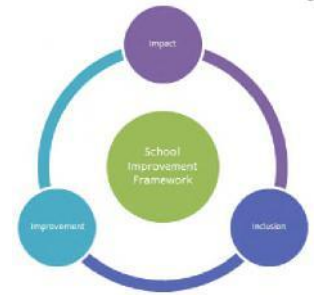




Extended Learning and Achievement Visit Report Blair Atholl Primary School 18 & 19 January 2017



BACKGROUND

To support the school in the process of self-evaluation, a team of officers from across Education and Children's Services (ECS) visited Blair Atholl Primary School on 18th and 19th January 2017. 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)* and by using the most recent Education Scotland Advice Note. It outlines the raised expectations in relation to all schools' implementation of all aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.

At the time of visit Blair Atholl Primary School had a pupil roll of 22 organised across two multi-composite classes and a Nursery with a total of 15 children accessing sessions. The school is led by the headteacher who is supported by a principal teacher. The headteacher and principal teacher leads Blair Atholl as part of a shared management team with Logierait Primary School.

The school has an attendance level of 93.5% which is below the Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) average of 95.3%. The school has plans to work with parents to increase attendance.

Information was gathered from class visits, scrutiny of data and evidence of children's learning, discussions with children, parents/carers and staff, and displays of children's work around the school.

ACHIEVEMENT

Children at Blair Atholl Primary School are very proud of their school and present as articulate, confident and enthusiastic learners. Children talk fondly about being a joint school with Logierait Primary School and about the planned learning opportunities they take part in with the children there. They report that they feel safe and well cared for at school and that adults know them well.

Attainment data reviewed in the areas of literacy and mathematics indicates that almost all learners are making very good progress in listening and talking, reading, writing and mathematics, with some children working beyond expected levels.

Teachers meet regularly with the headteacher and principal teacher to look closely at assessment data and evidence of learning, attainment levels and predictions particularly for those children requiring additional support or challenge. Together they are able to talk about the strategies, interventions and resources which have impacted positively on learning. These rigorous discussions are leading to early identification of barriers to learning and effective and targeted approaches for individuals.

A whole school approach to teaching numeracy and mathematics has recently been developed. Collegiate sessions are planned to share strategies and develop consistency of practice. There is a clear focus on the progression of skills in numeracy. This approach provides a clear structure for staff, which reinforces core skills and develops a common language for numeracy and mathematics. Class teachers express greater confidence in planning and teaching lessons which have appropriate challenge for all children and in describing the progress of learners. 'Maths in the World' homework tasks help children and families to see the link between maths and real life activities.

A similar whole school approach should now be used to provide the same structure for improvements in English language and literacy. The staff team should develop a shared understanding of the progression of skills in reading, writing, talking and listening so that there is clarity in identifying and planning the next steps for learning in these areas. Regular planned moderation activities would support this work. Focus should be given to identifying teaching approaches which will raise attainment and to developing consistency across the school in their delivery. This would ensure that there are regular opportunities for children to write for a variety of purposes and at length across all curricular areas, ensuring that expectations and standards for writing are ambitious and aspirational for all learners.

Children in Blair Atholl Primary enjoy a varied curriculum. All classes access regular science lessons and French is implemented as appropriate across all stages. Across the school children are able to describe how they make good choices about their health and wellbeing. Projects such as Bikeability and partnership work with Atholl Estates and the Zero Waste Team extend the curriculum on offer to all children in Blair Atholl Primary. The school is now well placed to revisit their curriculum rationale and design to ensure it reflects Blair Atholl Primary's unique local context and shared vision as to the outcomes they intend to achieve through the curriculum they provide. As discussed, Blair Atholl's curriculum should provide regular planned opportunities to develop the skills for learning, life and work and children should have regular opportunities to reflect on their progress in developing these skills.

Children are encouraged and supported to talk about achievements gained from out of school activities. The school website, 'Get Together' assemblies and displays are used to celebrate and recognise successes and achievements. All children are encouraged to take part in a range of cultural, sporting and citizenship events and activities.

LEARNING

Children at Blair Atholl Primary School have access to a variety of play areas in the school grounds which support creative play and outdoor learning. The nursery's well used outdoor environment provides a range of exciting and stimulating resources to support children in their learning. Nursery children engage and sustain levels of interest in the rich active learning experiences on offer and are supported by staff to be curious and to extend their thinking through skilled questioning.

Teaching staff reported that 1+2 French languages learning development had a positive impact on teacher confidence and pupil enjoyment and engagement. Learners have increased their range of vocabulary and confidence in using this in conversation.

The impact of staff engagement in teacher learning communities is evident; the recent school improvement focus on developing consistency in using assessment approaches

in learning and teaching has been successful. In all observed lessons, teachers share the intended learning and lessons are well planned and structured to support learning for all. In the best of lessons activities are challenging, careful questioning by the teacher is effective in extending learning and children are actively involved in tasks that develop understanding and improve skills. Across the school almost all children engage well in their learning activities.

In all observed lessons, explanations and instructions are clear and they build upon previous learning and real life experiences. A range of teaching approaches are used, including good use of ICT to extend learning in some lessons. Children are confident in working independently and in small groups. They are encouraged to share their learning and talk about strategies used to solve problems. A focus on the skills being used, linking these to the success criteria would support children in being able to identify and evidence their progress. Through regular discussion of what success, progress and skills development looks like, children will be more confident and able to describe how they know they have improved, developing their self-evaluation skills.

Teachers and support staff work very well together to provide well-judged assistance for children. Relationships between staff and children are very positive, helpful and respectful. There are effective systems in place to ensure joined up and consistent approaches from those staff supporting children with additional needs. Transitions are planned sensitively, from home to nursery, nursery to school and onto secondary.

LEADERSHIP

The headteacher and principal teacher of Blair Atholl Primary School work together well with a clear focus on school improvement, learning and teaching and getting it right for every child. Together they identify and build on the strengths of staff members and provide opportunities for them to lead on improvement priorities. They know the children and families very well and work effectively with partners to provide valuable support at all levels.

Pupil voice is present throughout the classes and in opportunities to work in citizenship groups. As well as contributing to planning, children also contribute through a whole school Eco Group. This Eco Group allows small groups of children to create action plans in working towards a Green Flag for the school. Primary 7 pupils have the opportunity to develop leadership skills in their Prefect roles. The school is now ready to further develop these opportunities for pupils to make a difference to their school and the improvement outcomes.

Those parents we consulted with reported that the school's communication methods are generally effective and they appreciate the information shared with them through monthly newsletters, homework diaries and the school's website. They appreciate advance notice of events, especially those involving dressing-up. They are positive about the planned parent workshops on offer, but all find these difficult to attend. Parents appreciate being regularly invited into assemblies where they hear about their children's learning. Parents report that teaching staff are approachable and always willing to offer time to talk when it is requested. They value the relationships between teachers and their children. They evidenced a strong sense of commitment to their school. The school now needs to ensure that children and parents are aware of the school improvement priorities, their important role in driving forward improvements and the impact they have.

Self-evaluation and quality assurance approaches provide accurate information to inform school improvement planning. Developments taken forward through this process are having a positive impact on learning and teaching. All staff show a commitment to developing their practice in the teaching of French and work well with teachers across their local management group to share approaches and learn from each other.

Strengths

- Confident, happy children who are proud of their school and who engage enthusiastically in their learning.
- The successful joint working between Blair Atholl and Logierait staff teams, sharing of skills and expertise to support improvement work.
- Positive impact on learners through developments in 1+2 French languages learning.
- The quality of transition arrangements across all levels.
- The positive impact of maths improvement work in developing mental maths skills and strategies.

We discussed with staff 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:

- Develop a whole school approach to the learning and teaching of literacy ensuring there is a clear skills progression and consistency in practice. Use the Benchmarks to support this work from August 17;
- Review the school's curriculum rationale and design to ensure it reflects the unique setting of Blair Atholl, that it ensures progression and coverage, optimises the potential of local partnerships and the outdoor environment, and reflects recent national guidance from April 2017;
- Further develop pupil voice by:
 - building on the number of opportunities for children to lead their learning, taking responsibility across the school and impacting on school improvement from August 2017;
 - explicitly talking about skills and progress with children so that they can recognise and describe their own progress and next steps from August 2017
- Further develop self-evaluation and school improvement planning processes to ensure that all staff, children, parents and partners have the opportunity to take ownership of improvement activities from April 2017.

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. Officers from Education and Children's Services will follow normal procedures and return for a follow up visit within 12 months.

[HMI Report 2011](#)

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