



Perth and Kinross Council Education and Children's Services



Extended Learning and Achievement Visit Report Comrie Primary School 15 & 16 September 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?' (4th 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.

Comrie Primary School is led by a two job share headteachers with the support of a Principal Teacher. At the time of the visit the school had a pupil roll of 157 children, organised across seven classes and a nursery with a total of 30 children accessing the sessions. Pupil attendance is above the national average.

ACHIEVEMENT

Attainment data shows that, in the past two sessions, at P1 and P4 almost all children were making very good progress in terms of national expectations in literacy and numeracy, with most children at P7 also achieving those national targets.

Class teachers report that they engage in rigorous discussions with members of the senior management about the attainment levels and progress of children in their class. Termly tracking and attainment meetings focus on scrutiny of available data and evidence, particularly for those children whose performance does not match their evident potential. The purpose of the meeting is to identify what might be done differently in order to better support or motivate children, and thereby improve attainment and achievement; adjustments to the learning environment, teaching approaches, resources and support are considered. As a result, across the school all children are making good progress in their learning; the progress of children with identified additional support needs (ASN) is judged to be very good.

Development work last session to enhance pace of progress in reading has been reported by staff and children to have improved pupil engagement. The well-judged introduction from P1 to P7 of a shared literacy resource has improved the effectiveness of teaching to support reading and writing, and raised the standard of literature with which children interact in their lessons. A standardised reading assessment is being used to evaluate the impact of this work on attainment in reading.

Children in Comrie Primary enjoy a varied curriculum. All classes access weekly Science lessons and French is implemented as appropriate across all stages. Learning in IT is being well developed at a few stages and there are plans in place to extend this further. Across the school children are able to describe how they make good choices about their health and wellbeing. Projects such as Bikeability and Comrie Strings extend the curriculum on offer to some children in Comrie Primary. The school is now well placed to revisit their curriculum rationale to ensure it reflects Comrie Primary's local context and shared vision as to the outcomes they intend to achieve through the curriculum they provide.

LEARNING

The environment for learning within the main building at Comrie Primary has been significantly improved of late with introduction of neutral colours and comfortable seating. These carefully considered improvements contribute to the calm, consistent and inclusive ethos which is supporting better learning experiences.

The range of opportunities to learn outdoors - in the garden areas, the raised beds, the woodland and the Hub - is a very positive feature of the school. Appropriate clothing, footwear and resources are provided so that learning outdoors is not limited by weather. Use of the school gardens as a learning environment is supported by parents and partners in the local community; in the growing season, vegetables and fruit are sold on Fridays and raise money for school funds. Learning outdoors, and in partnership with the local community, also has the potential for further development.

The impact of staff engagement in Tapestry teacher learning communities is evident; the recent school improvement focus on developing consistency in learning and teaching has been very successful. In all classes, teachers make plain to children the intended learning, and the criteria for success, for all literacy and numeracy lessons. Almost all lessons observed were well planned and structured to support learning for all. In the best of lessons observed activities were challenging, careful questioning by the teacher was effective in extending learning and children were actively involved in tasks that developed understanding and improved skills. Across the school almost all children engaged well in their learning activities.

Involving children in their own learning continues to be a focus for the school. In the best of lessons observed, skilled questioning promoted curiosity, independence and confidence. Children in P7 responded well to high expectations and were able to expand on answers and justify their responses. The impact of recent work on giving effective feedback was evident during lessons and at plenary sessions, often related to success criteria. Every class, Nursery to P7, has a weekly focus on supporting children to reflect on, and talk with their teacher about, their own progress learning. Learning Journals, achievement records and Snapshot folders are currently used to evidence a child's progress in learning. When prompted, children consulted were able to talk about what they were learning, and how they were developing, as a result of the activities they engage in. There are opportunities now to streamline approaches and agree consistency of language and practice, to more effectively evidence a child's learning journey and support individual target setting.

All children have opportunities to influence decision making and take responsibility within the whole school system of Committees – vertical (P1-P7) learning groups focused on key areas in the ethos and life of the school – which also enables teachers and children across the school to know each other. The annual whole school topic is valued by staff and parents for the opportunity to share learning across classes, and at home within the family. Committees and the whole school topic also contribute positively to the sense of shared community where everyone is valued and knows everyone else. The intended review of the planned learning to be delivered in committees will further extend the benefit of this approach.

Support staff in Comrie Primary School understand their particular contribution to the school's very flexible and effective approach to meeting the needs of all learners. Strong partnership working between PSAs, teachers and specialist services is providing high quality support for targeted children. All staff are encouraged to share their learning experiences with each other, effectively building staff knowledge of, and capacity in, supporting children with ASN. Effective transition planning is in place for those children, from class to class and on into secondary. The school are making good use of the Child's Plan to identify and provide for children's needs and have plans in place to increase the focus on wellbeing for all children.

The school's recently reviewed vision, values and aims encompass key principles of effective learning at Comrie Primary School. Given the consistent approaches to learning and teaching, particularly of core subjects, the school are now well placed to review the design of the curriculum to ensure it reflect their unique context; for example, extend across the school the very good use made by nursery of the woodland as a learning environment.

LEADERSHIP

The job-share headteachers of Comrie Primary School work together very successfully in promoting their shared vision of "high quality learning for all". They use their time effectively and model distributive leadership, placing a high value on the expertise of the staff team. The principal teacher leads the support staff team very effectively, ensuring that children identified as having additional support needs are well supported.

Staff consulted identified the ethos and practice of teamwork at Comrie Primary School as a particular support and strength. Across the school all teachers belong to a pair/trio and engage in peer observation and evaluation, scrutiny of planning and moderation of children's work within and across levels. Teachers encourage and motivate each other, engage in informed professional discussions and share responsibility for delivering improvement in the school. This is impacting positively on the pace of improvement in the school.

Parents consulted find current communication routes to be generally effective and particularly value sufficient notice of events and timely reminders such as the use of a sticky label saying "We're going to the woods tomorrow". Parents appreciate information about their child's progress in learning provided by Snapshot Folders and Open Afternoons. A Sharing the Learning morning, where parents were able to take part in a short lesson, was considered to be very valuable and worth extending. Parents report that school staff are visible, very approachable and always willing to offer time to talk when that is requested. They evidenced a strong sense of commitment to their school.

Work to embed restorative approaches in Comrie Primary School has been effective and the approach is consistently modelled by school adults. Staff report that children are now willing to talk about things that have troubled them, knowing that their whole story will be heard, and are beginning to have these conversations themselves without adult support. For example, in nursery children will say, "I need to talk to you. I don't like it when..." and then engage in a restorative conversation. This is evident in P1 among those children who attended Comrie Primary School nursery class.

CONCLUSION

Overall, children who attend Comrie Primary School are making good progress in their learning across the curriculum, and very good progress in literacy and numeracy. Recent work to develop consistency of quality in learning and teaching is proving to be effective. Relationships across the school are very positive, founded on a climate of mutual respect and a strong sense of school community.

Key Strengths:

- The strong leadership of the headteachers, supported by the principal teacher, in establishing consistent approaches to learning and teaching, and continuity of progress in learning for children as they move through school;
- The effective and inclusive staff team who work flexibly and responsively with improvement in children's learning and wellbeing at the heart of all they do;
- Well behaved, articulate children who are proud of their school and engage enthusiastically in their learning activities;
- Effective strategies which are improving attendance, achievement and attainment, in particular for children with ASN;
- The quality of children's experiences in the outdoor environment;
- High quality early learning and childcare provision which gives children a very positive start on their learning journey.

Areas for development:

- Extend the use of data to monitor attainment trends, pace of progress for learners and the impact of initiatives (from October 2016);
- Further develop planned and progressive opportunities for all children to lead learning, developing skills for learning, life and work (by November 2016);
- Review the school's curriculum rationale to ensure it optimises the potential of local partnerships and the outdoor environment, and reflects recent national guidance (by February 2017);
- Continue with plans to review current processes for profiling, recording progress in learning and target setting, and agree a streamlined approach (to be implemented by August 2017).

[HMI Report 2012](#)

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