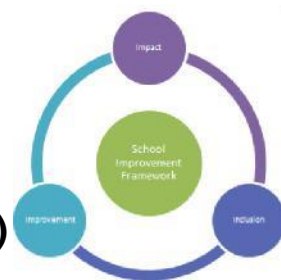




Extended Learning and Achievement Visit (ELAV) Report The Community School of Auchterarder (Nursery, Primary and Secondary, All-Through School) 22 and 23 February 2018



BACKGROUND

To support the school in the process of self-evaluation, a team of officers from Education and Children's Services visited The Community School of Auchterarder on 22 and 23 February 2018. 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* (4th edition).

At the time of the visit the school roll was as follows: Nursery 98 Primary 424, Secondary 488, total roll 1010. The Senior Management Team consisted of: The Headteacher; two Secondary Depute Head Teachers (DHT): one DHT School Improvement, one DHT Support; two Primary Depute Head Teachers (one Nursery-P3 and one P4-7) and a Business Manager. Attendance in session 2016-17 was 93% in the Secondary and 95% in the Primary which is in line with Perth and Kinross (PKC) schools average and is above the national average.

Information was gathered from class visits, scrutiny of a range of data sources, professional dialogue with SMT and staff, focus groups with pupils and parents and the school's self-evaluation and school improvement documentation.

ACHIEVEMENT

Primary attainment data reviewed in the areas of literacy and numeracy indicates that most children are currently making progress in their learning. In June 2017 almost all pupils in Primary 1 had achieved expected levels in line with national expectations in reading, writing, listening and talking and numeracy. In primary 4 and Primary 7, the majority of children had achieved expected levels in their learning in numeracy, reading, writing and listening and talking.

In the primary, attainment trends in literacy and numeracy have been variable over time. Identified individuals and groups of pupils are being supported in developing their skills in areas of literacy and numeracy with early indications of having a positive impact on the learners' confidence and abilities.

The management team and teaching staff in the primary are beginning to engage in a more robust and structured approach to tracking pupil attainment against national benchmarks with the support of the Perth and Kinross tracking and monitoring system. Staff report that this is providing more focus on tracking the progress of individual and groups of pupils over time and is beginning to result in a greater understanding of how improvement can be planned. This is at the early stages and should remain a focus and priority for the Headteacher and management team within the primary.

Across the primary, pupils are given a range of opportunities to achieve within their classrooms and the wider life of the school. This includes being part of the 'Buddies' group, the eco committee, and playground leaders. Every pupil in the primary is part of an enterprise project which works towards Christmas fundraising.

In the secondary, at the end of the broad and general education (BGE) in the session 2016/17, 75% of young people in S3 had achieved at the third level in literacy and 70% in numeracy. 24% of S3 pupils had achieved at fourth level in literacy and 31% in numeracy. The school's performance in literacy and numeracy at S3 is slightly below the Perth and Kinross Council average. There should be more structured opportunities for moderation of literacy and numeracy across the whole school to support teacher professional judgements of achievement of a level in the BGE.

Leavers achieved below the virtual comparator* (VC) in literacy and numeracy at Levels 4 and 5 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, however there is evidence of some improvement in performance in S4 and S5 performance when the cohorts are examined individually.

*The virtual comparator consists of a sample group of school leavers from schools in other local authorities who have similar characteristics to the school leavers from the school in question.

The secondary has adopted a sound, strategic approach to the tracking and monitoring of targeted groups in the BGE. The whole school should now adopt this approach as part of their universal approaches to tracking and monitoring to ensure there is an effective framework for measuring attainment over time for all pupils. Parents expressed high levels of satisfaction that learners are very well supported and provided with a range of opportunities to learn and achieve, however young people voiced a wish for greater choice in the senior phase.

The secondary has established a wider achievement programme which pupils told us adds value and enjoyment to their school experience. The school is performing below the VC in relation to the 'Attainment for All' benchmark in Insight, with the lowest attaining 20% of learners performing consistently lower over the last 3 years. The school should now review its senior phase curricular pathways, increase its vocational offer and maximise accreditation.

The secondary has enjoyed a successful academic track record in recent years such as the particularly strong performance of the 2016/17 S5 cohort at Higher level. In the most recent senior phase leaver attainment results, the school performed slightly below the VC in all key performance indicators. There are therefore clear targets for improvements in attainment moving forward.

The school continues to develop its approaches to Developing the Young Workforce. The school has established a sustained relationship with one local employer and has established links with a range of other employers. Priority should be given to maintaining and building on their existing network to increase opportunities of diverse and relevant work experience for senior phase pupils. This would be supported by planning to develop skills for work for all learners across the school to meet the entitlements of the Career Education Standard.

In the senior phase a number of young people engage in wider achievement awards, in particular the Duke of Edinburgh and Saltire Awards in S4, S5 and S6. There is some engagement with employability programmes enabling a small number of S5 and S6 pupils to be supported through the Career Ready programme. The school offers work placements in the senior phase which are in the main, dedicated 5 day placements, a small number of pupils undertake extended flexible placements. Participation rates of young people from the school entering into positive destinations rose last academic session to 97% of school leavers progressing into positive destinations from school. This figure is above the PKC and national averages. The SMT reported that this improvement was due to the commitment of

staff and effective partnership work between school staff, parents and Skills Development Scotland.

All young people in S3 take part in the Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) and many pupils in the secondary and in the primary are actively involved in fundraising for the school's chosen charities each year. Pupils talked about the value of being an Eco-School and highlighted that this initiative is being driven by primary pupils. The school provides an excellent example of a successful international link in its long-standing relationship with schools in Linthipe, Malawi. A group of pupils and staff visit biennially and those planning to go attend a discrete tutor group where they regularly write to peers in Malawi and plan fundraising. Many other teachers throughout the school have visited Malawi. It was evident through wall displays and class work that this is used to weave in interdisciplinary links with different subjects such as in English and Geography. The primary pupils and staff have also been significantly involved in fundraising to provide new toilets for their partner primary school.

The school's innovative intergenerational work with Generations Working Together Scotland, in partnership with another local secondary school and with local volunteers, funded by Pupil Equity Funding, has provided opportunities to build effective partnerships. Older people from the local community volunteer in the school working with children on their literacy and numeracy skills. This work is in its infancy however qualitative feedback indicates the learners and the volunteers are finding this work highly rewarding and of mutual benefit.

Pupils and staff across the school indicated that they feel pupils are safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Wellbeing is an evident part of the culture and curriculum and young people, parents and staff consider there to be a climate of mutual trust and respect within a strong sense of community. The staff that we spoke to demonstrated that they are a committed, supportive team who support each other and the pupils well. Pupils agreed with this and said that staff are accessible and responsive to the needs and interests of individual young people.

Secondary pupils participate in one half hour class of tutor time each week where they, in vertical, mixed S1-6 groups, have the opportunity to engage in learning conversations with their tutor and reflect on their learning. Pupils said that their experiences with this were variable. There are some very good examples of this working well. This good practice should be shared and a more direct approach to monitoring and evaluating would ensure a better consistency of experience. Pupil ideas should be taken into account in future planning of tutor time.

Child protection, additional support needs and safeguarding policies are in place which reflect the most recent legislation and are scrutinised on a regular basis. Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and risk assessments are in place, where appropriate, to ensure young people are safe and secure whilst at school.

The ethos at the Community School of Auchterarder is a strength. Respectful, nurturing and caring relationships are evident between staff and parents and between staff and pupils. Young people and their parents demonstrate a sense of pride in their school. Young people feel that they are listened to, that they are known extremely well in school by adults and that the school is quick to involve parents when required. They feel that they are well informed about relationships, internet safety, substance misuse and sexual health and that the school is proactive in promoting equalities and inclusion. Parents said they would welcome a review of sex education and the re-emphasis of key messages around this throughout the secondary PSE programme.

The current school improvement plan highlights work in improving relationships, dealing with conflict and pupil behaviour. It is recommended that, in taking forward this work, the school look outwards to other schools, to the expertise of some of their own Additional Support Needs staff and to take a collaborative approach to building capacity, skills, methodologies and understanding in their staff to ensure they are well-equipped to respond to and reflect in their practice, the emergent needs of some of their young people.

All parents that we spoke to said that they were confident in their knowledge of how their child is progressing in their learning and that they have access to a wide range of information regarding learning. Parents were very happy with the level and quality of communication between them and school staff. They particularly made reference to the increased parents' evening opportunities, the new approaches to reporting to parents and the use of digital technology to communicate effectively. Parents said they felt there was an open door policy in the whole school should they have any concerns. The parents strongly emphasised their satisfaction with the support offered by all staff, in particular they highlighted support for young people with additional support needs and praised the work of the Community Link Worker in leading the enhanced transition programme.

LEARNING

There is a friendly, warm and welcoming atmosphere in the whole school. Respect is a key feature of the vision and values of the school and the interactions between members of the school community were observed to be consistently respectful. Pupils are well behaved, polite and engaged in their learning. They interact positively with their peers in a respectful and positive manner. The pupils we spoke to were motivated to do well. They enjoy opportunities to be more independent in their learning and would welcome this on a more regular basis.

In the nursery, children were observed to be happy, motivated and engaged in a range of play experiences both indoors and outdoors. Children play a key role in leading their learning within the nursery. Staff listen effectively to children, ask appropriate open questions to encourage and further develop children's thinking. Interactions between staff and children are very positive. The staff know the children well and quality observations take place through play in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The planning in the nursery takes account of children's interests and this is evidenced in talking and thinking books. Tracking of children's progress and planning of next steps in learning should now take account of the developmental milestones. The parents we spoke to commented positively on the support provided to children and their families by the staff in the nursery. The staff in the nursery work closely with colleagues in the early years of the school throughout the year and at the point of transition to primary one.

Across the primary, almost all pupils understand the purpose of their learning and have this shared with them and referred to within lessons through the use of learning intentions and success criteria. This should now happen in a more consistent manner with pupils contributing to this process. In the best examples of lessons we observed there was effective use of skilled questioning, differentiation and feedback to inform next steps in learning. The school is now well placed to ensure that this good practice in the use of effective teaching strategies is developed collaboratively across the whole school in order to achieve consistency across all classes and stages.

Children write for a variety of purposes in the primary and were motivated by real life experiences connected to interdisciplinary learning. The frequency of opportunities for developing writing should be increased. The intended learning within all written tasks needs to be made explicit to the children. Written teacher feedback should focus directly to learning.

In the secondary, learning was well-planned, learning intentions were shared, referred to and built on previous learning and real life experiences. Learners had opportunities to achieve within the activities and were given regular feedback, and further activities which progressed their learning and motivated them as individuals.

Pupils demonstrated a sound understanding of the purpose of the activities they were undertaking. In the best lessons observed there was effective use of clear success criteria, skilful use of praise, the pace of learning and teaching was brisk and active learning was evident. There were some examples of highly effective Assessment is For Learning techniques observed such as a range of questioning techniques, no hands up, carefully

chosen learning partners and exit passes. The development of higher order and critical thinking skills was also observed in some lessons. There were some examples of appropriate differentiation. Positive relationships were evident in classes and the learning environment was conducive to good quality learning and teaching.

Staff have developed approaches to profiling and reporting pupil progress to parents including the use of Achievement Logs across the primary. These are shared regularly with parents who commented positively on how they provide information of some of the classroom learning. There is scope to enhance the Achievement Logs to ensure they support children to identify and talk about their progress and next steps in learning. Consideration should now be given as to how this profiling can be built on into the secondary to support the learners' entire school journey to the point of exit.

Staff in the nursery, primary and secondary have worked collegiately, within their sectors, to develop curriculum pathways in literacy and numeracy which support them in planning experiences for pupils. These pathways should be reviewed within the context of the all-through setting, to ensure coherence and progression for all learners including more able learners. This would ensure pupils are suitably challenged in their learning in order to maintain high aspirations for all.

Across the primary, use is made of digital technologies to support communication with parents. Some classes are engaging with the use of the Seesaw resource which has been positively received by the parents we spoke to. Most classes have their own twitter page and children make decisions about what is included on twitter. In the secondary, effective use is made of ICT in enhancing learning and teaching, with some emerging innovation in evidence.

Staff are currently reviewing the health and wellbeing strategy in the primary with a view to embedding consistent practice in Restorative Practices and the Relationships and Behaviour Policy across the school. In doing this, staff should now work collaboratively with their secondary colleagues to ensure consistency of approaches.

Across the whole school, children's additional support needs are identified effectively. Staff are motivated to meet the needs of all learners and pupil support staff deliver specific programmes of targeted work on an ongoing basis. Effective communication between class teachers and support staff should continue to be a focus to ensure that all aspects of planning and target setting are understood by everyone.

The school is well placed to develop greater consistency in approaches to learning and teaching and this should now be a priority for staff to share good practice and improve further upon the positive examples of learning and teaching observed.

LEADERSHIP

The Senior Management Team, together with the staff, demonstrate commitment to the school, its young people, their learning and their families, To ensure the full potential of the school is realised the Senior Management Team, led by the Head Teacher, should now work together to ensure effective leadership of the All Through School.

The Senior Management Team has empowered members of primary and secondary staff to undertake a range of whole school leadership responsibilities. Examples of this include primary staff leading collegiate working groups and secondary staff creating a new mobile phone policy. Many staff also take responsibility for a variety of extra-curricular events and activities. In the secondary the management team have worked to create the conditions where collaboration, creativity and innovation are well supported and the staff value these opportunities. This is evident in the leadership of practitioner enquiry groups led by unpromoted members of staff. This approach should now be considered throughout the whole school in order to ensure greater collegiate learning and development across the staff.

There is a strong ethos of teamwork among the staff. All members of staff make contributions to evaluating the work of the school and the Senior Management Team should now ensure staff, parents and pupils are more actively involved in ongoing, structured, self-evaluation and school improvement activities.

Pupils across the school are articulate and positive about opportunities for leadership roles and said that they have a range of opportunities available to them such as House Captains and Pupil Council in the primary and coaching at sports clubs as part of the Community Sports Leader Award, prefect duties and senior pupil leadership roles in organising charity and school events in the Secondary. Senior pupils praised the school's approach to having young people leading assemblies, SMT meeting regularly with senior pupils to brief them about approaches to managing pupil behaviour and pupil representatives attending the Parent Council meetings. As part of the wider achievement programme some pupils are gaining leadership experience in refereeing and as My World of Work ambassadors. Secondary pupils stated that there was the potential for more regular opportunities to lead and work together with younger pupils across the school to build relationships and further improve transitions.

The school should consider its approaches to encouraging increased pupils' responsibility for their own learning, the role learners can play in supporting the learning of peers and having opportunities to lead learning themselves.

Conclusion

The Community School of Auchterarder provides a nurturing, safe, respectful environment in which young people can learn and achieve. There is a shared vision to working together with young people and their families to get it right for the children and young people in their care.

Strengths

- The inclusive, caring ethos of the whole school community
- The commitment and team work of staff to ensure positive outcomes for young people
- The supportive approaches of the Senior Management Team which encourage and foster leadership, innovation and creativity
- A range of experiences and opportunities available to children and young people within the curriculum and the wider life of the school which support them in their learning and in their personal and social development

We discussed with the Headteacher and the Senior Management Team how they might continue to improve the school in light of their own self-evaluation and feedback from the Extended Learning and Achievement Visit team. The following areas for improvement were agreed:

- The Senior Management Team, led by the Head Teacher, should work together to ensure effective leadership of the All Through School
- In the current session, and in preparation for 2018-19, take forward a more structured approach to self-evaluation and school improvement planning across the whole school involving parents, pupils and staff
- Ensure a continued focus on raising attainment:
 - in literacy and numeracy across the school using structured approaches to moderation and the tracking and monitoring of progress
 - in the secondary by analysing their most recent results and identifying attainment targets for 2018-19
- Work collaboratively across the school to share and apply consistently the identified good practice in learning and teaching
- During 2018-19 the school should widen its vocational offer and review its senior phase curricular offer

As part of the normal ELAV follow up procedures, ECS officers will return within a year to evaluate the school's progress towards taking forward the recommendations for improvement.

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