

Introduction

In October 2017, a team of inspectors from Education Scotland carried out a full inspection of Gairloch High School. The report on this visit was published in January 2018. Due to the interim arrangements of the Head Teacher position the inspection report concluded that Education Scotland would further engage with the school to ensure continued progress was being made in the areas identified for improvement.

A year from the initial inspection a report was issued to Education Scotland from Highland Council outlining the progress made from the continued engagement during this time. Following this report, HM Inspectors identified that they would conduct a joint visit with Highland Council early in 2019, to review the school's on-going improvement work.

This joint visit took place on Tuesday 7th February 2019, and was led by the school's Quality Improvement Officer, Alan Bruce. Joan Esson, HM Inspector, who was managing inspector for the previous visit, was part of the team, and this allowed for continuity in the process. During our visit, the team gathered evidence of progress made. This involved reviewing interventions put in place since the inspection as well as a range of data focused on attainment, staff development and the views of young people. Classroom visits were carried out to evaluate the quality of the experience of young people in their learning. Discussion groups were held with young people from the school, middle leaders, parents and the school's Senior Leadership Team. This report sets out what we found.

The school has faced a number of challenges over the last year as a result of changes and shortages in staffing. Since the original inspection, the previous Acting Head Teacher has returned to their substantive post and, after several attempts to recruit a permanent Head Teacher to the position, Highland Council was unable to secure an appropriate candidate. A new Acting Head Teacher has been in post since August 2018. At the same time a new permanent Depute Head Teacher started in post replacing the previous post holder.

In addition to these changes, at the end of the last session, the school undertook a management restructure to establish a faculty system. All Faculty Head positions were successfully filled internally. There have also been several changes amongst classroom teachers which has presented challenges further compounded by recruitment pressures and long term illness. These challenges have added pressure to the consistency in addressing the schools improvement priorities, however, staff continue to work hard to minimise any negative impact this may have on their young people. Staff at all levels in the school have shown commitment to the ensuring continuity in the learners' experiences and have responded positively to the problems created by the staffing difficulties outlined here.

This report is organised under headings that reflect the areas for focus arising from the original inspection. In the original inspection there were five areas identified.

Continue to establish an effective system of self-evaluation in which staff, young people, parents and partners have clear expectations of their role for improvement and change.

The acting headteacher and depute headteacher are settling in well to their roles. They are establishing positive relationships with staff, young people and parents as a basis for taking forward change and improvement. During the visit parents commented positively on the current leadership and acknowledged that the school continues to improve.

School staff continues to develop and refine their self-evaluation systems to support the improvement agenda. Communication with pupils, parents, staff and partners is having a positive impact on helping the school gauge its progress and understand the local context and needs of its learners. A range of strategies support the gathering of views and is helping to focus on areas that will improve the experience and aspiration for its learners.

By redefining the extended leadership team, there is now greater involvement and accountability in defining the direction of the school from middle managers and class

teachers. With an increased leadership role and wider responsibilities for school improvement, there is now an opportunity to develop the middle leadership structure through a programme of enhanced support and development that focuses on areas of improvement. One area where this would see significant change is the approaches to departmental improvement planning and it is not always clear how these improvement plans align with the school plan. There is a need for all planning to define more clearly what the impact on outcomes for young people will be.

Working groups have been established to lead on the key priorities identified in the school improvement plan. With a clearer remit and a more structured approach to addressing their intended improvement initiatives, working groups could have a more focused approach and greater impact in supporting the progress of the school.

As part of this improvement process the Senior Leadership team, supported by the learning and teaching group, have identified the criteria for effective learning and teaching which has been shared and agreed with staff. The school now needs to consolidate its work in this area and ensure there is a consistent approach to the classroom experience for all young people.

The school should now take steps to ensure a more systematic and rigorous approach to its own reflections. The school should use evidence from its self-evaluation systems to help focus on appropriate improvement priorities and identify next steps to improvement. Whilst the school has worked hard to create more opportunities for communication with pupils, parents and staff, there is more scope for their greater involvement with various aspects of school improvement.

Ensure that monitoring and tracking of progress, achievement and attainment, for individuals and groups of young people, is systematic and based on reliable evidence across all curriculum areas.

The Senior Leadership team has introduced a more robust system to track pupil progress that takes account of data from a range of sources. Tracking and monitoring is beginning to impact on approaches to assessment and moderation that support professional judgements in the Broad General Education (BGE) particularly in literacy and numeracy. This is beginning to develop formal processes that will build staff confidence helping them inform pupils on the levels in which they are currently working.

The process of tracking is complimented by more frequent opportunities for learning conversations and target setting with young people to ensure learning and teaching adds value to the pupil experience and each pupil is making good progress.

Through analysis of data, specific targeting of students will increase progression from CfE 2nd level to 3rd level literacy and numeracy in S1 and from 3rd level to 4th level literacy and numeracy in S3. Pupil equity funding has been allocated to provide additional assistance to identified learners where there is greater need for support.

More robust systems of tracking and the analysis of data across the school are supporting improvements and early intervention where required. The school has introduced a tracking and monitoring toolkit to record learner achievements and ensure progression in each curricular area. There are some improvements in attainment. The percentage of young people achieving SCQF level 6 in literacy has improved since the inspection from significantly much lower to in line with the Virtual Comparator (VC). The numbers contributing to the attainment data in the senior phase is low as a result of the school's total roll. The attainment of all young people leaving school in the last year, as well as the lowest attaining 20%, middle attaining 60% and the highest attaining 20% (as measured by their tariff scores) shows some improvement while being in line with the VC.

Since the inspection, at S4, the percentage of young people achieving 6 or more awards at SCQF Level 3 or better, and Level 4 or better, has improved from significantly much lower than the VC to in line with the VC in the latest year. The percentage of young people achieving 2 or more awards to 4 or more awards at SCQF Level 5 Grade A or better has improved from in line to significantly much higher than the VC in the latest year.

By S6, the percentage of young people achieving 3 or more and 4 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 Grade A or better improved in 2018 from in line to significantly higher than the VC.

As part of the whole school self-evaluation strategies, staff should evaluate their on-going work to improve learning and teaching to measure the impact approaches are having on attainment, and to identify which changes have the greatest effect on improving outcomes for young people. There is capacity for staff to make greater use of data to support improvements and approaches to learning and teaching which will ultimately support raising the attainment of pupils.

Data looking at the school's approach to improving positive and sustained destinations for all leavers demonstrates 100% positive leavers destinations from last session. The school is continuing to seek support from local employers and partners to create greater opportunities and pathways for their young people as part of their 'Developing the Young Workforce' initiatives.

Build on the most effective practice within the school, and research findings, to develop a shared understanding of what high-quality learning, teaching and assessment means for Gairloch High School.

Staff have worked together to agree key features of highly effective classroom experiences and these features are supporting both pupils and staff's knowledge and understanding of learning and teaching and promoting a common language of learning for everyone.

This agreed criteria are displayed in classrooms and are starting to become a consistent feature of lessons. It is now the case that almost all staff share the purpose of learning with young people and in the majority of lessons success criteria are used to help young people to understand their own progress. Positive relationships and committed staff are a common feature across the school. Young people told us that at times they are concerned around the consistency in teaching staff and the impact this is having on their learning.

Formalising classroom observation is supporting the development of a more robust process of reviewing learning and the identification of strengths and areas for improvement. The roll out of the new process coupled with the development of the new Faculty system is promoting self-evaluation of learning for all. The learning and teaching group should plan how to engage all staff to work together across the school to improve the consistency of young people's learning experiences to raise attainment and encourage more opportunities for young people to lead their own learning.

There is still scope for learning to be more suited to the different needs of individual learners. In the majority of classes observed, young people were all working on the same tasks at the same pace. Young people responded well when activities were designed to take account of their individual learning needs. There is scope to raise expectations of what young people can achieve in class and to provide appropriate support and challenge for all through suitably differentiated learning tasks.

Pupils in the senior phase noted that Chromebooks are opening up the opportunities for learning in different ways and this is making a difference to their individual learning styles and studies at home. Based on feedback from the selection of learners in the junior phase, the school needs to carry out a review within each curricular area to determine how

chromebooks can be used proportionately to compliment and add value to the learner experience.

Continue to design a range of learning pathways, through the medium of Gaelic and English, to meet the needs of each individual young person, as well as national and local priorities.

Since reviewing the curriculum rationale the school continues to develop its column choice structure to offer greater flexibility and opportunity to its young people. Through ongoing consultation, the curriculum model continues to be refined to reflect the aspiration and needs of its young people. Within the small school setting staff recognise the need to be creative with the curriculum by looking beyond the school for wider opportunities through local college settings and the Highland Council virtual school.

The school is exploring ways to ensure that young people in S4 to S6 are suitably challenged in their curriculum and that their time is productively used to achieve positive outcomes (for example in tightening procedures relating to study periods). Partnership working is providing flexible and meaningful learning experiences for targeted young people, and is supporting personal development, wellbeing and youth achievement awards. There is a need to review the curriculum in S1 to S3 to ensure that young people are clear about the purpose of different courses and how they contribute to their learning and development of skills.

The school continues to look for ways to extend the curriculum offered through medium of Gaelic (GME). There is a commendable effort on the part of teachers of Gaelic to support young people to achieve a National Qualification for Gàidhlig and Gaelic (Learners) in the senior phase. Senior leaders have looked at how an additional subject through Gaelic may be offered. They are now discussing this with the council. With support from the Local Authority the school needs to continue to develop a strategic plan that will further integrate wider opportunities for Gaelic learners within its curriculum.

Define a strategic overview to wellbeing. This should detail the school's current approaches to wellbeing, while taking more account of the local context of the school.

The school has focused on the well-being of its pupils since the inspection and understands the impact of rural isolation on its young people. Considerable work has taken place to establish initiatives relating to mental health with the introduction of Seasons for Growth and Growth Mindset to support learners. Changes to the Guidance staff have identified the need to review the PSE programme across the school to take account of the factors that may negatively impact learners experience and progress. There is a more structured approach to both pastoral conversations that encourage learners to reflect on their progress and identify any support that may be required. Information is shared effectively with staff and parents around pupil progress and this system continues to evolve so it is capturing learner progress and any early intervention requirements.

When asked about support across the school, all young people within the focus group felt comfortable and confident in approaching a member of staff whom they trust for support and guidance. As they move forward the school should look to ways to promote the profile of Guidance staff so that pupils understand the significance of this role to support their progress and wellbeing.

What happens next?

There is evidence of some progress being made with the areas identified for improvements by HM Inspectors. There is still scope for further improvement to address fully the aspects for development identified in the original inspection report of 2017. We believe that the school has the capacity to improve further. At the time of the joint visit, The Highland Council had

recommended the process of recruiting for a permanent Head Teacher. At the end of April Highland Council were able to make an appointment to this post. Highland Council will continue to work with the school to support the transition period for the new Head Teacher and thereafter with their ongoing improvement agenda.

Alan Bruce
Quality Improvement Officer
3rd May 2019