

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL REVIEW

JAMES GILLESPIE'S HIGH SCHOOL

APRIL 2008

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THE SCHOOL IN CONTEXT

James Gillespie's High School is a non denominational secondary school built in 1960s and serves the area of south Edinburgh. It draws most of its pupils from East Preston Street, James Gillespie's, Royal Mile, Sciennes and Tollcross primary schools. The catchment area comprises Dumbiedykes, The Grange, Tollcross and parts of Marchmont and the Southside.

The current school roll is 1060. Twenty five non-district requests were made for places in S1 and 50 district pupils enrolled in other authority schools. The resulting S1 roll was 196. The pupil: teacher ratio is 13:1.

Absence rates for 2006-2007 was 26 half days per pupil. This compares with the authority average of 34 and the national average of 35. There were 19 formal exclusions during 2006-2007.

The pupil unit cost for 2006-2007 was £4367, compared to authority and national averages of £4539 and £4675 respectively. There is a School Board and parent teacher association (PTA) which will come together to form a School Council in 2008.

PUPIL ATTAINMENT

The school's current performance in relation to national 5–14 attainment is:

	2005	2006	2007
Reading	85%	83%	84%
Writing	81%	82%	82%
Mathematics	61%	76%	79%

The school's performance Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) attainment was as follows:

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Key:

Level 7:	Advanced Higher A–C
Level 6:	Higher at A–C
Level 5:	Intermediate A–C; Standard Grade at 1–2
Level 4:	Intermediate 1 at A–C; Standard Grade at 3–4
Level 3:	Access 3 Cluster; Standard Grade at 5–6

	'03–'05	'04–'06	'05–'07
% S4 roll gaining 5+ awards at level 3 or better, by end S4	93%	94%	93%
% S4 roll gaining 5+ awards at level 4 or better, by end S4	87%	88%	88%
% S4 roll gaining 5+ awards at level 5 or better, by end S4	52%	61%	55%
% S4 roll gaining 1+ awards at level 6 or better, by end S5	67%	61%	65%
% S4 roll gaining 3+ awards at level 6 or better, by end S5	48%	44%	48%
% S4 roll gaining 5+ awards at level 6 or better, by end S5	27%	21%	29%
% S4 roll gaining 3+ awards at level 6 or better, by end S6	54%	54%	51%
% S4 roll gaining 5+ awards at level 6 or better, by end S6	33%	37%	36%
% S4 roll gaining 1+ awards at level 7, by end S6	25%	23%	24%

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REVIEW PROCEDURES

James Gillespie's High School was reviewed by a team from the Quality Development and Neighbourhood Management Groups of the Children and Families Department during November 2007. An experienced practitioner from another school in the city was also part of the review team. The review was based on the quality indicators in *How good is our school?* 3.

The review was based on two focus areas:

- ✿ learning and teaching; and
- ✿ leadership for learning.

The following departments were involved in the review:

- ✿ English;
- ✿ Gaelic;
- ✿ design and technology; and
- ✿ physical education (PE).

The members of the review team made their evaluation on the basis of evidence provided by the school and their own observations. The results of their findings are given below as a commentary on the school's report.

In order to make their evaluation, the team consulted a number of school documents, including the improvement plan, interviewed samples of pupils, staff and parents, and observed learning and teaching. In total, 23 lessons were observed. A questionnaire was issued to a 20% sample of parents.

Two hundred and twenty questionnaires were sent to parents and 82 were returned.

Verbal questionnaires were carried out with sample groups of pupils.

PARENTS'/CARERS' VIEWS

- ✿ Almost all parents said their child enjoyed being at the school and most said their child found school work stimulating and challenging. The majority felt that their

child was encouraged to work to the best of his/her ability.

- ✿ More than half of the parents surveyed were satisfied with homework their child received and said they would like more information about their child's progress in school work and personal development. Most parents agreed that the school is well led and almost all agreed that the school has a good reputation in the community.
- ✿ The majority of parents did not consider the school had good accommodation.

PUPILS' VIEWS

- ✿ Almost all pupils surveyed said that they enjoyed school and that they felt safe and secure in the school environment. They all agreed that the school provided a range of opportunities to improve health and well being. Almost all strongly agreed that teachers set high expectations for all students and provided positive feedback for success. They all felt that they were treated fairly and that teachers listened to what they said and acted on their views of how to improve the school. They were encouraged to contribute significantly to decisions taken on their behalf, through discussion groups, community councils, by posting comments in a comments box and student representatives consult on all decisions with their registration groups. All pupils had confidence in staff dealing positively with any issue that might arise.
- ✿ Most S1/S2 pupils liked variation in lessons, especially when teachers used information and communications technology (ICT), and active learning and teaching approaches such as role play. Some S3/S4 pupils felt that they could have completed S1 and S2 work much earlier and welcomed starting S3 work in S2. Almost all pupils said they liked lessons where they were able to learn from one another and engage in discussion.

- ✿ All pupils spoke positively about the very wide range of activities on offer in the school. They felt they were valued as individuals and that their views were listened to. Senior students commented positively on the move to the community system as supporting an even stronger sense of community in the school.
- ✿ All senior pupils surveyed commented that in S5/S6 teachers supported them to take greater responsibility for their own studying and learning through judicious use of praise and feedback.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

1 LEARNING AND TEACHING

The review team considered the following quality indicators from 'How good is our school? 3':

- 2.1 Learners' experiences
- 5.2 Teaching for effective learning
- 5.4 Assessment for learning
- 9.3 Developing people and partnerships

Overall, learning and teaching was considered to be very good.

Strengths in learning and teaching

The school provided learning and teaching of a very high quality. In the departments reviewed, almost all pupils were well focused, responsive and on task. Learners were motivated and enthusiastic about their learning experiences and settled quickly into lessons. They spoke with pride of their achievements within and outwith the school and these were celebrated widely. Almost all pupils strongly agreed that teachers set high expectations, explained the purpose of lessons clearly, outlined progress and provided positive feedback for success. There was an effective home study programme and opportunities for study support.

The quality of lessons observed was very good. A major strength was the way all learners were encouraged to be actively involved in their learning and to take responsibility for it. For example, in the English department pupils were given the chance to lead learning for others and in PE and design and technology students worked cooperatively, providing feedback to other students.

All teachers encouraged learners to think and express their views. In English and Gaelic, pupils had many opportunities to engage in quality discussion, and in design and technology pupils were required to think creatively when designing products. Almost all pupils felt valued, that their views were listened to during lessons and that they were treated fairly. They particularly enjoyed being able to work independently and collaboratively in a variety of supportive groupings. They also valued opportunities to take the lead in their own learning and to learn from each other.

Pupils appreciated the fact that there were opportunities available to them to participate in a range of activities outwith the school day. The number of sporting activities on offer from the PE department, including dance, basketball and football, was particularly well received.

The learning climate in all the departments visited was stimulating and there was a high degree of learner motivation. A variety of active learning and teaching approaches that took good account of different learning styles was employed. This included independent working, collaborative group work and direct, interactive teaching. Almost all lessons were well planned and differentiated to take account of different abilities. Appropriate homework was set regularly to support learning.

Teacher pupil relationships were positive. Staff were enthusiastic and motivated to provide high quality learning experiences for all pupils and to support them to achieve their potential.

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Teacher pupil dialogue was engaging and supportive and, in most cases, teachers' questioning successfully involved all students and encouraged them to think about what was being learned. ICT was used effectively to motivate pupils and enrich lessons when it was available. The school had developed a very impressive initiative, the ICT Challenge, which was financed by an award from Learning and Teaching Scotland and delivered to all S1 pupils. The project focused on ICT core skills and team building skills. Presentation skills were also developed as all pupils had to work towards delivering a final presentation of their work at an event to which their parents were invited. In English, the S1/S2 Reading for Gold programme also effectively delivered a degree of individual choice for students and allowed them to set challenging personal targets.

There was a very good range of high quality strategies to improve learning and teaching in the classes visited. These included sharing the purposes of lessons with learners, effective use of questioning and provision of quality feedback. There were regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own learning, assess their own progress, set individual targets and engage in assessment of each others' work. A particularly skilful use of the latter was seen in S3 design and technology where pupils were involved in self and peer assessment of their S3 design folios and then set targets for their S4 folios.

Most departments had clear planning frameworks and used internal and national examination data effectively to evaluate the impact of their learning and teaching and to improve practice. Thorough arrangements for internal moderation and record keeping were in place and most pupils felt they received good feedback on what they had to learn and how to improve. They particularly appreciated the issue of revision notes at the end of lessons or units of work.

The school had organised a very successful parent workshop and parents felt that they had received good documentation on homework although some would also like to see copies of course plans to enable them to provide more effective support to their children. Parents of pupils in S1 would like more detailed information on pupil progress earlier in the school year. They also felt that the current interim report could be developed to provide a more detailed and personal report.

Commendably, the headteacher (HT) was committed to a collegiate and consultative approach to leadership. Steps were being taken to further improve quality assurance procedures across the school. The HT, with support from the senior management team (SMT) and principal teachers (PTs), has ensured that learning and teaching had a key role in the school improvement plan through an effective programme of sharing good practice, staff development and a programme that encouraged teachers to observe one another teaching.

Staff felt that the development programme led by the deputy headteacher (DHT) with responsibility for learning and teaching was a very effective vehicle for making them aware of the priorities in the school improvement plan and for providing guidance on new developments and methodology.

The school ensured that improvement plan priorities were linked to classroom practice through the adoption of a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating the work of departments. Each senior manager acted as an SMT link for a group of departments, attending departmental meetings, observing lessons and meeting with their subject PTs on a monthly basis. This role also successfully promoted effective and open communication throughout the school and reinforced the sharing of a common vision and values.

The highly effective learning and teaching working group provided members with the opportunity to take lead roles and exercise leadership at whole school level. Members were encouraged to drive forward projects, for example by leading professional development sessions, supporting peer shadowing across departments and sharing innovative practice sessions.

At department level, PTs felt they were well supported by senior management and were enabled to take a lead role in developments both in their subject areas and at whole school level. They in turn recognised individual department staff strengths and ensured that opportunities to take leading roles beyond the classroom were fully supported and encouraged. Staff welcomed these opportunities to develop personally and professionally and felt valued and included as a result.

Pupils' own leadership skills were being developed in a range of different ways, including representing the school, participating in trips abroad and through membership of the Student Council which was consulted most recently on the new registration procedures. In addition S6 pupils were required to register with S1–S4 pupils where they had a befriending and mentoring role. In PE, senior pupils took the lead in the delivery of extra curricular activities. Senior pupils were given leadership roles in supporting pupils with additional support needs at the lunch time and “chill out” clubs.

As part of its enterprise and citizenship programme, the school had developed links with Zwelibanzi High School, Ulmazi Township in Durban. Pupils at James Gillespie's High School had organised and participated in a range of activities to raise funds which had been used to provide the African school with a wide range of resources. Examples include raising money to build a library and create a sports field.

Currently, S1 and S2 pupils are raising money every week to fund a soup kitchen feeding over 120 children every day and S3 and S4 pupils raise money to pay for a sports coach. Every year 30–40 S6 pupils along with 5–6 members of staff visit the school to work with the children and teachers.

The school had very good relationships with the School Council who had cooperated to provide very effective workshop forums looking at areas such as homework and the role of the guidance department.

Areas for development in learning and teaching

Continue to develop planning, assessment and reporting processes to ensure consistency across the whole school.

Continue to develop and evaluate, in partnership with pupils, the school home learning policy and practice and look to develop the commercial virtual-learning package already in school to support this.

Further develop the use of ICT in subject departments to enhance independence and engagement of pupils in their learning.

2 LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

The review team considered the following quality indicators from ‘How good is our school? 3’:

- 1.1 Improvements in performance
- 5.6 Equality and fairness
- 9.1 Vision, values and aims

Overall leadership for learning was very good.

In 2006–2007, the school achieved very good levels of achievement at 5–14 levels in reading and writing and good levels in mathematics. The school performed well in national examinations and its performance placed it in the top 25% of schools of a similar nature across Scotland. In all the departments reviewed attainment trends

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compared well with similar schools with steady improvement over recent years.

The HT, with support from the DHT with responsibility for learning and teaching, had established a rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating attainment and achievement. The very effective SMT department link arrangement ensured that staff placed a strong focus on monitoring pupils' progress and attainment through individual meetings with PTs, the programme of classroom visits and a thorough review of examination results at all stages which resulted in clear action points for departments. The school had also introduced a programme that identified S3 students at risk of under-achieving. PTs, senior managers and members of the support for pupils department (SfP) cooperated in order to develop individual strategies and targets. They then mentored and provided support to the pupils by monitoring and tracking their targets and informing parents of progress at regular intervals. Setting had also been introduced to provide additional challenge for the more able learners and this had resulted in improved levels of attainment for this group of pupils. Commendably, the school delivered a very effective initiative along with local primary schools to promote Gaelic for Learners and this successfully helped to increase the profile of Gaelic in the community.

The extensive staff development programme focused on enhancing learning and teaching. Staff were encouraged to examine the effectiveness of different approaches and participate in sharing good practice to ensure a consistent experience for pupils. This had resulted in a reflective staff who were committed to improvement and providing quality learning experiences for their pupils.

The school had a friendly and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils demonstrated pride in the school, behaved very well and had very positive

relationships with staff. New staff were made to feel very welcome.

Planning to meet individual, social, emotional and learning needs was responsive and flexible. The positive learning environment established by staff encouraged almost all students to participate and make progress. Effective links with support for learning ensured that departments had appropriate strategies in place to support engagement, inclusion and meeting the needs of all pupils. Approaches included effective pairing of students and single-gender classes in PE. There were also examples of good use of a range of appropriate tasks and activities designed to overcome barriers to learning in English, Gaelic and product design. Personalisation, choice and responsibility were built in to programmes of work in English and design and technology while Gaelic students had many opportunities for self-expression and development of their talents. Students felt safe and secure in the school and they identified strongly with its inclusive ethos and its celebration of diversity.

The manner in which the school welcomed and celebrated diversity and addressed discrimination was considered by the review team to be sector leading. An outstanding example of this was recognised nationally by the award of substantial Lottery funding for the work done as part of the Diversecity project. Pupils took part in a sponsored walk organised around the One Scotland-Many Cultures theme which encouraged them to illustrate and celebrate their diverse cultural backgrounds. Global citizenship issues were given a very high profile through the link with Zwelibanzi High School.

The school made a point of revisiting and reinforcing its vision, common values and aims through its SMT departmental link system, its regular staff development sessions and ethos surveys. These values reflected school, local and

current national priorities, including *Curriculum for Excellence* and the promotion of Gaelic, and were focused on improving outcomes for pupils in the widest sense. Pupil choice, creativity, citizenship and enterprising approaches to learning and teaching were actively encouraged.

The inclusion of Gaelic in the life of the school and its high profile effectively met the requirement of National Priority 3 encompassing Gaelic within social inclusion.

Departments contributed very well to the inclusive ethos in the school. Diversity is also welcomed and celebrated at department level. In English, opportunities to incorporate and explore citizenship issues were planned for in programmes of work. In core PE, organisation of groups was well planned to enable inclusion and increased participation while effective links with support for learning ensured appropriate strategies were in place to support the participation of pupils with additional support needs.

A strong assembly structure, where issues such climate for learning are addressed, allied to an effective personal and social education programme, helped set and reinforce high expectations for learners. This applied not only to pupils' academic achievement but also to their personal and social learning, helping to promote a sense of community and to consolidate the school ethos.

Areas for development in leadership for learning

Further develop departmental planning processes to include clear success criteria to reflect impact on learning.

Further develop the school self-evaluation process to include departmental standards and quality reporting.

SUMMARY

Commendable features

- ✿ The very effective leadership of the headteacher.
- ✿ The development of leadership for learning throughout the school, and the effective work being done by staff at all levels to implement innovative approaches.
- ✿ The commitment of staff to continuous improvement enabled by the culture of distributed leadership and the effectiveness of the DHT, with responsibility for learning and teaching.
- ✿ The success of staff in establishing a very purposeful environment for learning, in setting high expectations and in promoting achievement.
- ✿ The manner in which the school celebrates diversity is sector leading and noted as an area of excellence.
- ✿ The opportunities afforded to pupils to take responsibility for and be actively involved in their own learning.
- ✿ Well-behaved pupils who were enthusiastic and motivated in their learning.

Areas for development by the school

- ✿ Continue to develop planning, assessment and reporting processes to ensure consistency across the whole school.
- ✿ Further develop the use of ICT in subject departments to enhance independence and engagement of pupils' learning.
- ✿ Further develop departmental planning processes to include clear success criteria to reflect impact on learning.

CONCLUSION

The school's performance in the focus areas of learning and teaching and leadership for learning was very good.

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The school will be supported to produce an action plan to meet the main recommendations in this report and a progress report will be requested the following session.

Graeme Thompson
Quality Improvement Officer
April 2008

