

9 April 2013

Dear Parent/Carer

**Dunbar Grammar School
East Lothian Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports young people to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including curriculum development, learners' experiences, how the school meets the needs of all learners, including the most vulnerable and how pupil voice informs school improvements. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving young people's education.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Young people learn and achieve very well within an inclusive learning environment. They engage very well in lessons and enjoy learning at school. Young people benefit from teachers' clear explanations and effective questioning. They work well together in pairs and groups, supporting each other and learning together. The school regularly seeks the views of young people to improve learning and teaching. Staff share the purposes of lessons with young people, encourage them to work to the best of their ability and build their self-confidence. Young people feel safe and well cared for and are confident staff will provide help and support when needed. Where teachers provide high quality feedback to young people about their learning and progress, this supports young people to have a clear understanding of their next steps in learning. There is scope to make this good practice more consistent across the school.

Young people are achieving very well in a range of cultural, sporting and citizenship activities. Through an extensive range of opportunities provided by the school, they are developing skills and attributes to prepare them for life and work. Young people contribute very effectively to the life and work of the school, particularly in the senior stages. They develop skills in leadership through roles such as school captains and house captains, young sports ambassadors and prefects. Young people in S6 demonstrate responsible and mature attitudes as they participate in weekly community experience. Across the school, young people are developing confidence and performing skills as they take part in musical concerts and shows. Young people achieve well in a range of sporting activities at local and national level including football, basketball and golf. Many young people have notable success in the Duke of

Edinburgh's Award scheme. The annual Battlefields Experience trip to France and Belgium, for all young people in S3, has a significant impact on young people and their understanding of global citizenship.

Young people from S1 to S3 are progressing well through the broad general education. At S4–S6 young people achieve very well in National Qualifications. By the end of S4, young people's attainment is above national averages in all key measures. By the end of S5, young people's attainment is well above national averages and is above, or in line with, national averages by the end of S6. Overall, the school's performance is stronger than other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Those who require extra help to learn are making very good progress.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Within its caring learning environment, young people across the school are supported very well to develop and learn. Teachers plan tasks and activities carefully to meet the needs of young people. Staff across the school have a very good knowledge of the needs of learners and are skilful at providing them with appropriate support. Teachers and support staff share a clear commitment to understanding young people's needs, and to taking action to meet those needs. Support for learning staff are highly skilled and have a clear impact on the quality of young people's learning experience, achievement and attainment. Across the school, staff work very well together to support young people's social, emotional and learning needs. They work very effectively with a range of partner agencies and quickly identify and act to resolve any barriers to learning. The school has notable success in meeting the needs of vulnerable young people, including through the Learn to Succeed programme.

Staff are making good progress in implementing changes to the curriculum to reflect the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. In S1, S2 and S3 the school provides a broad general education for young people. New approaches and courses are in place in curriculum areas to provide young people with opportunities to progress in their learning and develop a range of skills. There is scope to provide more opportunities which allow young people to link and apply their learning across a range of contexts. The curriculum from S4 to S6 offers a range of courses which provide progression and lead to certification. The school is planning to provide more vocational opportunities for young people in the senior phase. Most young people leaving the school progress to positive destinations in further study, employment or training. Staff should continue to plan approaches for developing young people's skills in literacy across their learning.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Staff use a range of approaches to evaluate the work they do, and the difference it makes to young people's learning and achievements. Faculties make use of a number of very effective approaches to monitor and improve aspects of their work. Class visits, surveys and regular discussions about approaches to learning and teaching all result in a shared understanding about what works well and where improvement is needed. Each session, teachers have the opportunity to be part of a Learning Team and take forward and evaluate new approaches in the classroom. This work has

resulted in improvements to classroom practice across the school. There is scope to involve partners more in evaluating the school's work and planning for improvement.

The headteacher has a strong and clear commitment to taking the school forward. He is dedicated to improving life chances for all young people. He knows the school very well and encourages staff to be reflective and take forward improvements. As the new senior leadership team becomes established, the school is well placed to build on these strengths.

This inspection of your school found the following key strengths.

- Confident young people who enjoy their learning.
- The overall quality and range of young people's achievements and attainment.
- The outstanding support provided to young people requiring additional support with their learning.
- The dedication and commitment of staff to working together to meet the needs of young people.

We discussed with staff and the education authority how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to develop the curriculum to ensure young people can make progress appropriate to their learning needs.
- Continue to increase the involvement of community partners and external agencies in evaluating the work of the school and planning for improvement.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. During the inspection, we identified an aspect of innovative practice which we would like to explore further in order to share the practice with others. As a result we will work with the school and local authority in order to record and share more widely the innovative practice. We will ask the school, in discussion with the local authority, to let parents know the outcome of the innovative practice visit(s).

Carol McDonald
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/DunbarGrammarSchoolEastLothian.asp>.

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0141 282 5000, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.

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 publication *How good is our school?*¹. 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 Dunbar Grammar School.

Improvements in performance	very good
Learners' experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	very good

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

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

A copy of the full letter is available on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/DunbarGrammarSchoolEastLothian.asp>.

¹ *How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence: part 3*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/HowgoodisourschoolJtEpart3_tcm4-684258.pdf