

22 April 2014

Dear Parent/Carer

**Kirkwall Grammar School and Papdale Halls of Residence
Orkney Islands Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. We also worked together with the Care Inspectorate to inspect the school's residential accommodation. During our visit, we talked to parents and young people and worked closely with the headteacher, halls of residence manager and staff from both. We wanted to find out how well young people are learning and achieving and how well the school and halls of residence support 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 leadership opportunities for staff and young people, and the achievements of young people. 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 well at Kirkwall Grammar School and Papdale Halls of Residence. They are confident, articulate and engage very well with adults and other young people. They welcome visitors to their school and halls of residence. They very much like the new buildings in which they are learning and living. Most young people feel safe and well cared for. Almost all are motivated, attentive and keen to do well. In a few lessons, young people are very clear about the purpose of their learning and how they will know if they have succeeded. In many lessons which are teacher-led, young people are too passive in their learning. Most young people with complex needs benefit from the range of creative and innovative learning experiences provided by staff. Many young people benefit from highly positive learning experiences in sport, music, arts and culture. The majority of young people contribute to the school and local communities through volunteering. Learning experiences help to develop young people's leadership, communication and social skills, resilience and citizenship. Across the school, young people's learning and achievements are enhanced by the wide range of supported study and revision classes on offer. Younger pupils in the halls of residence very much value the support they receive from older pupils with their school work. Young people were well consulted when the new buildings were being planned. However, they do not feel that the views of either the pupil council or the residents' council are taken on board enough and changes made as a result of their feedback.

According to data provided by the school, most young people are making good progress from S1 to S3. From S4 to S6, the school is making progress in improving

several aspects of attainment, particularly at S5. On almost all national measures, attainment is around the national average and is in line with schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. The attainment of boys and girls which was previously different is now more similar. Almost all young people with complex needs are making appropriate progress and all move on from school to a positive destination. Most young people with additional support needs are making good progress in their learning.

Large numbers of young people are engaged in sports, musical activities, and cultural events. Those young people who played with the BBC Symphony Orchestra responded very well to the challenge. Playing at Celtic Connections allowed young people to gain a sense of audience. Young people are gaining an understanding of sustainability through the 'Troot in the Shed' project. Notable numbers of young people gain accredited awards, for example, awards in food hygiene, community sports leadership, Youth Achievement and John Muir Awards. These awards support young people as they move on from school into employment. The school is at the early stages of recording and collating information about young people's achievements to ensure they all achieve as widely and as well as possible.

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

In classes, most tasks and activities are appropriate for almost all young people. However at times, the pace is too slow and the work is not always sufficiently challenging, particularly for higher-attaining young people. Staff in the halls work hard to support young people with their homework. Young people with complex needs are well supported during individual and group activities in the wing. More of these young people would benefit from support in class and better planning by teachers to meet their needs. This would provide them with more opportunities to benefit from working alongside their peers. Too many are currently removed and taken to the curriculum support wing. The recently-appointed head of guidance and principal teacher of curriculum support have identified key priorities for improvement in this aspect of the school's work. However, the school now needs to implement in full the strategy for meeting the wide range of needs for all young people. Across the school a number of young people have support plans. In the halls of residence all young people have care plans. We have asked staff in the school and halls to improve these plans and to work together to ensure all young people involved are fully supported to make suitable progress.

The curriculum is based on providing a very wide range of subject choices and opportunities for young people's personal achievement. Teachers are developing new courses, including those leading to National Qualifications in line with national advice and guidance. The curriculum is enriched and enhanced through work with a wide range of partners and by introducing new courses such as photography. Work with local artists and local businesses helps to broaden young people's experiences further. College courses such as those in care, maritime skills and rural skills, help young people develop skills for life and work. The curriculum is further extended through a variety of trips, such as the 'Hadhirgaan' group which performed in Canada and shared Orcadian music and culture. We have asked teachers to continue their review of the curriculum to ensure it is allowing progression and a greater pace in learning. Better partnership working and communication between the school and halls would enable

staff to share information about young people's achievements and plan more effectively to meet their needs. Transitions from primary and junior high schools are well planned.

How well does the school and halls of residence improve the quality of their work?

The school has correctly identified a number of key priorities for improvement. Teachers carefully consider their new courses and regularly make changes and improvements. They contribute to school and departmental improvement plans. They work with senior leaders to analyse examination results. Several teachers are working with the Scottish Qualifications Authority as new National Qualifications are being developed. Principal teachers and senior leaders visit classes to observe learning and teaching. However, some teachers lack understanding of their own individual and professional role in school improvement. There is too little evidence that teaching across the school has changed through the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence. Teachers now need to take greater responsibility for the quality of young people's attainment. Further career-long professional learning will support them in taking on such responsibilities. Parents, staff and young people do not always feel listened to or that their views are valued. Parents would value the opportunity to contribute more to school improvement. Overall, communication requires improvement.

The headteacher has set a clear direction for school improvement. Under her strong leadership, the pace of implementation of the new curriculum in line with national expectations has increased significantly. New deputy headteachers have been appointed in the past two years. They are beginning to have a positive impact through their respective remits, and are developing their leadership skills. While new faculty and support structures are developing a greater sense of coherence and teamwork, all staff need to work better together to improve the school. Staff in the halls are keen to improve the quality of the service they provide. Under the leadership of the head of housing and homelessness, approaches to quality improvement are being developed further. The whole school community needs to develop a shared set of values and a vision for what they want to achieve. The positive impact of the move to the new buildings provides an ideal opportunity to develop this shared sense of purpose.

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the halls of residence had five requirements and four recommendations. From these, five requirements and three recommendations have been met. Outstanding issues relating to comfort, safety and security are carried forward in this inspection. As a result of this inspection, there is one new requirement and four new recommendations. Further details about these may be found in the Care Inspectorate report.

This inspection of Kirkwall Grammar School found the following key strengths.

- Confident, articulate, friendly young people who are keen to learn and engage.
- The range of young people's achievements in music, arts, culture and sports.
- The school's commitment to working with a wide range of partners to enhance young people's learning.
- The outstanding new accommodation.
- The headteacher's direction and drive to make improvements to the school.

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

- Continue to develop the curriculum in line with national expectations.
- The whole school community should work together and take responsibility for improving outcomes for young people.
- Improve approaches to self-evaluation to ensure they are consistently applied and result in improvements to teaching and planning to meet learning needs.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that self-evaluation processes in the school and halls of residence are leading to improvements. As a result, HM Inspectors will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. The Care Inspectorate will follow up on their recommendations and requirements within one year of publication of this letter.

During the inspection, we identified an aspect of innovation which we would like to explore further in order to share it with others. As a result, we will work with the school and Orkney Islands Council in order to record and share this more widely.

Elizabeth Morrison
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations and national care standards gradings, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland and Care Inspectorate websites at

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/KirkwallGrammarSchoolOrkneyIslands.asp> and
http://www.scswis.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7644&Itemid=489&bereNextPageId=ReportDataDetails_action.php&action=displayReport&repld=CS2005112366

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