

Secondary school fieldwork summary report

September 2014 – January 2015

Introduction

Education Scotland conducted 47 one-day visits to secondary schools across 30 local authorities between September 2014 and January 2015 and held discussions with headteachers, staff and young people. The context of the schools visited represent the spectrum of deprivation and locality that exists within the secondary education sector. We were particularly interested in learning about the context for and how schools have used Curriculum for Excellence as an opportunity to meet their local needs. This report represents the collation of the views and information provided by staff in the schools visited.

Contents

Section A: Collated report from senior managers

- A (i) Strategic planning to take forward the 3 – 18 curriculum
- A (ii) Progress towards better transitions into S1 and post-16 through CfE
- A (iii) Progress towards building confidence in education through partnerships with key stakeholders including parents
- A (iv) Initial thoughts on Education Working for All! from the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce and an indication of areas Education Scotland could support schools with over the next few years
- A (v) The nature of community planning and working together to improve CfE outcomes
- A (vi) Progress with the implementation of the new qualifications, including the new Highers
- A (vii) Engaging with Insight to support improvement

Section B: Collated report from teachers

- B (i) Progress towards improving the quality of learning S1 to S6 and evaluating the impact of CfE on outcomes for learners
- B (ii) Planning in BGE
- B (iii) Planning in the Senior Phase

Section C Further support from Education Scotland and National partners

Section A (i)

Strategic planning to take forward the 3-18 Curriculum

The visits captured the following key features as a continuing focus of schools' strategic planning:

- The quality of learning and teaching;
- Stakeholder engagement, including with external partner providers, and
- Approaches to self-evaluation.

Schools have adopted a variety of approaches in taking forward whole school improvement priorities, including through:

- Curriculum and Responsibility of All development groups;
- Assessment, monitoring and tracking progress working groups;
- Professional learning communities;
- Career-long professional learning calendars, and
- Pupil leadership groups.

Key drivers of change in taking forward curriculum developments within their schools and communities include:

- Local authority implementation of an agreed common structure;
- Local authority implementation of an agreed senior phase curriculum model;
- An increase in consortia arrangements to extend and enhance the offer in the senior phase;
- Re-structuring of senior and middle management posts to reflect new ways of working;
- Increased involvement of young people in determining a clear and agreed rationale for the curriculum;
- Extensive parental consultation and engagement in the implementation of CfE, and
- Engagement with colleagues within and across local authorities through groups such as BOCSH.

Almost all schools report undertaking a review of the S1- S3 broad general education as part of their strategic planning for this session or session 2015/16. A number of reasons are given for the need to undertake this review, including:

- Curriculum development work with associated primaries leading to improved continuity and progression;
- To explore how well the broad general education is aligned with the senior phase;
- To ensure suitably challenging learning experiences and progression routes through the broad general education lead to success in the senior phase;
- Reflecting on the experience of the first year of the new NQs;

- To increase opportunities for every learner to have a regular learning conversation with an adult who knows them well, and
- To review the role of inter-disciplinary learning in adding value to young people's learning experiences.

Section A (ii)

Progress towards better transitions into S1 and post-16 through Curriculum for Excellence

Schools are confident that their pastoral transitions are effective and meet the needs of young people. Well-developed, enhanced transition programmes for individuals and groups of learners are also well established. Planning for effective curricular transitions and a joined-up education 3-18 is a work in progress in many of the schools visited.

The key challenges schools identify as impacting on the ability to improve curriculum transitions include:

- Creating the time and space to facilitate collaborative working given current staffing constraints and in some instances locality of school(rural);
- Curriculum transition information, and
- Placing requests from outwith associated schools group.

Overall, schools report more collaboration across sectors to moderate and agree standards. This practice is stronger where local authorities have taken a strategic lead in facilitating cross sector curriculum area moderation and standardization of assessment groups.

The initial focus of 3-18 transition groups tends to be in the following areas:

- Responsibility of All areas of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing;
- A common skills framework, and
- Taking forward 1+2 modern languages.

Other features of planning for curricular transitions include:

- Joint inset days to map out the curriculum;
- 3-18 curriculum area improvement planning teams;
- Cross-sector observations of learning, and
- Curriculum area link teachers or transition teachers.

Post 16 in-school and post-school support

Schools are making strong progress in developing more sustainable partnerships with a range of partners. These include, for example, universities, colleges, Careers Scotland within Skills Development Scotland, youth work staff, health professionals, voluntary sector providers, training providers, children's services staff, parents, employers and community learning staff. However, schools in more rural locations

report real challenges in providing a level of provision comparable to that of schools elsewhere across Scotland.

Section A (iii)

Progress towards building confidence in education through partnerships with key stakeholders including parents.

Parents

Overall, almost all schools report a shift in the role of their parental body and the methods they adopt to communicate with their parents. Parent Councils, Parent Focus Groups and the parental body play a much stronger role in the school's arrangements for self-evaluation. Consultative activities relating to curriculum design, homework policies, reporting on progress and the format of parental information events are highlighted as key aspects of the life and work of the school being shaped by parents. Parental involvement in the delivery of the curriculum is not as well developed as their involvement in observing the curriculum in action.

Employers

A few schools provided information on arrangements for sharing information on the purposes of Curriculum for Excellence with their business community. Business breakfasts are highlighted as an effective approach to inform the business community of Curriculum for Excellence and showcase what the school does well. This approach enables the business community to determine how best to contribute to the delivery of the curriculum and enhance learners' experiences.

Specialist services

All schools report having positive and productive partnerships with a range of specialist provision and external agencies and a few report a shift in the manner by which they engage with external services. Examples include:

- One school reports that improving the environment and space within which the support agencies and services work in the school has improved collaboration and community ethos.
- Another school has taken a deliberate step to move meetings outwith the school day to meet with specialist services in their own working environment.
- Others comment on involving specialist staff and external agencies more meaningfully in self-evaluation activities and improvement planning.

Wider community

Schools are proactive in building confidence in education with the wider community. For example:

- Community newsletters sent out to local businesses, community libraries and local care homes publicising young people's achievements;
- Schools making use of social and local media to increase the profile of the school within the community and share young people's achievements, and
- Senior pupils volunteering within the local community.

Pupils

Pupil councils and forums are increasingly involved in the development of policies within their school and council. All of the schools visited report increased involvement of young people in shaping their curriculum leading to greater confidence and understanding of personalisation and choice.

Section A (iv)

Initial thoughts on Education Working for All! from the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce and an indication of areas Education Scotland could support schools with over the next few years.

Almost all schools have in place a range of partners to support the curriculum offer, including local colleges, authority level employability groups, Chambers of Commerce, Community Learning and Development and Skills Development Scotland, GIRFEC transition and 16+ Opportunities for All groups.

In some schools additional posts have been created to support post-school transitions, mainly at Principal Teacher level i.e. Principal Teacher Positive Destinations.

Work experience and work-related activities tend to be conducted within the senior phase. However, a significant number of schools indicate a move to planning work-related activities in S3 with more bespoke experiences at appropriate points within the senior phase.

Headteachers identified a number of key challenges to be addressed in moving forward, including:

- Locality of school and accessibility to vocational provision;
- Societal bias towards academic qualifications;
- Changing the mindset of staff, parents, young people and employers;
- Quality of provision and the need for a 'service level' agreement with employers;
- Financial costs given economic climate;
- Lack of a local authority strategy leading to competition rather than co-operation across schools;
- Timetabling the senior phase curriculum, and
- Expectations of HMI.

Senior managers identified the need to tackle other aspects to support improved transitions and positive destinations for all, including:

- Vocational education pathways for 14-16 year olds at risk of disengaging with education, and
- Review of the school leaving age.

Section A (v)

The nature of learning community planning and working together to improve CfE outcomes

All schools viewed partnership working as an important element in curriculum planning. However, the responses from almost all school focus on the provision of a list of partners, the focus of the partnership arrangement but only a few schools provided information on the impact on improving outcomes for learners.

A number of schools consider there is a need for a more coherent approach to planning with their community partners.

Rural school communities feel they are vulnerable to the capacity of CLD and other professional groups within their area and are dependent on individuals rather than on teams.

Overall, schools are planning and working together with community learning partners in the following areas:

- Delivery of wider achievement programme.
- Contributions to personal and social development programmes.
- Supporting target groups and individuals at risk of disengaging with education.
- Supporting families to support their child's education and personal development.

Section A (vi)

Progress with the implementation of the new qualifications, including the new Highers

Schools report that the new Highers generally articulate well with National 5. However, there remains concern about the gradient of challenge from National 4 to National 5.

Schools report a need for a more flexible examination diet to reflect the varying timeframes of course delivery being developed within the senior phase.

Progress with the implementation of the new Highers session 2014/15

- Around half of the 47 schools visited have implemented the new Highers in all or almost all subject areas
- A further quarter of the schools visited have implemented the new Highers in the majority of subject areas.

Reasons for retaining the old Higher and delaying implementation until session 2015/16

- Lack of confidence in the level of support or information provided by SQA.
- Staffing shortages or one person departments caused difficulty in taking forward multiple initiatives at the same time.
- A few schools delayed implementation based on a need to review programmes and courses at National 5 level to ensure the level of challenge was appropriate and would lead to success at Higher.

Strategies to support successful implementation

- Robust monitoring procedures to track progress. In schools where such procedures are in place, senior managers report that they are confident the new courses are being delivered effectively and early interventions available if staff raise concerns.
- A whole school assessment calendar, working with staff to address any ‘hot spots’ and reduce the burden of assessment for young people.

Support

Senior managers highlight the following features as effective support:

- The local authority taking a strategic lead in supporting staff to implement the new qualifications;
- Local authority development officers, subject network groups and dedicated inter-school inset days are cited as being effective and invaluable in supporting staff to deliver the new qualifications with confidence;
- Staff who act as SQA markers, examiners and verifiers have benefitted greatly from the experience and their knowledge and experience is valued by their colleagues, and
- Support events and resources organized by SQA and Education Scotland were helpful.

Section A (vii)

Engaging with Insight to support improvement

Views are mixed in relation to the use of Insight as a benchmarking and self-evaluation tool. Where schools have continued to make use of a commercial resource, it is recognised that this may not be supporting staff to engage directly with Insight.

The level of support local authorities are providing to schools is variable. Where local authorities have established a strategic working group providing high quality guidance, advice and support to staff there is greater engagement and use of Insight as part of their arrangements for self-evaluation.

Features of engagement with Insight

- Attainment trios or Insight buddy groups with headteachers presenting and discussing their analysis with their colleagues;
- Staff provided with an overview of performance at whole school level and Principal Teachers working closely with staff to compile a subject performance report;
- Detailed analysis of the data being used to report on performance within standards and quality reports and inform whole school improvement priorities;
- Staff beginning to use the measures to explore the attainment of different groups of learners;
- Schools have generally shared their analysis of Insight data with parents via their parent council and school newsletters, and
- Most schools comment on using the analysis of data in Insight to inform their evaluation of QI 1.1 Improvements in Performance.

Areas of concern

- Schools to make more use of the analysis to evaluate the impact of curriculum change on improving outcomes for learners;
- Senior managers express concern about the tariff scale favouring schools continuing to offer 8 subjects at S4, and
- A few schools raise concerns about inaccurate data and difficulties with extracting data particularly at subject level. They would welcome a facility to generate custom reports from Insight.

Further support required

- Schools would welcome further information on effective use of learning partners and roles and responsibilities of staff.
- Senior managers identify a need for professional learning opportunities for staff with different roles to ensure engagement with Insight is meaningful and supports improvement planning across all areas of the school.

Section B (i)

Progress towards improving the quality of learning S1 to S6 and evaluating the impact of Curriculum for Excellence on outcomes for young people

Teachers report that there has been an increased focus on effective approaches to learning and teaching in recent years. Examples include:

- Teacher learning communities, learning rounds and other collaborative approaches which support effective learning and teaching;
- Staff working more collaboratively to take forward aspects such as literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and to connect learning across the curriculum;
- Young people more aware of the relevance of learning, with increasing motivation and enjoyment;
- Young people more involved and having a greater say in their learning with practice adapted accordingly, and
- Pupil voice giving young people the opportunity to evaluate the quality of education they are experiencing and evidence used to inform improvement planning.

Section B (ii)

Planning in the BGE

Based on their experiences of delivering National 5 courses staff feel there is a need to review the level of challenge within the broad general education. Staff express concern that programmes of learning may refocus on content rather than on knowledge, understanding and skills.

Features of planning in the BGE

- Schools are reflecting on the pace of learning and level of challenge within the BGE, particularly the S3 experience.
- Schools have developed the curriculum within the BGE taking account of their local context and the needs of their learners.
- Personalisation and choice varies considerably ranging from young people experiencing the same subjects and time allocations throughout the three years (with some limited personalisation and choice within the subjects themselves) through to significant personalisation and choice at the end of S1.
- Personalisation and choice within curricular areas is more likely to be within the sciences; social subjects; technologies and expressive arts.
- Additional opportunities for personalisation and choice are being delivered via masterclasses; major/minor classes; electives (including wider achievement opportunities).
- Schools have a variety of approaches to IDL although a significant number identify the need to review these.

Based on teachers' experiences of delivering the new NQs, the following aspects were identified as risk factors to the principles of CfE:

- Teachers see a clear divide between the BGE and senior phase, specifically around having ownership of the curriculum within the BGE but less so within the senior phase;
- Qualification 'creep' into S3 based on the experience of delivering the new qualifications, and
- Ensuring young people receive their entitlement to a BGE and have opportunities to stretch their learning into 4th level Es and Os and beyond to ensure depth of learning for the qualification phase.

Section B (iii)

Features of planning in the Senior Phase

Schools are offering a range of progression pathways within the senior phase. There is evidence of schools beginning to plan courses across different timeframes although this is not yet a consistent feature within the senior phase e.g. two year courses across S4 and S5.

- The number of qualifications taken by young people at S4 varies within and across schools. For example, in some schools young people can study from 5 to 9 courses taking account of their prior attainment and career aspirations. Schools offering 5 qualifications in S4 are now increasing this to 6.
- Some schools are broadening provision by planning S4/S5/S6 as a single cohort.
- Within the senior phase it is recognised that schools are developing partnerships to broaden the range of achievement pathways on offer and where young people undertake their learning e.g. work-based learning, school-college experiences.

Section C

Further support from Education Scotland and national partners collated from the views expressed and information provided by staff in the schools visited.

Education Scotland
Developing the Young Workforce
Senior managers and practitioners requested that Education Scotland:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• organise seminars between employers and schools in order to implement the recommendations within the report Education Working for All! from the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce.• provide a clear steer on what progress inspectors will expect to see in schools in session 2015/16.
Monitoring and tracking progress within the broad general education
Senior managers and practitioners requested that Education Scotland:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide clarity around connecting assessment to learning and how to 'catch and monitor' progress.
Universal Support
Senior managers and practitioners requested that Education Scotland:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide exemplification of effective practice in the delivery of universal support and planning young people's entitlement to personal support.
Inter-disciplinary learning (IDL)
Senior managers and practitioners requested that Education Scotland:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide guidance and advice on effective IDL within the broad general education through to the senior phase.
Insight
Senior managers and practitioners requested that Education Scotland:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide guidance and advice on how best to use Insight to support improvement.• provide information on how inspectors will use Insight within inspection activities.
Responsibility of All
Senior managers and practitioners requested that Education Scotland:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide examples of effective practice in the ROA aspects of CfE.
Communication
Senior managers and practitioners requested that Education Scotland:

- continue to communicate key information in the form of briefing papers.
- extend opportunities for face-to-face engagement .

Rural schools

Senior managers and practitioners requested that Education Scotland:

- provide further support and consideration of the challenges faced by rural schools in realizing CfE given size of school rolls, staffing issues, lack of employers and college provision.
- support rural communities in developing and taking forward approaches to distance learning.

SQA

Support for the new NQs

Senior managers and practitioners requested that SQA:

- provide more timely decisions on content and assessment changes to support effective delivery of the new qualifications.
- facilitate a consultation service between Principal Assessors and teaching staff to support decisions around presentation of candidates.
- provide further support to reduce the burden of assessment.

Status of the new NQs

Senior managers and practitioners requested that SQA:

- revisit the articulation between National 4 and National 5 qualifications to ensure the gradient of challenge is appropriate.
- ensure credibility of the National 4 qualifications by introducing either a merit award or grading.
- do more to promote the value of the National 4 qualification with parents, pupils and employers.

General points for consideration

Senior managers and practitioners requested that SQA:

- ensure that regular validation systems are maintained given the anecdotes circulating about significant discrepancies in the support given to candidates for internal assessment.
- continue to develop hierarchical courses within the SCQF framework to support progression within the senior phase.

Universities

General points for consideration

Senior managers and practitioners requested that universities:

- develop a better understanding of CfE and address apparent discrepancies between information on university websites and faculty admission decisions, and
- view the Scottish Baccalaureate as a valuable qualification.