

## Inspection – The Aberdeen Green School

3 November 2015

Dear Parent/Carer, The Aberdeen Green School. The Aberdeen Green School, located in Maryculter on the outskirts of Aberdeen, was inspected in September 2015 following the recent registration as a new school in August 2014. This inspection provided information to the Registrar of Independent Schools about the quality of the school's educational and care provision. The school opened in August 2014. HM Inspectors conducted a pre-registration visit in July 2014. The school was registered with the Registrar of Independent Schools to provide education for a maximum of 30 pupils of secondary school age. The school is managed by a Director.

### *How well do young people learn and achieve?*

Young people are keen to learn and participate well in class activities. Learners' experiences are motivating, varied and include frequent opportunities to learn outdoors, which is central to the ethos of the school. All young people are keen to progress and have ambitious plans for their future learning and possible careers. Staff are successfully building the confidence of young people as independent learners. As a result, young people are increasingly taking control of their learning and directing classroom discussions. All young people take great pride in their work, which is produced to a very high standard, with little or no prompting from teachers. The very helpful personal learning planning discussions between teachers, parents and young people, which take place every four to six weeks, help all concerned to review the progress young people are making and to plan future goals. Young people are now ready to set smaller targets for their own learning, in order to reach their longer-term academic and career goals.

Young people are achieving well and are acquiring a variety of important skills for learning, life and work. They are developing their knowledge of the world of work by independently researching a range of careers, including interviewing professionals who hold these roles. They enjoy and benefit from meaningful work-based learning placements and from participating in entrepreneurial projects, including the Young Enterprise initiative. The school is still to present young people for national qualifications, but plan to do so in 2016. Young people are increasingly undertaking a range of assessments and tests, which help to measure their progress. The results of these assessments show that all young people are progressing well in the core subjects of English, mathematics and physics. Staff should consider developing partnerships with other local schools to help moderate and benchmark the standards that young people achieve in their course work. In all lessons observed by inspectors, young people were confident in discussion with their peers and teachers. Almost all young people are articulate and convey their thoughts and ideas particularly well. Teachers have high expectations of young people's presentation of work. Young people write in detail and with accuracy. They research topics of interest to them and present their findings through information posters, essays and presentations. Young people have a sound knowledge of current affairs and are able to challenge each other's views on a range of topical issues. Staff should consider the use of national accreditation, or the development of their own awards scheme, to capture the skills that young people are developing through the full range of their experiences. As the school expands, staff should also consider looking at more formal procedures for monitoring and tracking young people's progress across their learning.

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

Staff involve parents and young people together very well in looking at how individual learning needs are met. As a result, teachers have a very good understanding of young people's strengths and talents, as well as any potential barriers to their learning. Teachers are good at adapting tasks and activities to ensure suitable challenge for all young people. In almost all lessons observed by inspectors, the pace of learning was brisk and focused. Teachers plan interesting and creative projects which encourage young people to extend their thinking and organise their own work, including study at home. Teachers are developing a clear and shared approach to the structure of lessons, across the different areas of the curriculum and contexts for learning. Staff should build further on this positive approach by now agreeing ways to provide consistently effective written feedback to young people on their work.

The Aberdeen Green School curriculum has a clear rationale, based on providing bespoke learning to young people, which is very closely connected to their ambitions beyond school and their intended careers. Staff actively pursue links with universities, training providers and businesses in order to determine the best progression route for each learner. Learning outdoors and the promotion of environmental stewardship is central to the rationale of the curriculum. As a result, staff are developing important partnerships with local organisations, such as the Maryculter Woodland Trust. This is providing meaningful opportunities for young people to develop their skills and knowledge in environmental science and geography. Young people demonstrate creativity in their learning through weekly drama lessons and high quality art work. There are authentic opportunities for young people to develop literacy skills through projects and authoring frequent newsletters to parents. Staff should seek ways for young people to also develop and apply their numeracy skills across their learning. As the school continues to become more established, we have asked staff to continue to ensure there is appropriate breadth, depth and challenge across all curricular areas, including personal and social education.

*How well do the accommodation and resources support learning?*

Classrooms are bright and appropriate places to learn. An open area provides ample space for young people to relax, play table tennis and have lunch and breaks. The accommodation is well-maintained and appropriate steps are taken to ensure young people are safe. The school accommodation is set in extensive woodland grounds, which provides ideal surroundings to deliver outdoor learning. There are displays of young people's work in classrooms, which showcases their talents and achievements. Digital technology is modern and used well by young people and staff. A few learners opt to use their own devices in school. Appropriate controls are in place to ensure that young people access the internet in a secure and safe way. Staff should continue to expand the range of practical resources available to young people, for example for science and mathematics.

*How well does the school improve the quality of its work?*

The leadership of the Director is very effective. She is focused on providing high quality educational provision for all young people. She supports and challenges staff through honest classroom observation and professional discussion. She has appropriately high expectations

of teachers. Currently, The Aberdeen Green School Parents' Group acts as the main consultative body for the Director to share the school's successes and areas for further development. The Director provides the Parents Group with regular financial reports and information on curriculum developments. The school has encountered challenges in instituting an appropriate board of governors. They should press ahead with their plans to strengthen governance arrangements by establishing an independent Advisory Board who can provide strategic leadership and direction to the school.

Staff are clearly committed to improvement through self-evaluation. Teachers reflect on their teaching and are developing approaches accordingly. They are keen to improve and participate in professional learning. The Director actively seeks the views of parents and young people to evaluate the development of the school. The young people have a strong voice in shaping their school and its curriculum. The Director is clear about the future short and longer term priorities for the further development of the school. She should now formalise these priorities more systematically in a clear improvement plan with measurable outcomes, which can be shared with the whole school community.

*This inspection of your school found the following key strengths.*

- Articulate and motivated young people who have a mature attitude to their learning and development.
- The personalised approach to learning which supports all young people to learn and progress well.
- The positive, caring ethos of mutual respect which is created by all staff and young people.
- The vision and commitment of the school's Director in ensuring the continued development of the school.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school.

- Strengthen the governance arrangements of the school to ensure appropriate transparency, accountability and strategic leadership and direction.
- Continue to formalise self-evaluation approaches to ensure they impact on learning and teaching and the further development of the curriculum.