

Biggar High School South Lanarkshire Council

11 March 2008

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1. Background

Biggar High School was inspected in November 2007 as part of a national sample of secondary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the school's work at all stages.

HM Inspectors evaluated how well the school was raising achievement for all pupils, taking into account the extent to which pupils' learning needs were met by the curriculum and teaching. They also analysed pupils' attainment in national examinations ([see Appendix 3](#)), the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement. Inspectors focused particularly on English, mathematics, computing, and modern languages. The inspection team also evaluated aspects of the school's progress in implementing national recommendations related to improving aspects of school meals provision.

HM Inspectors observed teaching, learning and achievement in lessons and other contexts and examined pupils' work. They analysed responses to questionnaires¹ issued to a sample of parents² and pupils and to all staff. They interviewed groups of pupils, including representatives of pupil councils, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Parent Council, a group of parents and local community learning workers.

Biggar High School is a non-denominational school serving the towns of Biggar, Carnwath and the surrounding rural area. It forms part of the Biggar Learning Community. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 729. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was well above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The innovative curriculum with strengths in enterprise and opportunities for pupils to integrate their learning across subjects in S1/S2.
- The successful approach to developing pupils' personal and social skills through having a broad range of wider curricular opportunities.
- The strong partnership with local businesses and the community.
- The strategic lead of the headteacher.

3. How well does the school raise achievement for all?

To evaluate how well the school was raising achievement for all, HM Inspectors considered the extent to which the learning needs of all pupils were met through the curriculum and teaching. They evaluated the effectiveness of the school in promoting the learning and personal development of all pupils in lessons and in other, broader contexts. They also considered the standards attained in specific aspects of learning.

Curriculum

The overall quality of the curriculum was very good. It had a clear rationale at every stage and was constructed to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. The school evaluated aspects of its curriculum on an ongoing basis and consulted staff, pupils and parents as part of an annual review.

Particular features of the curriculum included the following.

- At S1/S2, there was a broad and balanced curriculum. The school was continuing to develop its links with primary schools to ensure that work in S1 built on prior learning.
- The home-school partnership worker delivered a range of relevant adult and family learning activities that were highly valued by parents. She also contributed to effective programmes to support the transition of pupils from primary schools to the high school and parenting programmes for students.
- Pupils were developing their information and communications technology (ICT) skills at S1/S2 through an exemplary programme of activities delivered by subject departments.
- The school had a good core programme of physical education from S1 to S4 which offered pupils choice of activity. The core programme extended into S5/S6 although with a reduced allocation of time.
- The school ran a number of very successful day events as part of the S1/S2 curriculum. These involved pupils drawing on their knowledge and skills from a number of subject areas to work on challenging and enterprising tasks.
- At S3/S4, there was a good choice of Standard Grade and other NQ courses. Some pupils were benefiting from skills for work courses at further education colleges. These arrangements involved pupils in significant travel, which the school was seeking to address.
- At S5/S6, pupils were able to choose from a good range of Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. The school had sought to extend its range of Higher courses by using online learning packages.

- S5 pupils planning to leave at Christmas followed a separate programme made up of vocational taster courses at a further education college and personal development activities.
- An appropriate programme of religious and moral education was available for pupils in S1 to S4.
- At all stages, pupils' enterprise skills were being developed through a range of activities. The school had recently won a national enterprise award.

Teaching and meeting pupils' needs

Overall, the quality of teaching was good. Very good practice was evident in some departments. Most teachers shared the aims of lessons clearly with pupils. Most lessons were well planned and teachers gave clear instructions and explanations. Teachers included an appropriate variety of activities although they made limited use of ICT. There were good examples of direct teaching where teachers questioned pupils effectively to extend their learning. Some teachers provided very good feedback to individual pupils, including helpful comments on their written work. However, praise was not used consistently to motivate pupils and some teachers did not have high enough expectations of pupil achievement. In most classes, homework was used regularly to consolidate learning.

The school's arrangements for meeting pupils' needs were adequate. The school had very effective links with its associated primary schools and this enabled support for learning teachers to identify pupils' needs promptly. Support for learning staff, working with the home school partnership worker provided a programme to support the parents of pupils with dyslexic or dyspraxic difficulties. This project provided resources for parents and children to learn together and establish a network for parents to support one another. Across the school, lessons did not always provide sufficient pace and challenge, particularly for higher attaining pupils, and pupils in S1/2. Some subject departments provided resources for a range of abilities but this practice was not consistent across the school. Guidance staff supported pupils well and the school had good links with other agencies supporting children and families. Support for learning staff provided appropriate help for pupils undertaking Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) tasks and for homework. They gave teachers helpful information on individual pupils' learning needs. Most teachers worked hard to support individual pupils. However, there were weaknesses in procedures. Support staff needed to identify individual learning difficulties more precisely and then provide better learning programmes to meet the specific needs identified. For some pupils more comprehensive individual educational programmes (IEPs) were required with appropriate targets. Behaviour support staff offered well-judged support to individual pupils using a combination of approaches. They were beginning to establish good monitoring and tracking systems. The school was in the early stages of developing a more integrated approach to addressing pupils' needs. Target setting was developing across the school in S3 to S6. Teachers were beginning to use this as a tool to encourage pupils to be more responsible for their own learning and progress.

Learning and personal development

The overall quality of pupils' learning was good although this varied across the school. There were very good displays of pupils' work in corridors and classrooms. The library provided a welcoming environment for pupils to study or carry out research using the internet. In most classes, pupils were engaged in learning but they were not always highly motivated. Most pupils were able to work on their own without direct supervision. Pupils worked productively together when given the opportunity to do so. The school had made an effective start to developing collaborative approaches to learning.

The quality of pupils' personal and social development was very good. Almost all pupils were courteous and confident. Their personal development was promoted through a very good and progressive personal and social education programme (PSE), from S1 to S4. In S5/S6, the programme was organised through a number of conference days. Staff gave pupils good careers advice and support with their applications for university. The school provided a wide range of well-attended wider curricular activities which helped pupils to develop social skills and self-confidence. For example, pupils were able to take part in a wide range of music, drama, dance, art and sporting activities. Many took part in the school show. Pupils had won a number of individual art, music and sports awards. Teachers organised several residential visits, including trips abroad, to extend pupils' learning and develop their awareness of other languages and cultures. Senior pupils were becoming responsible citizens by carrying out a range of additional duties such as paired reading, buddying and supporting younger pupils in classes. S6 pupils had the opportunity to attain a unit award in community involvement. The school could make more use of national schemes to accredit pupils' achievements. Peer tutoring of S1 PSE by S6 gave seniors the opportunity to be good role models for younger pupils. Younger pupils were also developing personal skills by, for example, serving on school committees or helping in the library. The school had given pupils full responsibility for running a number of music and fundraising events for charity. These opportunities were very successful in developing pupils' self-confidence and leadership skills.

English

Teachers organised interesting and well-planned learning activities. Their questioning encouraged pupils to think for themselves. Pupils responded well to opportunities to be active in their learning and to collaborate with others in group tasks. Sometimes they took too long to settle down to work. Pupils wrote well-structured and thoughtful essays. They understood the quality of work expected and received helpful feedback about their next steps in learning. Teachers did not assess accurately skills in listening and talking at S1/S2.

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning, and approaches to meeting pupils' needs were good. The overall quality of attainment was good. Particular features included the following.

- At S1/S2, most pupils attained national levels in reading, and a majority attained these levels in writing. The majority attained national levels in listening and talking.
- At S3/S4, the proportion of pupils attaining grades 1-2 was above the national average.
- At S5/S6, the proportions attaining A-C grades at Higher and Intermediate 2 were below national averages, but performance was variable. About half of pupils gained A-C grades at Intermediate 1 and about a quarter at Advanced Higher.

Mathematics

Teachers gave clear explanations and had positive interactions with pupils. However, the range of teaching approaches did not always provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to work together or think for themselves. A few teachers made effective use of questioning to develop pupils' understanding. Almost all pupils were well-behaved and worked well on set tasks. Teachers met pupils' needs well at S1/S2 by grouping pupils by prior attainment. Most teachers provided appropriate tasks and activities which helped pupils to build on their prior learning.

Overall the quality of teaching was adequate. The overall quality of learning, meeting needs and attainment was good.

- At S1/S2 most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels. Most improved their levels of attainment between P7 and the end of S2.
- At S3/S4 the number of pupils attaining grades 1-4 was above the national average. A small number presented at Access 3 had met with success.
- At S5/S6 the majority of pupils attained an A-C grade at Higher. The majority of the pupils presented at Intermediate 1 and 2 attained A-C grades. Almost all of those presented at Advanced Higher attained an A-C grade.

Computing

The quality of teaching, learning and meeting needs varied across the department. In some S3/S4 classes, pupils were taught very well and achieved high standards. In some other classes teaching lacked drive and rigour. Teachers generally explained new work clearly and through questioning checked pupils' knowledge effectively. Teachers were inconsistent in their use of homework. Courses were provided at different levels to meet pupils' learning needs. Appropriate resources and tasks were available for pupils. At S3/S4, most pupils were on task and lessons had a brisk pace. At S5/S6, the pace of learning was generally too slow and pupils were not making good progress.

Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and meeting needs was adequate. The overall quality of attainment was adequate. Particular features included the following.

- At S1/S2, ICT skills were taught successfully by a range of other departments.
- At S3/S4, most pupils presented at Intermediate 1 computing attained A-C grades and almost all presented for Intermediate 2 information systems attained A-C grades.
- At S5/S6, most pupils entered for Intermediate 2 information systems attained A-C grades. Pupils did not perform as well at Higher information systems as they did in their other subjects at this level and the majority entered attained A-C grades.

Modern languages

Teachers gave clear instructions and used a variety of activities in lessons. They used questioning well to develop pupils' comprehension. Relationships between teachers and pupils were good overall. Behaviour was good in most classes but pupils were not always motivated or challenged by their work. They worked well together when given the opportunity to do so. Pupils had insufficient opportunities to develop extended language skills, particularly in speaking. Teachers had started to integrate the co-operative skills required for an innovative enterprise day into S2 lessons.

Overall, the quality of teaching was good. The quality of learning and meeting needs was adequate. The overall quality of attainment was adequate. Particular features included the following.

- In S1/S2, pupils were coping well with coursework. However, they had not developed sufficiently extended language skills.
- In S3/S4, pupils performed notably less well in French than in their other subjects.
- In S5/S6, almost all pupils presented for Higher French, and the majority of those presented for Higher German, attained A-C grades. All pupils presented for Intermediate 2 in French and German had attained A or B grades. At Advanced Higher, all pupils presented in each language had attained A-C grades.

Attainment

Information about the subjects inspected has been given earlier in the report. Across the school, particular features of pupils' progress, results in examinations and other qualifications, including those awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)³ for the three year period 2005-2007, are included below.

By the end of S2 attainment was good. Particular features included the following.

- Most pupils attained appropriate national levels in reading, and a majority attained these levels in writing. In mathematics most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels. The majority of pupils were making good progress across the curriculum but a small proportion of higher attaining pupils required more challenging work.

By the end of S4 attainment was good. Particular features included the following.

- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more SCQF awards at levels 3, 4 and 5 was above national averages. This performance was better than schools with similar characteristics. In 2007 the results at levels 4 and 5 were not as good as in earlier years.
- Pupils performed better in Standard Grade business management in comparison with their other subjects. The proportion of grades 1-2 was much higher than the national average in Standard Grade biology.

By the end of S6 attainment was good. Particular features included the following.

- By the end of S5, most presentations at Higher resulted in A-C grades and at Intermediate 1 and 2 the majority of presentations resulted in A-C grades.
- By the end of S6, the proportions of pupils attaining one or more or three or more or five or more awards at SCQF level 6 were above national averages and these results were better than in schools with similar characteristics.
- By the end of S6 the proportion of pupils gaining one or more awards at SCQF level 7 was in line with the national average. This performance was not as good as in schools with similar characteristics.
- At S5/S6 pupils performed better in art and design at Higher and at Intermediate 2 than in their other subjects at these levels.

4. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	Guidance staff had effective procedures to ensure the care and welfare of pupils. Clear guidelines were in place to deal with child protection, bullying, racial incidents and drugs misuse. These topics were reinforced through the very well planned PSE curriculum. The school worked effectively with external agencies to support pupils, including the home-school partnership worker and the Active Breaks staff. A very good Active Breaks programme was available to support pupils during lunchtime and at the end of the school day. Active Breaks workers also provided one-to-one support for some pupils and occasional group work for pupils needing behavioural support.

	<p>The well-organised transition programme, which prepared pupils for secondary school, helped guidance staff to be responsive to individual needs as soon as pupils enrolled in the school. Relationships between teaching staff and pupils were good. The achievements and learning experiences of vulnerable groups of pupils were monitored and reviewed regularly. However, some pupils did not need as many formal review meetings. The school had introduced health promotion days for each year group, which were enjoyed by pupils.</p>
<p>Quality of accommodation and facilities</p>	<p>Work had started on new school buildings. The existing accommodation had important weaknesses. Particular features of the existing accommodation included the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very attractive displays in corridors and classrooms. • A well-organised library • Poor disabled access to many of the teaching areas. • Limited social accommodation for pupils. • Poor access to drinking water. • Some small classrooms which constrained the range of teaching approaches. • An unattractive dining area. • Limited physical education facilities. <p>Aspects relating to the security of pupils in the school buildings were brought to the attention of the school and the education authority.</p>
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>Staff and pupils had positive relationships. The morale of staff was high and they respected and valued pupils. Active Breaks staff felt valued and well integrated into the life of the school. Parents and other visitors to the school were welcomed by staff and pupils. The behaviour of pupils was generally good in classrooms and corridors. However, in some lessons pupils did not pay sufficient attention or focus sharply enough on learning, and some teachers did not have consistently high expectations of pupils' behaviour. The school celebrated pupils' achievements well in displays in corridors, daily assemblies and at award ceremonies. Most teachers had high expectations of pupils' standards of work. However, a significant number of pupils did not have high enough expectations of themselves. Pupils enjoyed attending the school and there was a sense of equality and inclusion throughout. Racial equality and diversity issues were discussed in PSE, in some other subjects and in school events. These separate approaches were not planned coherently. The school had appropriate religious observance arrangements. More effective arrangements were required for the issuing of free lunch tickets.</p>
<p>Partnership with parents and the community</p>	<p>The quality of partnership with parents and the community was very good. Particular features included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very good partnerships with parents and the new Parent Council, including helpful parents' meetings; • excellent links with community organisations in performing arts, public art and local sports clubs; • important contributions from local businesses to the school's

	<p>enterprise activities, including inputs into assemblies during Enterprise Week;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very positive working relationships with Active Breaks and the Biggar Youth Project, activities which were highly valued by senior pupils, who also helped to staff the Project in the evening; • the joint approach to promoting healthy eating and practical cookery skills to a group of pupils and parents through the provision of an evening class taken by the home-school worker and home economics department; and • the school's Eco committee's work with the local community.
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5. Leading and improving the school

The school had many strengths. It was successful in raising achievement for most of its pupils and offered many opportunities for them to develop a wide range of personal and social skills. Teachers had positive relationships with pupils. Pupils were well-behaved and enjoyed being at school and most achieved good standards of attainment. However, the quality of learning and teaching was not consistently high across the school, and the needs of some pupils were not being met fully. The school benefited from exceptionally good links with the local community.

The headteacher had a clear vision for the school, which was shared effectively with parents and other stakeholders. He was strongly committed to developing the achievements of pupils by providing a wide range of learning experiences within a broad and innovative curriculum. He placed a great deal of importance upon teachers using approaches which fully engaged pupils in their learning. He furthered this aim by encouraging and enabling staff to develop their professional knowledge and skills. Overall, his leadership was very effective and he had had a major impact on developing and improving the school. Leadership was shared widely and effectively across the school. The senior managers, comprising the headteacher and three deputy headteachers, worked together closely as a team. They provided very good support for departments and individual members of staff but varied in their impact on improving learning in departments. Two of the deputy headteachers, and a head of faculty, acted as year heads and played an important part in the day-to-day running of the school, in their pastoral role as year heads. Some faculty heads and teachers also provided strong leadership. Overall, leadership across the school was good.

The school had a range of procedures and processes to monitor and evaluate its strengths and development needs. Staff, pupils and parents were regularly consulted on different aspects of the school's provision. Senior managers and faculty heads evaluated a sample of lessons, pupils' work and standards of attainment. However, the consistency and rigour varied considerably across managers. The headteacher rigorously analysed departments' examination performance. The results of self-evaluation were used appropriately to shape the improvement plan. Overall, these processes gave managers an all-round knowledge of the school's performance but did not sufficiently emphasise direct evaluation of learning and teaching. As a consequence, the quality of pupils' experiences was not systematically reviewed. Overall, the quality of self-evaluation was adequate.

The school had capacity to continue to improve. It had a clear vision of where it wanted to be, skilled and committed teachers, supportive parents, strong leadership and a record of innovation and improvement.

As well as building on the strengths and addressing the issues raised throughout this report, the school and the education authority should address the following main points for action.

Main points for action

- Build on the very good practice in the school to improve learning and teaching throughout the school.
- Identify the learning needs of pupils with additional support needs more accurately, and plan and deliver more appropriate programmes with suitable short-term and long-term targets so that progress can be evaluated.
- Build on existing learning and teaching strategies to challenge higher attaining pupils throughout the school, especially those in mixed ability settings in S1/S2.
- Focus self-evaluation procedures more sharply on improving the quality of pupils' learning experiences.

What happens next?

The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report parents and carers will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Terry Carr
HM Inspector

11 March 2008

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The following quality indicators have been used in the inspection process to contribute to the evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school in promoting learning and achievement for all pupils.

Section 3. How well does the school raise achievement for all?	
Structure of the curriculum	very good
The teaching process	good
Meeting pupils' needs	adequate
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Personal and social development	very good
Overall quality of attainment: S1/S2	good
Overall quality of attainment: S3/S4	good
Overall quality of attainment: S5/S6	good
Section 4. How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	weak
Climate and relationships	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	good
Partnership with parents, the Parent Council and the community	very good
Section 5. Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
Leadership across the school	good
Self-evaluation	adequate

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

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

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

The following provides a summary of questionnaire responses. Key issues from the questionnaires have been considered in the inspection and comments are included as appropriate throughout the report.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<p>All parents thought that staff showed care and concern for their children.</p> <p>Almost all parents thought that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school had a good reputation in the community; • staff made them welcome in the school and treated their children fairly; and • school reports gave them helpful information about their children's progress. 	<p>A minority of parents commented adversely on the condition of the school buildings.</p>
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<p>Almost all pupils thought that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers expected them to work to the best of their ability; • they got on well with other pupils; • the school helped them to keep safe and healthy; and • they felt safe and secure in the school 	<p>No significant issues were raised by pupils.</p>
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<p>All staff said that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they liked working in the school; • they worked hard to promote and maintain good relations with the local community; • they showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils and were aware of the school's procedures relating to child protection; and • the school dealt effectively with instances of bullying. 	<p>A minority of support staff felt that their training time was not used effectively.</p>

Appendix 3 Attainment in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels:

7: Advanced Higher at A-C/CSYS at A-C

6: Higher at A-C

5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2

4: Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4

3: Access 3 Cluster; Standard Grade at 5-6

Percentage of relevant S4 roll attaining by end of S4

		2005	2006	2007 ⁴
English and Mathematics @ Level 3	Biggar High School	97	94	96
	Comparator schools⁵	96	95	94
	National	90	91	91
5+ @ Level 3 or better	Biggar High School	97	94	95
	Comparator schools	95	94	93
	National	90	91	91
5+ @ Level 4 or better	Biggar High School	91	85	81
	Comparator schools	85	82	82
	National	76	77	75
5+ @ Level 5 or better	Biggar High School	42	50	32
	Comparator schools	39	41	37
	National	34	35	32

Percentage of relevant S4 roll attaining by end of S5

		2005	2006	2007 ⁴
5+ @ Level 4 or better	Biggar High School	85	91	88
	Comparator schools⁵	86	87	84
	National	78	78	79
5+ @ Level 5 or better	Biggar High School	50	54	62
	Comparator schools	54	56	54
	National	45	45	46
1+ @ Level 6 or better	Biggar High School	43	46	50
	Comparator schools	45	44	43
	National	39	38	38
3+ @ Level 6 or better	Biggar High School	26	24	31
	Comparator schools	26	25	23
	National	23	22	22
5+ @ Level 6 or better	Biggar High School	8	7	13
	Comparator schools	12	11	10
	National	10	10	9

Percentage of relevant S4 roll attaining by end of S6

		2005	2006	2007⁴
5+ @ Level 5 or better	Biggar High School	65	52	57
	Comparator schools⁵	57	57	56
	National	47	48	47
1+ @ Level 6 or better	Biggar High School	60	50	55
	Comparator schools	54	49	51
	National	43	43	42
3+ @ Level 6 or better	Biggar High School	45	34	32
	Comparator schools	38	34	35
	National	30	30	29
5+ @ Level 6 or better	Biggar High School	29	23	20
	Comparator schools	24	21	21
	National	19	20	19
1+ @ Level 7 or better	Biggar High School	14	9	12
	Comparator schools	15	15	17
	National	12	13	12

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Footnotes

1. [See Appendix 2](#)
2. Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.
3. Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels:
7: Advanced Higher at A-C/CSYS at A-C
6: Higher at A-C
5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2
4: Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4
3: Access 3 cluster; Standard Grade at 5-6
4. Pre Appeal
5. Comparator schools are the 20 schools statistically closest to the school being inspected in terms of the key characteristics of the school population.
