Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba

For Scotland's learners, with Scotland's educators

Primary Inspection Findings: Curriculum

Primary Inspection Findings: Primary Curriculum 2018-19

Contents

The photographs used in this report were taken before Covid-19 restrictions were in place.

Introduction

HM Inspectors of Education inspect quality and improvement of education across Scotland's schools using the quality indicators and the six-point scale as set out in How good is our school? (4th edition) (HGIOS4) quality improvement framework. As part of primary school inspections, HM Inspectors explore how well the school promotes equity of achievements for all children. This includes evaluating QI 2.2 Curriculum theme on learning pathways in a sample of schools. This enables HM Inspectors to explore the extent to which the curriculum provides flexible learning pathways to meet the needs and aspirations of learners, taking account of the unique context of the school. HM Inspectors link the extent to which the curriculum offered leads to positive outcomes for children as evaluated through QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement.

This briefing draws on a range of evidence including a sample of 96 primary school inspections where HMI evaluated the learning pathways theme for QI 2.2 Curriculum in academic year 2018/19. In addition, in a further 105 schools, although we did not evaluate QI 2.2 Curriculum, we reported on where the curriculum has had an impact on improving educational outcomes for learners, for example, in raising attainment and achievement across the curriculum. This briefing also includes evidence from the findings from the following national thematic inspections:

- Thematic inspection of Readiness for Empowerment Education Scotland 2018
- Thematic Inspection of Empowerment for Curriculum Leadership March 2019
- Thematic inspection of Empowerment for Parent and Pupil Participation June 2019
- Multiplying skills, adding value Numeracy and mathematics for Scotland's learners: a thematic inspection 2019

EMPOWERMENT

HEADTEACHERS' CHARTER

CFE

BENCHMARKS

CFE REFRESHED NARRATIVE

Background and context

Over the period from 2016-2018, National Benchmarks were developed to provide clarification on the national standards expected within each curriculum area at each level within the broad general education (BGE). In addition, Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) for aspects of reading, writing and numeracy were introduced for P1, P4, P7 and S3.

The Headteachers' Charter for School Empowerment, 2019 clarified that in relation to leading learning and teaching, headteachers should lead collaborative work to co-design and develop the curriculum and learner pathways, including transitions, which best meet the needs of all children and young people. It made clear that this should take account of the national framework for Scotland's curriculum along with the needs of the local context, as agreed between schools and the local authority.

In September 2019, Education Scotland published the 'Refreshed Narrative on Scotland's Curriculum' in response to recommendations made to the Scottish Government by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

It sets out Scotland's approach, revisiting the initial Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) narrative and restating the central importance of the four capacities[1] and the knowledge, skills and attributes that our children and young people need. It provides a process to facilitate engagement and development of the curriculum. It also provides a succinct single framework for practitioners.

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1. The four capacities are aimed at helping children and young people to become successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; and effective contributors.

Inspection findings for the curriculum for session 2018/19 are organised under the following key areas:
1. Curriculum leadership and development
2. Raising attainment and improving equity
3. Curriculum planning
4. Assessment
5. Transitions

1. Curriculum leadership and development

- The majority of schools have a broad and relevant curriculum rationale. In the best examples, these reflect the CfE design principles and the four contexts for learning. The majority of schools collaborate widely with their communities to refresh their curriculum rationale. They use the context of the school well to create interesting and relevant learning experiences to meet the learning needs of all children.

- There has been significant improvement in the way schools have involved parents and partners in developing the curriculum rationale. In most schools, parents and partners are now more aware of what the school is trying to achieve through the curriculum. Increasingly, parents and the community are supporting and enhancing the curriculum in areas such as, careers education. There is now a need for staff to collaborate more consistently with parents, pupils and wider partners on the design and evaluation of the curriculum. Staff should now build on the opportunities they have to collaborate across schools and become system leaders.

- Further work is needed to ensure that children are actively engaged in designing and evaluating the curriculum. A majority of schools now need to evaluate the curriculum to ensure that it reflects the vision, values and aims of the school more appropriately. Most schools need to revisit CfE design principles and ensure these are a consistent feature of the curriculum.

- Almost all headteachers and staff feel empowered to make decisions about their curriculum to best meet the needs of their children within the local community. Senior leaders develop distributive leadership and, as a result, staff feel empowered to work with pupils, parents and partners with the aim of improving outcomes for learners, reducing inequalities and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

- In the majority of schools, children are developing an understanding of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is reflected in their school values and helps to shape the curriculum. As a result, children are more aware of their rights and have an increased voice to influence school improvement.

- In the majority of schools, programmes in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects help children make connections across different curriculum areas through relevant and interesting contexts for learning.

- In almost all schools, children experience two hours of physical education each week. However, this is not always of a consistently high quality in a majority of schools.

- The majority of senior leaders are developing a culture of leadership for learning, which allows teachers to be creative and innovative within the design of their curriculum. All teachers should continue to embrace this developing culture, and regard themselves as leaders of learning across the system. A majority of teachers are increasingly using a range of local, national and international evidence to inform curriculum development.

- Most teachers have access to high quality professional learning. This includes, for example, play pedagogy, approaches to teaching numeracy and the use of digital technology for learning. A majority of teachers are supported by senior leaders to collaborate within and across schools to develop the curriculum and a shared understanding of national standards. This supports progression within the curriculum and consistency in learning, teaching and assessment. In most schools, staff plan motivating cross-curricular contexts for learning. A minority of schools implement a good approach to interdisciplinary learning. In these schools, teachers plan and assess learning from groups of CfE experiences and outcomes, drawn from different curriculum areas. Children learn within a wide range of relevant and enjoyable contexts that enable them to link learning across curriculum areas. However, more needs to be done in the majority of schools to develop staff's understanding of interdisciplinary learning. This will support children to make meaningful links in their learning, apply their learning in new contexts or create new learning.

affects teachers' participation in collaborative activities such as professional enquiry and action research to support curriculum development, as there are not enough teachers to cover classes to release staff for these activities. Often the leadership team cover classes in addition to their own role, which limits their capacity to facilitate collaboration, professional enquiry and curriculum development.

- At the early level, staff in the majority of schools use play-based learning contexts and enquiry-based approaches effectively to provide meaningful curricular experiences for young primary-aged children. This is an area that most schools need to develop further. Greater use needs to be made of curriculum design principles and in particular, challenge, depth, and progression.

- Overall, in most schools communication between P1 staff and early learning and childcare practitioners regarding continuity across the early level curriculum is improving. The majority of schools are beginning to develop shared approaches to pedagogy across the early level. This continues to be a key area for development across Scotland.

- There is considerable scope to increase the opportunities for children to lead their own learning. Meaningful opportunities for personalisation and choice need to be developed further.

- In the majority of schools, there is a need to develop further the implementation of the Scottish Government's 1+2 languages policy, which will support children's acquisition, and engagement of two additional languages by the end of P7.

- In a few schools, commercial resources are relied upon too heavily to drive the literacy and numeracy curriculum and other areas of the curriculum.

- Schools, particularly in rural areas, continue to find it difficult to recruit staff. This can limit opportunities to lead curriculum improvements and, in some instances, provide a local curriculum that meets the needs of children. Where there are difficulties in staff recruitment this also

2. Raising Attainment and improving Equity

- Staff are successfully improving how they track children's progress within the curriculum.

- In almost all schools, staff are now tracking the attainment of children in literacy and numeracy. Tracking attainment across all areas of the curriculum out with literacy and numeracy remains an area requiring further work. Most schools promote and celebrate well children's wider achievements across the curriculum in and out with school. Most schools track children's opportunities for wider achievement across the curriculum but are less strong in tracking and making explicit to children skills developed through these experiences.

- In the majority of schools, most children are making good or very good progress in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. Most children at early level, and the majority at first and second level, are achieving national standards. Overall, the attainment of children, including those with additional support needs, is improving. In a minority of schools, there is still a need for children to experience the breadth of learning in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics to consolidate and apply their learning. For example, there is a need for staff to provide more opportunities to develop progressive problem-solving skills

and a stronger focus on the development of listening and talking skills.

- Almost all schools have planned interventions in place using the Scottish Government Attainment Scotland Fund to raise attainment across the curriculum, in particular for the most disadvantaged children. Emerging evidence indicates that these targeted interventions are leading to improved outcomes for those children who experience barriers to their learning. This includes improved attainment in literacy and numeracy and progress in health and wellbeing. Staff in most schools have gained confidence and knowledge in identifying the poverty-related attainment gap in their local context. They have undertaken a wide range of professional learning, which enables them to provide universal and targeted support in literacy and numeracy. This is helping to improve outcomes for learners.

3. Curriculum Planning

- In the majority of schools, staff take good account of national guidance when planning relevant and motivating experiences for children. Schools are improving how staff use the four contexts for learning[2] to enrich children's learning experiences.

- Teachers in the majority of schools make effective use of local authority (or school created) progression pathways in literacy and numeracy. A majority of schools have these in place for health and wellbeing. This supports well, planning and progression in children's skills, knowledge and understanding. Increasingly, local authorities are creating progression frameworks for all curriculum areas. Most teachers adapt curriculum frameworks and programmes to suit their local circumstances and to provide interesting and relevant learning experiences.

- Almost all staff work collaboratively within their schools to develop or plan areas of the curriculum and come to a shared understanding of the National Benchmarks. Joint planning across CfE levels is improving teachers' understanding of standards for

2. The four contexts for learning are the ethos and life of the school; opportunities for personal achievement; interdisciplinary learning; and curriculum areas and subjects.

some areas of the curriculum. Most teachers take part in professional learning led by collaborative networks such as local groups of schools to develop their understanding of curriculum areas. They work collaboratively across their associated school group (usually schools linked to one secondary school), particularly on moderation activities and arrangements to support learners at points of transition.

- In the majority of schools, staff provide useful learning experiences to make children more aware of the world of work. Most schools support this approach through establishing positive partnerships in the wider school community. In the majority of schools, children are not always clear about the skills they are developing for learning, life and work. There is scope for schools to develop a progressive skills framework to ensure children build on their skills as they move through the school.

- [Developing the young workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (2014)](#) and skills for learning, life and work are areas that need to be developed further and embedded within the curriculum. The majority of schools need to develop children's understanding about the world of work more fully by developing the use of the Careers Education Standard.

- Outdoor learning and learning for sustainability are becoming increasingly positive features of the curriculum in the majority of primary schools. In a few schools, staff deliver effective outdoor learning programmes that provide children with varied experiences and opportunities to develop their skills. These learning experiences are often enriched through sustainable community partnership working and involve parents. Senior leaders still need to ensure the purpose of outdoor learning is clearly understood by all staff and that children have opportunities to extend and transfer their learning.

- In most schools, staff make good use of digital technology to enhance and support the curriculum. Children frequently access websites and commercial programmes to enhance and consolidate learning. Often, children enhance their understanding of curriculum areas through using search engines. More now needs to be done to develop children's digital literacy skills in a planned and progressive way to ensure they build on their skills as they move through the school.

4. Transitions

- Transition arrangements in the majority of primary schools support learners effectively in making progress across the curriculum. Transitions from nursery to P1, from stage to stage and from P7 to S1, are well-planned in the majority of schools. Enhanced transitions are in place for children who require individualised approaches.

- In most settings, communication between P1 staff and early learning and childcare practitioners is improving. In most schools, transition arrangements support children's wellbeing well as they move from early years settings to P1. Increasingly a majority of schools and early years settings are now working together to improve continuity and progression in learning across the early level. This continues to be a key area for development across Scotland.

5. Assessment

- In most schools, there is a greater emphasis on providing dedicated time for professional learning and moderation activities throughout the year. This supports staff to have regular opportunities to review the impact of their approaches to assessment. As a result, increasingly in a majority of schools staff have a clearer understanding of standards expected. Where schools have developed progression frameworks, this is helping to build staff confidence in developing a shared understanding of achievement of a level. It is also supporting teachers to plan progression in learning through the BGE.

- In most schools, staff make good use of National Benchmarks to support assessment of children's progress. Staff use these more frequently to assess progress within the context of literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics. In the majority of schools, staff collect and use data about progress in literacy and numeracy well to plan next steps in learning for children. This includes planning for children who require additional support and children living in areas of deprivation.

- Teachers are broadening the range of assessment evidence they gather to support their professional judgement of

progress through the curriculum levels. Increasingly staff use evidence from in-class assessments and standardised assessments such as, SNSA, to support their judgement on progress through the CfE levels. Most schools do not yet have reliable data on children's progress and achievement of CfE levels across curriculum areas outwith literacy and numeracy during the BGE. Schools need to continue to improve the reliability and validity of teacher judgements of children's progress and achievement across all aspects of their learning, including all curriculum areas.

- In a minority of schools, further work is required to embed fully assessment within planning for learning and teaching. There is a need to improve how assessment is used to inform planning and to ensure learning is well matched to the needs of all children.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91% - 99%
Most	75% - 90%
Majority	50% - 74%
Minority/less than half	15% - 49%
A few	Less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.

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Primary Inspection Findings: Primary Curriculum 2018-19

A presentation is available with a summary of these inspection findings, along with conclusions and recommendations based around: 'What is working consistently well?', 'What is improving?' and 'What are the challenges and areas for improvement?'.

Click here to visit the presentation.