

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL REVIEW

TOWERBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 2008

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THE SCHOOL IN CONTEXT

Towerbank Primary School, a non-denominational primary school built in the 1880s, serves the community of Portobello on the eastern outskirts of Edinburgh. The catchment area comprises private and local authority and rented accommodation.

The current school roll is 504 including the nursery. There are 16 classes in the school. The pupil teacher ratio is 22:1.

Fifty nine district pupils enrolled in P1 in August 2007 and 21 district pupils enrolled elsewhere. Twelve non-district pupils enrolled in P1.

The absence rate for 2006–2007 was 15 half days per pupil. This compares with authority and national averages of 18. There were no formal exclusions during the period.

The pupil unit cost for 2006–2007 is £2878, compared to authority and national averages of £3228 and £3422 respectively. There is a Parent Council and parent teacher association (PTA).

PUPIL ATTAINMENT

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

	2005	2006	2007
Reading	81%	78%	82%
Writing	67%	59%	73%
Mathematics	78%	72%	80%

REVIEW PROCEDURES

Towerbank Primary 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 both of which included aspects of leadership and equalities:

- ✿ attainment and achievement; and
- ✿ learning and teaching.

The members of the review team made their evaluation on the basis of evidence provided by the school and their own observations.

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.

Eighty eight questionnaires were sent to parents in the primary school and 44 were returned.

Seventy questionnaires were sent to parents in the nursery class and 15 were returned.

Verbal questionnaires were carried out with sample groups of pupils.

PARENTS' / CARERS' VIEWS

Primary parents

- ✿ All primary school parents said that the pupils were well-behaved, their children were treated fairly and the school had a good reputation in the community. Almost all parents said the school was well led, their child enjoyed the stimulating activities and knew that their child was fairly treated and would be helped if he/she was having difficulties. These parents were also satisfied with the information they received and their partnership with the school. A few parents were dissatisfied with their child's homework and would like more information about their child's progress. The majority of parents did not consider the school had good accommodation.

Nursery parents

✿ All nursery parents said their children found activities in the nursery stimulating and challenging and that they were encouraged, supported and treated fairly by the staff. Almost all parents considered they received helpful information about their child's progress and staff knew their child well. All parents thought the children were well behaved, the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community. Some parents would like more information on the work of the nursery class and what they could do to support their child's education.

PUPILS' VIEWS

✿ All pupils spoke of their enjoyment at being in school and the positive relationships between them and their teachers. Teachers almost always explained things clearly and they were encouraged to try their best. The pupils felt that they were well supported in their learning although a few would like more time to talk individually with their teachers. All pupils were treated with respect regardless of their ability and pupils were very aware of the additional support needs of others which at times resulted in some poor behaviour in the playground.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

1 ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

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

- 1.1 Improvements in performance
- 5.5 Expectations and promoting achievement
- 8.4 Managing information
- 9.2 Leadership and direction

Overall attainment and achievement was considered to be very good.

Strengths in attainment and achievement

An ethos of high expectations and individual success was in evidence throughout the school. Led by the headteacher's (HT's) clear, strategic vision to ensure the best educational provision for all pupils, the staff demonstrated a strong determined commitment to school improvement and raising standards of achievement.

Over the last four years there had been an improving trend in pupil attainment. Most learners had demonstrated very clear and continuous progress from previous levels of attainment. In the early years, a very high proportion of pupils had achieved national levels of attainment in reading and writing earlier than would have been expected. There had also been a significant increase in pupils' attainment in P6 and P7 especially in writing.

The school had a number of successful strategies which had contributed to raising attainment. Pupils' needs were being very well met through the well-structured arrangements for teaching in ability groups for writing, literacy and mathematics from P4-P7 and the dedicated teaching time given to the literacy and numeracy programmes in the early years. This highly effective initiative had enabled teachers to focus on providing appropriate support and challenge to pupils of similar ability. Progress within the groups was reviewed on a six-weekly basis and flexible movement of pupils between the groups ensured that learning experiences for all pupils were appropriately matched to need.

The two highly-experienced depute headteachers (DHTs) provided significant support to the ability grouping initiative by identifying pupils who required additional support or greater challenge. This support, provided through short-term targeted focus groups, had been very effective in addressing the needs of individual pupils to ensure that all became successful learners.

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Commendably the pupils had been engaged in setting their own targets for writing and personal and social development. The monitoring and evaluating of these targets with their class teachers had considerably improved pupil ownership and responsibility for their own learning.

Last session the HT had released a teacher from class commitment to focus on raising attainment in writing and mathematics with individual pupils and identified groups from the upper stages of the school. The very positive outcomes of the project had been the result of a very clear understanding by the pupils of what they needed to do to be successful. The impact on attainment and achievement had been considerable and many of the strategies had been transferred to classroom practice and extended to the middle stages of the school.

A high quality programme and toolkit to provide continuity and progression in writing across the school had been produced by a staff working group. All materials were accessible on the school server. Pupils were very clear about the kind and quality of work required to achieve success. The programme was implemented consistently at every stage in the school and was a model of the very best practice.

The collation, management and analysis of attainment data was very good. The HT had developed a very robust, systematic and comprehensive system to monitor the progress of pupils, benchmark performance and identify trends in the school. On four occasions during the year, promoted staff discussed pupil progress and predicted levels of attainment with each member of staff. By this close monitoring of pupils' progress the senior management team were able to identify the support or increased challenge required to ensure that all pupils achieved their potential.

Staff had the highest expectations of learners and learners had high aspirations for themselves. The school was outward looking and staff continually sought ways of enabling pupils to become effective contributors and responsible citizens.

The school had a strong ethos of achievement. There were excellent opportunities for all pupils to achieve through a wide range of activities including Eco initiatives, making a video on healthy eating, staging a community exhibition, and a current community project, 'Our Portobello'.

Pupils participated in an extensive range of clubs. These included running, basketball, drama, knitting, personal reflection and football as well as cultural experiences such as Capoeira (Brazilian Dance). Commendably most of these clubs were led by staff and took place at lunchtimes, after school and on Saturday mornings.

Pupils had been given responsibilities as prefects, group captains, playground games leaders and buddies to younger pupils as well as playing key roles on working groups. The pupil council which included representation from all classes had been very effective in addressing issues and had contributed significantly to school improvement.

The strong focus on achievement and involvement had developed in the pupils a strong sense of identity with the school where they made a very active contribution to their own learning and were developing well as confident individuals. Staff-pupil relationships were very positive. There was a strong sense of mutual trust and respect. The pupils were very well behaved and demonstrated care, tolerance and respect for one another.

The use of praise was well-judged and appropriate. Successes of individuals and

groups of pupils were celebrated at merit assemblies, in class books of achievement, in displays around the school and on the eye-catching plasma screen for which P7 pupils had responsibility. The pupils valued this well-earned praise and recognition of their success and were motivated by it.

The leadership of the HT was very strong. She demonstrated commitment and drive and a highly professional and personal commitment to ensuring success and achievement for all pupils. She had effectively communicated transparent procedures, providing staff and pupils with clear direction in the aims for school improvement and their roles in that process.

Areas for development in attainment and achievement

Continue to develop strategies to raise attainment in English language and mathematics.

Further develop the writing programme by including material to support the nursery and the early years and progress as planned with the units on personal writing.

Develop a formal whole school approach for gifted and talented pupils to ensure that they are appropriately challenged.

2 LEARNING AND TEACHING

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

- 2.1 Learners' experience
- 5.2 Teaching for effective learning
- 5.3 Meeting learning needs
- 5.4 Assessment for learning
- 9.2 Leadership and direction

Overall learning and teaching was considered to be very good.

Strengths in learning and teaching

The school provided learning and teaching of a high quality. There was a focus on the needs of pupils, on creating the most appropriate learning environment and on providing pupils with opportunities to develop their potential. The learning environment was stimulating and motivating and supported a positive climate for learning and teaching. Classrooms and corridors contained high quality displays of pupils' work which had contributed to making the school an exciting, inspiring place in which to learn.

Pupils were strongly motivated engaged learners who settled quickly into lessons. They listened attentively, were enthusiastic in response and showed good understanding of what they had been taught. Self-motivation was evident. Learners in all classes worked well and participated actively in their own learning. Discussion was used well. Pupils' contributions were openly valued and excellent use was made of praise to reinforce success. Generally, pupils worked well without close supervision. In most classes they were given responsibility for aspects of their own learning in individual research, choice in assigned tasks and self-correction of some of their work.

Pupils were given quality feedback from teachers on progress and success. They received comments on almost all of their written work in the form of two positive remarks and one area for development. As a result, pupils were clear about their next steps in learning.

Pupils' views were regularly sought through class and pupil councils, engagement in project groups, questionnaires and discussions and through informal comments to staff and school managers. Pupils were confident that their opinions were valued by staff and contributed to decisions in the school.

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Learning and teaching in the nursery class was of a good standard. The children were motivated, happy and confident. Good provision was made for activities and experiences in all the areas of pre 5 education. The nursery staff had worked hard to make best use of the outdoor area, creating an interesting and exciting space which needed to be enjoyed by the children more frequently. The children had good opportunities for choice and there was a balance between free play and adult led activities. While staff interacted well with the children to extend and support their learning, the quality of this interaction could be developed. Children's observations were gathered in a systematic way and formative assessment made on individual progress and learning. Some of these observations were used to inform future planning of children's learning experiences.

In many lessons observed, especially in the early years and the senior classes, there were examples of the very best practice in teaching.

In all classes, teachers started lessons promptly and set a very positive and purposeful tone. Relationships between teachers and pupils were very positive and pupils obviously enjoyed their learning. Teachers presented very well-planned and resourced lessons and in most classes these provided appropriate pace and challenge for pupils. In all classes, the purposes of lessons were shared with pupils who were clear about the outcomes.

Teachers used effective questioning to engage pupils in learning. Most teachers used a wide range of questioning skills and almost all made time for pupils to consider the responses of others before asking additional questions. Pupils felt secure enough to share their thoughts and ideas and were encouraged to ask questions.

The use of ICT to support learning and teaching was a particular strength in the school. There was a Smartboard in every classroom and

teachers and pupils made very effective and confident use of this. Very good use was made of the ICT suite to develop pupils' computer skills and to motivate learning. The school business manager had made a significant contribution to the development and implementation of ICT.

Teachers had made very good use of a variety of learning approaches. For example, an enterprising, problem-solving approach, developed by the teachers in the two senior classes had been very successful in fostering pupils' confidence in their own ability and the literacy programme at the P4 and P5 stages had addressed needs in spelling and the use of language.

In most classes tasks and activities were differentiated to take account of the learning needs of individual pupils. Setting pupils in ability groups had proved successful in raising attainment by enabling teachers to tailor the pace of learning and teaching to the needs of the groups.

Commendably, all staff knew their pupils very well, took good account of their needs and worked well together to support them. For pupils with individual needs, there was effective and well-planned support from the support for learning teacher and the promoted staff. However consideration should be given to deploying the support for learning teacher more consistently within the classroom. A wide range of professionals contributed to the formation of additional support plans which contained clear learning targets for pupils. Classroom assistants were very effectively deployed and working in close cooperation with class teachers made a very significant contribution to pupils' learning.

Visiting specialist staff including the active schools' coordinator provided rich and inclusive educational experiences for pupils. The commitment of all staff to addressing barriers to learning was commendable.

A selective range of formative assessment strategies was commonly applied. These were effective in ensuring that pupils were consistently encouraged to reflect on their progress and to consider their next steps in learning. Commendably, some classes had successfully explored the regular use of peer and self assessment strategies with the pupils. This work needed to be consolidated to ensure consistency and continuity in application.

The SMT's strong commitment to learning and teaching was demonstrated through their high visibility and their active participation in classrooms where they modelled good practice and worked with groups. They regularly observed how pupils were taught and gave feedback, support and advice to the staff.

The HT made excellent use of the skills of her staff. Very ably supported by the two DHTs and the business manager she had fostered leadership at all levels. All staff were members of working groups where they had undertaken leadership roles and shared and developed their expertise to support learning and teaching and promote continuous improvement.

Areas for development in learning and teaching

Develop a formal strategy and framework for the use of formative assessment strategies in areas of the curriculum and stages in the school to ensure consistency and cohesion.

The school should review the forward planning procedures to ensure that they are clearly based on outcomes for the pupils and include next steps in the process of learning and teaching.

The SMT should further develop the self-evaluation procedures though the formal introduction of peer and self-evaluation for staff.

SUMMARY

Commendable features

- ✿ The very effective leadership of the headteacher.
- ✿ The very positive learning environment.
- ✿ The commitment of all staff to continuous improvement.
- ✿ The very strong ethos of achievement promoted throughout the school.
- ✿ The confident and competent use of ICT in learning and teaching.
- ✿ The high quality writing programme.

Areas for development by the school

- ✿ Develop a formal whole school approach for gifted and talented pupils to ensure that they are appropriately challenged.
- ✿ The school should review the forward planning procedures to ensure that they are clearly based on outcomes for the pupils and include next steps in the process of learning and teaching.
- ✿ Develop a formal strategy and framework for the use of formative assessment strategies in areas of the curriculum and stages in the school to ensure consistency and cohesion.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the school's performance in both attainment and achievement and learning and teaching was very good.

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.

Sheena Liddell
Senior Quality Improvement Officer
February 2008

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