



**Perth and Kinross Council
Education and Children's Services**

**Extended Learning and Achievement Visit Report
Perth Grammar School
2 - 4 March 2015**



BACKGROUND

To support the school in the process of self-evaluation, a team of officers from across Education and Children's Services visited Perth Grammar School between 2 and 4 March 2015. The themes for the review were Achievement, Learning and Leadership. These themes were subject to scrutiny through core Quality Indicators from *How good is our school?*, and by using the most recent Education Scotland Advice Note which outlines the raised expectations in relation to all schools' implementation of all aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.

Through negotiation with the school, certain aspects were subject to particular scrutiny, namely: leadership, self-evaluation, curriculum and learning and teaching.

During the visit the team had discussions with the Headteacher, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Principal Teachers (PTs), Faculty Heads and teachers; conducted over 30 classroom observations; reviewed documentation including learners' work; and met with groups of learners and parents.

At the time of the visit the school roll was 1,018. The SLT consisted of: headteacher; 3 deputies (school improvement); and one deputy (support).

ACHIEVEMENT

Strengths

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has projected a clear sense of raised expectations and all staff spoken to expressed a willingness to rise to this challenge. These raised expectations are reflected in the school's department attainment review process and an increased focus on data that underpins this. The Headteacher has also met with all departments individually this session to review SQA attainment and consider next steps.

Positive destinations for school leavers have improved significantly over the last year and there is evidence of positive collaboration with the authority's 16+ Co-ordinator.

The school has robust procedures in place for tracking in the senior phase and for tracking the attainment of 'looked after children' and Young Carers. The SLT has increased expectations amongst middle managers to ensure more young people are being afforded the opportunity to sit National 5, and there is some evidence that new procedures in this respect are having an impact.

The introduction of a letter pack for PTs' communication with home has improved feedback to parents/carers on pupil progress, and has been well-received by staff and parents. Guidance staff are also involved which ensures that pastoral contexts are taken into account.

There was evidence of a wide range of supported study opportunities within departments and pupils stated that these were well-advertised by teaching staff and well-attended by pupils.

The school now uses MIDYiS standardised testing and has shared this information with middle managers during a seminar session to assist them in providing appropriate support and challenge for pupils. This and other seminars organised for middle managers were well-received by staff. Middle managers have also been provided with an overview of attainment across curriculum areas which has assisted them in developing a better picture of learners' progress.

The school has built opportunities for wider achievement into both its broad general education and senior phase, and there is a good range of extra-curricular activities available to pupils.

Areas for improvement

The school has a powerful dataset in the form of MIDYiS standardised testing results and, as a next step, must now ensure that this is used in a consistent way by classroom teachers. There is a need to ensure that PTs/Faculty Leaders integrate this information into department approaches towards planning, tracking and self-evaluation during session 12015/16

Although the school has been attempting to improve consistency in homework/home study across subjects, this was still identified as an issue by parents. The SLT need to monitor carefully the implementation of the recently issued homework policy to ensure that there is consistent application across departments.

The SLT should ensure that there is appropriate challenge across the curriculum during the broad general education through robust monitoring of tracking procedures within individual departments.

Further consideration must be given to the use of P7 profiles by teachers and how these articulate with work done in S1 profiling. The authority will support the school by identifying where good practice in this area exists in other schools.

LEARNING

Strengths

Almost all lessons were considered to be good or satisfactory. A few lessons were considered to be very good. Where lessons were good or very good, pupils were provided with a range of activities and were clear about their learning. Pupils were generally positive about their classroom experience and most felt that they were making good progress.

There was evidence of a range of assessment for learning strategies being used in classes. Learners were able to identify several subjects where learning intentions and success criteria were shared, and both Modern Languages and Social Subjects demonstrated particularly good practice in this area. There were also some opportunities for peer assessment. Many teachers also deployed effective questioning.

Staff involved in Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) were very keen to continue to build on and sustain the work they have been involved in as part of the 'Tapestry' development. They have found the collegiate working and professional dialogue very valuable. They also described the impact on learning and teaching, such as an improved ability to respond to learners' needs and greater embedding of opportunities for learner reflection into their practice. TLC leaders were positive about this development and felt that it has been a good opportunity to have a leadership role.

Learners were able to identify how they are using and developing their Literacy and Numeracy skills in some areas of the curriculum, for example in PE and Science.

The proposed curriculum model for 2015/16 has been consulted on with a range of stakeholders and has the support of almost all staff. The planning of this development had been enhanced by the ability of the Headteacher to create a vision for change based on the principles of pupil pathways and experiences to suit all. This overarching vision was commented on by both parents and staff as a strength of this consultation process.

Parents were very positive about arrangements for ASN. The house teams were seen as effective in supporting young people and making interventions where appropriate. Staff felt that they are well informed regarding the additional support needs of young people and could describe how such information is shared electronically through links to profiles on individual pupils.

The School Referral Team was seen as positive by staff. Although this involves a large commitment for staff within the school to attend weekly, it does enable further discussion around practical classroom strategies and has the consequence of reducing the number of young people referred to the school's integrated team meeting.

There was a clear programme for Personal Support at all stages and evidence of impact where this was being delivered consistently, for example in S1 reflection on skills via the ASPIRE booklet.

Areas for improvement

There were a few lessons that could be described as unimaginative and lacking in opportunities for engagement. In these instances, a small number of lessons were considered unsatisfactory due to a lack of challenge and differentiation. Although there was clear evidence of formative assessment strategies being deployed in classes, pupils' experiences of these across the school were inconsistent.

There was a view among some staff that the Tapestry development had not been given a high enough priority, particularly in the second year. There was also a lack of clarity among some staff about who was facilitating this development at SLT level. Whilst staff involvement with Tapestry had led to a greater level of engagement with pedagogical theory, there remained scope for yet wider engagement with research.

The school should now ensure that the development of quality learning and teaching is provided with a clear lead at SLT level, and that the benefits of the Tapestry programme are built upon in a way that impacts across all classrooms. This should be reflected in the school's improvement plan for Session 2015/16.

Although the curriculum model proposed for 2015/16 represents a significant step forward for the school, work remains to be done in ensuring that there is a good range of suitable opportunities in the senior phase for pupils not pursuing Highers. PTs and Faculty Heads should consider further the curriculum opportunities that they can offer within their departments beyond the traditional 'academic' diet to ensure that the needs of this group are addressed in a way that is equitable.

At the time of the visit there was no provision for core RME in the senior school. This school plans to address this in Session 2015/16 and needs to ensure that the approach it adopts will satisfactorily meet national expectations.

There was inconsistency in the extent to which literacy or numeracy were systematically promoted across the curriculum. In general, there was limited evidence of staff or pupils discussing literacy or numeracy in an explicit way. There is a need for a greater clarity of planning at whole school

level for the development of responsibility for all areas. Staff involvement in current and forthcoming authority training events for literacy and numeracy co-ordinators should assist in clarifying expectations in these areas.

Although staff are advised of IEPs and invited to provide information in advance of meetings, they did not appear to have any involvement in setting targets for pupils in the context of their own subject area. The school should build this aspect into IEP planning.

The term 'caseloaded' has wide currency within the school but does not accord with current recommended terminology. The school is advised to move away from the use of this term.

Although there was good use of digital media to ensure curriculum accessibility in the senior phase, this now needs to be extended into the broad general education. To allow for effective use of ICT for curriculum accessibility, there is a need for the school to update and augment its ICT provision.

There is an on-going lack of clarity about roles and responsibility of guidance and personal support staff within the school and a concern was expressed by some staff about the lack of contact between some young people and their guidance teacher. This issue was echoed by parents who expressed a concern that there was no single person within the school who had an overview of their child's progress and with whom they could speak at parents' night and other times. The school should take these findings into consideration as it prepares for the implementation of the 'named person' legislation in August 2016.

Although there is evidence of effective practice in personal support, there continues to be inconsistency in its delivery, and a lack of clarity particularly amongst older year groups about the purpose of this time.

LEADERSHIP

Strengths

A clear vision of increased expectations set out by the Headteacher percolated the school, and was in evidence in discussions with staff and pupils. For staff, there was a sense that there was a great deal to do, but morale seemed buoyed by a shared sense of direction and belief that significant improvement was realisable. In general there was an impression of an enthusiastic, energetic, committed staff throughout the school, who were embracing the direction of travel set out by the Headteacher.

Staff reported a greater sense of cohesion within the SLT and improved clarity with regard to their roles and responsibilities. They also felt that there were improved opportunities for leadership at all levels for staff, as well as for pupils.

Parents were very positive about improvements to communication, in particular, the weekly newsletter; the online booking system for parents' evenings; and information on assessment which was now available on the school's website. Parents also spoke positively about the school's response to parental concerns which in all cases were dealt with speedily and appropriately. In general, parents felt that the school's reputation had improved significantly in recent years.

Pupils also felt that communication was improving and spoke positively of the Headteacher's policy of trying to meet five different pupils each day (5 a day). Pupils also felt that the Pupil Council was now meeting more regularly and that it was having a greater influence on school improvement planning.

There was a clear rationale for the revised curriculum, with consultation from all stakeholders

influencing the way forward. The Headteacher's role in leading this change was very much recognised and appreciated by parents.

There was evidence that improvements had been prioritised and agreed through improved self-evaluation, which included robust, structured departmental Learning and Teaching Reviews as well as regular surveys to provide feedback from pupils, parents and staff. It was evident that the school is improving its knowledge of itself through improved approaches to self-evaluation and there is clarity about what still needs to be achieved. The school's self-evaluation document provided a good overview of progress and priorities for improvement and the judgements contained within it were largely validated by the visiting team over the three day visit.

SLT members now meet weekly with PTs/Faculty Heads and this has led to these staff feeling well-supported and being clearer on roles and responsibilities.

The annual ERD meetings for all staff, teachers and support staff are based on a culture of coaching and self-evaluation where feedback is given to staff on their progress towards meeting the Standard for Registration and Professional Update.

All staff have opportunities to contribute to the development of vision, values and strategic direction, in part through their involvement in working groups. Staff access programmes of professional development which are designed to raise whole school expectations in regard to attainment and achievement. A Collegiate Professional Development Calendar exists which outlines a programme of professional learning identified by staff through ERD.

Staff involved in the Tapestry programme can account for and reflect on how they have developed and can demonstrate impact that their professional learning has had on learners. They are evidencing this impact as part of their Professional Update.

The skills and confidence of newly appointed staff are developed through induction programmes and communication from promoted staff members. Opportunities are offered to staff to develop leadership skills, and leadership sessions are offered to staff to support career development and succession planning.

There is appropriate time allocation for supporters and probationers to meet throughout the session. Supporters understand their roles and duties and are able to provide well-judged support, appropriate expectations and challenge. There is easy access to support materials for supporters and probationers.

Areas for Improvement

There is a need for yet more clarity for staff on the areas of responsibility of the senior leadership team in, for example, the leadership of key developments such as Tapestry.

There is a need for greater direct and active engagement with all staff in the communication of change, rather than depending solely on a process of cascading through PTs and Faculty Heads.

There was evidence of parental involvement in school improvement planning, but Parent Council representatives remained unclear about their key role in this process. The Headteacher should be more explicit with the Parent Council about how they will be involved in a systematic way in improvement planning.

The SLT needs to ensure that the new arrangements for weekly PT meetings and department review lead to robust challenge in addition to support. Where actions for improvement have been identified either through observations or at department/faculty level, SLT should ensure that these are picked up through existing processes such as ERD, department improvement planning and

self-evaluation, and that a systematic review of such actions is built in to these processes.

There is a need for PTs and Faculty Heads to ensure consistency in the quality of learning and teaching across all departments. There was as yet insufficient evidence to confirm that classroom observations were being used in a systematic way to bring about sustained improvements to classroom practice.

There is greater scope to make connections between departmental self-evaluation processes and the Tapestry development, which should be seen as a powerful vehicle for whole school improvement in learning and teaching. In order to do this, the SLT will have to afford greater status to Tapestry and to consider how the momentum of this development can be maintained once this two year programme has concluded in June 2015.

The school policy of attempting to place all meetings/events occurring after the pupil day exclusively on a Tuesday had resulted in some disruption to the Tapestry and DM meeting schedules. The staff consultative committee should look again at this practice.

CONCLUSION

During the visit the team found Perth Grammar School to be a welcoming community where pupils were generally well-motivated and courteous. It was clear from talking to pupils that there were strong relationships between pupils and staff and that pupils held teachers in high regard.

In speaking to all stakeholders there was a sense of a school on a positive journey of improvement. The schools will continue to be offered the support of Council officers in bringing about the actions recommended in this report.

Responsible Officer: John Devine, Quality Improvement Officer

Email: jdevine@pkc.gov.uk

Telephone no: 01738 476221