

**Inspection of the learning community
surrounding Alness Academy
The Highland Council
28 April 2015**

1. Context

Community learning and development (CLD) partners within the area of Alness Academy were inspected by Education Scotland during February 2015. During the visit Education Scotland staff talked to children, young people and adults. We worked closely with local CLD managers, CLD providers, partners, paid staff and volunteers. We wanted to find out how well partners are improving the life chances of people living in the community through learning, building stronger more resilient communities and improving the quality of services and provision. We also looked at how well paid staff and volunteers are developing their own practices and how well partners, including schools are working together.

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

Across the learning community many young people and a few adults are engaging in good quality learning programmes. There is a strong focus on supporting young people to achieve and improve life chances. The Place youth centre provides good quality learning opportunities and young people are developing skills and confidence. A few young people gain awards such as first aid, child protection and food and hygiene through working in the Summer Playscheme. They use this experience to progress to further volunteering and employment. There is an improving trend in young people gaining Youth Achievement and John Muir awards. However, some are not clear about what they were achieving through these awards. The Youth Development Officer works closely with staff at Alness Academy to target young people requiring support. There is scope to work with the school to further develop a strategy to raise attainment and achievement. Partners are starting to target their work better through the use of a Demographic Profile. There is more to do to ensure that all of their work is underpinned by a clear and shared rationale. CLD staff now employ a more flexible and robust performance management system. This is encouraging but is at an early stage.

Commissioned adult learning classes funded by High Life Highland help a few adults and families to achieve, for example through the 'Healthy Brains' project at the Perrins Centre. There is a focus on improving mental health and wellbeing. Small numbers of adults are improving their computing skills through classes at the West End Community centre. However, opportunities for progression are not clear. The provision of adult literacy and numeracy in Alness has been hampered by staff vacancies and illness. A newly appointed member of staff should help this improve. A focus on improving health and wellbeing underpins programmes for older people at the Averon Leisure Centre. Concessions for older people and the unemployed is improving access to activity programmes. The 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' programme successfully engages new participants in physical activity. Across the learning community partners are not yet sharing management information and performance data. Improving this will help partners to target and plan better together.

Young people are improving confidence, self-esteem and gaining qualifications through a range of opportunities and activities. These include Rock Challenge, J Rock, Summer Playscheme and the Ross and Cromarty Pipes and Drum School.

Good numbers of young people in Alness Academy participate in the annual dance drama 'Rock Challenge'. They are gaining in confidence, improving relationships with other young people and with staff. For some the commitment required has had a significant impact on their behaviour and attitude to school. The project is also helping young people to make positive healthy lifestyle choices choosing to participate in an activity that produces a 'natural high' rather than smoking, alcohol or drugs. Other young people gain skills through dance and gymnastics. The Place helps young people to achieve through award programmes and fundraising. The Skillforce pilot programme improves young people's self-belief and confidence leading to improved life chances. Employability support at The Place enhances young people's employability and career management skills. Close working between the Children's Services Worker, Primary Mental Health Worker and youth work staff is leading to bespoke programmes being delivered to young people. Many young people are becoming more resilient as a result. Increasing numbers of young people are progressing to employment from Alness Academy. Volunteering opportunities in the community help young people move into further learning and employment. Those involved in 'Youth Voice' are active in campaigns such as 'save our schools'. However, mechanisms for feedback to other young people is not yet fully developed. Young people could also be more involved in planning their learning.

Adult learning is limited in Alness. Families at Book Bug sessions in the library are increasing knowledge about how to play with their children. They are making new friends and increasing social contact. Families from different background are becoming more active through the Creative Pathways to Peace project. A few adults are progressing to make a peace quilt. Adults attending the job club at West End Community Centre are learning basic computing skills. Older people at the Averon Centre are becoming more active and feel better about their health. Classes are specifically designed to alleviate falls and help people be safer in the community. Many older people progress to other groups. Information regarding opportunities for adults to learn and achieve is limited. There is considerable scope for partners to work better together to coordinate this.

A few community groups are active and influential across the learning community. The Place youth centre is highly valued by young people and adults. Youth programmes are helping to decrease anti-social behaviour. Easter Ross Employability Group jointly planned and delivered an event in 2014 that attracted almost fifty exhibitors. A few sports clubs are increasing membership and providing pathways to encourage participation. Through the Motiv8 programme NHS and High Life Highland are increasing the number of access passes for leisure facilities. Seeds of Hope deliver twice weekly food banks to local people and engage with over 300 families across Alness and Invergordon. The West End Community Centre, Ardross Community Hall and the Capstone Centre are addressing social isolation by providing support for older people. Evanton Community Wood are building capacity through volunteering. District Partnerships provide the interface for local community planning although these are at an early stage of development. Budgets provided through the Ward Manager are successfully used by youth providers to develop targeted programmes for young people. Networking between organisations is evident but it is not yet joined up enough. These would benefit from being more formalised. The Alness and District Times produced monthly by the Heritage Centre provides a very helpful local information. Over 600 copies are distributed each

month and it is valued by the local community. Volunteering across Alness is strong with some volunteers progressing to other learning. However, volunteers are not clear about the range of training and development on offer. Ross-shire Voluntary Action provide training and development to community groups although only a few are accessing this in Alness. A few community groups are heavily dependent on older volunteers and are finding it difficult to attract new volunteers to ensure continued service delivery. Alness has a range of community facilities such as West End Community Centre, Heritage Centre, the Perrins Centre and Capstone. There is considerable potential for groups to work more closely to ensure coordination of service and prevent duplication.

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

Whilst there is some positive collaborative work, partners could work better together to improve the quality of services and provision. As yet, there is no shared vision across the learning community and this needs to improve. A range of partners contribute to the curriculum at Alness Academy. Young people are being supported well to develop skills for learning, life and work. A preventative approach to securing improved post-school destinations is being developed in conjunction with Alness Academy. A partnership agreement between the school and youth work staff would further strengthen current informal networks. This would also assist with allocation of resources locally. Recent networking events run by the Easter Ross Employability Group are helping to increase knowledge of local services. Two young people are now involved in the Community Council as a result of partnership working with the youth work team. Closer working between the Rock Challenge and Plan B Dance will further enhance the learning offer to young people. Partners are working to improve health outcomes for older people with a particular focus on reducing loneliness and improving mental health.

Youth workers are developing their skills through support from staff at The Place. A few are now securing employment and completing training courses. Volunteers are supported to develop through a range of training and CPD although this could be more consistent. CLD staff engage in professional learning and feel well supported by managers. Regular support and supervision and appraisal is in place. Reporting back to stakeholders could be improved. The annual High Life Highland staff survey outcomes are not communicated well to local staff. Young people involved in youth participation now need to be more involved in taking forward the outcomes of consultation. The library is working towards Customer Service Excellence accreditation although timescales are unclear. Self-evaluation is developing but it is not yet embedded. Joint self-evaluation with partners is at an early stage.

This inspection of learning and development in the learning community surrounding Alness Academy found the following key strengths.

- Some innovative work with young people leading to positive outcomes.
- Focus on health and wellbeing with older people.
- Strong ethos of getting things done in the community.
- A wealth of community assets and active volunteers.

We discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

- Improve targeting through better data sharing and analysis.
- Embed a programme of adult learning across the learning community.
- Develop and embed a shared vision for learning across Alness.
- Formalise current partnership arrangements.
- Improve joint self-evaluation across partners.

4. What happens at the end of the inspection?

There are significant improvements needed and partners do not yet have a good understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement. Our Area Lead Officer along with the education authority will discuss the most appropriate support in order to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor progress. Education Scotland will provide a package of support to partners following the inspection. We have asked the learning community to provide us with a report on progress within one year of publication of this report. We will then decide whether another inspection is required.

Sheila Brown
HM Inspector
28 April 2015

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> .

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