

Team Improvement Visit Report

SCHOOL: Sandwick Junior High School

DATES OF VISIT: Monday 09 to Wednesday 11 March 2020

1. Background

As per Shetland Islands Council's Children's Services, 'School Improvement Framework, Appendix 2, Visits to Schools, Operational Guidance', the purpose of a Team Improvement Visit is to scrutinise and validate the school's own self-evaluation by gathering and analysing a wide range of evidence.

It was agreed between the school management team of Sandwick Junior High School and officers in Children's Services that a Team Improvement Visit would take place in term three of session 2019-20.

The school was inspected by Education Scotland in May 2019 with Education Scotland due to carry out their return visit in 2020.

To this end, the overarching purpose of Sandwick Junior High School's Team Improvement Visit was to support the school prepare for Education Scotland's follow-up visit. More specifically, the Team Improvement Visit was organised to review the progress and impact to date of all the priorities in the School Improvement Plan, and provide additional evidence to supplement the school's termly monitoring and measuring of the impact of all the improvement activity.

The 2019-20 School Improvement Plan, specifically addresses the areas for improvement identified through the Education Scotland inspection. The five priorities on the plan are as follows:

1. Develop clear procedures, which promote continuous improvement, including finalising the school's vision, values and aims and promoting leadership at all levels.
2. Improve our approach to checking progress of children across the school.
3. Improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment across the school.
4. Improve the structure of the curriculum.
5. To expand high quality provision in the school's Early Learning and Childcare setting.

Members of the team were tasked with considering the five priorities closely during the Team Improvement Visit, including the approaches to their implementation and their impact on learning, teaching and assessment within the school.

A range of documentation and data about the school, held centrally, was also referred to in the two team planning meetings prior to the visit.

The team for the Sandwick Junior High School visit consisted of:

- Mr. Calder, Executive Manager, Quality Improvement (Lead).

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- Mrs. Simpson, Quality Improvement Officer, Children and Young People with Additional Support Needs.
- Mrs. Flaws, Quality Improvement Officer, Early Learning and Childcare.
- Mr. Nicolson, Head Teacher, Brae High School.
- Mrs. Thomson, Depute Head Teacher, Mid Yell Junior High School
- Mrs. Angus, Head Teacher, Sound Primary School
- Mrs. Williamson, Head Teacher, Scalloway Primary School (Acting)

The Team Improvement Visit programme included:

- Meetings with the school management team;
- Classroom observations – almost all teachers were observed once by a member of the team during the three days;
- Dedicated time in the ELC setting;
- Discussions with pupil support and ASN staff about approaches to supporting and tracking children and young people, including children with Additional Support Needs;
- Consideration of whole school approaches to health and wellbeing, and the PSE programme;
- A staff focus group;
- A meeting with parents and carers;
- A meeting with some of the school's partners;
- Pupil focus groups at all stages of the school to consider learners progress in literacy and numeracy against expected CfE levels, and opportunities for pupil leadership and pupil voice within the school;

2. The High Level Messages from the Team Improvement Visit:

Following reflection and analysis on all the Team Improvement Visit activity over the three days in the school, five high level messages were agreed by the team and verbally shared with the school management team at the conclusion of the visit.

The five high level messages are set out below in bold text with additional explanation provided underneath each of the messages.

- (a) **The school needs to continue to progress, embed and reinforce the improvement activity within the five actions in the school improvement plan across the whole school; the current school improvement plan is supporting a more strategic approach to the school's work.**

The school improvement plan aligns to the areas for improvement identified from the Education Scotland inspection. The improvement plan has created a common purpose for the school community and a clearer strategic direction for moving forward, cohesively, which is crucial to ensure the school secures the improvements that are required.

Learners, staff and parents and carers agree that the school is now less reactive in its approach, and there is stronger, and more consistent, leadership, communication and guidance being provided around a number of key strategic issues. The school improvement plan is underpinning this more focused approach, including the progress on the school's new vision, values and aims, which has brought much needed unity and purpose.

In short, the improved strategic approach to its work, at all levels, along with a more settled senior leadership team, and less vacancies and recruitment challenges, has lifted the morale of the school community and provided the school with the platform to improve.

- (b) A significant programme of change is being progressed in the school in light of the Education Scotland inspection, and there is a need for the school management team, working with the wider school community, to consider this carefully and strategically when planning for the next school improvement plan.**

The school improvement plan sets out an ambitious and crucial programme of improvement activity for session 2019-20. Actions in the plan such as developing a new set of vision, values and aims, approaches to the tracking and monitoring of children's progress through the Broad General Education and into the Senior Phase, improving the quality of learning, teaching and assessment across the school, clarifying whole school approaches to behaviour management, improving forward planning and ensuring engagement with curriculum progression pathways, are significant items in scale in their own right and, understandably, are at varying stages of implementation.

The school management team needs to consider carefully the sheer scope of the current improvement agenda and avoid introducing a brand new suite of planned improvements next session. Many of the aforementioned 2019-20 priorities need time to embed across the school, and will need to be carried forward into future improvement plans, to ensure maximum impact for the school's learners and the wider school community.

- (c) The school management team need to continue to communicate and explain the purpose of the changes required to all stakeholders, and ensure the appropriate level of support, reassurance and challenge is in place to embed the new systems and initiatives outlined on the improvement plan.**

Related to the preceding high level message, a minority of teaching staff are finding the pace of change in the school very demanding, especially following on from the challenging Education Scotland inspection experience last May, which, for some staff, has weakened their confidence.

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Senior and middle leaders must continue to consider strategically how they ensure the appropriate and proportionate time, space, support and challenge for all teaching staff, both as individuals, and collectively in departments and faculties, to take responsibility and fully engage, implement and embed all the improvement priorities in their classrooms for the benefit of all learners.

- (d) There remains a need to ensure more consistency in learning and teaching across the school, and a shared understanding of what high quality learning and teaching looks like, building on the work already started in this area. This will support higher expectations for learners, improved pace and challenge, improved pupil engagement, and raise attainment.**

In around half of the lessons observed during the visit, learners were engaged in the learning activities and had opportunities for personalisation and choice in their learning. In these lessons, there were good examples of teachers using positive praise to build respectful relationships and interactions within the classroom and learner contributions being valued.

Moreover, in the best lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions were clear, good practice was modelled and shared with all the learners, and there was effective use of questioning to build upon learning, promote thinking and check for understanding. In these lessons, carefully selected resources, and well organised learning environments, led to active, interested and engaged learners with well-planned differentiation enabling targeted support for individuals. Effective plenaries reviewing learning and considering next steps were evident in a few lessons.

Learners we spoke to commented that, in some parts of the school, learning and teaching is improving, citing higher expectations from teaching staff and more attention and focus on their progress, improved feedback, and clearer next steps, including more informed pupil reports. However, they did concede the need for more consistency, especially in the secondary department. Meanwhile, some of the parents and carers commented on the need for more information on their children's progress and more clarity on how assessment judgements are being made.

More generally, from reviewing the feedback on the lessons observed, areas to continue to develop, as a matter of priority, include increasing the pace and challenge in lessons and improving the level of learner engagement in their learning across the school as a whole. In short, there remains significant work to be done to ensure that learning experiences are appropriately challenging, enjoyable and well matched to all learners needs on a consistent basis.

Continued focus on 'Assessment for Learning' strategies across the school will support this drive for greater consistency. As an example, in a majority of the

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lessons observed, learning intentions and success criteria were either not in place, or clear, manageable or meaningful for learners.

In short, teaching staff require further, dedicated, strategic time to reflect on their own practice in order to progress the required improvements from the inspection. Continual access to relevant, high quality and bespoke professional learning, relevant to professional review and development, and then implemented within the classroom environment, will also support improvement.

In conclusion, with an ongoing focus on improving learning and teaching, the school will be in a stronger position to turn the very relevant and appropriate aspirations and expectations for high quality learning and teaching into reality. This will in turn benefit the school community as a whole.

- (e) Recognising the early stages of the school's new behaviour policy, approaches to behaviour management remain inconsistent across the school. In a minority of lessons observed, low level behaviour issues affected the quality of the learning experiences for the class as a whole. More professional dialogue, training, and the sharing of practice amongst staff is needed, to build capacity and confidence. This will enable the school's aspiration for all learners to be 'ready, respectful and safe' to become more embedded across the school.**

Important steps have been taken by the school's positive behaviour working group in developing a draft new whole behaviour school policy and procedure, which is designed to empower teachers to manage behaviour in their classrooms and raise the expectations of pupils.

In a minority of lessons observed, staff purposefully met and spoke to children and young people, before entering their classrooms, setting the tone for the forthcoming lesson. However, this 'meet and greet' approach should be applied more consistently across the school, especially as it is supported by learners and parents and carers. Teaching staff need to fully understand the benefits of this approach and the school's wider commitment to restorative approaches to managing behaviour. The sharing of practice and peer collaboration will also support teaching staff who are lacking confidence in their own behaviour management.

In a few lessons, teachers skilfully praised the role-models, the learners who were on task and fully engaged in their learning, in order to address the disengagement of others and improve the learning environment. However, in around half the lessons observed, there was either a disproportionate focus by teachers on minor pupil indiscretions, or, conversely, learners' low level misbehaviour or lack of engagement was often ignored. In short, inconsistency in terms of pupil behaviour remains an issue.

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Within the existing parameters of the school improvement plan structure, there is a need to carry out a further piece of work on what 'ready, respectful and safe' means in practice, relating to the school's new vision, values and aims. Teaching staff, learners and parents and carers should all be part of this process to address inconsistency and support the school community develop their understanding, confidence and trust in the new positive behaviour policy and procedures.