



Extended Learning and Achievement Visit Report Robert Douglas Memorial Primary School 2 and 3 June 2016



BACKGROUND

To support the school in the process of self-evaluation, a team of officers from across Education and Children's Services (ECS) visited Robert Douglas Memorial (RDM) Primary School and nursery class on 2 and 3 June 2016. 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? (3rd Edition)* 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.

At the time of visit RDM school had a pupil roll of 416 organised in 16 classes. The Nursery class had capacity for 40 morning and 40 afternoon places, being accessed by 88 children. The Autism Base supports 19 children who work in four class groups. The school also has provision for nurture support in the Treasure Trove. The school is led by the headteacher (HT) who is supported by two depute headteachers (DHTs) and a principal teacher (PT) for the ASD specialist provision.

The school has an attendance level of 96.09% which is above the Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) and national average.

Information was gathered from class visits, scrutiny of data and evidence of children's learning, discussions with children, parents/carers and staff, and displays of children's work around the school.

ACHIEVEMENT

Children at RDM are learning in a purposeful and organised environment within which they feel safe and cared for. They impress as happy, very well behaved and positive towards their learning. Children are confident that their opinions and contributions are listened to and acted upon. They are able to describe the benefits of being in an inclusive school and almost all have a commendable understanding of the needs of others.

The school has improved standards of attainment in recent years. Most children are currently making good progress, in line with national expectations, in mathematics, listening and talking, reading and writing. A few children exceed national expectations across the stages. Children in the ASD specialist provision are making good progress within their levels of ability. Overall, this is a continuously improving trend which the school predicts will be sustained for almost all stages by June 2016.

The school has developed effective approaches to tracking and monitoring children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Assessment information is collated and interrogated to give a clear picture of attainment at year group, class and individual levels. The school is now planning to scrutinise this information by gender to further refine strategies for both support and increasing levels of challenge. The senior management team (SMT) regularly meet with staff to discuss children's progress, identify areas for further improvement and target support.

Recent evaluations have identified the very positive impact of the school's Maths Framework on improving children's learning experiences and attainment across the school. The framework provides a clear structure and rationale for learning and

teaching in Maths and Numeracy. Expectations of delivery, progression and assessment are explicit.

Across the school, attainment in reading continues to improve. Most children can listen attentively and most build very well on each other's contributions. Almost all children talk very confidently and articulately, with each other and with adults. Almost all collaborate very well with each other when learning in pairs and small groups.

Writing has been identified as an area for improvement. Staff are working together to finalise the school's Framework for Literacy which will ensure structure and progression for Reading, Writing, Listening and Talking. This development work includes the use of the Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) Indicators. The school team has prioritised raising expectations and standards of the quality and presentation of writing at all stages and across all curriculum areas. There should now be an increased focus on the moderation of standards and expectation at school level and with colleagues from other schools.

Children are developing an understanding about their own health and wellbeing. There is scope to build on the very good practice in the nursery which is particularly helpful in ensuring that children and their families understand, and use, the language associated with the GIRFEC Wellbeing Indicators. The SMT promote and reinforce the key principles of the Bounceback programme through assemblies and whole school events which complements the school's development of Restorative Approaches. This has had a positive impact on children's capacity to deal with challenges and is building their resilience. Teachers and children should now have more responsibility for leading the development of both these approaches.

Children talk proudly about the work that they are involved in to improve their school and contribute to their community. Successful initiatives which are very well supported by local businesses include the recent Community Counts programme to improve mental agility skills in numeracy and the current Scone Palace Gardening Project.

Children are also extremely positive about the range of opportunities they have to develop their interests and talents through sports, competitions and performances. The school is monitoring levels of children's participation in activities provided by staff, Active Schools and parents in and out with school and is on track to achieve the Sports Scotland Silver Award.

LEARNING

RDM's grounds are expansive and well used. Children have access to a variety of play areas which support creative play and outdoor learning very well. Classrooms are generally well organised. Children's work is displayed throughout the school. The most effective displays make clear how children's ideas and creativity have been used, for example, the nursery's use of light bulbs to note children's suggestions and contributions and the use of children's writing and art work to reinforce key learning points in the Treasure Trove nurture class. There is a need to increase all children's involvement in creating and annotating displays to ensure high quality evidence of their learning.

Staff in all of the school's settings, know children very well. Target setting and profiling is developing across the school starting in nursery. Children find this process most helpful when they are able to evaluate their progress in learning regularly with each other and with staff. The school should continue to support children to identify the skills they have developed and those they require to improve when setting their targets and adding to their profiles. There is a need to ensure that children are able to make connections between their individual targets and the evidence of progress they select for their profiles. The PKC Skills Framework will be an important resource

for this work as will ensuring that staff provide high quality written feedback for children in all curricular areas.

In almost all of the class visits, learning activities are well planned and carefully structured. In almost all classes, learning intentions are clear and in some classes children are involved in setting their success criteria. In most classes, the level of support and challenge is appropriate and activities are differentiated to meet the range of children's learning needs and abilities. Children have the capacity to take much more responsibility for their own learning; staff should be confident in increasing their facilitation of learning and decreasing their direct control of it.

Teachers and support staff work well together to provide well-judged assistance for children. Relationships between staff and children are positive, helpful and respectful. There are effective systems in place to ensure joined up and consistent approaches between those staff supporting children with additional needs. Strategies developed in the Autism Base for supporting children's independence in learning, and the active and creative approaches to learning in the nursery, should be shared across the staff team.

Staff are currently working together to review the rationale for RDM's curriculum to reflect their shared vision of high aspiration and ambition for all children to have a sense of community and be equipped with the skills they need to be successful throughout school and beyond. As part of this work, the school should ensure that contexts for learning reflect the uniqueness of the school and its community. The school has identified the need to involve children and parents more in developing the curriculum rationale and to expand their community links and business partnerships to enhance children's experiences across the curriculum.

Those parents we consulted with feel that the school communicates well with them and like the use of the website and twitter in addition to routine correspondence. They are provided with regular information on school events and on what their children will be learning in class through the "Road Maps". Parents appreciate the open-door approach of the school and are confident that they can talk to staff at any time about their child's learning. They commended the recent session led by mainstream and ASD base staff on Health and Wellbeing which increased their understanding of the school's approaches to developing the curriculum in this area and would welcome the same format for other curricular areas.

LEADERSHIP

The headteacher has successfully led the development of a range of self-evaluation processes which is clearly leading to improvement. The SMT know the school very well and have a clear sense of direction for RDM.

There is a strong ethos of teamwork within the school. Staff and parents appreciate the visible and supportive leadership of the SMT. Teachers are reflective about their own classroom practice and are involved in number of important and helpful monitoring activities throughout the year to check on standards. These include individual and group discussions with children about their learning and a programme of formal and planned observations of learning and teaching in partnership with the SMT. The HT collates the key areas of strength and areas for improvement from class visits which are discussed with all staff. This successful approach enables the team to identify where effective practice can be shared and to prioritise areas for development.

The staff team are well placed to use their individual and collective skills and expertise to increase their leadership roles in driving forward school improvement.

Teachers have developed a range of Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches to engage children, increase their contributions to activities and monitor their levels of understanding during lessons. It would now be helpful in moving forward with AfL, that the focus be looking at the consistency and quality of teacher's feedback to children. This would ensure that feedback both written and verbal is more specific and has the purpose of progressing learning across all curriculum areas.

The impact of the staff's commitment to improvement through self-evaluation is evident through the improvements in maths and numeracy and the developing approaches to curricular planning and assessment. Systems to predict, track and monitor children's progress in literacy and numeracy are effective. Staff now need to extend this approach to other curricular areas starting with Health and Wellbeing.

Children across the school appreciate the opportunities they have to develop their leadership skills and attributes. They talk enthusiastically about their organisation of events for parents and the community such as class assemblies, the Scone Seniors Easter Concert, the Fair Trade and French cafés. The school is already planning to increase children's involvement in planning and evaluating school improvement priorities, for example in the further development of the House System.

Strengths

- The very well behaved, articulate children who learn well together.
- The teamwork and commitment of all staff in providing a positive and inclusive ethos across school.
- The school's use of assessment information to track, monitor and evaluate children's progress in learning in maths and numeracy and the positive impact on children's attainment.
- The creative approaches used in the nursery to involve children in planning and evaluating their learning.
- The headteacher's leadership and the effective support of the SMT in taking forward improvement.

We discussed with staff how they might continue to improve the school in light of their own self evaluation and feedback from the Extended Learning and Achievement Visit team. The following areas for improvement were agreed:

- By October 2016, the RDM profiling guidance should be used to moderate the consistency of approach across the school, the levels of children's involvement in gathering evidence, and the quality of evidence gathered.
- From August 2016, continue to moderate expected high standards in learning, particularly in Writing as a staff team and with other schools.
- From August 2016, increase the involvement of children, parents and partners in planning and evaluating curriculum developments.
- By May 2017 extend the new approaches for tracking progress to all aspects of the broad general education with an initial focus on health and wellbeing.
- From August 2016, develop school improvement leadership roles of staff members.

Conclusion

RDM is a well led school where children are making good progress in their learning. The clear sense of direction of the HT, support of the SMT and the commitment of the staff team places the school in a strong position to achieve its aims to develop well-rounded and ambitious young people, who have a positive mind set and to feel a sense of value and community.

As part of the normal ELAV follow up procedures, ECS officers will return within a year to evaluate the school's progress towards taking forward the recommendations for improvement.

[HMI Report 2006](#)

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