



**James Hamilton Academy
Kilmarnock
East Ayrshire Council
21 April 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school. We describe how young people benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents¹ and services which support young people. We also comment on how well staff and young people work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school, how well young people are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns and details about young people’s examination performance. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school and a report on the learning community surrounding the school.

¹ Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

James Hamilton Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the New Farm Loch, Onthank, Southcraigs and Crookedholm areas of Kilmarnock. The roll was 739 when the inspection was carried out in January 2009. Young people's attendance was below the national average in 2006/2007.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The positive attitude of young people to their learning.
- Staff commitment to continuous improvement, leading to better teaching and learning.
- The inclusion of all young people in the life of the school.
- The work with agencies outside the school to support young people and improve their achievements.
- Leadership opportunities taken up by young people in S5/S6.
- Leadership of the headteacher and deputies in taking forward planning for *Curriculum for Excellence*.

3. Examples of good practice

- Ensuring young people can make progress through a relevant curriculum.
- Making effective links with local business.
- Developing skills which help young people to take part in society.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Young people are enthusiastic about their learning and have positive relationships with their teachers in almost all classes. In most classes staff help young people to become more confident. For example, they provide young people with well-organised opportunities to work in groups and present their findings. Young people are increasingly able to evaluate their own and others' work. In most subjects, they use information and communications technology confidently to improve their learning.

Teachers increasingly take account of the views of young people. Young people achieve and show leadership in a range of ways. Those at S5/S6 improve their personal and social skills by leading workshop activities and by providing support to younger pupils. Activities such as participating in the eco-committee, organising fundraising events and leading assemblies develop greater confidence in young people. Young people are improving their own wellbeing through well organised health days, a focus on healthy living and involvement in developing an understanding of mental health. Many young people participate in the local community through carefully planned work with the community council. This is leading to further volunteering in the community. Some young people build their team-working skills by taking part in sports such as rugby, basketball and football. Many young people take part in the successful annual show. They would benefit from more opportunities to achieve, particularly in musical and cultural activities. The school should introduce more activities which formally recognise young people's achievements.

Young people are achieving well in S1/S2. Most are achieving appropriate national standards in reading, writing and mathematics and progressing well from their previous levels of learning. In recent years, the performance of young people in S4 and S5 in national examinations has been generally in line with the national average and stronger than in other schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. The performance of young people in S6 in national examinations has improved to above the national average and this has led to many more young people leaving school able to enter further education courses. Young people with additional support needs are making very good progress. Vulnerable young people are supported well to develop a range of skills to support them into employment or training.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The school provides a very good range of well-planned courses

and activities for all young people. Increasingly effective links with local primary schools ensure young people continue to make progress in their learning as they move from P7 into S1. Transitions from school to work or further study are also well planned. The new citizenship passport allows young people to record opportunities they have to take part in the life of the school and local community. From S3, young people can choose from a wide range of options enabling them to build on what they have already learned. Some gain valuable skills for work through college courses, while others benefit from programmes to help develop independence. Almost all young people from S1 to S4 have two hours of good quality physical education per week. Some select a combination of physical education and a healthy living course. Young people in S5/S6 do not have sufficient physical education. Commendably, the range of courses at Advanced Higher level has been increased. Innovative courses such as photography at Higher level offer young people progression from S3 to S5/S6 and help to prepare them for the world of work. Staff are implementing a *Curriculum for Excellence* very well and further improving how the school develops young people's skills and achievements. They are planning well to develop young people's health and wellbeing, their literacy and numeracy and their skills in enterprise and citizenship.

Teachers across the school help to identify and meet the learning needs of young people very well. Almost all teachers plan tasks and activities at the right level of difficulty for young people. A few higher achieving young people are not always challenged enough. The pupil and learning support staff use very effective approaches to help young people who are experiencing short- or long-term difficulties. Almost all teachers set good quality homework and help young people to complete it at support classes. Almost all young people receive helpful updates on how they are progressing and this is reported to parents effectively.

5. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?

The school has developed a wide range of approaches for working and communicating with parents. High-quality newsletters provide parents with a range of information and help them to become better involved with their children's learning. Staff deal very effectively with the small number of complaints. The school actively works with a number of external partners to provide interesting activities which meet the needs of young people very well. The staff work well with the local college and businesses to support young people's learning. Working with teachers, the librarian has developed a "blog" for local people to contribute their memories and celebrate the 40th anniversary of the New Farm Loch estate.

6. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?

Staff provide a range of good opportunities for young people to express their views and help to improve the school. Young people helped to review the religious and moral education (RME) course and have opportunities to offer feedback on most courses. In a few cases, these opportunities should be focused on the quality of teaching and learning as well as enjoyment of courses. The pupil councils have developed well and are continuing to develop ways of helping young people to improve the school. Almost all staff are engaged in improving the work of the school through serving on committees, working groups and attending well organised in-house professional development. They use a range of data to decide how well the school is doing and what to improve. Teachers regularly reflect on their work and take action to improve when necessary.

7. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?

The school has high expectations of all young people. Strategies to improve attendance have been successful. Whole school approaches to improving behaviour are very effective and young people learn in a calm and purposeful atmosphere. The expectations for what senior pupils contribute to the school are very high. The reward systems such as merit awards and awards for attendance encourage young people to work hard. Plasma screens and high-quality displays of work help to celebrate achievements and encourage young people to achieve widely. The school offers regular opportunities for young people to reflect on morality and religious issues. All people are welcomed to the school and young people are treated with equality and respect in almost all classes. Through a very good programme for personal and social development, assemblies, RME and citizenship, young people develop a sense of equality and fairness. This is demonstrated in the good relationships across the school, Fair Trade events and positive attitudes to other cultures.

8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

The school is very well led by the headteacher supported by committed deputies. They are very effective and highly regarded by parents, young people, staff and partner agencies. The headteacher uses partnerships with parents, young people and staff to develop her very clear vision for the school. Staff have opportunities to lead across the school for example, by chairing committees and delivering in-house professional development. Young people have opportunities to lead and participate on committees, the pupil councils and develop leadership in some lessons. Those at S5/S6 have many opportunities to take on leadership roles. Teachers are keen to try new ways of providing courses and activities for young people and the school is particularly well placed to take forward the development of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

9. What happens next?

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we shall make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The education authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its schools. We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Increase opportunities for young people to achieve widely and for their achievements to be recognised.
- Continue to spread the good practice of acting on the views of young people about learning and teaching.

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 HMIE publication *How good is our school?*. 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 James Hamilton Academy.

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

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

The curriculum	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

HM Inspector: David Gregory

21 April 2009

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This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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