

17 January 2012

Dear Parent/Carer

Oakwood School, Laurieston, Falkirk

HM Inspectors recently visited Oakwood School. The visit was part of our professional engagement approach with independent schools. Professional engagement visits complement the general programme of inspections. The approach allows us to maintain our knowledge of schools in the independent sector throughout Scotland, and to work with them in bringing about continued improvement in meeting the needs of all learners. It also provides assurance to parents on the school's capacity for evaluating its own work and making improvements which have a direct impact on the quality of experiences for its young people. Our visit was based firmly on the school's self-evaluation and the priorities identified for school improvement. Following our initial discussion with the headteacher, we agreed to focus our visit on key aspects of the school's continued development. These included:

- the extent to which children and young people take responsibility for their learning and contribute to school improvement;
- approaches to supporting and challenging learners with varying needs and abilities; and
- opportunities for young people to have personalisation and choice within the senior curriculum.

During our visit, we talked to staff, young people and trustees of the school and worked with the headteacher and senior leadership staff to consider the school's improvement priorities and planned future developments. This letter sets out what we found.

How does the school ensure consistently high standards for all?

We found that the school has in place appropriate arrangements to ensure all children and young people enjoy school and achieve well. The school seeks to provide a high standard of education within a strong Christian ethos. Important values of self-discipline, respect, tolerance and working hard are at the heart of this school community. We found the school encourages learners to achieve their best in national examinations whilst developing confidence and skills for their future lives. Staff set high expectations and young people respond well to these and, as a result, are motivated and engaged in their learning. They have opportunities to achieve success and develop leadership, organisation and communication skills within the school and also through involvement in activities outside the classroom. Young people appreciate that their efforts and achievements are recognised and praised during school assemblies and in classes.

¹ This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as this will not connect.

In the junior school, staff approaches to developing Curriculum for Excellence are having a positive impact on their planning for learning within relevant themes and contexts which draw a number of curriculum areas together. Throughout the whole school, young people's opportunities to apply literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills are evident. For example, they spoke very well about how their involvement in the recent farm business project had deepened their understanding through this practical experience. In the senior school, the school's curriculum developments in recent years have resulted in well-structured courses leading to a range of academic and vocational qualifications. Staff have increased opportunities for young people to choose what they study. Effective tracking systems allow staff to monitor the progress of individuals and groups of learners. As a result, young people feel appropriately challenged to reach their potential.

The school works in partnership with other agencies, to ensure learners with additional needs are identified and supported. Support for learning staff work closely with class teachers, parents and young people to set and review individual learning targets. However, young people's varying needs and abilities are not always met consistently across all lessons and classes. This needs continued focus in the school's procedures for professional development for staff and monitoring learning experiences. The transition curriculum for children in Year 7 is well planned to give them an introduction to senior school whilst maintaining high levels of support from a class teacher who knows them well. The school's policies and aims promote the importance of living a safe and healthy lifestyle. Children and young people feel well cared for. The school has clear arrangements to safeguard children and young people.

How does the school continue to improve?

With strong support from trustees and the wider Brethren community, the school has increased the roll and extended the curriculum in recent years. A culture of reflection and commitment to continual improvement is evident. Staff share ideas and seek opportunities to extend the range of skills they can offer learners. The school community values the work of the professional leadership team. Our discussions with the headteacher and depute headteachers show that they understand the school's strengths and needs well. The school improvement plan contains appropriate priorities which have been set in partnership with staff, parents and learners. As the school moves forward as part of the One School network, it is important to ensure these priorities are kept to the fore.

We discussed and agreed with staff those areas on which they might focus in continuing to improve the school. These included:

- Continue to build on recent positive curriculum developments to ensure senior students have a broad and personalised programme of learning and personal development.
- Monitor approaches to support for learning to ensure class teachers and specialist staff meet the needs effectively of all learners.
- Trustees and professional staff now need to work together to plan next steps for the school which take account of the aims of the school and maintain the expectations and entitlements for all learners within the Scottish context.

We are confident that, with school staff and the Board of Trustees working closely together, the school can improve its arrangements and procedures for ensuring continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and the Board of Trustees will inform parents about the school's progress as part of their arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its school. Our lead inspector and link inspector will maintain contact with the school to support and monitor improvements.

Patricia Watson
HM Inspector
17 January 2012

Additional information about the visit can be obtained from the school.