



Extended Learning and Achievement Visit Report Perth High School 10-12 December 2014



BACKGROUND

To support the school in the process of self-evaluation, a team of officers from across Education and Children's Services visited Perth High School between 10 and 12 November 2014. 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?*" 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.

Certain aspects of the school were subject to closer scrutiny - namely: Personal Support, Social Subjects, Biology and Maths.

During the Extended Learning and Achievement Visit, the team had discussions with the Headteacher, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Principal Teachers (PTs), and teachers; made approximately 40 classroom observations which included Personal Support classes; reviewed documentation including learners' work, and met with groups of learners and parents.

ACHIEVEMENT

Strengths

Perth High School has raised attainment and maintained consistently high standards of attainment for learners over the last 4 years. Attainment trends compare well with similar schools and in many cases are above national levels of attainment.

Overall, learners are successful, confident, exercise responsibility and contribute in many ways to the life of the school and the wider community. They have been successful in a range of activities for personal and wider achievement including areas such as sport, vocational and work related activities, outdoor education and residential experiences.

School improvement priorities have had a measurable impact on improving the achievements, attainment and well-being of learners, and the work of the school. For example meeting Curriculum for Excellence entitlements through the four contexts for learning has been progressed through innovations like

the Perth High Experience, which guarantees formative experiences for young people from when they start Perth High School, and in the range and number of leadership opportunities across the school.

There have been improvements in post school transition planning which is evidenced by an increase in number of young people recorded as having a positive destination. The school continues to develop approaches in the senior phase to broaden vocational and academic opportunities. The school also provides many opportunities for personal achievement throughout S1-3 and is beginning to track and target those pupils with a deficit of such experiences through the First Steps programme.

Personal Learning Plans focus on skills and some departments use these very effectively in engaging pupils in that process. There was clear evidence of very supportive, trusting and positive relationships between pupils and staff.

Within Personal Support there were opportunities for pupils to reflect on their personal learning strengths and next steps and to help them review and plan for wider achievement activities. Pupils also have support from Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing buddies, pupils within the class who will share their knowledge and offer help.

In some cases approaches to inter-disciplinary learning have been creative and there are some well-planned examples of this context for learning. For example in second year, Business Education and Home Economics departments collaborate on an enterprise activity where pupils research marketing, demographics and advertising to design a cereal bar in Business and then make their prototype in HE where they consider health implications and scalability of their product.

The school has very good monitoring and tracking mechanisms in all curriculum areas and is developing these well in Literacy and Numeracy.

Areas for improvement

There is currently an inconsistent approach regarding the Perth High Experience. Pupils in the senior years, especially, feel a disconnection. Tracking mechanisms through Personal Support should be used to help identify those pupils at risk of being disengaged.

There is an inconsistent approach in Personal Support in terms of enabling pupils to track their own progress and discuss next steps in learning. In a significant number of classes, learner conversations were not supported effectively for all learners.

Implementation of Personal Learning Plans(PLP) is varied with some departments using them well and other departments using them as a simple task list for pupils to complete. Some pupils advised they had them but never

used them. Many pupils could not articulate the link between the PLP and improved personal outcomes.

Whilst there are some well-planned examples of interdisciplinary learning (IDL), there is a varied understanding amongst staff of how to develop this using E's and O's.

The school must develop approaches to tracking pupil progress in Health and Wellbeing.

The school should evaluate the impact of Literacy, Numeracy and Health & Wellbeing buddies in Personal Support. Some buddies said they felt they were not used or valued by the other pupils.

Some pupils found it difficult to articulate the link between the skills in the Broad General Education and Senior Phase courses. All departments should make such links more explicit.

LEARNING

Strengths

The school has a sound rationale for delivering the entitlements of Curriculum for Excellence, including a model for Personal Support which has been developing positively over the last session. This is been reviewed on a regular basis, involving staff, learners and parents.

The curriculum continues to evolve as the result of feedback from consultation and as a result of good self-evaluation processes, including the analysis of SQA results and recognition of national priorities. There are well developed partnerships to enhance the curriculum for learners through Perth City Campus, Chinese Community links and the Youth Philanthropy Initiative for example. These support learning in different contexts.

The Perth High Experience provides a model for learning out with curricular areas, using formative experiences and opportunities for wider achievement to promote skills development.

The school is making good progress with whole school approaches to Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing. These are particularly creative in Health and Wellbeing where for example pupil surveys have identified those students whose readiness to learn was being impacted by their confidence or other issues that previously were perhaps been hidden. Teachers have a clear understanding about their role in developing learners' literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing skills. For example, classrooms had a Health and Wellbeing focus board that staff allude to through the course of their work with pupils.

Pupils feel staff are approachable and care about them. They recognise that the school staff work hard to provide them with opportunities to participate in

the life of the school. Pupils with additional support needs reported they felt well supported and safe.

The majority of staff have a good understanding around Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) and their role in meeting learner's needs. The school has good tracking mechanisms for vulnerable groups and is targeting leadership opportunities proactively for those who may otherwise not feel confident enough to engage. Pupils with additional support needs feel well supported, have a real sense of belonging and have very positive relationships with support staff.

Pupil voice was a strength in the school. Learners know that their views are sought to influence school improvement. Staff consider leadership and wider opportunities for pupils as two main strengths of the school.

Well-established transition arrangements from P7 to S1 continue to build on the very good pastoral support and the school is making good progress in developing curricular transitions. The science transition project is an example of very good practice.

Staff feel that the impact of co-operative learning has improved learner's experiences and pupils said they enjoyed the opportunity to work in collaborative groups.

Almost all pupils value the vertical grouping arrangements in Personal Support. Younger pupils valued having older pupils in class and often benefited from such arrangements. Many felt it helped promote good and friendly relationships amongst pupils. Pupils expressed appreciation for those staff who plan valuable activities during this time.

Pupils felt there was an open door policy with almost all staff in the school and that they wanted to meet their needs in an inclusive way. Trusting relationships were key and most pupils said they felt listened to and included.

Areas for improvement

The inconsistent quality of experience that pupils have in Personal Support needs to be addressed. Many pupils discussed the lack of equity of experience and felt that they should have access to the same high quality experience that others had. Pupils reflected that some staff are not confident in this role.

There is an inconsistent use of the Perth & Kinross Skills Framework and the indicators for Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing. Coordinators should continue to engage with departments to develop understanding of the standards.

The school should evaluate how well the Perth High Experience enables participants to develop key life skills and their understanding of the learning that is gained from such experiences.

The school needs to gather evidence of the impact of its creative approaches to Health & Wellbeing. Parents should be further advised about key aspects of the Health and Wellbeing survey and how this information will be used to support learners.

Some pupils with additional support needs sometimes struggled with articulating the progress in their learning and the school should evaluate the processes that are in place to develop their skills in self-reflection. They felt they were not consulted often enough about their learning styles

The school should continue to develop the range of courses and approaches to Learning and Teaching in meeting learners needs

Where there is a lack of confidence in the teaching staff around meeting learners' needs, the school should work closely with, and in support of, those staff.

Whilst pupils recognise they have a voice in the school they would like to receive better feedback information about the impact of their voice.

A small group of pupils in S3 was dissatisfied with different aspects of their experience and therefore their voice and feedback should be captured and actioned by the school as a matter of priority.

LEADERSHIP

Strengths

The leadership of the Headteacher, working closely with the Senior Leadership Team is a significant factor in the positive progress the school is making in all key areas of improvement.

There are effective systems in place to gather the views of staff, parents and learners about the work of the school.

The school has a very clear focus on and commitment to continuing improvements to learning and teaching and achievement for all learners. All staff have the opportunity to be a member of a whole school working group that contributes to the school improvement plan.

Parents are supportive of the school and believe that the Senior Leadership Team have an open door policy and are approachable. They felt that parental views were taken into account and that communications between home and school are good. This included approaches such as Twitter, a Perth High School App, Groupcall and the school website.

Staff are becoming more involved in seeking and using feedback from pupils to help with improving learning and teaching.

Systems for Employee Review and Development, self-evaluation and reflection within the school are evident. Staff are encouraged to evaluate their own work with learners and use this as the basis of planning for improvement.

Staff lead developments and improvements across the school and there is an in-house programme of professional learning to support aspiring PTs in developing their leadership skills.

Leadership opportunities for pupils are abundant and are having a positive impact on pupil confidence, for example in Mentors for Violence Prevention. Pupils are encouraged to take their ideas forward, particularly in the senior phase. Examples include development of subject specific support groups for younger students and developing whole school policies into pupil friendly form.

The curriculum continues to evolve as the result of feedback from learners, parents and staff. As part of the self-evaluation processes, teachers are adapting and developing programmes and courses to meet the needs of learners, for example Personal and Social Education (PSE) courses have been revised as a consequence of pupil feedback.

A culture of professional learning is being nurtured through the involvement of staff in Tapestry, Learning Rounds and in the use of Quality Improvement folders. There are many opportunities for formal and informal professional dialogue in school. Good links exist with the other schools within the Local Management Group (LMG) and professional development opportunities have been developed as a consequence. The school has invested a great deal of time in creating and maintaining the Perth High CPD Zone. This shared resource to support professional learning and development across the school community is commendable

Support for probationers was well-judged, very helpful and with appropriate expectations and challenge.

Areas for improvement

While systems exist for self-evaluation and reflection for staff there needs to be a greater buy-in to develop the culture across the whole school. Importantly there is an inconsistent use of Quality Improvement folders. Staff are using this quality assurance model for self-evaluation in a range of ways which leads to variance in practice. The school need to share the good practice that exists in this area and continue to improve the use of these folders by staff.

Not all staff were comfortable in using the terminology of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), for example, the four contexts for learning. The school should encourage staff to promote understanding and therefore develop the use of the language of CfE in professional dialogue and with pupils and parents.

Views on the effectiveness of whole school working groups varied and the school should evaluate more closely the impact of working groups and the rationale that sits behind them. A small number of staff showed a lack of understanding of how school improvement is developed through working groups.

Greater sharing of effective practice and the use of research to challenge and/or validate personal reflections in Quality Improvement folders should now be considered. The impact of these personal reflections on improved experiences for learners should be identified.

The school should consider how it makes the links more explicit between individual reflections in the Quality Improvement folders and how these feed into whole school self-evaluation and improvement planning.

The school should consider how they can actively involve more partners in the school's self-evaluation processes, for example using business/third sector involvement in auditing aspects of their work.

Overall Conclusion

During the visit we found pupils to be articulate, welcoming and well-behaved. There was a sense that pupils enjoyed being at Perth High School and that they trusted their teachers to do their best for them.

The school set high expectations of the pupils and provides them with a broad range of opportunities through the curriculum to develop the four capacities.

The school's self-evaluation processes are good and informs the improvement plan appropriately

We are confident that in taking forward the advice in this report and building on the very good practice that exists, the school will continue on its journey of improvement.

[HMI Report](#)

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