



Follow-through Inspection Report

St. Thomas Aquinas Secondary School

May 2010

1. The Inspection

Following their inspection of the school in January 2008, HMIe published a report in May 2008 on key aspects of the school's work at all stages. HM Inspectors had evaluated how well the school was raising achievement for all pupils, taking into account the extent to which pupils' learning needs were met by the curriculum and teaching. They had also analysed pupils' attainment in national examinations, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement.

HM inspectors had asked that parents and carers be informed of the extent of improvement by the school after two years. 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 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.

2. Continuous Improvement

Staff had demonstrated their cooperation and commitment to school improvement and, led by senior managers and principal teachers, had further enhanced the rigour of monitoring learning and teaching and analysis of attainment data. This had led to improved teaching strategies, course delivery and more effective learning opportunities for young people which, in turn, had resulted in continued improvement in attainment in SQA performance across all levels from S4 to S6. In 2009 by the end of S4, the percentage of young people gaining five or more awards at Credit and/or Intermediate 2 had increased from 26% to 31%. By the end of S4, the school performed overall much better than similar schools. Furthermore, in 2009, by the end of S5 the percentage of young people gaining five or more awards at Higher level had increased from 8% to 9%. By the end of S6 the percentage of young people gaining one or more Advanced Higher had risen to 13%. The school consistently performed much better than similar schools for all measures at S5 and S6.

There had been greater clarity in tracking processes in S1 and S2 and in 2009, by the end of S2, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics had improved significantly.

Leadership capacity had been developed through the re-establishment of a series of school improvement groups. These had made a significant impact on the school's readiness to introduce Curriculum for Excellence through, for example, focussing on 'Literacy across Learning', and 'Numeracy across Learning'.

The entire school community had been involved in reflecting on, reviewing and restating the school's core values and aims and this is reflected in a reduction in the number of half days lost to exclusion which has declined by more than half since 2007. Exclusion figures to end of March 2010 show that this reduction is continuing.

Under the leadership of a designated depute headteacher, child welfare and protection had been further improved through the continued development of an integrated Pupil Support Team. External evaluation of Child Welfare and Protection conducted by Education Services had described the school as exhibiting 'best practice' in these key areas.

The school had continued to enhance further the range of activities which develop young people's confidence and their capacity to act responsibly and to assume leadership roles. Young people had benefitted from these experiences and their achievements had gained recognition in various ways. Some examples of these include:

- The School and the Learning Community had achieved a Diamond Enterprise Award in recognition of the various elements of enterprise education included in the curriculum such as the P7 KNEX challenge; Mothers Day Cards and Gifts which had been planned, developed and produced by the third year student council; fourth year student council had organised a year group trip to Alton Towers for those young people who met strict, negotiated conduct criteria.
- Winter Leavers had attended an event designed to discuss future pathways with a wide range of external providers, as part of the school's drive to increase personal confidence and capacity for young people who require MCMC opportunities.
- In association with Dumbarton Road Corridor Project, second and third year students had engaged in a peer education programme mentoring local primary school children over sensitive issues such as alcohol and drug abuse.
- Senior students had formed a Charity Concert Committee and had led their peers through the production of a concert showcasing musical talents. All proceeds were donated to two overseas establishments linked to the school (an orphanage in Quito/Ecuador and Nkhamenya Girls School (Malawi).
- The Performing Arts faculty had developed young people's skills enabling some to take principal roles in Glasgow's Youth Theatre Production over the last two years.
- The school's commitment to equality and justice, as evidenced by the young people's continued charity work, had been recognised by a national charity which had invited the young people to help launch their national 'Wee Box' Lenten appeal in 2009.
- Senior students had gained 'Diana Awards', most recently for services to those requiring geriatric/palliative care in a local hospice.

The school had continued to work closely with parents and carers. A new Parent Council had been established and had supported the school in implementing important programmes such as sex and relationships education through 'Called to Love', on-line Internet Safety and in the development of a revised Anti-Bullying Policy. The Parent Council has also participated fully in the development of the school's improvement plan. Parents/carers, young people and staff had been kept fully informed through a well presented regular newsletter which is also available electronically on the school web-site developed and managed by students. The school roll had risen from 786 in 2004 to 938 in the current year reflecting the growing confidence of the community in the school.

3. Progress Towards the Main Points for Action

Main point for action 1

The report identified four main points for action:

Further review the curriculum to meet needs of all leavers.

The school had made good progress towards meeting this action point.

A curriculum review group comprising a range of staff including two deputy headteachers (DHTs); a small group of principal teachers (PTs) and an unpromoted member of staff had developed a new curriculum architecture to deliver a broad general education for S1-S3. All staff had been regularly and extensively consulted. As a result of which the revised curriculum is in place and had gained widespread support. Notable features of the revised curriculum had included the opportunity for personalisation and choice at the end of S1, with depth and progression being facilitated into S2 and S3; an overall reduction in the number of subjects delivered, and a simplification of the rota arrangements.

In S3 and S4, the school had offered ASDAN courses as appropriate. This is continually monitored to ensure the programme meets young people's needs. Last year all young people following this course achieved a bronze award. The school is currently undertaking an evaluation of the Scottish Qualifications Authority's 'Personal Development Award' with a view to its introduction into S3/S4.

Glasgow's EVIP programme had continued to be accessed by the school to meet the needs of some of its most challenging young people and young people in other alternative provision had been more rigorously tracked and monitored. As a result more young people attending alternative provision had achieved positive outcomes.

The school had introduced English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to meet the needs of a number of young people with English as an additional language.

The school had improved progression for young people from S4 to S5. The introduction of new courses in Creative Cake Production and the Culinary Excellence Programme had provided additional opportunities to a wider range of young people, including 'Christmas Leavers', and had supported the formation of strong learning links with some of Glasgow's leading hotels and restaurants. These curricular initiatives had enabled some young people to gain employment.

The school had made significant progress in improving programmes for personal and social education (PSE). The responsibility for development of courses had been delegated to the Pastoral Care Team and as a result, the teaching of PSE in the senior school had undergone a significant improvement. A greater number of young people now had access to a quality physical education experience in the senior school. However an appropriate number of hours for physical education for all young people in S5/S6 still remained a challenge for the school in line with other denominational schools operating within a 33-period week structure.

The school had provided a range of opportunities for wider achievement through their enhanced enterprise programme. Of particular note were the MCMC Literacy Support Group (S3); Numeracy – Personnel Finance (S5-S6); Health and Well-Being – Healthy Lifestyles in PE (S4) which were all recognised in the Diamond Award for Enterprise.

Main point for action 2

Further develop the integration of the support for learning staff, including the Language Unit, to provide better support provision.

The school had made very good progress towards meeting this action point.

Under the direction and leadership of a DHT an integrated pupil support team had been formed comprising PTs pastoral care, support for learning and Specific Language Impairment Unit (Secondary). This had ensured a greater degree of consistency in approach monitored through regular departmental meetings chaired by the DHT. Both mainstream and Language Unit students had benefited from this coordinated approach to their pastoral and curricular support. Joint Assessment Team (JAT) meetings and Integrated Support Team (IST) meetings had enabled better liaison with associated primary schools and appropriate external agencies concerning young people with additional needs.

Close cooperation had been established with Ladywell School, a Behaviour Support facility developed by Glasgow City Council. Staff from Ladywell had delivered support programmes to individual young people who had been identified through the JAT and/or IST meetings. In some cases individual young people had attended Ladywell School on a part-time basis for additional support, in preparation for full re-integration back into school.

A recent Glasgow City Council thematic review had commended the high degree of consistency in relation to the care and welfare of young people across the school, including those young people who attended St. Thomas Aquinas RC Secondary as members of Glasgow's Specific Language Impairment Unit (Secondary).

Main point for action 3

Further increase the Leadership capacity at all levels across the school.

The school had made very good progress towards meeting this action point.

The headteacher and one of the depute headteachers had participated as peer reviewers in Glasgow's School Quality Review Programme while another depute had undergone peer reviewer training and had been involved in delivering and presenting aspects of this training programme to senior colleagues from across the authority. In addition, two members of the school's leadership team had been selected for the Scottish Qualification for Headship programme. Consequently the capacity for effective school self-evaluation had been significantly enhanced in the school's senior leadership team.

Leadership capacity at middle management level had also increased. Two principal teachers had been seconded as School Based Development Officers (SBDO) to work in tandem with the authority's Quality Improvement Officers to support curriculum and quality initiatives within technical education and social subjects departments across the city. One had been recruited to the Curriculum for Excellence national team in numeracy.

As part of the professional review and development programme a principal teacher had been conducting research on the impact of the school's decision to introduce maximum class sizes of 20 across the entire lower school curriculum. His findings will be used by the school to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy.

A wide range of school improvement groups had provided the opportunity for increased leadership capacity for principal and classroom teachers – e.g. the curriculum architecture group contains three principal teachers and an unpromoted member of staff. Other groups include ‘Literacy across Learning’ led by the principal teacher of English, ‘Numeracy across Learning’ led by the principal teacher of design and technology (who is also the school’s numeracy champion) and supported by the principal teacher of mathematics.

Teachers had been encouraged to further develop their classroom leadership and had been supported by Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) in the delivery of ‘cooperative learning’. A number of exemplars of good practice from teacher’s work in this area had been posted on the LTS website.

The school had also increased leadership opportunities for young people through the development of a Pupil Council structure for all year groups and with representatives from the Senior Student Council participating in the authority’s Student Council Forum. Members of S3 Student Council had worked with two teachers and a depute headteacher in developing a positive behaviour framework for students.

S4 Student Council members had initiated charity campaigns for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) and had organised and set the criteria for a student trip to Alton Towers. The Student Council had also raised funds to contribute to the cost of one member of their team to visit Malawi with a local church group.

A number of senior students had undergone rigorous selection procedures to represent Glasgow at this year’s Commonwealth Games in Delhi. One senior student had made the final selection and had been chosen to act as one of twelve ‘Ambassadors’ representing Glasgow as ‘Host of City of the Commonwealth Games 2014’.

**Main point for
action 4**

Develop approaches to tracking and monitoring pupils’ progress in order to improve the consistency of teaching and learners’ experience.

The school had made very good progress towards meeting this action point.

The school had established a very clear commitment to addressing this area and had charged a newly appointed DHT with the responsibility to develop tracking and monitoring systems. The result of a more rigorous tracking and monitoring of pupils’ progress in the senior school had led to a significant impact on attainment in the senior school. These procedures had been identified as an example of good practice by Glasgow City Council and the school had been invited to lead presentations for senior managers across the Authority in this aspect of quality assurance.

Particular aspects of the tracking procedures had included the creation of ‘pupil progression plans’ for all S4/S5 students which had been used as a reference guide for option choice planning and curricular support interviews.

There had been immediate evaluation of examination data on a pupil by pupil basis and this had allowed the identification of specific groups of students to target support as appropriate. S6 students had been interviewed to ensure appropriate subject choice with the planned impact of maximising their attainment in the coming year.

A ‘Monitoring and Tracking’ Calendar in S5/6 had been updated to create additional communication points with parents. Performance data across all subjects had been analysed and collated at all tracking ‘alert points’ and had been shared with all teachers. This had generated appropriate interventions to lead to more positive outcomes for young people. Such interventions had included parental/pastoral care interviews, Head

of Stage interviews and departmental pupil support sessions.

The monitoring and tracking procedures had been extended to S3/S4 and to specific vulnerable groups such as young people for whom English is as an additional language and those who are looked after away from home.

Young people requiring extra support are carefully monitored through 16+ Learning Choices case-load meetings. Further support for these young people has been successfully engaged through Glasgow West Regeneration Agency.

Young people who attend St. Thomas Aquinas RC Secondary through Glasgow's Specific Language Impairment Unit are now similarly tracked through the school's rigorous monitoring and tracking procedures. Lessons delivered in the Specific Language Unit now follow the whole-school model of lesson structure and delivery, including 'Assessment is For Learning' strategies.

4. Conclusion

The school had demonstrated its ability to continue to improve and had made very good progress overall regarding the main points for action outlined in the report of May 2008. Since the inspection, the school had continued to build upon its positive ethos and the additional structures in place had enhanced its capacity for continuing improvement.

Under the very effective leadership of the headteacher and the distributed leadership throughout the school there had been a more rigorous and systematic approach to monitoring and tracking and a very clear focus on maximising achievement for all. Staff commitment and openness to continuing professional development and sharing of good practice had resulted in improvements in the quality of pupils' learning experiences. As a result, the school's capacity for further improvement had been significantly enhanced.

The increasing school roll and greater involvement of parents/carers in the life of the school and the general trend of raised attainment had contributed to a growing confidence in the school by the local community.

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