



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



**Extended Learning and Achievement Visit Report  
Balhousie Primary School  
19-20 April 2016**

## **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this visit was to support the school in the process of self-evaluation and it was conducted by officers from Education and Children's Services. The themes subject to scrutiny were based on core Quality Indicators from 'How good is our school?' (3<sup>RD</sup> EDITION) and reflected the most recent advice note from Education Scotland which outlines raised expectations in relation to schools' implementation of all aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.

Information was gathered from visits to classes, scrutiny of data, records and children's work, discussions with children, parents, staff and displays of children's work around the school.

Balhousie Primary School is led by a non-class committed headteacher with the support of a Principal Teacher. At the time of the visit the school had a pupil roll of 120 children, organised across six classes and a nursery with 30 children accessing the sessions and a number of "Strong Start twos" places. Pupil attendance is below the national average.

## **ACHIEVEMENT**

Children at Balhousie Primary School enjoy a positive and supportive school ethos. There is a strong focus on ensuring that the school has a focus on good behaviour at all stages. Children impressed as polite, well-mannered and aware of the feelings of others.

Attainment data from session 2014-15 indicates that the majority of children in P4 and P7 were achieving in line with national expectations in listening and talking, reading, writing and mathematics. Data has not yet been sufficiently collated or analysed to develop a clear picture of improvements in performance over time. The headteacher has been asked to work with all staff to develop a better understanding of assessing children's progress in learning over time and to increase the use of assessment information.

In those primary classes where reading groups were observed, a good standard of reading was evident. Children were able to read aloud confidently with appropriate expression. There is scope to raise the level of challenge in reading to ensure all children develop advanced literacy skills.

Examples of writing evidenced that writing skills are developed regularly across all stages. A focus on the presentation of work is evident. There now needs to be more opportunities for children to engage in extended writing and a greater variety of writing formats and genres.

In the Nursery, profiles are used to track the core skills in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

The school has begun to address the need to raise expectations about what children can achieve in mathematics and have recently purchased a programme to support the delivery of active maths. This should be used in conjunction with rich and meaningful real-life contexts for the application of mathematical skills.

Children respond well to the high expectations for behaviour. This is supported by the use of the programme BounceBack. The school is at the early stages of using Restorative Approaches to enable children to resolve any disagreements or talk through issues. The school should now complement this work with awareness raising and use of the wellbeing indicators through learning and teaching approaches as well as through the children's self-reflections.

Children learn how to develop their physical skills and team work in the context of PE. The Visiting PE Teacher recognises achievement in PE and this is celebrated on a "Success Wall".

Across all the learning settings in the school staff provide caring and nurturing learning environments. Relationships between staff and children are positive. Staff members support children to feel safe and secure and most children demonstrate a readiness to learn. The headteacher is the designated Child Protection Officer (CPO). A second CPO is recommended. This would support a sharing of the Perth & Kinross Child Protection guidance and procedures to include record keeping.

## **LEARNING**

Staff make good use of the generous space that the school affords to provide calm and purposeful learning environments.

In the nursery, activities and resources are well matched to the needs and interests of children. Opportunities to enable curiosity, inquiry and creativity to flourish were evident as children were seen to enjoy mixing materials, making a "camp fire" and exploring the wildlife garden with appropriate support from staff.

Across the primary stages almost all children are eager to learn. In most lessons, children are interested in what they are learning. They work well in groups, pairs and individually, and help each other to complete activities when they are given the opportunity. In Primary 1, children were observed to use a variety of materials and resources to explore the language of measurement and comparisons. In Primary 3, children were effectively supported to create their own writing targets and a few demonstrated a very sophisticated level of understanding of grammatical structures.

In the majority of lessons observed children showed a commitment to staying on task. They are more motivated when involved in making decisions about how and what they learn. For example, children in Primary 5/6 and Primary 6/7 were able to contribute to the planning process of their learning context of Perth with a variety of well-paced learning activities as a stimulus.

In the Nursery, "Talking and Thinking Books" are used very effectively. The school has invested in an online "Learning Journal" resource, implemented in the Nursery from the start of this session and being trialled in P1. With the exception of the Early Years there are currently no formal opportunities for learners to capture their own learning profiles,

targets and progress. There should be planned opportunities for all children to be involved in talking and reflecting on their learning within a whole-school framework for profiling, target setting and review.

Children's additional support needs are identified effectively across the school. This supports the staff's knowledge of what children's needs are and how to plan further learning. Staff need to ensure that Individualised Education Programmes are relevant and contain appropriate short and long term learning targets. The headteacher and staff should fully utilise the Perth & Kinross Guidance for supporting learners with Additional Support Needs.

A strength of the school is the richness afforded by the diversity of the school population: there are a significant number of children who are identified as learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The Care Inspectorate commended the clear and evident sense of flexibility in meeting the needs of those children in the Nursery who have EAL. The uniqueness of the school's diversity needs to be more evident in its curriculum rationale and design.

The school currently benefits from some small class sizes and this affords opportunity to more effectively meet the needs of all learners. Greater scrutiny of progress and interventions will support the careful consideration of the deployment of support staff in order to provide the best support for those who most need it.

The school has reviewed aspects of the curriculum in order to ensure that children experience appropriate breadth in their learning across the curriculum areas of language/literacy and maths/numeracy. In the primary stages, programmes of study already in place have recently been extended to include the implementation of Heinemann Active Maths and Big Writing. There is scope for a review of the implementation of these new resources as part of the school's quality assurance procedures. This will identify consistency of use and evaluate effectiveness in improving progress in maths/numeracy and language/literacy.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The headteacher and Principal Teacher work well together. They are supported by a committed team who value the effective working relationships in the school. The headteacher's strategic direction when taking up post in August 2014 was to focus on building relationships with and between staff, pupils and parents/carers. The comments from his staff team acknowledge that this focus has had a positive impact on effective team working and in turn created a positive climate for learning and teaching. The school team is now ready to ensure that the strategic focus shifts to the leadership of learning and teaching. The school should implement the Perth and Kinross guidance on Tracking and Monitoring of Attainment and Achievement in the Broad General Education.

The Principal Teacher demonstrates sound vision and understanding of the direction the school now needs to take and is well placed to support the headteacher in managing change and securing positive improvements to learning and teaching. Teachers demonstrate commitment to developing more effective self-evaluation, for example through monthly professional reading collegiate activities and taking leadership roles in the school.

Children develop their confidence by performing at events such as the National Youth Choir of Scotland, Nativity play and pantomime. A Pupil Council has been established. Its role should now develop to include evaluation the work of the school and the impact of the School Improvement Plan on pupils' learning. There is scope to extend leadership opportunities for all children.

Parents consulted commented positively on the ethos of the school. They are pleased with the positive impact of the headteacher's high expectations of behaviour, manners and the wearing of school uniform. They spoke favourably about the approachability of teachers and how well staff know their children. They recognise the support of parents in attending and holding events such as the summer fete. They expressed their satisfaction with the information they receive from the school however feel the website should be updated regularly and that the frequency of the issue of newsletters could be improved.

### **Key Strengths**

- Polite, friendly children who are good ambassadors of the school and work well together
- Innovative approaches in the Nursery in supporting EAL children and families
- Led by the headteacher, the teamwork and commitment of all staff in providing a positive and supportive ethos across the school
- The thought and care evidenced by staff in bringing about best outcomes for children and families

### **Areas for Improvement**

- With immediate effect follow Perth & Kinross guidance specifically on tracking and monitoring and record keeping of ASN
- By August 2016 develop and agree a curriculum rationale and review the curriculum
- During session 2016-17 develop a system of rigorous self evaluation which leads to improvements in learning and teaching and impacts leadership at all levels

### **Conclusion**

The headteacher, staff, pupils and parents should continue to work together to support future improvements in order to enable all children to develop and achieve their full potential. Education Officers of Perth & Kinross Council will work with the school in taking forward the improvement agenda. A follow up visit will take place in April 2017.

### **[HMI Report](#)**

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