



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



**Extended Learning and Achievement Visit  
Pitlochry Nursery, Primary and High School  
7 and 8 May 2014**

## **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this visit was to support the school in the process of self-evaluation, and it was conducted by a team of quality improvement officers, a peer headteacher and a secondary peer assessor from Education and Children's Service. The themes subjected to scrutiny were based on core quality indicators from How Good is our School 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.

Pitlochry High School has a pupil roll of 417 and is organised in a nursery class, 9 primary classes and eleven secondary departments. The school offers secondary education up to and including S4. The headteacher has been in post since August 2013 and is supported by a primary depute headteacher, two secondary depute headteachers and a business manager.

During the visit, the team gathered information from: observing learning and teaching during class visits; scrutiny of data; documentation; examples of pupils' work; discussion with staff, senior management team, groups of pupils, parents and carers.

### **Achievement**

Throughout the school, there was a high level of care and interest in children's safety, happiness and well-being by all staff. Parents consulted commended staff for the efforts they have made across the school to encourage them to feel welcome, listen to their ideas and address their concerns. Across all stages children had positive relationships with staff. They learned in a safe and caring environment. Almost all children and young people were well behaved and showed interest in their learning.

Children were confident that staff knew them well as individuals and that any concerns they had would be listened to and taken seriously. Children in the nursery presented as happy and settled. Observed interactions in the nursery saw staff proactively encouraging and supporting children to talk about and pursue their interests.

Large numbers of children across all stages of the school increased their fitness, interpersonal skills and creativity through involvement in sport, music and drama.

Children in primary classes talked positively about their opportunities to learn with children in other classes, for example in lunchtime groups, assemblies and as reading or computing buddies.

In secondary, many young people benefited from challenging team building experiences such as Duke of Edinburgh, Saltire, Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) John Muir Award schemes, and programmes which prepared young people for leadership and coaching awards. However, staff agreed in their conversations with the visiting team that they should formalise plans to scrutinise the uptake of the range of achievement opportunities in order to ensure that all children and young people benefit from what is on offer.

It was recommended that starting from August 2014 the school should:

- track the numbers of pupils at each stage accessing wider achievement activities and experiences
- identify barriers/ reasons for those children and young people who are not
- look at the balance of opportunities across the school
- evaluate how well staff are planning wider achievement experiences

In primary classes most children are making good progress in their learning within national expectations. A few children are exceeding these expectations and there is an upward trend in attainment in maths which is sustained into S3. Current attainment predictions verify the need to focus on reading and writing skills, particularly within the second level.

The school is taking a more focussed approach to the scrutiny of attainment data for individuals and cohorts as they progress across and up through the school. There is, though, a need to ensure that all staff plan learning which consistently enables children to build on their previous learning, attainment and achievements.

Overall, the school performs consistently well in most examinations at S4. The number of pupils achieving 5 or more awards at level 5, however, remains significantly below comparator schools, despite an improvement in this area in 2013. The school has identified this as an area for action in its current improvement plan. Parents reported that staff supported children well to achieve qualifications and provided appropriate guidance when progress towards this has been problematic or causing anxiety. However, there remains scope across the school for all staff to ensure that their planning of learning activities includes an appropriately high level of challenge.

## **Learning**

Relationships and ethos within almost all classrooms were positive. Children were keen to learn and almost all participated in activities well. However, children at all

stages across the school generally had the skills and abilities to engage with and respond to a higher level of challenge across the school.

Children were able to talk confidently about the responsibilities they had been given and the benefit of these opportunities to themselves, their school and the local community. They now need the same level of responsibility for influencing plans for their learning.

Where the team saw learning that was successful and of high quality the key elements were:

- carefully thought-out plans about what children were going to learn, taking account of curriculum 'experiences and outcomes'
- expectations and intentions for learning were made clear and revisited throughout the lesson
- learning experiences were well structured and children were clear about what would make them successful and help them to progress
- the pace of learning was brisk, with regular checks for levels of understanding and with children actively thinking about their learning
- the organisation of the learning environment allowed children to work well independently, and together
- questioning was differentiated to suit capabilities/abilities and build on prior learning and extend thinking
- Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was used appropriately to enhance teaching and learning

However the good practice identified as noted above was not yet consistent across the school. To help achieve greater consistency of experience for all children and young people the following key areas were identified as priorities for improving the quality of the learning experiences across all stages:

- embed consistent and appropriate use of formative assessment strategies e.g. questioning
- ensure there are shared, higher, expectations about what constitutes a quality, relevant learning experience
- ensure there is appropriate differentiation in planned learning for all
- ensure the planned curriculum offers appropriate opportunities for personalisation and choice in both what is learned and how it might be learned.

The monitoring of learning and teaching by the Senior Management Team should focus on the areas above identified for improvement with immediate effect.

The school accessed a range of services to support children and families. Services consulted reported effective working relationships and a high level of willingness from all staff to engage and use their expertise. There was a proactive approach to securing the right kinds of support or interventions from partners at an early stage to

address arising issues. Partners also contributed significantly to a number of supportive initiatives such as the S3 sexual health programme.

The effectiveness and positive impact of the pastoral support for children and families was evident. The Integrated Team Meeting (ITM) worked effectively with good representation from partner agencies, and benefited from a dedicated senior manager with a whole school overview. It would be advisable for the school to adopt a similar approach towards achieving an overview of curriculum progression across the whole school. Support staff would benefit from more structured and planned consultations with teachers about plans for support and interventions. It is advised that as from August 2014 a rolling programme of planning discussions is introduced.

### **Leadership**

This session the school has developed a more comprehensive approach towards formalising approaches to self-evaluation through leadership folders. This approach was developed in consultation with staff and has introduced a more structured and supportive framework for gathering evidence of the progress of learners on a monthly basis. Regular discussions that involve all staff are beginning to lead to changes in practice and processes. This needs to continue.

The school should now further develop the approach of using key themes to evaluate whole school performance for evaluation of children's progress and attainment alongside peer and Senior Management Team class evaluations. This should ensure a more robust triangulation of what is being planned and what is being achieved.

Parents consulted commended the school for the range of clubs and activities available to children during and after school. They appreciated the support that enabled their children to work on study and homework tasks, citing the lunchtime clubs for Maths and French as examples.

Parents commended the school team, in particular the SMT, for the successful pastoral transition and communication in a time of significant changes within the staff team. They praised the headteacher for how she was respecting and evolving school traditions, being mindful of the school culture and the expertise of staff. They felt well informed and that their views were sought and affected change.

The SMT exemplified good shared leadership and responsibility. They facilitated the sharing of good practice through their own observations and peer visits. This needs to continue to ensure the necessary improvements are planned for, implemented and have a positive impact on the consistency of approaches to learning and teaching.

Staff engaged with the team willingly and professionally over the course of the visit. They were positive and constructive in their conversations and able to think with us about how to tackle the continuous improvement agenda. The staff team is strong and well placed to reduce bureaucratic processes and instead place a greater emphasis on professional dialogue about learning and school improvement across the whole school.

The team noted in the current plan that next round of classroom observations by SMT and colleagues will be cross-sector, and it was felt that this was an appropriate next step.

In addressing the points made above, the school should now focus on the following to secure ongoing improvement:

- Improving literacy and numeracy across the school must remain a development priority and the responsibility of all. It should lead to greater connections to skills for learning, life and work at all stages being made.
- Pupils' progress in learning should be more robustly tracked and evaluated from August 2014 using Perth and Kinross Indicators and other sources so as to:
  - support professional dialogue and judgements made as a consequence
  - inform dialogue with pupils and parents
- The school had already identified areas for particular focus, for example:
  - improving their performance in young people achieving 5 or more awards at Level 5
  - being clear about progress and attainment at all points of transition, particularly at P7 –S1 as from August 2014
- The school should continue to develop approaches and processes that enable staff to plan together to ensure there are shared high expectations, standards and agreed milestones in learning and skills development.
- There needs to be greater liaison within and between departments, and across the whole school with regard to the use of core resources and approaches to formative and summative assessments.

## **Conclusion**

The very positive, welcoming and caring ethos in Pitlochry supports its children and young people very well. Pupils, parents and staff have a great pride in their school and believe it has been successful in promoting a strong sense of community both in and beyond the school. Pitlochry is a school where staff work well together and are interested in and care about the achievement and well-being of their children and young people. The group of parents consulted during the visit were extremely supportive of the school and happy with their children's educational experience.

The school should now use the information from this report to modify the current school improvement plan, ensuring that revised priorities are achieved within the given timescale. The headteacher, staff and parents should continue to work together to further develop the good work already established to drive forward continuous improvements.

A follow up visit will be arranged to evaluate the impact of the school's progress in taking forward recommendations and identified areas for development in term 4 of session 2014-2015.

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