



**Airdrie Academy  
North Lanarkshire Council  
26 April 2011**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents<sup>1</sup>, 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](http://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 there will also be a report on the learning community surrounding the school.

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<sup>1</sup> 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**

Airdrie Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the north Airdrie area and surrounding villages. The roll was 1109 when the inspection was carried out in February 2011. Although young people's attendance had improved slightly in 2009/10, it was below the national average. The school moved into newly-built accommodation in October 2006.

## **2. Particular strengths of the school**

- Young people's leadership skills and their range of achievements.
- The school's very positive ethos, which encourages and celebrates achievement.
- The impact of self-evaluation on school improvements, involving young people and staff.
- The strong commitment of staff and partners to improving young people's learning experiences.
- The impact of a wide range of partnerships on meeting learning needs and broadening learning experiences.
- The impact of the leadership shown by the headteacher and senior management team.

## **3. How well do young people learn and achieve?**

### **Learning and achievement**

Across the school, young people are confident and friendly and have positive attitudes to learning. They respond particularly well to practical problem-solving tasks which challenge them to be creative and independent in their learning. A few teachers give young people too much direction, which limits their thinking and slows the pace of learning. In some classes and in form time, young people talk confidently about their progress with staff and each other. Staff should continue to build on this to help young people identify their strengths and how to improve, across their learning. At all stages, young people feel safe, valued and well cared for. The school increasingly asks for and takes account of young people's views about their learning to help plan improvements.

At all stages, young people's achievements show how well they are developing a range of skills and qualities. They take a strong lead in the work done in Houses and at assemblies, organise events and tackle challenges during outdoor education. Large numbers of young people show great commitment to the performing arts and to sports. They are developing high levels of confidence as performers and artists. They build strong relationships with the community through concerts, shows, sporting events and exhibitions. Young people have well-developed citizenship and enterprise skills. In their Houses, they raise significant amounts of money for their chosen charities. They also help others through such things as peer support in lessons and community sports coaching. The work of the eco group has helped the school reduce its energy costs. Young people have also been very successful in achieving Millennium Volunteer Awards, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Quality Young Scot awards.

At S1, most young people are progressing well within their broad general education. They are beginning to see where they can apply what they have learned and to go into greater depth in their learning. In a few areas of their learning, they are making very good use of their literacy and numeracy skills. The progress of young people who are looked after is particularly strong. In almost all measures, the school's performance in examinations is better or much better than schools serving young people with similar needs and backgrounds. By the end of S4, young people's attainment is in line with national averages, and has improved steadily at General level or its equivalent. At S5/S6, young people's attainment is in line with national averages and has improved for those gaining five or more Highers. Most young people go on to positive destinations after school.

## **Curriculum and meeting learning needs**

Young people benefit from a curriculum which helps them to develop skills for learning and for their future lives. They have a broad range of experiences from S1 to S6 to help them make progress. These include academic and vocational courses, as well as activities which develop citizenship, leadership and enterprise skills. The school is

making good progress in taking Curriculum for Excellence forward. Staff and young people are actively involved in discussing and planning improvements to the curriculum and the school has introduced new courses. Teachers are developing successful approaches to help young people identify how well they are using their literacy and numeracy skills. The librarian also provides young people with approaches to learning which develop their literacy skills well. The school should continue to build on existing practice to develop a systematic approach to support health and wellbeing across all areas of the curriculum. Imaginative approaches to planning improvements are helping to get aspects such as effective interdisciplinary learning off to a good start. The school is strengthening its links with its associated primary schools to ensure young people in S1 have better continuity in their learning. The school does not provide all young people in S5 and S6 with enough physical or religious and moral education.

Staff across the school know young people very well and respond sensitively to different learning needs. Occasionally, activities do not challenge young people enough to think for themselves and take on more demanding work. The school has very well-organised and effective arrangements for identifying learning needs. Young people benefit from very strong pastoral support at times of transition. Young people who need additional support benefit from well-judged help from pupil support teachers and assistants and visiting specialists. Those who have support plans are making very good progress towards achieving their targets. Class teachers should now ensure that their plans include personal support for all young people, in line with Curriculum for Excellence.

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

The school has very effective links with parents and the wider community. The Parent Council, parents and partners provide valued support for aspects of young people's learning. The Parent Council is keen to develop its role further in helping the school to plan

improvements. Staff work closely with the home-school partnership officer to support young people's personal and social development. A strong example of the impact of this work is the very successful summer school to support young people as they move from P7 into S1. The chaplaincy team, community police officer and Careers service have strong links with the school. Young people benefit from the school's very effective partnership with its facilities management company which includes a challenging leadership programme for S6 and careers education. In addition, a wide range of local employers provide valuable work experience, visits and workshops. Young people develop new skills and understanding through the school's strong links with the nearby hospice. The Active Schools coordinator successfully encourages young people to take part in a large and growing number of clubs and activities. These provide very good opportunities for young people to use their knowledge and skills to coach others.

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

Young people have a direct impact on school improvement through their membership of development groups, the pupil council and House councils. They share their views on learning and teaching, most notably through the "Big Conversation" initiative and at form time. This is helping the school to include priorities identified by young people in its improvement plan for next session. The school is very well placed to build on this good practice. Teachers help to improve the school through their active involvement in working groups and the teacher learning community. They share ideas and teaching approaches very well. Their commitment to making sure young people have a high quality of learning experience helps to create an ambitious ethos for young people. Promoted staff visit lessons and give feedback on learning and teaching. They should continue to provide challenging feedback to further improve consistency in the quality of learning and teaching. The school analyses young people's attainment very carefully to check that learning and teaching approaches meet young people's needs. The senior management team and teachers mentor

young people in S4 to S6, to help raise their attainment. In addition, visits to similar schools to compare approaches they use to raise attainment help to plan improvements.

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

The school encourages young people to set high expectations. Morale is very positive across the school and there is a high level of mutual respect. Most young people are very well behaved. Over the last three years, the number of exclusions has dropped notably, although it is still high. The school actively promotes achievement and young people celebrate each others' successes with enthusiasm at assemblies. Young people make very good use of opportunities to challenge themselves, through demanding projects such as World Challenge and Comenius. Working closely with its partners, the school meets young people's social, emotional and health needs very well. The school strongly promotes healthy and active lifestyles. Staff take their responsibilities for child protection seriously. Young people are developing a secure understanding of equality and diversity through aspects of their coursework, their links to charities and Fair Trade activities.

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

The school has a clear vision, which focuses on preparing all young people to fulfil their potential and be successful in school and later life. Young people and staff work very well together to maintain a culture of achievement, and share a commitment to make a difference. The headteacher successfully encourages young people, parents, staff and partners to play a full part in improving school life. He challenges young people and staff to produce work of high quality. In turn, the depute headteachers provide valued support and challenge to the headteacher and other staff. Individually and collectively, the senior management team, principal teachers and faculty heads help to give highly effective direction for school improvement.



## 8. 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 schools.

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

- Continue to develop the curriculum to build on emerging practice, including approaches to ensure a consistently high quality of learning experiences across the school.

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 Airdrie Academy.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>very good</b>

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

<b>The curriculum</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>very good</b>

**HM Inspector:** Mary Ritchie  
26 April 2011

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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