

Department of Education,  
Culture and Lifelong Learning

# Standards and Quality Review

Ayr Academy

October 2008

## Purpose of this report

This report is the result of a Standards and Quality Review and focuses on certain quality indicators contained within the national evaluation framework “How Good Is Our School 3” (*sometimes referred to as HGIOS 3*). It highlights where the school is doing well and points to actions that will bring about improvement. The purposes of Standards and Quality Reviews are to:

- Support, validate or challenge the school's or establishment's own self-evaluation;
- Provide support and challenge to schools and establishments in their journey to excellence;
- Acknowledge the effective work and practice in learning and teaching, management and leadership ongoing in schools and establishments and highlight any areas for improvement;
- Share good practice across the authority;
- Inform stakeholders of the quality of education in our schools and establishments;
- Bring together internal self-evaluation and external moderation as a support to our schools and establishments; and,
- Provide a mechanism for the authority to assure the quality of education within its schools and establishments.

## Information about the school

Ayr Academy is a non-denominational secondary school serving the Newton and Dalmilling areas of Ayr, the villages of Mossblown, Annbank and Coylton and surrounding rural areas. In addition, a number of pupils from other areas attend the school by placing request. At the time of the review, the school roll was 661. The percentage of pupils entitled to free meals was above the local authority average. The attendance of pupils in session 2007/08, though improving on the previous year's performance, was below the local authority average. In 2007/08 there was a significant decrease in the number of exclusions though they remained higher than the authority average.

## How Good is Ayr Academy?

The school had adapted well, within a relatively short period of time, to the many challenges it faced by the change to its catchment area. In that respect, it had been particularly successful in welcoming pupils, parents and staff from Mainholm Academy into the school community. The Head Teacher and his staff had worked hard to develop a calm, respectful and purposeful ethos, which was characterised by good working relationships, positive pupil behaviour and considerable pride in the school. Ayr Academy is now well-positioned to build on this commendable ethos by raising the levels of expectation, pace and challenge, to improve the attainment of all pupils.

The following sections of this report provide more detailed answers to each of the 6 key questions that form the basis of *HGIOS 3*.

## What outcomes has the school achieved?



In 2008, attainment was good by the end of S2 with the majority of pupils having achieved appropriate and improving levels in reading and mathematics.



Although overall attainment in 2008 was generally weak by the end of S4 and S6, there were notable examples of stronger performance. These included:

- Some pupils in S4, S5 and S6 gaining excellent sets of awards;
- An improvement in the percentage of pupils, boys in particular, gaining SCQF Level 3 awards;
- By the end of S4, pupils attaining generally better in French, Administration and Religious Education than in their other subjects;
- The majority of pupils presented for National Qualification awards at Intermediate 2 gaining A-C awards, with pupils generally performing better in English, Mathematics, Modern Studies, Physical Education, Hospitality, Administration and Business Management than they did in their other subjects. Results in Art & Design were particularly commendable; and,
- At Higher Grade, pupils generally performing better in Art & Design and French than they did in their other subjects.



The school had in place a number of procedures which celebrated pupils' success in wider achievements.



There was in place a wide range of extra-curricular activities for pupils which promoted a sense of identity and pride in the school, and many pupils and staff contributed effectively to the life of the school through willing participation in a range of sporting, charitable, community and cultural activities.



Senior pupils developed leadership skills by supporting other pupils' learning through the Buddy Programme, by active decision-making through the Determined To Succeed programme and by accepting positions of responsibility in the school.



A number of S4 pupils were developing confidence and team-working skills through their active involvement in the XL Club.



The school recognises that, as its most important priority, it now must improve the generally weak attainment by the end of S4 and S6. Particular challenges include:

- The percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more awards at SCQF Levels 3 and 4 were below the national average and notably weaker than in other schools with similar characteristics;
- A relatively high number of pupils not gaining awards in Standard Grade across a wide range of subjects;
- Pupils generally performing less well in Standard Grade Biology, Science, Modern Studies, Geography, Music and Physical Education than they did in their other subjects;
- The percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 5 and of those gaining 1, 3 and 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 was below those of other schools with similar characteristics;
- The percentage of S6 pupils achieving 1 or more awards at SCQF Level 7 was below that of other schools with similar characteristics; and,
- Pupils generally performing less well at Higher Grade in Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Geography, Administration, Computing and Graphic Communication than they did in their other subjects.



The Head Teacher and his senior managers have identified the need to implement, in a more systematic, consistent and rigorous way, their emerging good procedures to monitor and evaluate the work of the school in order to impact significantly on the quality of pupils' learning experiences and standards of attainment.



The school recognises the need to build on its existing good practices in identifying, promoting and celebrating pupils' wider achievements by developing a more systematic, whole-school approach.

## How well does the school meet the needs of the school community?

- ✔ Through working purposefully together, the Head Teacher, staff, pupils and parents/carers had developed a very positive school ethos, characterised by courteous and respectful pupil behaviour, very good teacher-pupil relationships, generally strong staff morale and a clearly shared sense of pride in the school.
  - ✔ Staff were very committed to supporting school life and highly motivated in providing a safe, caring and supportive learning environment for pupils.
  - ✔ The Head Teacher and the Senior Management Team were well-respected by staff, who considered them to be hard-working, accessible and supportive.
  - ✔ The school enjoyed a good reputation in the community with pupils perceived to be caring and well-behaved, and staff at all levels considered to be accessible and helpful.
  - ✔ Pupils generally felt well-supported, with clear evidence available that guidance, pastoral care and pupil support were of high quality.
  - ✔ The school had forged purposeful and effective partnerships with parents/carers and the wider school community who reported that the quality of communication, consultation and engagement was very good.
  - ✔ The school had developed a range of procedures to seek pupils' views on important matters and pupils generally believed that their views were taken into account in planning for improvement.
  - ✔ The school had in place a wide range of educational excursions and trips, extra-curricular activities, clubs, study support initiatives and community-based events which contributed significantly to pupils' learning and to meeting the needs of the community.
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- ▶ Building on the very high expectations of good working relationships and pupil behaviour, the school should now raise its expectations of pupil attainment through a whole-school approach which seeks to increase pace and challenge and gives pupils more responsibility for their own learning.
  - ▶ The school now needs to build on its good reputation by raising its profile in the wider community, demonstrating its impact on the community and celebrating pupils' wider achievements more proactively and consistently.
  - ▶ The Head Teacher and his senior managers should now build on their positive relationships with staff and pupils to provide a higher profile in classrooms and a greater degree of challenge, where appropriate, in order to raise attainment for all pupils.

## How good is the education the school provides?

- ✔ The curriculum provided by the school reflects national and local advice and progress is being made in implementing key aspects of *A Curriculum for Excellence*.
- ✔ Classroom organisation and routines are generally well-established across the school.
- ✔ Display is used to good effect in many learning areas and corridors to provide attractive and stimulating environments.
- ✔ In most classes teachers created a positive and stimulating learning climate, making effective use of questioning, discussion and praise to encourage and motivate learners.
- ✔ In the best examples of effective learning and teaching, teachers used key aspects of *Assessment is for Learning* such as revising prior learning and sharing the purposes/intentions of lessons with learners, engaging learners actively in their own learning, matching the pace of learning to individual needs, creating good opportunities for individual and collaborative learning and providing feedback.
- ✔ The developing collaboration between learning support, behaviour support and guidance had been effectively managed and provided a strong foundation for the support of all aspects of pupils' learning and development.

- ▶ Although the curriculum provided meets the needs of the majority of its pupils, the school needs to make better provision for particular groups of pupils, to ensure that their individual needs are met.
- ▶ In a number of classes the use of differentiated approaches to learning and teaching was limited and pupils were not sufficiently challenged or stretched in their work. The school now needs to ensure that activities and learning approaches are more consistently matched to supporting individual learning needs.
- ▶ Building on the very good staff-pupil relationships and high expectations of pupil behaviour, the Head Teacher and his staff should now set similarly high and consistent expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- ▶ Scope exists in most classes to develop detailed feedback to pupils on how to improve their learning.
- ▶ From the strong platform of stimulating learning environments that had been created, there is now a need for all staff to increase pace and challenge in a concerted whole-school approach to improve pupil attainment.
- ▶ All teachers should now build on the many available examples of effective practice within the school, to implement the principles of *A Curriculum for Excellence* and *Assessment is for Learning* more consistently.

## How good is the management of the school?

- ✔ Staff were very hard-working, highly-committed and loyal to the school and had a clear sense of ownership and pride in the school.
  - ✔ The Head Teacher and senior managers had developed a number of effective systems for identifying the school's own strengths and improvement priorities which, if now applied more consistently and rigorously, should result in a more systematic evidence-based approach to improvement planning.
  - ✔ Departments were consistently well organised with effective administration underpinning their operation.
  - ✔ The Head Teacher had provided training for senior managers to enable them to engage with subject departments in undertaking analyses of the results of national examinations and in discussing their self-evaluations in order to agree priorities for improvement.
  - ✔ There were many examples of effective operational management in evidence throughout the school.
  - ✔ The Head Teacher had developed an effective and transparent evidence-based system for the allocation of resources, designed to target agreed key objectives aimed at raising standards and improving the quality of learning and teaching.
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- ▶ In evaluating the work of the school, promoted staff should now focus more directly on pupils' attainment and achievements.
  - ▶ Building on the increasingly rigorous discussions between senior managers and departments, Principal Teachers and their departmental staff should now evaluate pupils' progress more consistently and rigorously, in order to improve target-setting, increase challenge and raise attainment.
  - ▶ The well-developed, paper-based quality assurance system and self-evaluation procedures should now be applied systematically, consistently and rigorously throughout the school in order to improve learning and teaching and to raise attainment.
  - ▶ The school now needs to build on what it is already doing well, by sharpening the focus on the evaluation of learning and teaching, and by developing appropriate departmental action plans to bring about improvement in learners' experiences and achievements throughout the school.

## How good is the leadership of the school?

- ✔ Working with his highly-committed staff, the Head Teacher had been very successful in building teamwork, developing good relationships, promoting positive pupil behaviour and creating a strong school ethos.
- ✔ The Head Teacher and senior managers had high visibility in open areas of the school campus and were regarded by pupils and staff as being accessible, responsive and supportive.
- ✔ Working closely with staff, the Head Teacher and senior managers had persevered diligently, sometimes in difficult and challenging circumstances, to win the hearts and minds of pupils and parents/carers in the very successful transition of pupils from Mainholm Academy.
- ✔ The Head Teacher and his staff had worked well together in establishing a broad and purposeful direction for the school.
- ✔ There was clear evidence of very productive working relationships between senior and middle managers in the school.

- ▶ As a matter of priority and building on the strong school ethos, good working relationships and positive pupil behaviour in the school, the Head Teacher and senior managers now need to engage with all staff, pupils and parents/carers to lead a whole-school drive to raise expectations and pace, and to improve attainment for all pupils.
- ▶ The Head Teacher and senior managers now need to extend their already high visibility in the school, to visit classrooms on a more routine basis in order to enable them to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching more systematically.
- ▶ There is a need for Senior Management Team meetings, meetings of Principal Teachers and weekly departmental meetings to become less operational/administrative in nature, and for these to develop a clear and sustained focus on the core agenda of learning and teaching, attainment and achievement, thereby supporting key staff to develop as effective leaders of learning.

## What is the school's capacity for improvement?

The progress achieved by the school over the past two years, in developing a positive ethos and climate for effective learning, has provided a strong platform for the Head Teacher, staff and pupils to drive a whole-school approach to further improve the overall quality of learning and teaching in a concerted effort to raise standards of attainment. This should clearly be the school's principal objective.

The development of a comprehensive quality assurance framework and clear self-evaluation procedures has provided the Head Teacher and his staff with the appropriate systems and tools to monitor the effectiveness of the school through a sharp focus on improved outcomes for, and impact on, all learners. All staff now need to work together as a team to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching and to prioritise actions to raise standards for all pupils.

Ayr Academy now has a solid base from which to work in driving pupil attainment and achievement to the next level. By maintaining and developing the school's purposeful and positive ethos, all staff now need to be very clearly focused on increasing pace, challenge and expectations of what every learner can achieve.

## Attainment data and statistical information about the school

### 1. SQA examination performance levels - percentages based on S4 roll for awards achieved by the end of S4

English @ level 3 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	92	85	95
South Ayrshire	96	94	95
National	94	94	94

Maths @ level 3 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	89	84	89
South Ayrshire	94	92	94
National	93	94	94

5+ awards @ level 3 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	90	80	85
South Ayrshire	92	90	92
National	91	91	90

5+ awards @ level 4 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	75	58	57
South Ayrshire	77	76	75
National	77	76	76

5+ awards @ level 5 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	21	24	23
South Ayrshire	38	36	38
National	35	33	34

### 2. SQA examination performance levels - percentages based on S4 roll for awards achieved by the end of S5

3+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	15	11	8
South Ayrshire	26	24	23
National	22	22	22

5+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	9	1	3
South Ayrshire	12	11	11
National	10	10	10

### 3. SQA examination performance levels - percentages based on S4 roll for awards achieved by the end of S6

English and Maths @ level 3 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	85	88	87
South Ayrshire	93	94	93
National	92	91	92

5+ awards @ level 3 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	87	89	91
South Ayrshire	92	94	92
National	91	91	91

5+ awards @ level 4 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	56	71	77
South Ayrshire	79	80	80
National	79	78	79

5+ awards @ level 5 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	30	51	31
South Ayrshire	51	51	49
National	48	47	48

1+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	26	36	29
South Ayrshire	45	47	43
National	43	43	43

3+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	15	23	15
South Ayrshire	33	33	30
National	30	29	30

3+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	15	23	15
South Ayrshire	33	33	30
National	30	29	30

5+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	10	14	8
South Ayrshire	22	22	21
National	20	19	19

1+ awards @ level 7 or better	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	4	8	6
South Ayrshire	14	14	14
National	13	12	12

SCQF LEVELS	SQA QUALIFICATIONS	
7	Advanced Higher	
6	Higher	
5	Intermediate 2	Credit Standard Grade
4	Intermediate 1	General Standard Grade
3	Access 3	Foundation Standard Grade
2	Access 2	
1	Access 1	

#### 4. 5-14 attainment levels - percentages of pupils attaining or exceeding level E by the end of S2

5-14 Reading	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	61.0	59.2	72.2
South Ayrshire	68.5	72.8	70.1

5-14 Writing	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	41.8	50.0	44.4
South Ayrshire	56.8	61.1	56.8

5-14 Mathematics	2006	2007	2008
Ayr Academy	41.1	42.1	73.8
South Ayrshire	60.9	63.4	65.4

