

## **Aberdeen City Council**

### **Education, Culture and Sport**

#### **Validated Self Evaluation of**

#### **Hazlehead Primary School**

**November 2012**

### **Overview of Process**

The Validated Self Evaluation (VSE) exercise undertaken in Hazlehead Primary School in November 2012 was part of a programme developed by Aberdeen City Council to provide a model for reviewing the work of schools across the local authority.

The particular model of VSE used in Hazlehead Primary School was evolved by a team comprising local authority officers and staff from the school . It involved a visit by a team of professionals to the school to experience the learning and teaching environment and share in where the school thinks it is at and where it is planning to go in the coming months and years. The process demonstrated a collegiate approach, which allowed the school to evaluate its work, recognise strengths and plan future improvements.

This was framed in the context of the documents, '*How Good is Our School 3*' and '*Journey to Excellence*'.

### **Report**

#### **Key Themes for Validated Self-Evaluation**

In discussion between staff and the Quality Improvement Officer there were three key themes and two sub themes identified for the validated self evaluation visit-

#### **Key Themes-**

- **Learners' Experiences**
- **Meeting Learning Needs**
- **The Curriculum – with a particular focus on Inter Disciplinary Learning**

#### **Sub Themes**

- **Pupil Voice**
- **Parent Voice**

In the following sections these themes are treated individually with a summary statement of the team's findings provided, along with evidence of particular strengths and suggested areas for further development but throughout the visit the cross-cutting element of these themes was fully recognised. Each section was developed collaboratively by the VSE team resulting in agreement on the school's work as it currently stands. Suggested areas for further development are offered as a support for the continuing programme of improvements planned within the school.

### **Summary of Findings:**

Throughout the VSE visit there was strong evidence of the quality of work going on at Hazlehead School and of the very positive relationships and ethos across the school, all of which have created the necessary climate and environment for creating purposeful learning experiences for all pupils.

Throughout this summary it is evident that there is a correlation between the VSE team's findings and the school's own self-evaluation. Most of the next steps already identified by the school were endorsed by the VSE team and, as a result, Hazlehead Primary is well placed to take forward these clear areas of focus to further improve the experience of learners.

### **Key Theme: Learners' Experiences**

Almost all children are highly motivated and enjoy learning. Children feel valued and are aware that their voice is heard and staff respond to their feedback.

All children have benefited from a variety of high quality learning experiences through a wide range of opportunities. Many of these are in class through the delivery of the curriculum. In addition a significant range of excellent learning experiences are available through whole school challenges and extra curricular opportunities. The Scottish Opera work was an example of excellence.

Almost all children are eager participants in active learning and increasingly take responsibility for their learning. The children are very positive about their experiences at school and most are able to reflect to some extent on their own progress in learning. This is a developing area. Most children feel that their learning is at an appropriate level but some feel that they would enjoy more challenge and pace. In some classes there is sufficient pace and challenge but this is not consistent throughout the school. There is differentiation in most classes but in some classes this needs to be better matched to children's abilities and the pace and challenge needs to be increased.

The school has worked to establish a sound curriculum. Children have access to the breadth of curriculum. The PE specialist contributes significantly to the quality of the two hours PE. The art specialist is a very valuable asset to the school. RME is supported by the school chaplains. Science and Music require further consideration. Outdoor learning is increasing and is an area for further extension.

Parents are very positive about the school and the experiences children have. They said 'The school is fantastic'. Children's emotional and social wellbeing is well supported and staff respond quickly to any concerns. Parents recognised that the SMT have taken the school forward over the last two years and that staff work tirelessly to improve the opportunities available for the pupils. Homework was an area of concern. They indicated that the approach to homework is not

consistent across the school. Parents valued the information about children's learning on the blogs but recently this information has not been so readily available. Some parents felt that IDL dominated homework tasks and there is insufficient focus on the basics in literacy and numeracy.

### **Key Strengths**

- ⇒ **The commitment of the Head teacher , the Depute Head teachers and all staff to improving the school.**
- ⇒ **Behaviour and attitude of pupils towards their learning and the school.**
- ⇒ **The whole school challenges, World of Work, Science Week , Health Week , Masterclass, Balloon Buggy and The House System.**
- ⇒ **The recognition of achievement of all pupils.**
- ⇒ **The practice in the Nursery.**

### **Next Steps**

- ⇒ **Development of outdoor learning experiences for pupils.**
- ⇒ **Improve the use of ICT to support the curriculum.**
- ⇒ **Develop the homework policy further.**
- ⇒ **Ensure that where appropriate a differentiated curriculum is delivered to all pupils.**
- ⇒ **Ensure that adequate pace and challenge for learning is in place for all pupils.**

### **Key Theme: Meeting Learning Needs**

'Meeting learning needs' has been an area for development within the school for the last two years. The school indicated in their own evaluation that considerable work had been undertaken in reviewing all ASN procedures and putting in place a robust staged procedure to address issues identified through audit. These included the need for consistency, developing a culture of collective responsibility for pupils with additional support needs, improving communication and developing the inclusive culture of the school. They felt this was beginning to make a difference. However they recognised that there was scope for further development and improvement.

The school felt they had worked hard to develop close partnerships with parents about their child's progress through a variety of approaches at different times throughout the year. A good start had been made to challenging more able pupils through a range of approaches, with plans in place to extend these further. This approach now needs to be extended to all pupils.

SMT felt that learners were now significantly more engaged in their learning through reviewed personal learning planning and a range of recent initiatives.

The school advised that ASN Base provision has been reviewed through observations and consultation and work has begun on looking at the use of staff, resources and procedures to support and meet learning needs. However, they acknowledge that further work is needed in this area.

During the VSE it was found that the school's evaluation of its progress within this area was valid and reflective of current practice within the school. The pupils almost all demonstrated good behaviour, pride in and enthusiasm for their school and an interest in their own learning. SMT had rigorously evaluated the work of the school in this area and had put in place a wealth of rigorous policies and procedures to support improved practice. Although the majority of staff seemed to recognise the need for this and are appreciative of it, there were still significant differences in practice and some lack of understanding about what was required and why. The school had introduced setting to try to deliver support and challenge. They now need to ensure that these times are used for valuable learning and teaching activities. In some cases pupils were engaged in activities which they could have tackled independently at these times. In most classes differentiation was provided solely by teacher expectation and level of support provided by adults. Learning intentions and success criteria were used in all classes visited, although these were not always appropriate or related to each other and some teachers seemed unclear about this. Pupils supported by the ASN base attended mainstream classes in the afternoon, but there was a lack of consistency in planning for appropriate learning experiences to meet their needs or evidence of any meaningful connect between their mainstream and base experiences. Parents were highly supportive of the school and the changes the new management team had put in place and were still implementing. However they reported very different experiences of their involvement in their childrens' learning and opportunities for engagement with the school. A number of pupils were still unsure of the purpose of processes such as Personal Learning Planning and their role in developing IEPs. Staff were not entirely clear about when children required IEPs or other types of individual plan or whose responsibility the development of these was. Staff tended to view pupils with additional support needs as the responsibility of someone other than the class teacher.

### **Key Strengths**

- ⇒ **Very good relationships between staff and pupils.**
- ⇒ **Strong leadership in providing robust policies and procedures for staff, parents and pupils.**
- ⇒ **Motivated ,competent and resourceful PSAs who demonstrate a commitment to their own professional development**
- ⇒ **Engagement with different agencies to identify the needs of and support pupils with additional support needs.**

### **Next Steps**

- ⇒ **Ensure all staff understand and are supported and enabled to follow policies and procedures and that classroom practice reflects these.**
- ⇒ **Extend approaches to differentiation to ensure all pupils are appropriately challenged /supported in both mainstream and ASN settings.**

⇒ **Further develop the approaches to personal learning planning and Individual Education Planning.**

⇒ **Improve inclusive practice for ASN pupils.**

### **Key Theme: The Curriculum (focus Inter Disciplinary Learning)**

Curriculum development has been a main theme within the school for the last two years with a particular strong focus on the area of IDL. The school felt in their own evaluation that they were making steady progress within this area and that they now had rigorous and robust systems to ensure that a broad curriculum was available to all pupils. They did, however acknowledge that this had not fully impacted in consistent quality teaching and learning experiences for pupils, especially in the area of IDL.

During the VSE it was found that the school's evaluation of its progress within this area was valid and reflective of current practice. All staff were clear about the planning approach to IDL and fully understood the principles which underpinned its design. The concept of 'subject drivers' for each topic is well established and staff ensure that this is reflected in their delivery of the IDL teaching and learning experiences. There now needs to be a closer look at the 'driver, having both a content and skill focus with equal weighting.

Pupils are consulted on IDL through initial mind maps identifying areas which have been covered previously and areas of interest to be investigated by the class. The quality of these approaches is variable throughout the school. At present the approach to IDL does not facilitate the principle of personalisation and choice and this is reflected in some pupils lacking motivation for certain topics.

The staff feel well supported by the structures and approaches created in their delivery of IDL. They also value the feedback on the monitoring of plans which ensure that IDL is delivered in a consistent and progressive way. Shared stage planning has allowed staff expertise and interest to be used. This has resulted in creative and engaging lessons in some classes and stages.

Approaches to AifL such as sharing learning intentions and success criteria is variable in terms of quality for IDL work and this can result in a lack of depth in the teaching of each of the individual subject disciplines which is essential in the production of a high quality IDL final outcome.

The school has worked to establish a sound curriculum. Children have access to the breadth of curriculum. The PE specialist contributes significantly to the quality of the two hours PE. The art specialist is a very valuable asset to the school. RME is supported by the school chaplains. Science and Music require further consideration. Outdoor learning is increasing and is an area for further extension.

## **Key Strengths**

- ⇒ **The whole school approach to the planning of IDL ensuring the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum.**
- ⇒ **The professional and evaluative approach of the SMT to ensure continued improvement in the delivery of the curriculum.**
- ⇒ **The innovative practice of the I pad project.**

## **Next Steps**

- ⇒ **Further development of skill progression for each of the discrete areas of IDL.**
- ⇒ **Explore ways of increasing flexibility in the planning approach allowing more personalisation and choice for pupils and staff.**
- ⇒ **Develop further the setting of learning intentions and success criteria for IDL tasks.**

## **Sub Themes: Pupil and Parent Voice**

Over the course of the VSE there were several opportunities to engage with parents and pupils. There was focused discussion with parents and pupils on extra curricular activities, Nursery provision and on the voice of parents/pupils in the school.

The overwhelming view of parents is one of support for the Head Teacher and the school. They believe that their views are listened to, valued and taken account of. They provided several examples of high levels of commitment and participation from staff in a wide range of initiatives and activities – this was considered to be a key area of strength by parents. Another area that parents welcomed was the range of ways in which the school celebrates success.

The views of the parents from the nursery provision were extremely positive. Some of them were able to compare and contrast their experience in Hazlehead School with the previous provision and cited a range of examples of improved provision. The open days were considered to be particularly helpful for parents in clarifying arrangements and what was to be expected of them and their children. Parents are made to feel part of the nursery and welcomed the opportunity to be actively involved. They were particularly supportive of the transition arrangements that the school has put in place between nursery and P1. They were able to see a much greater connection between the learning in the nursery and that of P1 – this included homework activities and the increased expectation of parental involvement with these activities. There is a clear belief that the nursery experience in Hazlehead adds significant value to their children's skills, social interaction and learning. A quote from one of the parents and echoed by all of the others was 'the parents love Mrs Bruce and Mrs Enston and our children love being in the nursery. The evidence from our visits certainly endorsed these views.

The parent voice focus group ranged across a number of areas from school environment to homework and parental involvement. There was a very clear sense of full support from parents for the school and a keenness to be actively involved in the life of the school. The senior management team have been very successful in making the parents feel included and welcomed. This is a key area of strength of the school. Parents welcomed the array of

information they receive from the school and the establishment of the working groups that their children are involved in across the year groups in the school, again they perceived this to be a very inclusive approach to engaging pupils in wider activities and in ensuring their involvement, again this is a particular area of strength. The school set high expectation of children and this is welcomed by parents. There is a strong sense of community in the school and this is to be commended.

### **Key Strengths**

- ⇒ **The wide range of opportunities for pupils to engage in school activities supported by staff and parents**
- ⇒ **Very high levels of commitment from staff to offer and become actively involved in providing opportunities**
- ⇒ **Inclusive environment which encourages young people to become involved**
- ⇒ **Wide range of suitably challenging activities in the nursery**
- ⇒ **High level of inclusion and parental involvement in nursery**
- ⇒ **The introduction of homework diaries were seen as a very positive step**
- ⇒ **Visibility and availability of the Management Team who work hard to welcome and involve parents in the life of the school**
- ⇒ **Strong clear communication from the school to parents**

### **Next Steps**

- ⇒ **Consider whether there would be value in establishing/extending breakfast and after school provision**
- ⇒ **Consider the current phasing arrangements for nursery – parents suggested that the current arrangements can be challenging for some working parents**
- ⇒ **Some parents questioned whether pupils should attend parent evenings**

### **Summary of Findings:**

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Throughout this summary it is evident that there is a correlation between the VSE team's findings and the school's own self-evaluation. Most of the next steps already identified by the school were endorsed by the VSE team and, as a result, Hazlehead Primary is well placed to take forward these clear areas of focus to further improve the experience of learners.