



Perth and Kinross Council Education and Children's Services



Extended Learning and Achievement Visit Report Muthill Primary School 9 & 10 November 2016

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this visit was to support the school in the process of self-evaluation and it was conducted by an officer from Education and Children's Services and a peer headteacher who is an HMI Associate Assessor. 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.

Muthill Primary School is led by a Headteacher with the support of a Principal Teacher post filled on a job share basis (each of 0.5FTE). At the time of the visit the school had a pupil roll of 63 children, organised across three classes. Pupil attendance is above the national average.

ACHIEVEMENT

Most children in Muthill Primary are making very good progress in their learning. In June 2016 all children in P1, P4 and P7 were making very good progress or better in reading, writing, listening and talking and maths. Over the past four years, most children have attained in line with national targets in these areas of their learning. Generally, data shows an improving trend in terms of the number of children who have been judged to be secure or better in their learning at P1, P4 and P7.

Regular tracking meetings between the headteacher and class teachers focus on current and predicted attainment, taking account of national targets. Appropriate strategies are then put in place for those children whose attainment is not in line with national targets. The school have recently introduced the Perth and Kinross Tracking and Monitoring Spreadsheet to further support professional judgements about children's potential for progress in their learning across the curriculum.

Last session a whole school focus on mental maths was effective in raising attainment and the involvement of parents in supporting children's learning at home was particularly valuable. The school is now in the process of agreeing a numeracy and mathematics learning pathway from P1 through to P7. It would also be helpful to agree a consistent approach to planning for writing across the curriculum to ensure appropriate challenge for all learners. Teachers have identified attainment gaps for a few children in Muthill Primary; this includes 'gaps' arising from the impact of additional support needs (ASN). In planning for learning, teachers should take account of

identified gaps and so minimise the impact of children's circumstances on their attainment.

Children in Muthill Primary enjoy high quality learning experiences across the curriculum. They particularly enjoy topic work and current developments to ensure appropriate opportunities for breadth and depth of learning in social subjects, science and technologies will strengthen these areas of the curriculum. Increased confidence and competence in French is becoming evident in Muthill. Last session saw a whole school topic on Francophone countries and the establishment of a link with a French partner school; this session's improvement plan aims to embed the 1+2 French framework across the classes. Information and Communication Technology is used well to record learning and experiences but there is now a need to develop and extend pupils' skills across a range of digital technologies.

Across the school, the wellbeing indicators are used by children each term to evaluate their own wellbeing, with opportunities given during learning conversations to consider changes in evaluation. Social, mental and emotional aspects of the health and wellbeing curriculum at Muthill are well supported by BounceBack and Restorative Approaches. These programmes combine very well with the well-established Rights Respecting Schools approach.

At whole school level, children in Muthill Primary are rightly proud of their significant achievements. A Fairtrade school, Muthill Primary has also gained Full International School Award reaccreditation for 2016-2019, in recognition of their long established partnership with a school in Ghana and the fact that global citizenship is firmly embedded in the curriculum. Five time ECO Schools Green Flag award winners, the school also hold the Rights Respecting Schools Level 2 Award. Every child in the school is a member of a school committee, (Outdoor Learning & ECO, Intergenerational, Health and wellbeing or Rights Respecting School). These groups are pupil led and focus to develop attitudes and skills for learning, life and work. Children in Muthill Primary are supported to be creative and have opportunities to engage in their own personal projects. For example, a group of P5 boys have set up an enterprise activity. Starting off with a loan of £20 from the school, they bought and sold stationery items. The company have now paid back their loan and accrued a profit of over £50. To support all children to enjoy similar opportunities and reach their potential, the school should now put in place a consistent approach to planning for children's skills' development.

Muthill Primary evidences a strong ethos, closely related to the school's vision and values. Children in the middle and upper classes talk confidently about their values and the school motto, articulating an understanding of how these shape their attitudes, behaviours and actions. For example, last session, children engaged in an event, where they undertook an obstacle course weighted down by potatoes, to support a school friend with significant mobility issues and experience for themselves something of the challenges he faces.

LEARNING

Classrooms in Muthill are stimulating and well-ordered learning environments, with wall displays which support and extend learning and areas which engage children in meaningful activity. The compact playground includes a range of activity areas and a greenhouse; in fair weather children also use the playing field across from the school.

Children particularly enjoy learning in the local community, for example visiting the forest, the intergenerational learning in the local care home, and the strong partnerships with Muthill in Bloom. There are opportunities to further develop links with the community (e.g. with local businesses, farmers and the estate) to extend the range and context of planned learning experiences for children.

In all classes teachers plan a range of motivating learning experiences, including rich tasks which offer appropriate challenge. In their topic on the Second World War, children in P5/6/7 have researched, and built to full scale, an Anderson shelter - measuring, sawing and building the wooden basis of the structure. Across the school all children have opportunities to learn in a range of groupings and independently.

Children in Muthill Primary are very well behaved. In lessons observed, almost all children engaged enthusiastically in the learning activities prepared for them. Learners talk confidently about what they are learning, referring to learning intentions and success criteria. In the best of practice, teachers' feedback in jotters can be seen to impact in further improvement. Children talk of the skills they are developing in terms of leadership, working with others and problem solving, and recognise the future relevance of these skills to the world of work. In all classes children are curious to learn and have opportunity to influence their own learning, particularly in relation to topic studies.

Across the school teacher-pupil interactions are of a high quality; mutual regard and respect are evident and teacher questioning is effective in extending thinking and learning. In some classes Big Books are used to good effect to capture children's activities and thinking. Learning Walks are becoming established as a valuable activity each term. In vertical house groups, children visit each room and take turns to explain what children in their class have been learning. All children have Learning Journey Journals to evidence their progress in learning; these are used as a basis for a learning conversation with their class teacher and are also sent home. The school have rightly identified a need to now review the current process so that the folders are more effective in evidencing learning over time.

In all classes learning activities are differentiated so that children are appropriately supported and challenged. In P1/2/3 a cat, a frog and a suitcase were effective in launching a writing lesson with activities which engaged and challenged all learners. Robust processes and procedures are in place for identifying children's additional support needs. Child's Plan meetings, informed by the Wellbeing Wheel and the My World Triangle, are ensuring partners work together to make a difference. Support staff know children very well and have a clear understanding of their role. They are deployed effectively and flexibly to support the learners and also to build capacity within the school team.

In continuing to improve learning at Muthill Primary there is a need now to formalise the rationale for the curriculum, so that curriculum developments fit well with the school's vision, values and aims, take account of national guidance and reflect the unique nature of Muthill Primary School.

LEADERSHIP

Career long professional learning is highly valued by teachers in Muthill. Teachers take the lead in a number of school improvement priorities and all engage in a professional reading group which has led to changes in practice. For example, children in P3/4/5

now use coaching questions to help others think through their learning and persevere when tasks are tricky. The leadership of the principal teachers, during a time of change, has been effective in maintaining the very positive ethos and, with the appointment of a new headteacher this session, the school is now well placed for improvement.

Children in Muthill learn that as responsible citizens and effective contributors their actions can influence change in the wider world, and the school promotes values based action. For example, two P3/4 girls are collaborating to fund a polytunnel to replace the bottle greenhouse; at the time of this visit, after four weeks of fundraising, (including donations, sponsorship and a grant), they had raised £800. The introduction of a pupil consultative group last session created an authentic method of engaging pupils in the school improvement planning process and the revised remit for the Pupil Council now incorporates this role. There is now opportunity to build further on these strengths to extend aspiration and agency for all children.

Parents consulted during the visit place a high value on the education provided at Muthill Primary, and particularly recognise the benefit to their children of the strong family ethos and the well-embedded focus on children's rights and global citizenship. They report that their children are confident to cope with challenges, view themselves as building a range of skills and can solve their own problems. Parents have many opportunities to be involved in the life of the school, through the strong Parent Council and Parent Staff Association, and as school helpers. Parents would appreciate the opportunity for closer engagement in relation to how best to support their own child's progress in learning and the proposed review of Learning Journey Journals is intended to address this.

CONCLUSION

Muthill Primary School is a supportive learning community which aims to "Inspire to excel". Children there benefit from high quality learning experiences and have many opportunities to achieve, at whole school and individual level.

Key Strengths

- The strong nurturing ethos which, combined with ambition and opportunities for success, supports children to develop their own values and aspirations.
- Well behaved, articulate children who care for each other and their world, and engage enthusiastically in their learning.
- High quality learning experiences built around relevant, meaningful and current contexts.
- A staff team marked by genuine collegiality and a shared commitment to providing high quality learning experiences for all children.

Main areas for improvement

- Revise the Learning Journey Journals to be more manageable and meaningful for children, parents and teachers. (by January 2017)
- Create a curriculum rationale which represents the unique features and aspirations of education in Muthill Primary. (by February 2017)
- Review approaches to the planning and pathways, to ensure appropriate skills development, pace and breadth of learning, for all children. (by March 2017)

- [HMI Report 2006](#)

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