



## **Extended Learning and Achievement Visit (ELAV) Report St John's RC Academy (Nursery, Primary and Secondary, All-Through School) 27 and 28 March 2018**

### **BACKGROUND**

To support the school in the process of self-evaluation, a team of officers from Education and Children's Services visited St John's Academy that is located within the North Inch Community Campus on 27 and 28 March 2018. The themes for the review were achievement, learning and leadership. The themes were subject to scrutiny through core Quality Indicators from How Good is Our School 4 (HGIOS4). It outlines the raised expectations in relation to schools' implementation of all aspects of Curriculum for Excellence. The ELAV, as agreed in partnership with the Headteacher, had a particular focus on validating the school's self-evaluation and under the HGIOS4 Quality Indicator 1.1, Self-evaluation for School Improvement.

At the time of the visit the school roll was as follows: Nursery 100, Primary 398, Secondary 625, total roll 1123. The Senior Management Team consisted of: the Headteacher; two Primary Depute Head Teachers; three Secondary Depute Head Teachers; (one DHT School Improvement, one DHT Support, one acting DHT Pupil Equity Fund) and a Business Manager. Attendance in session 2016-17 was 91% in the Secondary and 95% in the Primary which is in line with Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) schools' average and is above the national average. St John's RC Academy is a denominational, Roman Catholic school.

Information was gathered from class visits, scrutiny of a range of data sources, professional dialogue with SMT and staff, focus groups with pupils and parents and the school's self-evaluation and school improvement documentation.

### **ACHIEVEMENT**

Primary attainment data reviewed in the areas of literacy and numeracy indicates that there are improving trends of attainment over time. In June 2017 the majority of pupils in Primary 1 had achieved expected levels in line with national expectations in reading, writing, numeracy and most had achieved the expected levels in listening and talking. In primary 4 the majority of children had achieved expected levels in their learning in reading, writing and listening and talking and most children had achieved expected levels in numeracy. In Primary 7 most children had achieved expected levels in listening and talking and the majority had achieved expected levels in reading, writing and numeracy.

In the primary staff know the children well and monitor their progress very effectively. Staff use a wide range of data to identify and plan for children at risk of missing out in their learning and provide well planned interventions. This is particularly evident in the nursery and early years where early intervention expressive language and active literacy approaches support children in developing their emergent skills in literacy. At P4 stage the Dyslexia Pathway and Wave 3 are being used as targeted interventions. The management team have a robust system in place to track impact of these targeted interventions and early indications show these have resulted in improvements in literacy for most pupils.

Across the all-through school, pupils are given a range of opportunities to achieve within their classrooms and the wider life of the school. This includes being part of the Eco committee or the Pupil Council. The Catholic faith and values underpin the life of the school and pupils are given the opportunity to take part in initiatives such as the Caritas Award and the Pope Francis Faith Award. They also have an opportunity to participate in a range of

cultural and artistic activities and opportunities to share their learning with parents and the wider community.

In the secondary, at the end of the broad general education in session 2016/17, the school reported that 70% of young people in S3 had achieved at third level in literacy and 47% at fourth level. In numeracy 93% of young people in S3 had achieved at third level and 53% had achieved at fourth level. Young people in the senior phase achieved above their virtual comparator (VC) in literacy and numeracy at Level 4 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and slightly below the VC at Level 5, however this had been above the VC in the 2 previous years. There is evidence of improvement in performance and added value for those who stay on to S6. The school should continue to build upon processes and approaches to moderation of literacy and numeracy across the whole school to support teacher professional judgements of achievement of a level.

Young people who attend St John's Academy predominantly perform above those who attend similar schools nationally, and in the wide range of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) qualifications. They achieve well in National Qualifications and there is the opportunity to access a wide range of academic qualifications to Advanced Higher. The profile of St John's Academy is that most young people reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation bands 1-7 and the young people from these backgrounds achieve predominantly above their comparators. It is recommended that the school focusses on the performance of the highest performing young people to ensure they are challenged and achieving their full potential.

The school continues to build effectively on its approaches to Developing the Young Workforce. The Career Education Standard and the PKC Wider Achievement Standard are used to plan and evaluate and there are good examples of analysis using data and also a risk matrix that maintains a focus on those young people who are at risk of not achieving, have low attendance or need to secure a positive destination. There is a positive partnership with Skills Development Scotland whose offer currently includes P5-S6 pupils, parents and teachers and also digital elements including MyWorldofWork. The school offers work placements in the senior phase which are in the main, dedicated 5 day placements and a small number of pupils undertake extended and flexible placements. The school should continue to focus on Developing the Young Workforce and priority should be given to maintaining and building on their existing network to increase opportunities of diverse and relevant work experience for senior phase pupils and to continue to build partnerships.

Children and young people have the opportunity to experience wider achievement opportunities across the broad general education including the P6 John Muir Group, the P7 SCIAF Talented Fundraisers Initiative, the S1 Lendrick Muir residential and the S2 winter sports trip to Italy. In the senior phase a number of young people engage in wider achievement awards, in particular the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Dynamic Youth Award and including the John Muir and Sports Leader Awards. There is engagement with employability programmes enabling S5 and S6 pupils to be supported through the Career Ready programme, for example. Participation rates of young people from St John's Academy entering into positive destinations from school were 94% in session 16-17 and this was above the VC and in line with the PKC and national average. All young people in S3 take part in the Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) and many pupils in the secondary and in the primary are actively involved in fundraising for the school's chosen charities each year. Pupils talked about the value of being an Eco-School and highlighted that this initiative is being driven by pupils.

Pupils and staff across the school indicated that they feel pupils are safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Wellbeing is an evident part of the culture and curriculum and young people, parents and staff consider there to be a climate of mutual trust and respect within a strong sense of community, and a strong sense of the

school's Catholic faith and values. The staff that we spoke to demonstrated that they are a committed, supportive team who support each other and the pupils well. Pupils agreed with this and said that staff are accessible and highly responsive to the needs and interests of individual young people. The Health and Wellbeing programme is being well received by children and young people and staff also speak positively on it.

Child protection, additional support needs and safeguarding policies are in place which reflects the most recent legislation. Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and risk assessments are in place, where appropriate, to ensure young people are safe and secure whilst at school. Children and young people say that they feel that they are well informed about relationships, internet safety and substance misuse and that the school is proactive in promoting equalities and inclusion.

Parents report that overall they have a positive experience at St John's Academy. They feel that they receive information about the school and that the school is approachable and well led and managed. They receive updates on their children's learning through parents' evenings, the learning sheet, through soft starts and meet the teacher. They would appreciate more information on how their children are assessed, how to support learning at home and activities for children and parents to learn at home together. They also spoke of tracking reports in the secondary but felt that they would appreciate a better understanding of the function of tracking. They talked positively about the clubs for families, Roots of Empathy and soft starts. They indicate that they are asked their opinion through questionnaires and surveys.

## **LEARNING**

There is an inclusive, caring and kind ethos across the school community that is built upon strong and positive relationships. Children and young people demonstrate a sense of pride in their school and quickly identify themselves as being part of St John's Academy. They feel that they are listened to, they are known well in school by adults and that the school involves parents when required. The staff are nurturing and committed to the work of the school. Fairness and respect are key features of the vision and values of the school and the interactions between members of the school community were observed to be consistently respectful. Pupils are well behaved, polite and engaged in their learning. They interact positively with their peers in a respectful and positive manner. The pupils we spoke to were motivated to do well. They enjoy opportunities to be more independent in their learning and would welcome this on a more regular basis.

In the nursery the learning environment is built on positive, nurturing relationships which lead to high quality learning experiences. Children play a key role in leading their learning within the nursery. Staff listen effectively to children, ask appropriate open questions to encourage and further develop children's thinking. The staff know the children well and quality observations take place through play in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The parents spoken to commented positively on the support provided to children and their families by the staff in the nursery. Almost all children are making very good progress in literacy and numeracy and their individual achievements are recognised and celebrated.

The staff in the nursery work closely with colleagues in the early years of the school throughout the year and at the point of transition to primary one. The nursery has implemented positive changes and the team is committed to continuous improvement. It is recommended that approaches are developed to record next steps for children and also to build on outdoor experiences.

In most of the learning episodes observed in primary, the learning environment was stimulating, pupils were treated respectfully and their responses were valued and encouraged. Across the primary the majority of pupils engaged well in their learning

activities. There is a clear focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing and evidence of joint planning across stages. In most lessons learning intentions and success criteria were shared and in the majority of lessons a range of formative assessment strategies were used effectively. In the best examples of lessons we observed there was effective use of skilled questioning, differentiation and feedback to inform next steps in learning. This practice should now be further enhanced by continuing to develop a more consistent approach to learning, teaching and assessment across the primary and in particular use of success criteria to ensure differentiation and to support pupils to identify and understand next steps in their learning. In primary there are regular opportunities for pupils to write for a variety of purposes motivated by real life experiences and connected to interdisciplinary learning.

Across the primary, staff are lead learners and take on leadership roles to support school priorities in literacy and numeracy and in taking forward areas such as rights respecting schools, the world of work and digital technologies where P5 & P6 are trialling SeeSaw resource to share learning with parents. One of the teachers is also leading the implementation of French as part of the Language Learning in Scotland: 1+2 Approach. Numeracy leaders are working collegiately to develop a clear policy and strategy for improving attainment in numeracy. The approaches towards outdoor education and the links to self-regulation and meta-cognition that begins in the primary school are commendable.

In the secondary, learning is well-planned, learning intentions are shared, referred to and build on previous learning and real life experiences. Relationships are positive and explanations and instructions are clear and learners responses are valued and encouraged and they are treated with fairness, equality and respect. Learners have opportunities to achieve within the activities which progress their learning and motivate them as individuals. The learning environments are stimulating and learners are given well-earned praise which motivates. There are high expectations for all learners, they are engaged and they are motivated to achieve and progress. In the best examples of lessons observed teachers were facilitating learning, there was brisk pace and challenge, peer feedback was evident, Assessment for Learning was embedded and there was skilled questioning and high level of interactions. Co-operative learning techniques, when observed, were successfully deployed.

There is an opportunity to consider feedback as a focus for the all-through school and its definition in their context and to utilise the examples of good practice that are evident. The school should build upon approaches to questioning that includes all children and young people and that differentiation is integrated into questioning. The whole school is well placed to develop greater consistency in approaches to learning and teaching, including feedback and differentiation, and this should now be a priority for staff to share good practice and improve further upon the positive examples of learning and teaching observed. The School Improvement Plan details as an improvement outcome that children and young people are leading learning experiences and there is the opportunity to extend this including developing further opportunities for pupil voice and leadership of learning at classroom level. The successful pupil mentoring programme can provide a platform to build from.

Across the school, children's additional support needs are identified effectively. Staff are motivated to meet the needs of all learners and pupil support staff deliver specific programmes of targeted work on an ongoing basis, and for example the effective collaboration with Educational Psychologists on self-regulation. Effective communication between class teachers and support staff should continue to be a focus to ensure that all aspects of planning and target setting are understood by everyone. It was observed in a few classes that young people with English as an Additional Language (EAL) were not coping well with English language acquisition and it is recommended that visual aids are used to assist children and young people with EAL to learn by association and build their English

language skills. The school should now ensure that the recording of children and young people with additional support needs is updated and frequently reviewed to ensure accuracy of needs and support.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The all-through school under the leadership of the Headteacher is in a strong position for continuous improvement and leadership of change. There is a shared understanding and visible presence of the aims and values and particularly its denominational, Catholic identity and values, including the Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland.

The Headteacher has implemented a rigorous and robust process for self-evaluation and self-improvement and this visit validates that. All staff are actively involved in the cycle of self-evaluation and contribute through departmental and whole school processes and evaluations are made based on departmental audits and How Good is Our School 4 quality indicators.

The school's Senior Leadership Team, together with the all-through school staff, demonstrate a strong commitment to the school, its young people, their learning and their families. Members of the all-through staff undertake a range of whole school leadership responsibilities that are individualised and linked to self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. Examples of this include effectively leading the Caritas Award, sports leaders, Duke of Edinburgh Award and the House system. Many staff also take responsibility for a variety of extra-curricular events and activities. Staff report that they feel valued and enjoy working collaboratively and sharing practice and that they have a clear understanding of the social, cultural and economic context of the school.

The Teacher Leader Initiative provides a productive and pro-active platform for whole school improvement priorities and is building leadership capacity across the school. Teachers talk positively about their involvement and the impact that this initiative is having and also the collaborative approach. This has been enhanced this year with the opportunity for staff to present their rationale for interventions that are beginning to contribute to closing the poverty related attainment gap and this is being supported by the Pupil Equity Fund.

The school's approaches to Career Long Professional Learning and collegiate activities are also providing a platform for teacher leadership, Masters level learning, action research and the model for improvement. There is a strong ethos of teamwork among the staff. The school's Relationships policy is under constant review and provides a solid foundation that underpins the ethos.

Children and young people in the school are articulate and positive about opportunities for leadership roles and highlight that they have a range of opportunities available to them such as the Eco-school, the Pupil Learning Council and the Fairtrade Group. The Rights Respecting Schools initiative is a key driver for pupil leadership and has been recognised for its success in receiving its second award. Emerging approaches, through the teacher led equity groups, to family learning and the Digital Learning Council's work on access at home are contributing to closing the poverty related attainment gap. Young people contribute effectively in approaches to paired reading, numeracy and Health and Wellbeing and appreciate being involved.

## **Conclusion**

St John's RC Academy all-through school provides a nurturing, safe, respectful environment in which young people can learn and achieve. There is a shared vision to working together with young people and their families to get it right for the children and young people in their care.

## Strengths

- The school's strong sense of identity and the ownership of the identity by the children, young people and staff. Children and young people are well behaved, polite and engaged in their learning. They interact positively with their peers in a respectful and positive manner.
- The leadership of the Headteacher and the Senior Leadership Team who have a strong sense of direction and strategically plan for continuous school improvement. The leadership approaches which encourage and foster leadership, innovation and creativity across the school.
- The shared understanding of the vision, values and aims in the school community and the inclusive, caring and kind ethos of the whole school community that is built upon strong and positive relationships.
- The school's approaches to school improvement planning and self-evaluation that are collaborative, and are systematic and robust. Self-evaluation is based upon analysis, evaluation and data and is impacting on learners.
- The effectiveness of staff to ensure positive outcomes for young people and the capacity for continuous improvement.
- The approaches to targeted programmes such as resilience and self-regulation and the partnerships which enhance this.

We discussed with the Headteacher and the Senior Leadership Team how they might continue to improve the school in light of their own self-evaluation and feedback from the Extended Learning and Achievement Visit team. The following areas for improvement were agreed. In session 2018-19 the school should:

- Build on its approaches to Responsibilities of All and provide moderation, quality assurance and engagement opportunities for staff and enhance approaches to improving literacy and numeracy for all learners.
- Continue to develop its approaches to young people as leaders of learning, and in contributing to the leadership of learning, and should further explore opportunities for pupils and parents to participate in school improvement processes.
- Continue to develop approaches to class based universal and targeted support for young people, including EAL pupils and approaches to pace and challenge for all.
- Ensure all teaching staff adopt common approaches to Learning, Teaching and Assessment, including Assessment is for Learning, feedback and differentiation that will provide parity of experience and expectations and ensure the identified good practice in learning and teaching is shared collaboratively and applied.

As part of the normal ELAV follow up procedures, ECS officers will return within a year to evaluate the school's progress towards taking forward the recommendations for improvement.

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