

Charleston Academy

Standards and Quality

Report for School Board

April 2007



Charleston Academy Standards and Quality Report



Dear Parent/Carer

'Charleston Academy demonstrated the capacity to continue and further develop as a high attaining school that effectively met the needs of all its pupils and the community.'

These concluding words from a Highland Council Inspection of Standards and Quality at Charleston Academy in 2004 were both a compliment and a challenge.

They reflected the school's positive response to a school inspectors' report in 2002. But they challenged us to maintain the standards previously set and to ensure that quality is the hallmark of all aspects of school life.

To assess our progress in the past year, we have continued to use criteria developed by school inspectors. The criteria cover seven key areas of school life:

- Curriculum
- Attainment
- Learning and Teaching
- Support for Pupils
- Ethos
- Resources
- Management, Leadership and Quality Assurance

We believe our self-evaluation is an honest appraisal of progress at Charleston Academy. We have assessed each by key area using the inspectors' 1-6 scale where 1 is unsatisfactory, 2 is weak, 3 is adequate, 4 is good, 5 is very good and 6 is excellent.

The sources used in compiling this report at the end of each section. The recently completed Faculty Reports have been a particularly valuable resource and I want to give a special thanks to all involved in completing them in such a detailed and open way.

There is now an invitation for anyone with an interest in the school to comment on the self-evaluation and also to be part of the process of working towards a position where it is regarded as excellent in all seven key areas. That remains a challenge for all of us.

Calum MacSween
Rector

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Curriculum

Level 4 – Good

- In response to the Scottish Executive plans for 3-18 curriculum, we have continued to work with associated primary schools to improve curricular continuity, particularly at the key P7/S1 transition point.

In 2005 Primary Science textbooks, which link to ones used in S1/S2, were purchased for all P7 pupils. Primary schools can now access to secondary based Science resources. A 'Science Passport' is also being trialled.

Maths textbooks have been aligned so that work covered in primary leads to units of work in secondary textbooks. To emphasise the point, primary pupils continue to use their P7 Maths jotters in the early part of S1. Work is now underway to standardise the order in which maths units are completed at each level in P7 across all associated primary schools

A similar arrangement exists for transferring language jotters between primary schools and secondary English classes.

PE staff provided specialist inputs to most associated primary schools in session 2005 - 2006 with noticeable benefits when p7 pupils transferred to S1.

Information has been exchanged about History topics to avoid duplication and repetition.

- Project classes now well established in S1/S2, have been successful in developing the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils who need additional support.
- In English, pupils embark on Standard Grade in S2 but do not sit exam until S4. Maths and Music operate a 'fast track' system for more able pupils.
- A Curriculum Review Group has been established within the school. Two key priorities are to address 'the learning dip' in S2 and the pressure encountered by pupils moving from Standard Grade or Intermediate 2 to Higher.
- The curriculum offered in S3/S4 is appropriate for most of the cohort. Although a broad range of subject is recommended, pupils can 'specialise' by taking two Social Subjects (Geography and History) or three Sciences or three Technological subjects. However, for a small group the 8 Standard Grade option is not appropriate. In the past two sessions, for some pupils, one Standard Grade has been replaced by a Lifeskills Course but a more radical and extensive change based on vocational options will be needed in the future.
- Higher Still courses are well embedded in S5/S6 and provide a wide range of options over the two years. However, the step up from Standard Grade or Intermediate 2 to Higher is difficult for a number of students. Options for students moving from the lower end of General or Foundation at Standard Grade to S5 are limited. Time for Advanced Higher courses is at a premium.

Sources: Departmental Conference and Senior Management Minutes, Primary/Secondary Cluster Meeting Minutes, Departmental and School Improvement Plans, Curriculum Review Minutes.

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Attainment

Level 4 Good

- Attainment is good and, in the case of Standard Grade, usually very good.

SQA results 2000 – 2006

% of S4 roll gaining 5+ Standard Grades at Grade 4 or better

2000 - 91
2001 - 90
2002 - 90
2003 - 91
2004 - 92
2005 - 94
2006 - 85

% of S4 roll gaining 5+ Standard Grades at Grade 2 or better

2000 - 35
2001 - 37
2002 - 40
2003 - 43
2004 - 38
2005 - 44
2006 - 35

% S4 roll going on to gain 3+ Highers in S5

2000 - 25
2001 - 23
2002 - 25
2003 - 30
2004 - 30
2005 - 24
2006 - 28

% of S4 roll going on to gain 3+ Highers by end of S6

2000 - 35
2001 - 35
2002 - 33
2003 - 36
2004 - 36
2005 - 42
2006 - 29

Comments

- Despite a drop in 2006, the consistently high % of S4 pupils gaining 5+ Standard Grade at General is excellent. The Scottish average is 76%.
- The % of S4 gaining 5+ Credit Grades is very good.
- However, results in S5 are less consistent. A dip in Credit passes in 2004 fed through to a dip in 3+ Highers in 2005 but rose again in 2006. Overall, S5 results are good.
- The % of S6 gaining 5+ Highers was 20%.
- Advanced Highers provide a real challenge for aspiring university students but motivation to complete these demanding courses is often undermined when S6 receive 'unconditional offers' for university courses in mid session.
- Results are consistently very good across the curriculum.
- Many departments make very good use of SQA data, looking at issues such as gender differences in results and comparisons with results in schools with a similar profile to Charleston Academy.
- Target setting is established but would benefit from a more consistent approach across the school.
- The absence of good baseline assessment in S1/S2 needs to be addressed.

Sources: SQA Statistical Information 2000 – 2006, Highland Council Performance Management Unit, Departmental Analyses of Results

Learning and Teaching

Level 5 – Very Good

- The school is involved in a Scottish Executive funded initiative entitled Assessment is for Learning. Basically it asks teachers to look at different ways in which assessment can be used to improve learning rather than an end in itself.
- During the past two sessions, associated primary schools and all secondary departments, trialled different techniques which were collated in a 'Best Practice in Formative Assessment' booklet.
- Some of the techniques trialled included: teachers increasing wait time when asking questions to give all pupils a choice to think; 'no hands questioning' in which teachers involve all pupils in question/answers and not just those who put their hands up; sharing the marking criteria for work and getting pupils to assess each other's work before it is assessed by the teacher; more use of comments rather than grades when work is assessed etc.
- The school has a Learning and Teaching Research Group drawn from different departments. The Group meets regularly to share insights on learning and teaching and also to advise senior management on what staff development should be made available to staff.
- Learning and teaching issues are discussed at departmental conferences.
- Across the school, activities and tasks are well matched to the needs of individual pupils; there is ample evidence that a wide range of resources are available to pupils; learning and teaching approaches encourage pupils to achieve well; enterprise funding is being made available to departments.
- A number of teaching areas remain cramped; more classrooms are needed.
- The refurbishment of Home Economics converting the open plan area into five separate teaching areas has made a notable improvement to the learning environment.
- Innovative work is going on in some areas to harness the potential of ICT to improve learning and teaching.
- In addressing the Scottish Executive's Curriculum for Excellence proposals, the school will ensure that improved learning is the main rationale for curricular change.
- Pupil progress is recorded formally on annual reports and discussed at well attended parents' evenings.

Sources: Learning and Teaching Group Minutes, Primary/Secondary Cluster Meeting Minutes, Departmental Conference and Senior Management Meeting Minutes, Faculty Reports, ICT Strategy Group Minutes.

Support for Pupils

Level 5 – Very Good

- Guidance staff are very experienced and supportive. The needs of individual pupils are at the centre of all they do. Issues are identified at the earliest possible point and addressed as fully as possible. Pastoral care is responsive and sensitive.
- Guidance staff are also well informed on curricular and vocational matters. They are very well supported by the Careers Service.
- Support for Learning staff balance their various roles very effectively. These roles include well planned tutorials, co-operative teaching, creating programmes of work and strategies to meet individual pupil needs. Most recently they have offered short courses for colleagues on different learning needs and a new club for pupils who wish to improve their co-ordination.
- The newly opened base for children with Additional Support Needs is an excellent and welcome new resource. It has reduced the pressure on the Learning Resource Base in the main building which was overcrowded. In particular, it provides a very important base for children with autism.
- Staffing levels are not as originally envisaged for the ASN base and, therefore, restrict its scope for development.
- Accommodation for Guidance staff is very limited. There is also a need to improve provision for Personal and Social Education classes – they currently have to use a wide variety of teaching areas.
- The appointment of a Children's Service Worker has been an excellent initiative, highly appreciated by colleagues, pupils and parents/carers. However, the temporary nature of the post means that there has been a turnover of staff which undermines the quality and continuity of support available to young people.
- The School Liaison Group brings Guidance, Support for Learning and colleagues from other agencies together on a monthly basis to plan and review support provision for individual pupils – joined up working in practice.
- Both Guidance and Support for Learning Staff are highly respected by colleagues. Subject departments are appreciative of their professionalism and expertise.
- Many subject departments provide materials and revision booklets for pupils. Increasing use is made of web based resources.
- The school has clear policies for dealing with issues such as bullying, child protection, drug or alcohol abuse, racial incidents and so on.

Sources: Guidance and Support for Learning Minutes, Focus Group Minutes, School Liaison Group Minutes, Faculty Reviews, School Nutrition Action Group Minutes, Departmental Conference Minutes

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Ethos

Level 5 – Very Good

- Relationships between staff and pupils are generally very good.
- High expectations are set and achieved in the main. However, there is on going concern about the work ethic/motivation of a small minority of pupils and its effect on progress of some classes. Lack of progress is effectively identified by the 'trawl' system.
- Parental support is very good. Parental attendance at parents' evenings is encouraging and regularly tops 80%. However, a small group of 'hard to reach' parents never attend parents' evenings. Parental support in individual cases where pupil progress/attitude/behaviour is a concern is almost always supportive.
- The school produces a monthly newsletter, Charleston News – delivered home by school bag mail. Our website at www.charleston.highland.sch.uk is a work in progress but well worth a visit.
- There are many and varied extra-curricular opportunities, ranging from chess to World Challenge expeditions, available to pupils. There are particularly good opportunities in music and sport. Some inter house competitions were revived in 2005-2006.
- The sponsored walk is now an annual event. Over £14,000 was raised in September 2006.
- Charity events are well supported. Last Christmas, 50+ hampers were distributed to local people. The school established a link with a school in Sri Lanka following the January 2005 Tsunami. Fund raising is ongoing. Other beneficiaries this year included the Rachel House at Home charity and a school community in South Africa.
- Pupil Councils are well established and active. The Whole School Council this session is particularly effective, particularly in relation to Highland 2007. Other committees, such as the School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) and Charities Committee have provided more opportunities for pupil involvement.
- The prefect system is well organised and prefects make an important contribution to the positive ethos in the school. The buddy system is equally well established and makes an important contribution to the development of the school as a community. Activities such as paired reading and paired learning are invaluable.
- The School Board and Charleston Academy Association held joint meetings ahead of the development of a Parental Forum and Parental Council in 2007. A new constitution has been approved by Highland Council and will be put to parents for approval in May / June.
- The school wishes to share its resources with the community. The process of integrating the school and Community Complex is underway and should lead to greater access to the school facilities by community groups and individuals. This ambition was recognised by the Scottish Executive with the recognition of Charleston academy as one of its Schools of Ambition and a minimum of £300,000 over the next three years to help realise that ambition.
- The school was accredited as a Health Promoting School at Grade 4 (the highest grade) in November 2005.

Sources: Whole School Council Minutes, Behaviour Review Group Minutes, School Board/Charleston Association Minutes, Community Complex Management Committee Minutes, Departmental Conference and Senior Management Meeting Minutes.

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Resources

Level 3/4 – Adequate/Good

- The school is fully staffed. However, we are going through a period of change with five probationer teachers in post this session and a further five expected next session. All staff – teachers, auxiliaries, clerical staff, janitorial, librarian and technicians are mutually supportive and combine effectively for the benefit of pupils. The Children's Service Worker has been an excellent appointment.
- Capitation budgets are distributed fairly according to an agreed formula.
- Over the past seven years, the annual re-configuration of the devolved school budget has drawn a large sum of money from the devolved school budget to the core Education, Culture and Sport budget to help address overspends in key areas such as school transport and Special Educational Needs. These annual cuts in budget have been off-set by additional Scottish Executive funding and via the National Priorities Action Fund.
- Teaching accommodation is adequate but there are a number of pressure points:

cramped classrooms – lack of storage; insufficient classrooms leading to some staff teaching in a number of different rooms (up to 10 in one case) and lack of access to classrooms when teachers are not actually teaching limited staff preparation / study areas; limited facilities for Guidance work and Personal and Social Education (PSE) teaching; insufficient music practice rooms; lack of storage, including in Community Complex; inadequate base for ICT technician; no social areas for pupils; over-crowded canteen facilities; Science labs are 'tired' looking; shortage of changing rooms and storage for PE/community.
- Improvements in recent years include the opening of new Additional Support Needs (ASN) base, a new all weather pitch as part of the Highland Football Academy (HFA) and a refurbished Home Economics Department.
- Spending on an ICT base to replace the language lab, refurbished computing rooms, new flooring in corridors, refurbished staff toilets have all helped improve the fabric of the school. All improvements have been made possible by a surplus accrued at the end of the financial year. However, there is an unacceptable variation between the level of ICT provision between some classrooms which makes it particularly difficult for peripatetic teachers.
- A 'wish list' from departments was compiled in April 2004 and updated in 2006. Many of the items have been purchased over the past three years but some items are still awaiting funding. The list will be updated in 2008.
- Health and Safety matters are well monitored by a staff committee. Head janitor, Colin Stein, makes a particularly effective contribution.
- The main health concern for staff relates to the school's heating/ventilation system.
- There have been problems of recruitment and retention in the canteen which has led to a regrettable reduction in service on a number of occasions.

Sources: Departmental Minutes, SMT Minutes, Faculty Reviews, Health and Safety Committee Minutes, Departmental and School Improvement Plans, Budget Information.

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Management, Leadership and Quality Assurance

Level 4/5 – Good/Very Good

- The school has a well structured development planning process. The school's 2005 development plan was rated as 'very good' by the Performance Management Unit in Dingwall. In 2006 we moved to a three year improvement plan from a one year development plan in an attempt to ensure developments/improvements had an opportunity to be embedded before initiating further changes.
- Self-evaluation is fully embedded in the work of departments. Analysis of SQA results, faculty reviews and departmental minutes all generate valid and reliable evidence as part of a well established quality assurance procedure.
- School Aims were reviewed just after the Easter holiday in 2006. Staff/pupil/parents were involved in the consultation.
- A major survey of pupil/parent/staff opinions was conducted in May 2006 ahead of the completion a the three year improvement plan. The survey proved very helpful in determining priorities.
- All promoted staff have clear remits and discharge them effectively.
- Principal Teachers provide very good leadership and manage departments very effectively.
- Miss Shona Giliies was appointed as Depute Head earlier this session and ensured that the Senior Management Team continued to provide experienced and effective leadership to the school community.
- The school is well supported by its Quality Development Officer, Alan Cowie, Area Education Manager, Hector Robertson and Area Community Learning Manager, Douglas Wilby.
- School Board members are extremely supportive and very well led by a highly experienced Chair, Suzann Barr. Mrs Barr and Chair of the Charleston Association, Jennifer Campbell, successfully navigated all parties through the potentially difficult journey of creating a new constitution for the Parent Council. The constitution will be put to the Parent Forum for approval in May / June 2007.
- Tom Wall has shown similar commitment and support to the Community Complex Management Committee in his 11th year as Chair.
- Work is underway to integrate the staffing of school and community facilities as part of the move towards an Integrated Learning Community which should lead to extended and improved access to all the facilities on campus.

Sources: Departmental and School Development Plans, Faculty Reviews, Departmental Minutes, Principal Teachers Minutes, School Board and Community Complex management Committee Minutes.

Key Strengths

- Quality of staff – at all levels
- Responsive, friendly pupils
- Quality of learning and teaching
- Attainment and overall achievement
- Quality of support for pupils
- Quality and variety of extra-curricular provision
- Parental/community support

Areas for Improvement

- Accommodation – more classroom space, refurbished labs, additional music practice rooms, increased storage provision, Guidance office space etc
- More vocational courses from S3 onwards; more flexible and alternative curriculum arrangements for individual pupils
- Ensure adequate support staffing is in place to meet diversity and complexity of pupil needs
- Further investment in ICT – projectors, whiteboards, upgraded software – in classrooms to ensure equality of access and provision
- Further development of school website and improved use of ICT to support pupil study and communication with parents
- Improved facilities, specifically lighting/sound in hall, changing rooms for newly enhanced sports provision and new surface for part of blaes area
- Develop community use of school/community complex
- Improve parent involvement in life of the school via new Parent Council
- Review lunchtime arrangements