

**Learning community inspection
Continuing engagement**



A report by HM Inspectors

**Inspection of the learning community
surrounding Alness Academy,
The Highland Council
9 August 2016**

We published a report on the learning community surrounding Alness Academy in April 2015. That report set out key strengths of the learning community and areas for improvement.

This continuing engagement report is based on an inspection visit which was carried out in June 2016. It tells you about improvement since the original inspection in the quality of learning opportunities provided. It also comments on how providers are getting on with the main points for action. We describe how learners are doing and how good the learning community is at helping them to learn. We comment on how well staff, learners and groups work together and the difference they are making in the learning community. Finally, we focus on how well the learning community is led and how leaders help the learning community achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our original inspection of the learning community, please visit:

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

You will also find a report on the secondary school.

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1. How well are partners improving learning, increasing life chances, promoting and securing wellbeing?

Partners are now improving learning and increasing life chances across Alness more effectively. A few adults are gaining skills and improving confidence through literacy support. There are increases in the numbers of learners referred from job centres as a result of inputs from adult learning staff. Adult learning staff are now working with some small groups of learners although the numbers remain low. Adult learners are building confidence, increasing social interaction and learning camp craft and forest skills through the Evanton Woodlands Project. All learners who participated also achieved a John Muir Discovery Award. The Adult Learning Coordinator vacancy has been filled since the last inspection visit and this is now leading to an increase in adult learning provision. The ending of commissioned adult classes presents a challenge to staff. There is now an opportunity to work collaboratively with partners to address gaps in provision.

Community Learning and Development (CLD) staff are now using data to more effectively plan and review their work. The new management information system is beginning to be embedded in practice. This is helping staff to plan and reflect on their work in a more structured manner. Managers are now better able to approve and direct the work of staff than in the past. Work with young people continues to be targeted at those requiring support. For example the Quiet Youth Club is helping young people who struggle to cope in mainstream youth clubs to participate.

Further analysis of the Alness demographic profile and use of local knowledge is leading towards better targeting of resources. For example, a new partnership in Milnafua is being actively supported by a range of partners to help address local needs. This community capacity building approach is resulting in local community members being more confident and articulate. Milnafua Community Group were visited by the First Minister thus raising the profile of their work. A community clean-up is improving the local environment and is leading to children having greater respect for their community. In recognition of their efforts and the impact of poverty locally, Moray Firth Radio Cash for Kids Appeal has offered funding for a lunch club throughout the summer holidays. Four refugee families from Syria, including 14 children, have recently been housed in the area. A significant amount of planning has taken place to support and welcome them into the local community including a film to raise awareness.

The youth work team are continuing to build on the success of initiatives such as *Rock Challenge* and are encouraging primary schools to undertake the *JRock* (Junior Rock Challenge). Young people are improving their life chances by developing leadership skills. Several are progressing on to employment and further learning. The Active Schools Coordinator is helping to provide additional opportunities. For some young people this is leading to positive changes in behaviour.

2. How well are partners working together and improving the quality of services and provision?

Partnership working across the Alness learning community is improving. This is leading to some positive outcomes for young people and adults. There are some good examples of collaboration between CLD and their partners including a more formalised partnership between The Place youth centre and High Life Highland. The partnership with Alness Academy is now more formalised and the contribution that youth work makes to the curriculum is clearer. Care needs to be taken to ensure that all work with the school is clearly planned and evaluated. As a result of the partnership between Active Schools staff and youth workers, twelve young people are gaining Dance Leaders awards. A few are progressing to lead dance classes in the local community.

CLD staff are now developing work across the wider learning community. The Black Rock Rovers project in Evanton although at an early stage is helping engage the community in a response to the lack of youth facilities in the area. The High Life Highland Leadership Programme is helping disengaged young people to participate. Close partnership working between youth workers and Active Schools staff supports young people to use evidence for award programmes such as Saltire and Youth Achievement more inter-changeably. This is helping to reduce duplication. There is now clearer collaboration between youth work and adult learning staff for example in relation to employability. Strong partnership working at the monthly 16+ transition meetings is leading to improved outcomes for learners.

Self-evaluation is improving although there is more to do particularly across partnerships. The creation of the Adult Learning Partnership (ALP) for Mid and Easter Ross is beginning to inform partnership planning. However, ALP should now move beyond information sharing and networking to undertake joint self-evaluation. As yet, there is no clear shared vision for learning across Alness. The planned District Partnerships provide an opportunity to progress this. Leadership is improving. CLD staff are being supported well to develop their practice and upgrade their qualifications. The CLD plan for Highland Council is not yet informing local planning in Alness. It is insufficiently focussed on outcomes and there is considerable potential to involve staff and learners in future.

3. Does the learning community have a clear sense of direction?

There is a now much better sense of direction across the learning community. Improved leadership is reaping benefits for staff and learners. Building further on recent successes should ensure a clear sense of direction in future.

4. What happens next?

We are satisfied that progress has been made since the original inspection. As a result we will make no further visits to the learning community.

Sheila Brown
HM Inspector
9 August 2016

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for this learning community can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/othersectors/communitylearninganddevelopment/AlnessAcademyLearningCommunity.asp>

If you would like to receive this report in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on 0131 244 4684.

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