

School/Establishment	Tain Royal Academy
Head of school/centre	Wim Chalmet
Date of Visit	30 April and 1 May 2015
QI Team/HMI personnel involved in visit	Donald Paterson [QIM], Ruth Binks [QIM], Fiona Grant [HT, Wick High School], David Gregory (HMI), Donald MacLeod, [QIO], Linda Schubert [QIO]

The Highland Council Quality Improvement Team Visit, in association with Education Scotland, took place on Thursday 30 April and Friday 1 May 2015.

The QI Team involved were Donald Paterson, the Mid Area Quality Improvement Manager, along with Ruth Binks (Quality Improvement Manager) and Linda Schubert (Quality Improvement Officer) with Fiona Grant (HT, Wick High School) augmenting the team. Donald MacLeod (Quality Improvement Officer - Gaelic) was part of the team on the first morning, looking specifically at Gaelic provision. David Gregory (HMI) was the final member of the team, providing the Education Scotland perspective and expertise.

During the visit there were 33 classroom observations covering almost every member of teaching staff at the school. Focus Group meetings were held with Parents, Parents of students studying Gaelic, BGE and SP Pupils, Faculty Leaders, Support Staff, Unpromoted Teaching Staff, Non-Teaching Staff and Partners, and their comments helped us to write this document.

The SMT began the two day visit by presenting their thoughts on the school, focusing on strengths, areas of recent work and areas for improvement. The visit ended with the team sharing feedback with SMT on Friday afternoon, followed by a brief meeting with all staff to thank them for their involvement and to communicate some of the key messages.

The report below summarises the main points raised during the visit, organised under 7 key headings:

- **How has the school improved attainment and achievement for pupils?**
- **How has the school improved learners' experiences?**
- **How has the school improved the school curriculum?**
- **How effective is teaching in developing pupils' learning?**
- **How well does the school meet learners' needs?**
- **How well does the school evaluate its work?**
- **How well is the school being led?**

In each section the report explains what is going well and what the school should focus on to continue improving.

How has the school improved attainment and achievement for pupils?

What is going well?

Pupils' attainment improved in 2014 and the school has spent a good deal of time analysing data to help to make sure that this improvement continues. In S4 pupils generally do better in exams than pupils with similar backgrounds in other parts of Scotland. In some subjects this improvement is being carried forward into S5 and S6.

When pupils leave the school, an increasing percentage move on to positive destinations, such as college, university, employment or training. The percentage of pupils moving on to positive destinations is higher than the average figures for Highland and for Scotland as a whole.

The school is beginning to develop effective systems to track and monitor pupil progress in courses and this will help to make sure that improvements in attainment continue.

The school provides many opportunities for pupils to take part in a range of activities which improve their confidence and help them to develop skills that will help them in later life.

What should the school focus on now?

Overall, there could still be improvement in attainment, especially in terms of providing challenge for the most able and in terms of helping pupils to develop literacy and numeracy skills.

Further work should be done to make sure that there is more consistent progress between S4 and S5, which will be reflected in examination grades.

Continued work is needed on tracking young people's learning to make sure that they are challenged to make appropriate progress.

In classrooms, learners should have more opportunities to take responsibility for their own work and targets. The assertive mentoring initiative and the personal support work that is being developed in the school will help pupils by allowing them to talk about their school work and how they could improve.

Further work is needed to make sure that there is agreement in the school about effective learning and teaching so that pupils experience consistency in the classroom. This in turn will help them to achieve as highly as they can.

The school should continue to analyse attainment data carefully to make sure that the improvement seen already continues.

How has the school improved learners' experiences?

What is going well?

Young people in the school are well behaved and hard working. There is widespread agreement that behaviour in the school has improved, thanks to the Management Team having a focus on pupils' conduct. This means the experience for pupils in the classrooms is better. Overall there was agreement amongst the people we spoke to that the school's ethos is much clearer now.

Young people in the school have an increasing part to play in the life and work of the school and their opinions are sought more often. Senior pupils often support younger pupils in their school work.

In the classrooms pupils are receiving more helpful and targeted feedback.

The experience of Gàidhlig pupils has improved significantly. The wider achievements of Gàidhlig pupils are nurtured and valued.

Overall, young people feel they are treated much better in the school, and they put this down to changes initiated by the school's Management Team.

What should the school focus on now?

Further work should be done to make sure that the good feedback pupils receive is consistent across all classrooms. Conversations between pupils and their teachers should be consistently focused on helping young people understand what next steps they need to make in their learning in order to improve their attainment.

Further ways should be found to gather pupils' views, and to include a wider range of pupils in consultation. Pupils should be given the chance to give their views about their experiences in the classroom.

The school should find ways to gather information about pupils' wider achievements beyond the classroom to help them to develop key skills.

The school should continue to develop the process of recognising and rewarding positive outcomes for pupils, which will help to develop the school's ethos.

How has the school improved the school curriculum?

What is going well?

There has been a significant improvement in the way the school plans its curriculum to make sure that pupils have a range of options that will lead to positive destinations when they leave school (such as employment, university, training, college, voluntary work and so on).

The school is committed to providing personal support for all pupils and the school timetable has been developed to allow this to happen.

There has been wider involvement with the school's partners to help with the development of the curriculum so that it meets the needs of a wide variety of learners, including Gàidhlig pupils.

The school has been very creative in keeping course options available as far as possible, even when staff absence has been a factor or where it has been difficult to fill posts.

What should the school focus on now?

Continued work on developing pathways for all kinds of learners will help the school to reach the point where all leavers go to a positive destination. This work should involve all partners in the discussion, including parents/carers and pupils.

Work on the Broad General Education (S1-S3) should be focused on making sure that pupils experience a breadth and depth of study that challenges them to achieve as highly as possible and prepares them for life in the Senior Phase (S4-S6) and life after school. The development of the Broad General Education should aim to further improve learning and teaching, employability skills, skills for learning and life as well as health & wellbeing, numeracy and literacy.

The introduction of personal support time should include clear explanations to pupils and families about the value of this course. The school should monitor personal support time carefully to make sure it is delivering improvements for pupils.

The school should develop inter-disciplinary learning, where learning connects different subject areas, to help pupils develop skills that can be applied in several different situations.

The school should give thought to further developing the profile and image of Gaelic to continue to raise the profile of Gaelic language and culture.

Developing and evaluating the curriculum should continue to involve as many partners as possible.

How effective is teaching in developing pupils' learning?

What is going well?

Most teachers provide well-planned and organised lessons. In some classrooms teachers demonstrated considerable skill at responding to the needs of individual young people. In most classes activities chosen were engaging for pupils. In almost all classrooms Learning Intentions and Success Criteria were identified and, in most cases, shared with learners, helping them to understand how to improve in class. In many classes there were opportunities for pupils to develop collaborative skills. In the best classes questioning was skilfully used to help pupils use higher order thinking skills. Teachers in most lessons set high expectations in terms of behaviour and learning. In the best classes conversations between the teacher and pupils about learning were at the heart of the activities.

There were examples of lessons that could be held up as examples of excellent practice within and beyond the school.

What should the school focus on now?

The school should continue to work on helping pupils to understand how the skills they are working on are developed by the different subjects in the curriculum. Teachers can support this process by explaining why pupils are studying particular topics and showing how the skills being developed are useful in a wider sense.

Pupils should be given more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and to take the lead in learning activities.

There should be greater consistency in the challenge for pupils to make sure they are achieving as much as they could.

The school should set up a staff Learning and Teaching group which will help to make sure that good classroom practice is experienced by pupils in all classrooms.

How well does the school meet learners' needs?

What is going well?

The work done in classes is generally at an appropriate level for the pupils.

There is good transition from Primary for pupils with Additional Support Needs and these pupils are well supported throughout their time at the school.

Guidance teachers are increasingly talking to pupils about their learning and about their choices as they progress through school.

Personal & Social Education courses are being redesigned to better meet the needs of pupils.

The support team in the school works well together to move forward the development priorities identified by the school's Management Team.

The school works well with families as they seek to meet the needs of learners.

The Youth Support Officer has been working in collaboration with the school's Management Team to improve attendance, which is allowing pupils' needs to be better met.

What should the school focus on now?

It is important to make sure that all learners are consistently challenged by their learning, and that there is a good pace in all classrooms.

Work on differentiating learning will help to make sure that pupils' work is better suited to their ability.

The role of PSAs and ASN staff should be made clear to all involved so that they are used as effectively as possible.

Continued development of the conversations between the support team and pupils will help young people to feel supported in the choices they make as they progress through school.

Further involvement of parents/carers in the process of target-setting and review of progress for pupils with Additional Support Needs will help these pupils to make good progress in their learning.

Faculties should work on developing consistency of teaching practice to make sure that learners' needs are met in all classrooms.

Continued work on supporting pupils with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Needs will help these pupils and will contribute to the development to the school's ethos.

How well does the school evaluate its work?

What is going well?

Staff in the school are increasingly reflective and are being given the tools to evaluate their work more carefully. The views of others (such as pupils, parents and partners in the community) are being gathered more consistently.

The school's Management Team is using data more effectively to evaluate the work of the school and to bring about improvements.

Observations of lessons have been more focused on particular areas for improvement.

What should the school focus on now?

Young people would like to have even more involvement in evaluating the work of the school and would like to know more about how their views are taken into account.

Teaching staff are keen to be even more involved in evaluating the work of the school.

Evaluation should be built into all new developments. Faculty Heads should continue to evaluate provision in their own faculties and should be key players in evaluating whole school developments.

The school has identified key areas for improvement in attainment and these areas should be tackled now.

Continued classroom visits, with a clear focus on identifying best practice and how this can be shared, should be a priority. Strategies for making sure good classroom practice is consistent across the school should be developed.

Staff training should be planned to support new developments.

How well is the school being led?

What is going well?

Leadership across the school is developing. The School's Management Team are good role models for the rest of the school and have made a strong impact on ethos, systems and the welfare and outcomes for some of the school's most vulnerable young people. For example, much work has been done on improving attendance and reducing exclusions.

The school's Management Team are seen as visible, approachable and supportive, showing a clear direction for improvement. They are seen to seek the views of all who are involved at Tain Royal Academy.

There have been greater expectations regarding the role of Faculty Leaders in leading their staff.

What should the school focus on now?

Now that the groundwork has been done in terms of building the ethos of improvement, the pace of change needs to increase, and this will mean leadership development and opportunities for leadership at all levels in the school. Faculty Leads now need to work increasingly effectively across the school and play a much bigger role in taking forward whole-school developments, including, importantly, the development of learning and teaching. There are clear opportunities for staff working groups to take lead roles more effectively, so that developments (such as literacy across the school) are not reliant upon one person.

In short, the good work done by the school should continue and increase in impact.

Highland Council Care and Learning officers will continue to work with the school, to assist in the delivery of the improvements outlined above.

Donald Paterson

Education Quality Improvement Manager (Mid Area)

28/05/15