

Tain Royal Academy

Report on progress



Introduction

In October 2014, a team of inspectors from Education Scotland carried out a full inspection of Tain Royal Academy, with the report on this visit being published in November 2015. The conclusion of the report was that HMI would continue to engage with the school until certain improvements had been made.

A joint Highland Council/HMIE visit took place in May/June 2015, when officers from Highland Council worked alongside HMI to evaluate progress against the priorities identified in the 2014 inspection. The conclusion was that while some improvement was seen, there was insufficient progress made for HMI to disengage.

Subsequently, an HMI team visited the school for three days in November/December 2016 to explore the school's continuing progress. Further improvements were identified in the Continuing Engagement Report (CER) produced following the visit, and it was agreed that a further joint HMI/Highland Council visit would happen early in 2018, at which point it would be determined if it was appropriate for HMI to disengage from the school.

Prior to this visit in January 2018, the school's Quality Improvement Officer, Donald Paterson, gathered evidence of progress made, covering various interventions put in place since the last HMI visit as well as data and other information regarding attainment, staff development and the views of young people. Classroom visits were also carried out to evaluate the quality of the experience of young people in their learning.

On Tuesday 16 and Wednesday 17 January 2018, a joint visit involving Donald Paterson, Highland Council Quality Improvement officer, and Carol McDonald, HM Inspector, was carried out. During the two days, discussion groups were held with young people from the school, parents of the young people, middle leaders in the school, unpromoted teaching staff and the school's Senior Management Team. This allowed further scrutiny of the progress that has been made since the continuing engagement visit. Following the two days, this summary report was finalised.

Throughout the time since the original inspection, there have been various changes to the Senior Management Team (SMT). However, there have been no changes to the SMT since last session's HMI visit, with the Head Teacher (Mark Jones) and two Depute Head Teachers (Connie Farrell and Ross Waldie) all in permanent posts. All Faculty Head posts in the school have been filled on a permanent basis, so there is now the desired stability in terms of the promoted post structure that had not been the case in the years immediately following the original inspection. This summary report focuses, therefore, on improvements that have been brought about under the leadership of the current SMT and other school leaders.

The report is organised under headings that reflect the areas for focus arising from the original inspection and subsequent continuing engagement.

Heading #1 - Increase the involvement of young people in their own learning and the life of the school

Actions taken in school

The school has continued to place an emphasis on developing learning and teaching so that young people are more fully engaged in their learning. Teachers have improved their approaches to discussing learning with young people. They now provide effective feedback and this has helped learners to be clear about next steps. Various checks are in place to help to make sure these improvements are being embedded.

Pupil voice is becoming more central to the work of the school. The Pupil Council is increasingly effective and a new process, "Pupil Aloud", has begun. This involves weekly meetings of some pupils from each

year group discussing with the Head Teacher what the school is doing well and what the school could do better.

Young people are also included in contributing to new developments such as the work on a rationale for religious observance. There is still scope for the Pupil Council to become more involved in discussing their classroom experiences.

Impact of changes

During the programme of classroom visits mentioned above, we found that cooperative and collaborative approaches to learning were in evidence in most lessons, with the result that young people are more actively engaged in their learning across a wider range of classrooms. We observed that learning conversations were being used effectively in almost all classes. In most of the classes observed conversations and feedback were based on clear learning intentions and success criteria.

The school's timetabled "Plustime" allows tutors to have conversations about young people's learning in general and helps young people to have an overview of their progress and this is working well in S1-S3. However, young people in the Senior Phase reported that they did not feel that Plustime was useful in providing helpful conversations about their learning in general. The school will reconsider how this timetabled class could be best used to support older students in the school.

The SMT are aware of the need for ongoing work in establishing even more consistency in learning and teaching. We are confident that this will lead to further improvements. The school's focus on improving learning and teaching has involved much professional dialogue and sharing of ideas. This dialogue has helped to increase the sense of professional trust within the school, and staff reported that they are confident about observing others and being observed themselves in class. This has helped to create a culture of self-improvement across the school.

The impact of the work on pupil voice can be seen, for example, in the way work on improving the school environment and the increase of non-sporting House activities has resulted from pupils' suggestions. Pupils have had "You said, we did" assemblies where SMT have communicated the way that the pupil voice has led to improvements in the school.

Leadership opportunities for young people are much expanded. These include prefects running pupil voice focus groups and devising rotas for school supervision at break and lunchtimes, younger students supporting parental engagement events, the new anti-bullying group, sports leaders, buddying opportunities, Outward Bound activity with a focus on leadership and many other examples, including SQA leadership awards. Further opportunities for leadership have been developed in individual departments.

Young people, their parents and school staff all commented on the importance of the increased emphasis on the House system. Young people identify strongly with their Houses, as do parents and school staff. This has helped to create a sense of pride in the young people. Senior Phase students reported that the revitalised House system had created more opportunities for young people to take on leadership roles, and that there were opportunities to influence the variety of House activities taking place.

Heading #2 - Increase the level of expectation and challenge in young people's learning **Actions taken in school**

The CER identified the fact that there was still insufficient pace and challenge in too many lessons and that in almost all cases there was insufficient differentiation in lessons. Young people were not yet being given sufficient opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills such as problem solving, and had few opportunities to extend their creativity.

The Head Teacher's focus has continued to be on high quality learning and teaching across the school. The drive is on the use of developing assessment approaches, with appropriate feedback based on clear success criteria. There is increased staff understanding of the importance of level and next step information for young people so that they are clear about how to improve. As mentioned above, professional dialogue is encouraging teachers to share ideas and to consider how to improve the

classroom experience of young people. There is a shared sense of what the priorities are in terms of learning and teaching.

The school has engaged with session 17/18 authority professional learning in developing creativity skills, with the aim of increasing challenge in developing the higher-order thinking and creativity skills of problem-solving, open-mindedness, curiosity and imagination.

SMT and the extended management team of Faculty Heads (FHs) are beginning to cross reference attainment across departments to see what level the same pupils are working at in different classes, with a view to supporting pupils in areas where they are experiencing difficulty and helping to ensure appropriate challenge across the whole curriculum.

The school's tracking and monitoring system for the BGE continues to be embedded at departmental/faculty level, which helps to ensure that vulnerable pupils are picked up and appropriate interventions are being applied. This follows the successful development of a tracking and monitoring system in the Senior Phase.

Further development is now needed of a whole-school tracking system for the BGE. A system of this sort is needed to provide an overview of each young person's learning and to support the planning of appropriate interventions to help young people make the best possible progress. It would also help Plustime tutors to access relevant information prior to and during learning conversations with young people.

Parents reported that they like the content of reports received from the school and feel the information about learning in the reports is helpful to them in understanding how their children's progress. They would, however, like to explore with the school ways in which information about learning could be shared more immediately, for example using electronic communication.

Assertive mentoring is being introduced to challenge pupils, drawing on information in the SEEMiS Risk Matrix. SMT are leading on this initially, with the new TRA Mentor Programme involving more members of staff as appropriate.

Young people are very appreciative of the time spent by staff delivering additional study support after school. It is important that there is clarity of purpose about these study sessions and that the impact of the provision is monitored.

Impact of changes

During our two days of observations we observed differentiated learning happening in the majority of lessons. While there is still further work to do in this area, the focus on differentiation has clearly had impact on the experience of young people in classrooms, with learning more suited to individual needs. In the best examples observed, young people with specific needs were supported well and the most able were stretched in carrying out work that was suited to their ability.

Higher order thinking skills formed part of the learning in the majority of lessons observed, with pupils engaged in problem solving, analysis and hypothesising. We saw evidence of creativity skills being addressed in the majority of lessons, though there was not always explicit discussion of individual skills development. The overall impact of this increased focus on higher order thinking and creativity skills is that young people are increasingly engaged because of a higher level of challenge.

Ultimately the benefits of the increased focus on pace and challenge in the years since the original inspection are to be seen in attainment data (see *Heading #5*, below).

Heading #3 - Improve the quality of provision of Gaelic within the curriculum

Actions taken in school

The HMI visit of 2017 identified improvements that had taken place since the original inspection in the provision of Gaelic in Tain Royal Academy, but identified the need for further developments in Gaelic

Medium (GM) Education. The staffing of Gaelic in the school has been increased from 1.4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to 1.6 FTE. The new teacher in Technical is a Gaelic speaker, having undertaken the Gaelic Immersion in Teaching course. The profile of Gaelic language and culture within the school has been raised: the school magazine now includes Gaelic sections, the department has worked with young people on the *Film G* project, and has taken pupils to Stornoway to participate across Gaelic speakers from other schools in the debating competition, and the school has young people participating in as well as attending the Mod. Further work could be done to raise the profile of Gaelic language and culture in the school, for example through bi-lingual signage and consideration of how Gaelic culture can be included in planning learning.

Not all young people wishing to study Gaidhlig in the SP have been able to do so because of the specific option column structure. Given that the school is a Gaelic Medium establishment, the organisation of SP option columns for session 18/19 should take into account the preferred pathways of native Gaelic speakers.

Impact of changes

Relationships between Gaelic teachers and young people are strong. In the class observed, pupils worked cooperatively in pursuing clear learning intentions with success criteria that were discussed throughout the lesson. The impact of the new staffing provision has led to an increased pupil uptake in both Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learner education. The school has begun to deliver GM education more widely across the curriculum, with one of the Gaelic teachers delivering GM S1 Art, and studying to be able to deliver Media in GM. The new technical teacher will be delivering GM technical and the returning Gaelic teacher will be delivering GM Geography in the BGE. Home Economics continues to be delivered in GM.

When surveyed, young people studying in the BGE in Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learner classes responded with 59.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement “I enjoy learning in Gaelic”, up from 48.0% in session 16/17. 75.8% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am getting along well with my school work in Gaelic”, up from 74.4% in session 16/17. 59.8% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Staff talk to me regularly about how to improve my learning in Gaelic”, up from 56.9% in session 16/17. These positive attitudes amongst BGE Gaelic students are encouraging as the school looks to increase Gaelic participation in the SP.

Heading #4 - Continue to develop the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners

Actions taken in school

The curriculum at Tain Royal Academy has improved considerably since the original HMIE inspection and this was recognised in the 2017 visit. Continued development of the curriculum, especially in the Senior Phase, has been supported by new appointments and by a commitment to curricular redesign based on data analysis, with the aim of maximising pupil choice, supporting appropriate learning pathways.

Continuing development of partnerships with local employers has led to an increase in the number of work placements on offer to young people, with a focus on matching these to individual goals and aspirations. Young people use the Hi-hope website to find placements that would meet their specific needs. All of the young people who are doing work placements in the current S3 and S4 are undertaking the SQA Work Placement Unit at an appropriate level. Young people requiring significant additional support are timetabled at appropriate points to undertake work placements and the SQA Work Placement Unit, as part of the school’s drive to ensure that such pupils move on to positive destinations when leaving school. Continued work with business partners is focusing on skills for work progression. The Associated Schools Group “DYW Extravaganza” assists young people in understanding appropriate pathways through school and beyond. There are also departmental links with local business partners.

The school’s Pupil Equity Funding has allowed for the engagement of a Youth Support Officer through Highlife Highland to support and work with young people at risk of becoming disengaged from school based education. Funding is also being used to buy tuition time from Evanton Wood Community Company to provide 1:1 tuition weekly for disengaged pupils who require highly personalised timetables.

At the time of last session's inspection visit concerns were expressed that the school did not yet meet national expectations in terms of quality physical education and religious and moral education through the senior phase. A rotation has been developed and implemented for PE and RME in S4. PE in S5/6 is now blocked with PSE and a health and wellbeing input. The school's staff Curriculum Review Group continues to explore this and other aspects of curricular provision.

It was agreed that a rationale for religious observance should be developed. One of the DHTs has convened a pupil group to liaise with the school chaplains over the development of a religious observance strategy, which will tie in with the wider development of a whole-school approach to "Time for reflection", allied closely to the school's vision, values and aims. Reflection time will be tied into all assemblies, linking more strongly to current events in the local community and beyond.

Moving forwards, the school should consider how the curriculum, especially in the BGE, meets the needs of diverse learners. There are opportunities to balance year-long courses and shorter learning phases to provide additional curricular options.

Impact of changes

Following this ongoing analysis of the curriculum, the school has made a number of changes which are already impacting on learner pathways and will continue to do so.

For example, there are increased opportunities for young people to study Modern Languages in the Senior Phase and the Construction Skills offers an option for young people that is more directly relevant to local employment opportunities.

The school continues to support young people's curriculum offer by providing personalised timetables for young people, with several senior students engaging in work placements that suit their future pathways incorporated in to their timetable. Through these placements, which are individually appropriate, young people are becoming better informed about potential career opportunities and are developing skills for learning, life and work which will help them to sustain post-school destinations, whether that is in employment or Further and Higher Education.

There is scope to involve partners more in developing the curriculum and this could also support plans to diversify the BGE curriculum.

The school's Community Centre, TRACC, supports the school in providing leadership opportunities such as Lifeguarding. The school continues to link with Inverness and North Highland College to offer courses that the school is unable to run and the school's engagement with the Authority's virtual school is allowing courses to be offered that cannot be run in-house, such as Advanced Higher Physics.

The impact of all of the above is that young people have increasingly personalised learning pathways that are more directly relevant to their own personal goals. This work is ongoing and discussion of the curriculum is an important part of the dialogue between SMT and the extended management team of Faculty Heads.

There are now many more activities being offered for wider achievement, which has extended opportunities for young people in the broad curriculum. Pupil Aloud feedback has indicated that young people appreciate these new opportunities and have suggestions for even more.

Heading #5 - Improve approaches to self-evaluation to raise young people's attainment

Actions taken in school

The Continuing Engagement Report of 2017 identified some significant improvements in self-evaluation processes that had been developed in the school, but commented that there was now a need for increased use of data by staff to inform the planning of learning. The whole school self-evaluation calendar now

aligns with departmental self-evaluation calendars, ensuring that there is coherence across self-evaluation activities.

A greater emphasis has been put on the use of attainment data, especially expectations around how this data will be analysed in departments. This is supported by expectations about the way that standardised assessment information is used to enhance staff knowledge of pupils. Data and information about individual young people are increasingly central to staff discussions about pupil attainment, helping them to identify possible barriers to learning. The embedding of BGE assessment/tracking and monitoring policy within each department/faculty involves staff being committed to exploring tracking data and planning appropriate interventions.

Departments align the planning of learning with conclusions drawn from lesson observations. This process is closely linked with the cooperative learning training which underpins much of the school's work on improving learning, teaching and assessment. The processes for classroom observation are kept under review by the extended management team.

Evaluation of the current attainment data in numeracy has led to some new collegiate working across the school and in the Associated Schools Group, aimed at raising attainment in numeracy.

As noted above, pupil views are sought to help the school to establish where interventions of various kinds are making a difference and where new areas for development might emerge and this is reinforced at departmental level through the use of pupil subject surveys.

Reporting on young people's learning is now more regular throughout each session: there is a greater knowledge of learning progress across the whole school community. The Parent Council have been involved in analysis of the school's SQA results and areas for focus.

Partnership engagement has developed considerably since the original inspection and continues to do so. Developing the Young Workforce partners have engaged with the school in developing a new employability skills programme, and further expansion is planned. Various partners contribute to programmes such as the PSE course.

Departmental Standards and Quality reports are now produced twice a year, with an emphasis on using data and other evidence to show what has been going well and what new plans should be put in place moving forward. These reports inform the annual Departmental Improvement Plans, which in turn are aligned with the School Improvement Plan, and national priorities.

School staff are committed to looking outwards as part of the self-evaluation process. Staff at all levels in the school have attended authority-led training on self-evaluation theory and practice. The Head Teacher has established links with schools beyond Highland and continues to develop strong links with other Highland secondaries. In addition, he has worked alongside Highland Council Officers in a Quality Improvement Visit to another secondary. He continues to deliver training sessions for teaching staff in Highland on cooperative learning and leadership and thus has a very extensive network of colleagues at all levels across the Primary and Secondary sectors.

DHTs look outwards to support their analysis of current provision and possible improvements, joining authority development groups and projects.

Faculty Heads in the school have extensive links outwith Tain Royal Academy and these links support self-evaluation work carried out in departments. For example, FHs belong to formal Highland subject development groups. Several staff work with the Scottish Qualifications Authority as markers and have worked as nominees on verification of assessment standards. Other staff belong to national subject development groups and have links with other schools within and beyond Highland. Staff at all levels develop knowledge and expertise through engagement with career-long professional learning opportunities.

Impact of changes

The development self-evaluation activities has led to the school being increasingly self-aware about understanding attainment data and the connection between data and interventions for improvement. This is impacting on attainment.

Most young people in the Broad General Education achieve at appropriate levels in Reading, Writing, Listening & Talking and Numeracy.

Despite the increased focus on pace and challenge, some parents felt that the learning in the BGE, especially in S3, was not challenging enough. It would be appropriate for the school to engage in professional discussion about the gradient of learning as young people move through the BGE and onwards into the SP. This would help to ensure attainment in the BGE continues to rise.

In the Senior Phase there are some important improvements in attainment since the original inspection. There is scope for further improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for young people in S4 and S5, though the improving pattern at SCQF 5 in literacy in S4 is noteworthy. The attainment of higher attaining leavers in both literacy and numeracy showed improvement when compared with young people from similar backgrounds from across Scotland. There is as yet no pattern of improvement in this measure for lower attaining leavers.

In the Senior Phase, in 2016/17 most young people attained in line with young people from similar backgrounds from across Scotland. These figures represent significant progress from the original inspection, where attainment, especially for the highest attaining 20%, was a major concern.

However, SMT, middle managers and teaching staff are aware that there is a need to explore the reasons for the relatively poor performance of the lowest attaining 20% and to consider how to improve attainment in S4 where there is not yet a pattern of improved attainment. More detailed analysis is required of the success rates of young people tackling six subjects in S4.

As mentioned above, a strategic overview of curricular and learning pathways is essential in helping the SMT, middle leaders and classroom teachers to support young people to attain and achieve as highly as possible.

There is awareness amongst staff of the need to identify and understand the barriers that may be preventing young people facing socio-economic disadvantage from attaining as highly as possible. SMT and support staff work hard to support young people at risk of leaving school with few qualifications.

Staff have worked hard to improve positive destinations for school leavers, and to support young people and their families when there is a risk of a non-positive outcome. The most recent data in Insight shows that almost all leavers go on to positive destinations. School guidance/support staff work closely with the SDS adviser in weekly meetings, engaging with pupils at risk of non-positive destinations.

Partnership working with local colleges and the University of the Highlands and Islands is having a positive effect on the overall attainment of young people, especially in S4 and S6. This aspect of the school's work continues to develop.

All of this self-evaluation work is ongoing and there is a need to monitor the impact of changes in terms of outcomes in attainment, positive destinations and reducing inequity for specific groups of pupils.

Leadership

The school community, including staff, young people and their parents, has confidence in the Head Teacher and his Senior Management Team as they lead improvements in the school. Middle leaders work much more closely together in contributing to improvement at department and whole school level, and in many cases have whole school leadership responsibilities. Unpromoted staff are encouraged to lead projects and feel that middle and senior leaders are very supportive in this process. All of this has contributed to a much clearer sense of direction for the school and young people reported that they were aware of the increased focus on improvement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the improvement identified by the visiting HMI team in 2017 has continued and the details outlined above summarise the joint view of HMI and Highland Council of this continuing progress. We believe that the school has the capacity to continue to improve in all of the key areas identified and that the SMT and extended management team are committed to continuing to improve outcomes for young people.

Because of this, HMI will make no further visits to the school in connection with the 2014 inspection.

Communication between the school's SMT and the Quality Improvement Officer is regular, and Highland Council officers will continue to work with the school to help to bring about further improvements in the years ahead.

Donald Paterson
Quality Improvement Officer
31 January 2018