

Department of Education,
Culture and Lifelong Learning

Standards and Quality Review

Girvan Academy

November 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

Girvan Academy is a non-denominational secondary school serving the town of Girvan, the villages of Ballantrae, Barr, Barrhill, Colmonell, Dailly and Pinwherry, and the surrounding rural areas. At the time of the review the school roll was 658. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals on that date was 19%, which is above the authority and national averages. The school has made good progress in reducing absence levels over the last 5 years and in 2007/2008 absence levels fell below the authority average for the first time. Notably, the school's level of unauthorised absence was the lowest in the authority. Exclusion levels have been above the authority average for the last 5 years, but have decreased during that period. The school is experiencing success in motivating pupils to return to school in increasing numbers in S5.

How Good is Girvan Academy?

The review found that Girvan Academy has a very positive school ethos, which is underpinned by a clear set of values and characterised by good pupil/teacher relationships, courtesy and respect, a calm atmosphere and positive pupil behaviour. Staff were highly committed to the school and provided a caring and supportive learning environment for pupils. Girvan Academy now needs to build on this solid base to increase pace and challenge throughout the school, and to raise the level of expectations of what pupils can achieve.

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 in English language was satisfactory by the end of S2, with the majority of pupils having achieved appropriate levels for their age in reading and writing.



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

- A reduction in the number of pupils who fall within the lowest attaining 20% of the national figure;
- A notable improvement in the percentage of pupils, particularly boys, achieving English and Mathematics at SCQF Level 3 or better by the end of S4;
- An improvement in the percentage of boys and girls achieving 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 3 or better by the end of S4;
- An improvement in the percentage of boys achieving 3 or more and 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 by the end of S6;
- By the end of S4, pupils generally attaining better in Standard Grade Home Economics, Biology, Computing Studies and Science, than in their other subjects;
- Good performances by pupils in S4 at Intermediate 1 and 2 in Art & Design, Music, History, Modern Studies and French;
- Very good performances by pupils in Woodworking Skills by the end of S6;
- Successes by some pupils in Access 3 courses in a range of subjects by the end of S6;

- Pupils attaining generally better in Art & Design and Biology by the end of S6, than in their other subjects; and,
- Some pupils in S4, S5 and S6 gaining very good sets of awards.



The quality of many pupils' wider learning experiences was enhanced by their participation in a range of extra-curricular activities, clubs, sporting, cultural and inter-house activities, trips and excursions.



Individual pupils gained added value from the effective inter-agency work that underpinned the Children at Risk of Missing Out (CHARM) initiative.



Good partnership working with Ayr College and appropriate work experience programmes enriched many pupils' core skills.



The school recognises that it needs to continue to improve attainment by the end of S4 and S6. Particular challenges include:

- In Mathematics, national assessment levels were significantly below the authority average;
- The percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more awards at SCQF Levels 4 and 5 by the end of S4 was weaker than in other schools with similar characteristics;
- The percentage of pupils achieving English and Mathematics at SCQF Level 3 or better by the end of S5 and S6 was notably weaker than in other schools with similar characteristics;
- The percentage of pupils gaining 1, 3, 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 and 1 or more awards at SCQF Level 7 by the end of S6, was notably below those of schools with similar characteristics;
- Pupils generally performed less well in Standard Grade Geography and Craft & Design, than they did in their other subjects; and,
- Pupils generally performed less well at Higher Grade in English and Product Design, than they did in their other subjects.
















Building on a number of examples of good practice, the school should raise the profile of celebrating pupils' successes to generate an ethos of achievement.

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










- ✔ The Head Teacher, his senior managers, staff, pupils and parents had worked well together to establish a clear vision and set of appropriate values and aims which underpinned the work of the school.
 - ✔ They had also worked hard to create a positive and supportive learning environment, characterised by a strong ethos, a respectful and orderly climate, good working relationships and positive pupil behaviour.
 - ✔ The school was well regarded by parents and the wider community.
 - ✔ Teaching and support staff were clearly committed to the school, worked diligently and gave their time willingly to support pupils' development.
 - ✔ The Head Teacher was well regarded and highly respected by the school community.
 - ✔ The Senior Management Team valued the contribution of all staff who, in turn, regarded them as hard working and committed to supporting the development of pupils.
 - ✔ Staff morale in Girvan Academy was generally very high.
 - ✔ Pupils interviewed regarded staff as being willing and approachable, and committed to treating them fairly and with respect.
 - ✔ Pupils and staff willingly contributed to charitable, fundraising and other activities geared towards supporting the local community.
 - ✔ While many pupils reported that their views were actively sought on a range of matters, they generally felt that these had limited influence on the work of the school.
 - ✔ Many staff contributed voluntarily in project groups, extra-curricular, sporting and cultural activities.
 - ✔ While parents reported that they felt well-informed and supported by the school, the opportunity should now be taken to use their commitment and skills, and those of the wider community, to influence and add value to the school's work.
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- ▶ The school should extend opportunities to pupils and parents to become more directly involved in influencing and contributing more directly to key whole-school developments.
 - ▶ Building on some good examples, the school should develop a more proactive, systematic and high profile approach to celebrating pupils' successes both in school and in the community.

How good is the education the school provides?

-  The curriculum provided by the school reflects national and local advice, and a good start has been made to raising awareness of key developments in *A Curriculum for Excellence*.
-  In a range of classes, teachers created stimulating and motivating learning environments and used praise, reward and humour to encourage learners.
-  Display was used to good effect in many learning areas and in school corridors, to showcase pupils' work and motivate learners.
-  In most classes, pupil-teacher relationships were clearly conducive to supporting effective learning.
-  Across a range of classes, many teachers used skilled questioning and discussion to stimulate pupils' learning and build their confidence, while most pupils consistently paid attention and remained focused on the work of the class.
-  In a number of classes, the guiding principles of *Assessment is for Learning* were becoming established. In examples of best classroom practice, these included revision of prior learning, explaining expected learning outcomes, peer/self assessment, paired working, differentiated approaches and active learning strategies.
-  Girvan Academy presented as a truly inclusive school and while the extended learning facility provided well-structured support for individual learners, inclusion and integration had clearly been established as the norm.
-  The school's Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme was well organised and effectively supported.
-  Guidance, pastoral support, careers advice, PSE and care and welfare of pupils were clear strengths of the school and operated seamlessly.
-  The school and its cluster primary schools worked effectively to ensure supportive pastoral arrangements for pupils at transition.
-  In recognising that the curriculum meets the needs of a number of pupils, the school now needs to improve its provision for particular groups of pupils to ensure that their learning experiences are matched more appropriately to their individual needs.
-  In many classes, lessons need to be more carefully differentiated to support individual pupils and stretch others where appropriate.
-  In general terms the pace of lessons was too slow, and all staff now need to raise the level of challenge and their expectations of what pupils can achieve.

- ▶ Considerable scope exists in most classes to provide learners with opportunities to think critically and creatively, and to encourage them to take more responsibility for their own learning.
- ▶ Building on some early examples of good practice, the school now needs to promote the principles of *Assessment is for Learning* more overtly and systematically in all classes, so that learners are aware of what they are striving to achieve and effective feedback is provided to them, in order that they can continue to make good progress.
- ▶ All staff should now adopt a more high profile and systematic approach to promoting higher expectations of pupils' pace, attendance and achievements, in order to improve attainment across the school.
- ▶ Considerable potential exists to involve staff more fully in whole-school forums to share good practice, discuss innovative ways of working and improve the quality of learning and teaching.
- ▶ Girvan Academy needs to work closely with its associated primary schools to develop a shared focus on curricular continuity at the transition stage and to take more systematic account of prior learning in planning learning and teaching.
- ▶ The school now requires to translate its very good knowledge of its pupils into clearly defined actions that are targeted to improve the learning and teaching experience for all pupils.

How good is the management of the school?

-  The Head Teacher, his senior managers and all staff have worked well together as a team to create a climate of order, care, support, mutual respect, shared responsibility and collegiality in the school.
 -  Girvan Academy's welcoming atmosphere was notable, with pupils and staff playing their parts in maintaining a clean and attractive learning environment where good order and productive relationships prevailed.
 -  The school's policy framework and policy statements were generally clear, concise, relevant and user-friendly.
 -  Relationships between senior managers, middle managers and teaching/support staff were generally strong, with clear lines of communication playing an important role.
 -  Staff were hard-working, committed, had a clear sense of loyalty to the school and had developed an ethos of collegiality across and between departments.
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-  The school now needs to implement, in a systematic and rigorous way, the quality assurance and self-evaluation procedures that have been developed well on paper.
 -  The rigour and consistency of the school's procedures for staff development and review need to be improved, in order to provide more challenge in relation to the performance of individual departments and staff.
 -  The Head Teacher and his senior managers need to work with Principal Teachers to refine their procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of learning and teaching, in order to ensure comprehensive coverage and consistent approaches and to provide feedback to teachers.
 -  The Head Teacher should engage with all promoted staff to sharpen the focus of evaluation of learning and teaching, pupils' attainment and achievements and analysis of examination results in order to evaluate school effectiveness more systematically and to target improvements for pupils.

How good is the leadership of the school?

- ✔ The Head Teacher and his senior managers were approachable and accessible, and highly visible in open areas of the school campus.
 - ✔ The Head Teacher and his senior managers had worked well with staff and pupils to embed the school's appropriate vision, values and aims and to make them "live" across the school.
 - ✔ Teamwork, collegiality and a clear sense of ownership clearly permeated school life.
 - ✔ Promoted and unpromoted staff had all played their parts in generating the school's positive ethos and many staff accepted whole-school, collegiate responsibilities for wider aspects of school life such as corridor discipline and curricular support for pupils outwith timetabled periods.
 - ✔ Many staff willingly participated in extra-curricular, sporting and cultural activities and in project groups which focused on developing the quality of pupils' learning experiences.
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- ▶ The review found that, within a very positive and mutually supportive school climate, there was only limited evidence of challenge. In order to raise pupils' expectations and attainment, the Head Teacher now needs to work with the whole school community to lead and generate an ethos of constructive and rigorous challenge at all levels.
 - ▶ Staff expectations of what pupils can achieve were generally too low and all staff now need to work together as a team to focus on raising these expectations, through increasing pace and challenge in all classes.
 - ▶ The Head Teacher, his senior managers and all Principal Teachers need, as a matter of urgency, to implement the school's own quality assurance and self-evaluation procedures more consistently and to translate these into clearly-defined, targeted actions to raise attainment and improve the quality of pupils' experiences.
 - ▶ Meetings of the senior management team, of Principal Teachers and of departments need to focus clearly on the core agenda of learning, teaching and raising attainment.

What is the school's capacity for improvement?

The hard work and commitment of the Head Teacher, staff, pupils and parents have generated a strong school ethos and positive climate for effective learning in Girvan Academy. The school is now well placed to address its key challenge of increasing pace and challenge, and raising attainment for all pupils. In addition, the development of a well-constructed system of quality assurance and self-evaluation has provided the school with the appropriate tools to focus on taking action to improve outcomes and impact for learners. Girvan Academy staff now need to work purposefully as a team to use these systems systematically and rigorously, in order to identify specific actions which will improve the quality of learning and teaching and raise attainment and achievement for all pupils.

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
Girvan Academy	91	89	93
South Ayrshire	96	94	95
National	94	94	94

Maths @ level 3 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	87	83	92
South Ayrshire	94	92	94
National	93	94	94

5+ awards @ level 3 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	87	84	91
South Ayrshire	92	90	92
National	91	91	90

5+ awards @ level 4 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	69	69	73
South Ayrshire	77	76	75
National	77	76	76

5+ awards @ level 5 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	24	26	24
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
Girvan Academy	14	11	13
South Ayrshire	26	24	23
National	22	22	22

5+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	4	5	7
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
Girvan Academy	91	94	87
South Ayrshire	93	94	93
National	92	91	92

5+ awards @ level 3 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	88	94	87
South Ayrshire	92	94	92
National	91	91	91

5+ awards @ level 4 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	75	71	71
South Ayrshire	79	80	80
National	79	78	79

5+ awards @ level 5 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	44	41	37
South Ayrshire	51	51	49
National	48	47	48

1+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	34	39	32
South Ayrshire	45	47	43
National	43	42	43

3+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	20	19	15
South Ayrshire	33	33	30
National	30	29	30

5+ awards @ level 6 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	14	9	10
South Ayrshire	22	22	21
National	20	19	19

1+ awards @ level 7 or better	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	4	7	5
South Ayrshire	14	14	14
National	13	12	12

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

5-14 Reading	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	65.9	67.4	63.9
South Ayrshire	68.5	72.8	70.1

5-14 Writing	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	54.8	52.3	55.5
South Ayrshire	56.8	61.2	56.8

5-14 Mathematics	2006	2007	2008
Girvan Academy	57.0	47.7	49.6
South Ayrshire	60.9	63.4	65.4

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	

