

ST THOMAS OF AQUIN'S HIGH SCHOOL

FOLLOW THROUGH REPORT

1. The inspection

HM Inspectors from Education Scotland published a report on the quality of education in the school in May 2012.

The education authority visited the school on an ongoing basis to assess the extent to which the school was continuing to develop the quality of its education, including the areas identified for improvement during the inspection.

During the visits, lessons were observed, young people participated in focus groups and continued conversation took place with the headteacher, senior leadership team and staff exploring how the school had continued to improve.

There was a focus on particular areas over a period of time that had been identified in the initial inspection and on aspects of the school's work as identified by the headteacher. As a result we were able to find out how well young people were now learning and achieving and how the school was continuing to support them to do their best. This report summarises the findings.

Areas for improvement from the original report:

1. Continue to develop the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*
2. Review the practices of pupil support staff in helping young people
3. Implement the school's plans which are in place to meet the national requirements for religious education (RE) in denominational schools

2. How well do young people learn and achieve?

1.1 Improvements in performance

2.1 Learners' experiences

Strengths and progress identified during visits

Across the school, young people's learning and achievement continue to be of a very high standard. Teachers and young people have high aspirations and are committed to successful learning. There was a strong focus on young people understanding what they were learning in lessons with very clear learning intentions in all lessons. Young people were encouraged and stretched to work to their ability, therefore young people were highly motivated and engaged in their learning.

Young people enjoyed working together and teachers provided a wide range of opportunities for them to work collaboratively to enhance their understanding and to problem solve, which they enjoyed.

Young people were clear about their learning targets and what they needed to do to improve. Good use was made of the school's tracking and monitoring systems to inform teachers of young people's progress in learning. This enabled appropriate interventions to take place to support under performance, particularly in the senior school through a mentoring programme.

There was a positive climate for learning throughout the school. Young people's experiences in the Inclusion Resource continued to be of a very high quality.

Young people demonstrated a great pride in their school. They contributed to the broader life of the school and community by involving themselves in an extensive range of volunteering gaining various awards, such as the Saltire Award. These wider achievements are tracked from the P7 Profile onwards.

In line with the City of Edinburgh improvement priorities, all pupils, including those at risk of missing out by the end of S4, achieved five passes at Standard Grade or equivalent at foundation level. In addition, 96.4% of pupils achieved five or more awards at level 4 which is the highest in the City of Edinburgh.

The attainment of S5 pupils in 2013 was the highest in the last three years in all key measures. Pupils attaining three and five passes at Higher level remain significantly above both the national average and that of comparator schools.

The number of young people moving into positive sustained destinations for employment, training or further education is above 98% which is the highest in the City of Edinburgh. This has shown an improving trend for the last five years and is currently well above the National Scottish average. This is due to this being a priority and focus for school improvement.

3. How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

5.1 The curriculum

5.3 Meeting learning needs

Strengths and progress identified during the visit

The curriculum has been developed with a clear rationale based on shared values as outlined in the Charter for Catholic Schools; it also takes account of the latest local and national advice. The school is committed to the principles of the *Curriculum for Excellence* and places high importance on young people developing the four capacities as well as lifelong skills.

Following consultation on the restructuring of the school day, a discrete period of both business management and modern studies were added to the curriculum as part of the Broad General Education (BGE). In addition, the school also extended their S1 and S2 skills-based Enrichment Programme into S3. Two hours of RE per week are now provided on the timetable at all stages in the school to meet the national requirements of RE in denominational schools.

At S3, programmes and courses for each subject have been developed to include knowledge and skills, to enable young people to be successful learners who can contribute effectively to society. This was evident as young people were fully aware of how they use literacy and numeracy skills in other contexts in the school. All subject areas have been mapped out to ensure coverage of the Experiences and Outcomes through to fourth level to provide motivating and challenging learning

experiences for young people. Further work will be done to review the broad general education to ensure that it delivers all of the entitlements for young people.

In response to an increasing number of pupils staying on in S5 and S6 and to ensure a progressive learning experience, there has been an increase in timetabled skills and vocational based courses in the S5 and S6 stage of the senior phase such as life skills mathematics, people in society, photography, lifelong skills unit and practical woodwork.

The school has further established and enhanced successful partnerships with local schools, further education colleges and community partners who offer additional curricular personalisation and choice for young people. A number of local business partners deliver additional support, work experience opportunities and mentoring provision to young people.

The school's comprehensive S3 profile has inserts for each curricular area which are completed in classes by young people in discussion with teachers. This information is then collated and used in personal and social education (PSE) support pupils to develop skills for life, learning and work across the school. This good practice had now been extended to include S1 and S2 in PSE with an extended programme to develop skills and review progress of learning. This has resulted in young people being more aware of themselves as learners. The school will include the skills profiling in the school planner for the future, to allow all staff to see the overview for each young person. Learners' reviews at the end of S2 and S3 will also continue to be monitored to ensure continued personalisation and choice.

A well developed P7/S1 transition programme allowed for transfer of academic and pastoral information and data enabling the meet the needs of all learners to be met, particularly those with additional needs. This resulted in continuity in learning, particularly in English and mathematics.

Relationships between staff and young people were very positive. Teachers knew learners well and were clear on their needs. Differentiated targets for those with individualised education plans (IEPs) were appropriate. Young people were very well supported by learning assistants in classes where appropriate. Young people who were supported by support for learning (SfL) staff find this support to be effective in helping them learn. Almost all young people felt they received help if they asked for it.

Partners were positive about relationships with staff and the school made well-judged use of outside agencies to meet young people's needs at all stages. This improved integrated and collaborative approach where pupil support and SfL worked closer together had improved working practices and communication, which in turn had helped young people's learning. Planning and planning meetings had become more focused on outcomes for young people and therefore more streamlined. Both young people and parents were involved in reviewing their target and plans. Extensive and effective ongoing support was provided for Inclusion Resource young people.

4. How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

5.9 Improvement through self-evaluation

Strengths and progress identified during visits

School leaders, including curriculum leaders, SfL and pupil support leaders were taking forward curricular, pastoral and whole school developments. This use of distributed leadership ensured learners were still receiving a high quality learning experience. Staff throughout the school were very reflective practitioners and sought the views of learners formally and informally, resulting in changes and improvement for young people.

The school standards and quality report accurately reflected the schools strengths. The improvement plan reflected the schools priorities for the year and has helped the school progress. Additionally a very clearly structured departmental improvement plan for supporting learners had further supported improvements in this key area. There was a very clear commitment by teaching staff to continuous self-evaluation.

The school continued to be data rich. Importantly the school used this data well to inform and analyse where it was in relation to their own and other schools' performance and used this to inform school improvement priorities.

Young people were very articulate and confident individuals. Senior students particularly appreciated the wide range of leadership and other opportunities offered to them. Young people felt valued; however they would like to take a more active part improving the work of the school.

The recent appointment of a new headteacher will ensure that the school is well placed to continue to move forward on it's journey to excellence.

5. Conclusion

St Thomas of Aquin's RC High School continues to provide a very good and improving standard of education for its young people. The school has progressed well since the inspection and has made the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. The education authority will not publish further reports in connection with the 2012 HMIE report.

Maria Lloyd
Quality Improvement Officer
March 2014