

Follow-through Inspection Report

St Paul's High School

April 2009

The Inspection

Following their inspection of the school in April 2007, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) published a report on standards and quality in St Paul's High School in September 2007 and had asked that within two years of that report parents and carers be informed of the extent of improvement by the school.

Working with the education authority, the school had prepared an action plan indicating how they would address the main points for action identified in the original report.

The Area Education Manager, link Quality Improvement Officer and other members of the Education Improvement Service had visited the school throughout 2007-2009 to evaluate the extent to which the school was continuing to improve the quality of its work and to evaluate the progress made in responding to the main points for action.

Continuous Improvement

The headteacher at the time of the original inspection had retired in August 2007 and a deputy headteacher had taken up post as headteacher in January 2008 following a spell as acting headteacher. She and her senior leadership team had led teachers very effectively in taking forward the main recommendations of the report and, supported by the Joint Managers (Principal Teachers) had incorporated these into the school and faculty/departmental improvement plans.

Staff at all levels had shown a willingness to secure improvements and had participated in a range of working groups to take initiatives forward. These had built upon the existing very good developmental practice within the school and further nurtured by its status as a School of Ambition. These had included, amongst others, Attainment and Achievement, Curriculum for Excellence, Steps to Success, Health Promotion and Self-evaluation groups.

The authority's Education Improvement Service had supported the school through a range of organised in-service provision at authority level and had visited the school to provide more focussed support at departmental level. To enhance their own skills and to improve the quality of learning experiences for young people, staff had willingly undertaken a range of opportunities for professional development from both internal and external providers including the Universities of Glasgow, Strathclyde and Aberdeen.

The school had continued to improve attainment. In 2008, the school performed across a range of indicators better than or in line with similar schools. For example by the end of S4, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 4 or better had increased by 4% to 60%. Attainment at SCQF level 5 or better had increased by 2% to 17%. By the end of S5, the percentage of young people gaining 3 or more Highers had shown a steady increase since 2005 and was the highest in ten

years. However, in 2008 performance by the end of S6 had decreased across a range of measures. The school had recognised this and had set itself some ambitious targets to increase attainment levels in 2009. Early analysis from the school's own monitoring and tracking procedures would indicate that these targets are achievable.

In 2008, by the end of S2 attainment in national assessments in reading, writing and mathematics had shown continuous improvement since 2006. In particular, attainment in reading had shown significant improvement. Now, the majority of young people were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and mathematics with around half achieving the appropriate level in writing. The school's performance monitoring procedures had indicated that this improvement would be maintained or bettered by the end of June 2009.

The school had made very good progress in improving the destinations of young people leaving school. The proportion going to higher or further education, training or employment had increased from 63% in 2002/03 to over 80% in 2007. In particular, the percentage of young people unemployed and seeking work had declined steadily from over 30% in 2003 to 16% in 2007.

The school continued to make good progress in reducing the number of exclusions. In 2007/08 the number of exclusion incidents had almost halved since 2005/06 and the number of days lost per 1000 pupils had declined by around 25% in that same period.

Over the last three years the school had embarked on a programme of change funded by the 'Schools of Ambition' project. HMIE had indicated that the school had correctly identified its areas for development and had used its funds appropriately to support these targets. Overall, they felt that the programme had made a real difference to the school with staff more confident to try out new ideas and that young people had gained a broader perspective of education and preparation for adult life, particularly through the projects developed within the 'Learning Beyond the Classroom' strand. Through projects such as the St. Andrews Day, Environment and Health weeks, the citizenship initiative and residential projects such as visits to Madrid, New York, Ecuador and Auschwitz young people had developed as active and responsible learners.

There had been clear evidence of a very positive ethos throughout the school and an increasingly positive perception of the school within the local community. Attendance at parents meetings had increased and the school roll had steadily increased over the last four years.

Progress Towards the Main Points for Action

The report identified three main points for action.

Main point for action 1

Extend the good practice in learning and teaching more consistently across the school.

The school has made very good progress towards achieving this target.

At the time of the original inspection HMIE had evaluated the quality of teaching as good, with several examples of very good practice but had wanted this good practice to be extended more consistently across the school. Since then, in order to achieve a more consistent approach, the school had agreed a clear structure to lessons. Every department had adopted the practice of sharing lesson outcomes with young people. This enabled young people to have a better understanding of what they were expected to learn and become more active in their learning.

The school had also involved all departments in using a wider range of teaching strategies, including group work. Pastoral care staff had adopted a more consistent approach to the teaching of personal and social education. Young people were more actively involved in their learning in all subject areas. Good practice had been shared through teachers watching each other teach and through working alongside each other in the class room. Young people across the school were able to work together more on activities in classes.

Teachers were continuing to extend and develop their teaching approaches to be more interactive and to involve young people more in their learning. As a result, young people had become more motivated and engaged in their learning.

Consistency in learning and teaching had been monitored and evaluated by the senior leadership team and by the joint managers through classroom visits and departmental meetings.

Main point for action 2

Ensure the learning needs of all young pupils are being met effectively so that all are able to achieve their full potential.

The school had made good progress towards this target.

At the time of the original inspection meeting learners' needs was evaluated overall as good. The school had provided staff development in constructing 'SMART' learning outcomes for teachers and by increasing the skills and confidence of the Pastoral Care team in supporting young people's learning. As a result, planning to meet individual learning needs had been improved. However, the school should continue to monitor the effectiveness of their model for delivering support for learning.

Those young people with social, emotional and behavioural needs had benefitted from the introduction of an ASDAN course, aimed at providing a more individualised experience to meet their needs. All young people in S1/2 had received increased

support in the development of literacy and numeracy with the introduction of weekly designated core skills periods. Some young S3 people had benefitted from close links with the local college and were following part-time courses more suited to their needs. In addition, some young people in S3 and S4 had been able to follow the Princes' Trust Excelerate with XL programme as an alternative to a Standard Grade course. This programme had provided a range of activities such as the Celtic Education programme and XL Enterprise Activities and had resulted in increased confidence and engagement in learning by participants.

In mathematics, classes had been grouped by prior attainment which allowed young people to follow a course appropriate to their ability. Higher attaining young people had been challenged by beginning Credit level in S2 allowing an early start to the Higher course by the end of S4. In English, National Qualification courses at Intermediate level had been provided as an alternative to Standard Grade to increase pace and challenge. Access 3 courses had been provided in many departments for young people to raise attainment and better meet young people's needs.

To meet the needs of the higher attaining young people the school had continued to offer a range of courses at Advanced Higher level.

Main point for action 3

Improve the rigour and consistency of self-evaluation to provide a sound basis for identifying and sharing good practice and for addressing priorities for continuous improvement.

The school had made very good progress towards achieving this target.

The school had established a self-evaluation working group to review current procedures and this had resulted in the development of a systematic whole-school policy on monitoring and evaluation of practice. A calendar of monitoring activities had been established at whole-school and departmental level to ensure a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation. These monitoring activities had included reviewing the pupil experience through sampling classwork, projects and other display work by young people. It also included regular observation of classroom teaching and learning.

A process had been established whereby the member of the Senior Leadership Team linked to departments or faculties met with the Joint Managers (Principal Teachers) on a six-weekly schedule to evaluate departmental/faculty performance. The outcomes of these Quality Assurance meetings had been discussed at regular Senior Leadership Team meetings and feedback to departments was provided. As a result departments had become more systematic in their approach to self-evaluation and more accountable for a range of performance issues such as teaching and learning, homework and attainment.

From the monitoring of classroom experience good practice had been identified and had been shared with staff through the publication of a good practice newsletter and through school-based professional development sessions.

In addition to the regular monitoring and feedback of classroom practice by the Joint Managers and the senior leadership team, individual teachers had kept a self-reflective log of their own teaching whereby they had self-evaluated at least four lessons per

session. The various evaluations were used during the Professional Review and Development procedures to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning experience for young people.

The school had developed a very effective pupil tracking system. Young people and departments negotiated and agreed ambitious but achievable attainment targets and their progress towards them was monitored on a regular basis. A reporting and tracking calendar was established at the beginning of each session and this had enabled comprehensive forward planning at whole school and departmental level. There had been systematic gathering of tracking information which had enabled appropriate interventions to take place. Pastoral Care and mentors had been informed of young people not on track and had liaised with parent/carers to enable them to become involved in their own child's progress.

Staff had evaluated individual and faculty performance through regular discussions with senior managers and during the PRD process. A range of audit tools was used by the school to evaluate progress. These included, How good is Our School, parental and pupil surveys and pupil evaluations of classroom practice. Performance in SQA examinations was analysed by departments and reviewed in discussion with the link member of the senior leadership team. The head teacher and senior leadership team had analysed and evaluated whole school performance in SQA examinations and had engaged with the authority in performance review meetings.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The head teacher and staff had worked hard and the school had clearly demonstrated its willingness to continue to improve and had made very good progress overall regarding the main points for action outlined in the report of September 2007. The school's capacity for continuing improvement and, in particular, its ability to deliver a varied and stimulating curriculum had been enhanced by its involvement in the Schools of Ambition programme.

There had been clear evidence of a real difference having been made to the school and to the confidence of staff and young people. Moreover, the increasing school roll and greater involvement of parents/carers in school meetings and the general trend of raised attainment had contributed to a growing confidence in the school by the local community.

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