

28 August 2012

Dear Parent/Carer

Dollar Academy, Clackmannanshire

HM Inspectors recently visited Dollar Academy. 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. During our visit we talked to staff and young people and worked together with the Rector and senior staff about the planned future direction of travel for the continued development of the school.

How does the school ensure consistently high standards for all?

The school aims to provide its pupils with a friendly and supportive environment in which they will achieve highly academically and in a wide range of co-curricular activities. The school achieves its aims very successfully. Children and young people, across the stages, respond very well to the broad and motivating range of learning experiences provided. In the Prep and Junior School, there are sound arrangements in place to make sure that children make very good progress in their learning. In the Senior School, the attainment of young people in national examinations is commendable. Almost all young people move successfully into higher education at a wide range of universities. Children and young people enjoy, and benefit greatly from, the outstanding programme of co-curricular activities. Large numbers of young people are developing strong leadership and team skills through participating in the Combined Cadet Force and Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Across all stages, children and young people achieve notable successes in a wide range of sporting activities. Similarly, very large numbers develop skills and confidence in musical and other cultural activities. At all stages, young people get on very well together and with their teachers and are very proud of the school and their achievements. Young people are developing well as responsible and thoughtful citizens, helping younger pupils willingly. They make a strong contribution to the school's local community.

The school provides children and young people with a broad curriculum. Very strong arrangements are in place to help children make a confident move into successive

stages of the school. Staff work very well together to make sure that they are aware of, and build well on children and young people's earlier learning. Children in Prep School have good opportunities to learn actively, making appropriate use of games. In the Junior School, children benefit from a well-judged amount of input from specialist staff. Young people have very good opportunities to develop their skills in using foreign languages as a result of the school's extensive links with schools in several other countries. Across the school, staff provide good opportunities for children and young people to become confident users of a wide range of information and communications technology.

The school has a very caring ethos. As a result, children and young people are happy and feel safe and well supported. There are sound procedures to ensure that boarding pupils are well looked after, with house parents and other staff providing high levels of care and support. Effective systems are in place to identify and support children and young people with additional needs. All staff, including class teachers, heads of year and senior staff know pupils well and engage readily with them individually. Staff provide very good arrangements for young people to receive additional help with their learning.

How does the school continue to improve?

The Rector and his senior staff provide very effective leadership for learning. Together, they are maintaining and enhancing the commendable quality of children and young people's achievements very well. The pace of change of improvement has been well judged. The school has a number of appropriate approaches to improvement through self-evaluation. For example, annual reviews by individual staff and departments provide a good opportunity to identify strengths and areas for improvement. There is some scope to improve the consistency and effectiveness of arrangements for observing class lessons and in the analysis of available assessment data. Recruitment and induction arrangements for new staff are rigorous and supportive. These arrangements and staff's readiness to share good practice help to ensure high standards and expectations across the school.

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

- In order to maintain and improve further the very strong levels of attainment, staff should continue to develop approaches to monitoring the quality of pupils' learning and progress.

We are confident the school has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and board of governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the progress of the school.

Alistair Brown
HM Inspector

To find out more about quality improvement through professional engagement visits please click on the link below.

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/professionalengagementvisits/index.asp>

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