Blairgowrie High School

Perth and Kinross Council and Education Scotland Follow-up Report

Tuesday 8th – Thursday 10th December 2015

Perth and Kinross Council, in partnership with Education Scotland, recently visited Blairgowrie High School as part of the school inspection process. The visit focused on three areas of school improvement - Learning, Leadership and Achievement - and this report will consider the key strengths and areas for further development in each.

LEARNING

Key strengths

Learning, in the main, is effective with well organised lessons, clear objectives and outcomes which are shared with young people. Tasks and activities are relevant and interesting to young people and the overall pace of learning ensures progress across lessons. Relationships between staff and pupils are friendly and purposeful. Young people speak positively about their learning experiences and are generally happy, well-motivated, engaged and hardworking. They perceive that almost all staff are caring and committed.

Support for learning specialists provide highly effective services for young people experiencing additional support needs. Staff are aware of the learning needs of young people in their classes and appreciate the information they get from pupil support staff to help them to make appropriate provision. They are increasingly making use of a range of differentiation techniques including the provision of different levels of work, differentiated success criteria and access to appropriate technological resources.

The curriculum offers a widening range of learning opportunities for wider achievement, in which formal accreditation was typically a feature. The school is increasingly well connected to local businesses and agencies and almost all departments have developed positive links with external partners which enhance learning. Departments are continuously monitoring the curriculum and its impact and are revising as appropriate.

Young people are generally positive about their school and balance many positive comments with a lesser number of areas of concern.

Areas for Development

Parents, pupils and staff have concerns about staffing difficulties and discontinuities affecting a number of departments and specifically Mathematics. The school should continue to

communicate openly about the steps it is taking to try to address issues of staff absence and supply cover.

Pressures on the Support for Learning department to meet the needs of those with more complex needs means that there is little time available to support other young people in their mainstream classes.

The school needs to find ways to encourage young people who can attain well to perform even better than they do at present and it should continue to focus on encouraging growth mind sets and tracking learner progress at all levels.

The “Every Good Lesson Has” approach is not yet consistently applied and there is an opportunity to revisit and refresh the features with staff and young people. Tasks and activities chosen for young people are sometimes less well structured to meet different needs and a greater consistency of approach and expectations across departments is required.

LEADERSHIP

Key strengths

The Headteacher knows her school, and the young people within it, well. She is committed to improving the school so that young people can achieve to the best of their ability. Young people and staff offered strong, corroborating evidence that the Headteacher’s purposeful leadership is central to the school’s sense of direction. The senior management team work well together to lead the school and they have ensured that the school has an increasingly extensive set of data to allow staff to monitor and track the progress of young people.

Principal Teachers are generally enthusiastic about their role in the improvement of the school and acknowledge that staff have worked particularly hard over the past few years to effect change. They are positive about the improvement priorities in the school. Teachers are committed to helping young people to achieve as well as they can and are clear that a main priority is to improve learning and teaching in the school. They appreciate the professional learning opportunities which have been organised to support this, including Tapestry and Learning Rounds. Some teachers play a lead role in school development priorities, for example through chairing working groups and leading on Restorative Approaches across the school.

Young people have many opportunities to contribute to leadership in the school, for example through house duties, prefects, buddy initiatives, class support activities and specific programmes including one senior pupil taking the lead in a course in Cardiac Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). Young people perceive the senior management team as highly visible and readily approachable, and that any contacts with them demonstrate senior staff’s close interest in their views.

Areas for Development

Young people highlight that while they are consulted on areas for improvement in their school, it is not felt that they are always listened to or that the impact of their voice is clearly

evident in change. They would benefit from more open and regular feedback. There is scope for the recently reorganised Pupil Council to achieve greater impact on the school improvement plan.

The vertical house system continues to develop and should provide an opportunity to embed citizenship and identity and to build a sense of community across the school.

Opportunities to be more proactive in building curricular links with associated Primary schools could strengthen P7-S1 transition and ensure that all staff can plan for pupil progress on the basis of prior attainment.

ACHIEVEMENT

Key Strengths

The school has an emerging curriculum model for the senior phase that has been rigorously planned and prepared for, and this is supported by robust tracking and monitoring processes of achievement and attainment in the Broad General Education and Senior Phase.

The school has continued to broaden the opportunities for young people to achieve accreditation, both through the curriculum and also through increasing the wider achievement and vocational education (WAVE) options, including partnership with Perth College.

Attainment in S5 and S6 through SQA examinations has an improving trend, particularly at Higher.

Young people demonstrate impressive achievement of their skills in contributing to group debate. They are confident, thoughtful, respectful of others' views and resilient in sticking to their opinion as necessary.

Areas for Development

The school should ensure that it is not disadvantaging a small number of young people in S5 by the timing of changing their course from Higher to National 5. It would be helpful to track outcomes for those who transferred from Higher to National 5 last year to ensure that they achieved appropriately.

The S4 results for examinations in 2015 were comparatively disappointing, although they were largely in line with expectations. The school should ensure it understands why these results were not at least in line with their virtual comparator and what needs to happen to improve this situation.

The school should build on its success in Employability and Enterprise by exploring how all curriculum areas can make more effective contributions and developing this further.