

Quality Improvement – School Self-improvement Review

Report: Stranraer Academy

Dates of Education Authority and Peer Engagement: 1st and 2nd March 2016

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As part of the Education Department's focus on quality assurance and drive to raise attainment and improve life chances of young people the above team carried out the school self-improvement review. This centred on two priorities, the impact of the 'acting' PT appointments in leading aspects of the SIP including wider achievement, raising attainment for all, learning and teaching - selected by the school and Literacy (Responsibility of All) – selected by the authority. Both of these priorities allowed the authority to validate the school's self evaluation. This report details the key findings.

The review team were in the school for two days and observed forty five lessons ranging in subjects from English, Mathematics, IDL, Social Subjects, Art, Physical Education, Home Economics, French, Health and Wellbeing, Technical, Religious Education, Science, Biology, Physics, Chemistry and Information & Communications Technology. Members of the team also met with groups of learners, staff, parents, partner agencies and the Senior Management Team.

The Head Teacher provided the review team with a position paper which outlined actions taken, impact on learners, evidence and next steps in relation to the two identified priorities. This formed the basis for the self-improvement review.

The school's vision, values and aims were revisited during the session 2012/13. They were articulated by a mixed group of staff, with representation from the Parent Council and consultation and active involvement of young people. The young people clearly relate to them showing a pride and a strong sense of ownership of their school community. This has been further strengthened by the introduction and wearing of a formal school uniform including shirt, tie and blazer this session. The vision, values and aims are highly visible and are displayed in almost every learning space within the school.

The school has a strong commitment to partnership working and building positive relationships within and beyond the school community. This makes for a learning environment which places the child firmly at the centre when planning for learning and improvement.

Partners, parents, staff and pupils are all generally positive about the school. Young people in the focus groups commented on how happy they were in school, emphasising in particular the positive relations they had with the staff. They highlighted how very supportive they found the learning environment and pupil support to be and commented positively about the range of experiences they have access to. The senior pupils would however like to see more opportunities to be involved in leading their learning and a more interactive classroom environment.

Young people are encouraged to take part in both local and national sporting, cultural and enterprise activities and have opportunities to participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities and educational excursions both at home and abroad. The school enjoys very positive relationships with a number of partner agencies, and this along with responsibilities placed on the young people at all stages eg senior ambassadors, pupil council representation, LGBT is helping to develop their leadership skills, wider achievement and ensure they have a voice in the school.

Staff are positive about the school and are giving of their skills and talents to support the young people and progress their learning. They are hardworking, motivated, enthusiastic, enjoy working with the young people and are keen to celebrate success. Staff are actively involved in making a positive difference for the young people. They are keen to foster the aspirations of the young people in order to raise attainment, achievement and participation and have worked hard to create a welcoming, caring environment in which the young people feel safe and learn effectively. The lesson observations provided a good source of evidence highlighting in particular a generally positive ethos and atmosphere where young people can learn.

A focus group of parents and partners, were positive about the provision for the young people. They feel that they are well informed about their progress, the young people were well supported and that the school was reactive to any issues raised by them. Some members of the parents group were part of a focus group which had looked at reporting to parents. They had enjoyed having this consultation role and would like to see more opportunities like this in the future. The parents were positive about the work the staff did with the young people to foster attainment, achievement

and participation although they would like to see a more consistent approach across the school particularly in relation to homework. They felt the young people were provided with a wide range of experiences in subjects, across subjects, in school and outwith the school.

Literacy across Learning

A whole school policy, practice and strategy for literacy across the curriculum has been created by a cross curricular working group of staff lead by an 'acting' PT Literacy. This group has also liaised with additional support for learning, a pupil focus group and a parent focus group. All staff have participated in training focused on Literacy as a responsibility for all. In some classes, the benefits of this was evident as courses have been reviewed to reflect and embed Literacy outcomes in coursework. However in others, there is a need to further develop the planning of lessons to incorporate literacy strategies more effectively to enhance the development of literacy within individual classes.

Young people are benefitting from literacy interventions such as setting in English based on INCAS, CAT and sample writing from primary school, a personal reading lesson included in the English curriculum and the Scotland Reads which a large number are taking part in. Within the BGE English courses have been designed to support the development of critical literacy skills required for NQs. This good practice along with information on standards of presentation has been shared across the school through joint INSET led by the English staff and the TLCs. A common literacy correction code is used throughout the school. The impact of these interventions is seeing improved results in English / Literacy, Literacy / Numeracy levels for leavers, improving reading levels and a better standard of presentation of pupil work in jotters.

Some staff are using INCAS and SOSCA data to inform the planning of learning and teaching to meet learners individual needs and shape differentiation within the classroom however there is a need to broaden the use of this across the school to identify learners' strengths and areas for development in relation to Literacy

A number of wider opportunities and activities designed to enhance literacy skills are promoted in the school – including writing, public speaking and debating competitions.

A range of teaching and learning experiences were observed across the school. In most classes the teacher had high expectations and in almost all cases the learners' behaviour was good. Most lessons were however in the main teacher led which dictated the pace and challenge of the lesson. In the majority of lessons the learning intentions were shared although limited use was made of success criteria or the young people in identifying them from the outset. In a number of lessons, there was a clear focus on developing skills and feedback was given to support further improvement. There were a number of activities observed across a range of subjects where young people were able to develop their listening, talking, reading and writing skills although the young people did not see the link to the development of their literacy skills .

In the main, class work and course work requires further differentiation to enable and enrich learning for all young people and provide more opportunities to increase pace and challenge across the ability range. There was some effective use of HOTS in the discussions during whole class teaching, in feedback at the end of lessons and in the teacher's interaction with individual young people when they were supporting individuals. In these cases the discussions were productive and allowed the young people to demonstrate and build on their skills.

Strengths

- There is commitment to the development of language skills as part of the responsibility of all and some staff are developing language skills as part of their classroom practice.
- Emerging good practice is shared across the school through the TLC's.
- A number of staff in a range of subjects are employing HOTS effectively.
- Moderation activities in English to support assessment of CfE levels.
- The young people are setting targets to enable them to review progress and identify next steps in English.
- Young people feel that they are making improvements in their skills in talking, listening, reading and writing across the school and this is supported by evidence in their class work and in conversations with them.
- Parents felt that the young people's skills in literacy were improving and noted a growing confidence in their ability to talk, read and write.
- There is a clear commitment to harmonise learning and teaching strategies – for example to further develop approaches to active learning. This will ensure more effective engagement across the curriculum but particularly in literacy, numeracy and health and well being.

Next steps/ Aspects for Development

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- Continue to involve all teachers in professional reflection and dialogue to share their views on literacy across the curriculum and how it can be achieved by embedding existing good practice and sharing high quality pedagogy from within and out with the school.
- Share literacy policy across the school.
- Use expertise of English staff to lead and support moderation of literacy across the school to maintain consistent standards and a shared understanding of expectations.
- Continue to develop teacher confidence in the delivery of literacy through training, peer observations, collaborations as well as through monitoring and feedback from management.
- Continue to improve the consistency and standard of teaching and learning by- reviewing the planning to: ensure the success criteria are meaningful and foster the involvement of the young people; the activities and experiences are relevant and offer opportunities to assess breadth of learning; materials are differentiated to meet the needs of all and provide for HOTS.
- Share emerging practice in the development of literacy across the curriculum and the cluster.

Role of the 'acting' Principal Teachers in leading SIP priorities

Following on from the retirement of a DHT in June 2014 and a streamlining of SMT roles and remits five acting principal teacher posts have been leading on aspects of school improvement during sessions 2014/ 15 and 2015/16. This has included posts linked to developments in Literacy, Numeracy, Wider Achievement, Interdisciplinary learning and Communication. Their work has progressed well and the school is now at the stage of reviewing the requirement for the continuation of these posts.

Strengths

- The commitment of the 'acting' PTs in taking forward their individual remits
- The opportunities these temporary roles have provided in distributing leadership and building the capacity of a group of unpromoted staff.
- The emerging impact of the work that has been carried out in relation to Literacy, Numeracy, Wider Achievement, Interdisciplinary Learning and Communication.
- The role of the TLC's and working groups in supporting and embedding aspects of development work associated with some of these posts.

Numeracy

The focus on improvement in this area has been through the formation of a Numeracy Group with the aim of raising the profile of numeracy across the curriculum and to standardise approaches. A toolkit for staff and parents, posters, booklets have been developed along with updates on Facebook and social media, the school also introduced a numeracy week. These developments have been evaluated by the Numeracy group and in discussion with a pupil focus group. The impact at this point is focussed through the "traditional" numeracy subjects with less of an influence on pupil learning across a wider range of curricular areas. School leaver performance at National 5 numeracy is improving and is higher than the school's virtual comparator, at National 4 it is improving and in two out of the last three years has outperformed the virtual comparators.

Next Steps / Aspects for Development

- Continue to support the Numeracy group and its aims.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of their contribution and have a wider understanding of their role in developing numeracy.
- Develop approaches through sharing practice and resources, from within and out with the school (Education Scotland).
- Continue to develop / embed cluster approach to developing numeracy through the Broad General Education.
- Consider the impact that Financial Education could have in developing numeracy skills for life, learning and work.

Wider Achievement

An initial part of this role was connected to the creation of a wider achievement database to ensure that the school had first hand knowledge of the wider attainment of all its young people. Having successfully created this, this role
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was subsumed into the remit of a PT Pupil Support who in conjunction with the original post holder and CLD has worked on the development of a wider achievement programme. This has been linked to the skills base identified in the Dumfries and Galloway Pathway to Employability and will form a firm foundation for the assessment, progression and development of key skills.

Impact at this stage is difficult to assess however what the school, in conjunction with the help and support of CLD, now clearly has is a very assessable record of all activities and achievement their young people participate in. They can now clearly identify where young people are not involved in activities and can signpost accordingly. They have correctly identified that this database needs to be more than just a record in that it needs to consider skills development and show progression as a young person moves up through the school. Accreditation and recognition for involvement in activities is also being considered both externally through for example Saltire awards and internally through the wider achievement programme and levels.

Next Steps / Aspects for Development

- Pilot wider achievement programme with all S1 pupils next session.
- Enrol pupils involved in leadership and volunteering roles in both the school and community in a scheme which provides recognition and involvement in these activities eg Saltire Awards.
- Consult with pupils to ensure wider achievement programme meets their needs.
- Consider how the wider achievement programme will be monitored and tracked in relation to skill development and how the young people will reflect on their progression and achievement in a meaningful way within it.
- Share with staff the nature and purpose of the wider achievement programme and their role in supporting young people within it.

Inter-disciplinary Learning

In session 2014/15, a timetabled IDL programme was been introduced for all S1/2 pupils. A double period was allocated to this aspect of the curriculum providing small class groups access on rotation of three subject specialist teachers. The content focus of the programme was framed around big questions which the young people then explore and investigate under the guidance of their teacher with the emphasis on their own subject specialism. Within IDL, the young people are encouraged to take a lead in the content and the direction of the activities in lessons, providing an element of personalisation and choice.

This current session, the school is aware that this programme has experienced significant ongoing staffing issues which has impacted on the delivery of planned elements and continuity of experience for students. This concurs with the findings of the review team who visited timetabled IDL classes observing subject specific lessons rather than teaching and learning which reflected the principles of IDL. Focus groups of young people indicated that they enjoyed IDL but they saw no links with the other subjects in the rotation therefore did not see the point of it.

As a consequence of the staffing and delivery issues experience this session it has been suggested that next session IDL will be restructured with the S1 /2 curriculum to provide a Scottish Studies focus . This will give ownership and direction of this work within the Social Subjects faculty and allow for the development of a progressive programme providing opportunities for skills and knowledge to be further developed through a deeper and broader learning experience. across this curricular area.

Next Steps/Aspects for Development

- Develop an integrated Scottish Studies IDL approach through the Social Subjects curriculum area to provide opportunities for deeper and broader learning.
- Following review at the end of next session next steps would be to consider how Scottish studies might be further developed to deliver a multi discipline integrated programme to include other curricular areas. These links would however have to be subject or content specific links rather than relying on an individual subject teacher.

Communication

A key area for improvement identified in the school improvement plan has been over the last two sessions – improvement in communication with parents and the wider community. As a consequence of this a number of key developments have taken place to ensure information is more readily available. This has seen the creation of a new school web-site www.stranraeracademy.org.uk , Facebook page , Twitter feed and a school app.

All of these developments have been welcomed by most parents and the wider school community who indicated that they now feel much better informed and know where to go for information. This has strengthened partnership working. Some parents however feel that there is a need to consider how to 'reach' parents who are perhaps not so technologically advanced or perhaps don't want to receive communications this way. The young people were very enthusiastic about the school app and the school's presence on the web, through it's website, facebook page and twitter feed.

The school is effectively using these technological developments as a way of sharing daily notices, celebrating and publicising achievements of the young people, newsletters and other communications as well as 'Show my Homework' which is helping to support the needs of the young people and keep parents informed.

Investment has also been made in 'survey monkey' as a way of gathering information from parents, pupils and staff on particular topics linked to school improvement. The use of this tool has yet to be fully developed however the school clearly sees this as a valuable tool to gather information and opinions.

The acting PT has led the development of this aspect in conjunction with a working group for consultation.

Next Steps/Aspects for Development

- There is now a need to broaden the ownership of this aspect of development to ensure sustainability beyond the duration of this acting post.
- Young people and parents need to become more involved in shaping future developments and need to be consulted further on what this should look like.
- 'Survey Monkey' as a research tool needs to be embedded into improvement process as a tool to gather information particularly in relation to considering impact and gathering stakeholders views.

Summary

The school is making effective progress in the aspects of development identified for the purposes of this review. There is a need for continuing rigour and consistency in self evaluation to inform further action that will ensure that the developments have a sustained positive impact on the attainment and achievement of the young people. The SMT and staff at all levels are committed to taking forward these areas. As a result there continues to be good capacity for further improvement at all levels.