and principal teachers, are clear about their role in bringing about improvement in young people's learning and development.
  - Involve young people and the school's partners more closely in planning, delivering and evaluating learning across the school.
  - Continue to develop strategies to raise the attainment of young people across all stages. Systematic monitoring and tracking of progress and achievement will support young people to know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve.

- Continue to develop equity for young people in Gaelic Education by embedding its further development within the strategic planning of the school. It would be beneficial to be making more use of bespoke self-evaluation frameworks for Gaelic to inform whole-school improvement.
- 3.5 The school has already developed a plan to address these areas for improvement and has begun to implement changes to ensure progress in these areas.
- 3.6 During a short model inspection such as this one at Dingwall Academy, HMI report against two specific Quality Indicators (which relate to the priorities of the National Improvement Framework) and evaluate the school's performance in these Indicators. In the case of Dingwall Academy the evaluations were as follows:
- Learning, teaching and assessment – Satisfactory
  - Raising attainment and achievement – Satisfactory
- 3.7 A fuller document, known as the Summarised Inspection Findings (SIF) is published on the Education Scotland website [here](#). This document is designed to provide schools with more detail about the inspection conclusions to help with future work, and contains some more specific information about attainment.

Some of the key additional positive points made in the SIF relating to the main QIs were:

- The school's use of digital resources and the way this engages young people.
  - Well organised lessons.
  - Developments already under way that have the potential to improve outcomes, for example the staff working groups and the involvement of young people in improvement activity.
  - The progress of young people is tracked and as a result appropriate interventions are put in place to support learners.
  - Over the past five years, almost all young people have entered a positive destination on leaving Dingwall Academy. The percentage of young people going to higher education on leaving school is fairly constant between 2013 and 2017. The percentage leaving school and entering further education has increased over the past five years.
  - Young people in the autism unit say they feel that they are Dingwall Academy students and are treated fairly by their teachers and peers. They access all areas of the school and curriculum and they enjoy making friends.
- 3.8 Some of the key additional areas for the school to work on identified in the SIF were:
- There is scope for young people to be more active in their learning and to understand their next steps in learning across the curriculum.
  - Further work could be done to enhance the impact of lesson observations to ensure effective sharing of good practice.
  - More consistency in approaches to improving young people's literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.
  - There is scope to track the progress of learners over time.

- There is scope to take a more planned and strategic approach to tracking young people's achievements (including young people in the autism unit), which would include ensuring progression in skills development and increased formal accredited awards for all young people

3.9 The conclusion drawn by the visiting team of Inspectors was that they will ask The Highland Council for a report on progress with the agreed areas for improvement within 12 months of the publication of the report. Taking account of the progress report, HMI will then decide whether further engagement with the school is required. This may involve another inspection visit.

3.10 Following the inspection, the Quality Improvement Officer for the school, Donald Paterson, has continued to work with the Head Teacher as she works on implementing the improvements indicated in the HMI report. This joint working between the QIO and Head Teacher will allow for a detailed progress report to be written in April 2020.

#### **4. Alness Academy**

4.1 In 2015, a team of inspectors from Education Scotland carried out a full inspection of Alness Academy. The report on this visit was published in May 2015. The conclusion of the report was that Education Scotland would continue to engage with the school until identified improvements had been made. Subsequently, a team of Education Scotland inspectors visited the school in December 2016 to evaluate the school's progress since the original inspection. The Continuing Engagement Report following that visit was published in March 2017, and concluded that a further joint Education Scotland/Highland Council visit should take place early in 2018, to review the school's ongoing improvement work. In February 2018 this joint visit took place and, despite further improvements being identified, it was agreed that another, similar joint visit should be made to the school in March 2019 to check on continued progress with the school's agreed improvement agenda. This further joint visit took place on 20 and 21 March 2019, and was led by the school's Quality Improvement Officer, Donald Paterson. Aileen Monaghan, HMI (part of the original 2015 HMI team) and Lesley Taylor, Highland Council Quality Improvement Officer were also on the team. During the visit, the team gathered evidence of progress made. This involved reviewing interventions put in place since the last joint visit as well as data and other information regarding attainment, staff development and the views of young people. Classroom visits across the departments and year groups were carried out to evaluate the quality of the experience of young people in their learning. Discussion groups were held with the school's Senior Management Team, young people from the school, middle leaders in the school, unpromoted teaching staff, parents and partners whose work supports the school.

4.2 The visit found significant improvements in terms of learning and teaching, for example in the way young people understood their next steps in learning, young people making choices in and taking responsibility for their learning, learning that is differentiated appropriately for young people and the way Pupil Support Assistants were effectively deployed to support learning. In all of the classrooms visited positive relationships were in evidence, creating an ethos

that was conducive to learning. Young people were polite and courteous to each other and to the adults in the school. This increasingly positive ethos is reflected in a reduction in the number of exclusions in recent months.

- 4.3 There is scope for further work to be carried out on developing digital learning and on tracking and monitoring supported by effective moderation processes.
- 4.4 While there are signs of progress in attainment, there is still scope for further improvement. The early indications suggest that such improvement will be visible when data is published for the current session.
- 4.5 In terms of wider achievement, young people are achieving a range of skills and attributes through participation in sport, culture, citizenship and through developing leadership skills. Senior leaders and staff now need to put in place clear tracking data to show progress across the range of skills and attributes being achieved.
- 4.6 Over the last two years, almost all young people who left school have moved to a positive destination.
- 4.7 The last two Education Scotland visits had already identified improvements in the curriculum on offer in the senior phase (S4 to S6). This work has continued and the curricular offer in the school's senior phase (S4-S6) is increasingly meeting the needs of young people. The school continues to work with partners to provide some courses beyond the school, for example in collaboration with the local college. Departments are being encouraged to make links with local businesses and organisations with a view to building curricular support involving the wider school community. Work has been ongoing in the last year to ensure that the curriculum young people experience is suitably challenging.
- 4.8 There is still scope to develop the curriculum in the broad general education (S1 to S3) to ensure that young people are clear about the way courses contribute to their learning and development of skills and pave the way for success in the senior phase.
- 4.9 Young people are now much clearer about who they would see as a key adult who knew them well as individuals and as learners. All of the young people we spoke to about this knew who they would talk to if they were facing difficulties with their health and wellbeing or about their learning overall. Young people were much clearer about the role of pupil support staff in the school and valued the one-to-one interviews that they have with these key personnel.
- 4.10 The school has continued to take steps to increase the involvement of young people in the life of the school, and there are now more opportunities for young people to develop leadership skills, for example through the expanded student committee and other pupil voice focus groups. Young people told us that their views are increasingly being sought and that they are able to contribute to improvements in the school.
- 4.11 Self-evaluation processes in the school are becoming increasingly rigorous. Revised approaches to analysis of data, gathering people's views and direct observations have led to the school being increasingly self-aware. Ongoing

development of self-evaluation processes involving the whole school community will help to embed the sense of all being fully engaged in the school's improvement activity. Overall, there is a very clear strategic direction in the school and all of the groups spoken to during the visit agreed that this was the case.

- 4.12 While there is still scope for further improvement, especially in terms of raising attainment and tracking achievement, the visiting team concluded that there was confidence that the school leadership team and school staff in general have the capacity to bring about continuing progress. The stability in school staffing has been a significant factor in allowing the team to reach this conclusion. As the school prepares for the move to the new building in 2020 there is a recognisable sense of excitement across the whole school community about what the future holds for Alness Academy. The role of the new headteacher, Ms Nicky Grant, in developing this sense of optimism and positivity has been of crucial importance, and staff told the visiting team that they felt reinvigorated about their work at the school. Staff, pupils and members of the wider school community told us that they had an increased sense of pride in Alness Academy.
- 4.13 Education Scotland will, therefore, make no further visits to the school in connection with the original inspection of 2015. Highland Council officers will continue to work with the school to support the work being done to bring about further improvements in the year ahead.

## **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 – none

Designation:

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Author: Steph Wood (EQIM, Mid Area)

Background Papers: Education Scotland report on visit to Dingwall Academy, which can be found [here](#), and Highland Council report on joint HC/Education Scotland visit to Alness Academy, which can be found [here](#).