



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

**Extended Learning and Achievement Visit  
Blairgowrie High School  
December 2010/January 2011**



## **BACKGROUND**

To support the school in the process of self-evaluation, a team comprising Education Services staff and Peer Assessors visited Blairgowrie High School during December 2010 and January 2011. 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?*

The focus departments were English, mathematics, science, home economics and physical education. Support for pupils across the school was also evaluated.

The School Improvement Plan 2010-2011, STACs and the school and departmental self-evaluation pro-formas formed the core documentation for scrutiny and discussion during the visit.

During the Extended Learning and Achievement Visit, the team carried out discussions with school staff, made classroom observations, reviewed documentation including children's work and met with groups of young people and parents.

The key strengths and recommended improvement actions resulting from this visit are recorded below. The report is organised into 2 main sections:

1. Departmental findings
2. Whole school key messages

## **1 DEPARTMENTAL FINDINGS**

### **English**

#### **Strengths**

- All teachers demonstrated a good knowledge of the pupils with whom they worked
- Pupils were co-operative in their learning and strong teacher-pupil relationships were observed.
- Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to Continuing Professional Development
- In all classes observed, teachers demonstrated a knowledge of cooperative learning techniques

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The attainment in English, particularly in S5 and S6, must be improved
- Pupils should have more experience of the different aspects of the examination completed under timed conditions in order to raise attainment
- The presentation policy for senior pupils should be reviewed to ensure that all pupils are following an appropriate level of course
- Teachers should ensure that learning activities are well matched to the needs of all learners
- All teachers should be actively involved in the process of department self-evaluation to ensure a more collegiate approach to improvement planning
- The principal teacher should continue to develop a culture of leadership at departmental level

### **Mathematics**

#### **Strengths**

- Overall attainment in mathematics is good
- Most teachers in the department provide effective direct teaching to which most pupils respond well
- Teacher - pupil relationships were generally positive and pupils were well-behaved and courteous

- Teachers in the department are committed and hard-working

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Attainment in mathematics in S5 and S6 must improve.
- More feedback should be given to pupils on an individual basis to help them improve
- The department self-evaluation pro-forma should be kept under review and regularly updated
- More work needs done to contextualise learning in mathematics so that pupils can demonstrate when learning is 'secure'
- More creative, interactive use could be made of Smartboards to support learning and motivate pupils
- Consultation and communication within the department must be improved in order to ensure that teamwork is more effective and all staff share in the improvement agenda
- Homework policy and practice needs to be reviewed and agreed by all and implemented consistently
- Strategies should be put in place at the earliest stage possible to support pupils who are underachieving

#### **Sciences**

##### **Strengths**

- In S4 in 2010, attainment in Chemistry at both Standard Grade and Intermediate 1 showed encouraging improvement compared with previous years
- The attainment of pupils in Intermediate 2 Physics in 2010 was above the national pattern
- Pupils are treated equally and fairly and encouraged to support each other
- In almost all classes the learning intention and success criteria were shared with pupils and explanations and instructions were clear
- In almost all lessons the learning was well paced with appropriately organised resources and some varied teaching approaches
- All three science departments have produced self-evaluation statements which accurately reflect the issues relating to the attainment of pupils

- Some useful transition work has been done with Primary colleagues to support the delivery of Level 2 experiences and outcomes in science

### **Areas for improvement**

- *Assessment is for Learning* techniques should be applied with greater consistency across the three departments
- At appropriate times in young people's learning, greater use should be made of co-operative learning strategies
- Attainment in biology at all levels must improve
- The physics department's pupil tracking system should be shared with biology and chemistry colleagues to allow early intervention strategies to be put in place for pupils identified as being at risk of underachieving.
- All class teachers should be actively involved in the process of departmental self-evaluation
- Opportunities should be provided to allow staff to demonstrate leadership with a specific area of responsibility

### **Home economics**

#### **Strengths**

- Overall attainment in home economics is very good
- The Principal Teacher has excellent leadership skills and there is an excellent team ethos
- The department offers a wide range of courses to ensure that all pupils are given every opportunity to succeed
- All pupils demonstrate a positive attitude to learning and very positive pupil - teacher relationships exist
- Learning activities undertaken are of high quality and meet the needs of most of the learners
- Outside partners and agencies are used to enhance the learning experiences for pupils
- Pupils are aware of the purpose of lessons and have a clear understanding of learning intentions
- There is evidence of robust planning across the department

### **Areas for improvement**

- The department should further develop Level 3 Experiences and Outcomes and identify appropriate interdisciplinary learning opportunities
- The home economics department should be represented on the Health and Wellbeing/Health Promoting School group
- The process of departmental self-evaluation should be considered throughout the session

### **Physical Education**

#### **Strengths**

- The department continues to attract a high number of pupil entries at Standard Grade
- Pupils' wider achievements are recognised through extra-curricular activities and involvement in various sporting events
- Opportunities to address the 4 Capacities of Curriculum for Excellence are offered to pupils on a regular basis through extra-curricular and curricular events in sport and dance
- All staff show a clear understanding of the importance of strong pupil-teacher relationships
- Pupils are using self and peer evaluation techniques

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Approaches to self evaluation need stronger professional commitment and teamwork, including effective monitoring and review of projects / tasks
- Action must be taken urgently to address the mismatch between pupil potential and actual attainment at all levels and teachers should have higher expectations of pupil achievement
- More effective departmental communication is required and careful consideration given to the structure and purpose of departmental meetings
- *Assessment is for Learning* techniques need to be introduced and implemented consistently, including verbal checks on pupil understanding of tasks and providing more individual feedback to pupils
- The department should seek to develop interdisciplinary learning opportunities

- Approaches taken to form class groupings should ensure the best learning experience for all pupils.

## **Support for Pupils**

### **Strengths**

- Staff in the Support for Pupils Faculty have a positive ethos
- Relationships between the Depute Headteacher (Support) and faculty Principal Teachers are very positive.
- Imaginative and effective use is made of the accommodation available, and there is an increasing range of provision to meet pupil needs
- The contribution of Support for Learning Assistants is of a high quality
- Community link workers are effectively deployed

### **Areas for improvement**

- The Additional Support Needs audit should be used as a dynamic tool to ensure that resources are appropriately allocated and reviewed in line with SMT priorities
- Faculty improvement planning should be more focused on extending the range of provision (eg Nurture) and improved integrated working
- Support for learning assistants should be involved in the whole team approach where appropriate, including review meetings
- Communication standards should be monitored to improve the professionalism of language used to report on pupils
- There is a need to measure the impact of support in relation to planning, target setting and achieving positive outcomes for children and young people
- Support for learning should be provided for pupils with additional support needs in physical education classes
- The deployment of support for learning staff needs to be more carefully planned across the school to ensure young people's learning needs are effectively met within the full range of learning experiences

## 2 WHOLE SCHOOL

### Strengths

- Attainment in 2010 showed good improvement in a number of areas
- The school's reputation in the local community is positive and improving
- Some very good lessons were observed, with clear learning intentions and motivated pupils
- There is a growing commitment among most staff to quality assurance and to distributed leadership
- Teacher-pupil relationships are generally positive and pupils are well-behaved

### Areas for improvement

- Provision for lower attaining pupils needs to be considered carefully as the school moves towards the full implementation of its plans for early presentation
- There is a need to review the mentoring system to ensure that its purpose and its potential benefits are clearly understood by staff and pupils
- The school should continue to develop ways of recording and celebrating pupils' wider achievement
- An audit of courses from S1 to S3 should be carried out to ensure that the entitlement to a broad general education is being met
- More opportunities for meaningful interdisciplinary learning should be created across the school
- In order to promote numeracy across the curriculum, a higher profile needs to be given to the *Numeracy Across Learning* guidelines
- More direction is required to help address staff, pupil and parental concerns regarding early presentation
- Cooperative learning and *Assessment is for Learning* must be used more consistently across the school.
- The excellent practice in planning and assessment and pupil self-evaluation in home economics should be shared with other departments.
- Perth and Kinross Departmental Self-evaluation expectations need to be embedded in the whole school Quality Assurance Calendar

- All teachers should be actively involved in the collegiate process of departmental self-evaluation and opportunities should be sought to include the views of learners and parents in this process
- An induction process should be implemented for teachers who are on long term supply, similar to that which exists for new teachers
- There is a need to enhance the status of Pupil Support across school by making it more central to the SMT priorities
- Greater departmental involvement in Health and Wellbeing policy formation and improvement actions
- The school should work with those parents who are already engaged in the life of the school to explore ways of ensuring wider parent involvement