



Bocombra Primary School

Improvement with an emphasis on self-evaluation, literacy and numeracy

Bocombra Primary and Nursery School is located in the suburbs of Portadown. The school's current enrolment is 355 and its main intake is from expanding local housing developments. The nursery unit opened in 2013 and a five year renovation and extension programme was recently completed at the school.

This case study focuses on the school's journey in effecting improvement with an emphasis on improvements in self-evaluation, literacy and numeracy.

The school was inspected in 2009 and overall provision at the school was reported as good.

Priorities for development included the need to focus on self-evaluation and more effective monitoring strategies; to raise literacy and numeracy standards, particularly at key stage one and to focus on improving learning and teaching.

The school was inspected again in 2016 and its overall performance was reported as outstanding with provision for learning evaluated as very good.

A new management structure

The key area developed since the 2009 inspection was the formation of a new management structure. Clear lines of responsibility for priorities in the school development plan (SDP) have been allocated to members of the senior team with all staff serving on key teams reporting to assigned co-ordinators.

All co-ordinators have linked action plans which are monitored and evaluated according to a central monitoring schedule which sets clear guidelines for standard assessment, review, evaluation and target-setting.

This tool enables clear communication of responsibilities to all staff on a monthly and yearly basis and demonstrates robust action-planning, monitoring and evaluation at all levels.

Through this system all staff have a shared commitment to continuous school improvement

and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the SDP. The monitoring schedule details a month by month process comprised of questionnaires, lesson observations, action plan reviews, standardised testing, internal standardisation, data analysis, book scoops and planning meetings.

Formal whole staff meetings are supported by regular key stage and curriculum meetings where discussion is centred on classroom practice and the monitoring and evaluation of learning.

Team work and staff welfare

An important element in ensuring this model for improvement is effective is in the maintenance of positive relationships throughout the school.

In the past 10 years there has been a significant change in staffing, leading to careful consideration being given to staff induction and development.

The school places a high priority on the pastoral care of staff, with the leadership team sensitive to the needs and circumstances of individual staff members.

A wide and varied extracurricular programme involving every teacher in the school operates on every day of the week. Each member of staff, including the Principal, contributes to the leadership or supervision of an activity for one day a week after school for two terms. This commitment illustrates the strong sense of team work and commitment that has been developed over the years.

The ethos of the school is ‘caring, sharing, excelling’. This has underpinned the focus on building professional teams with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Sharing good practice both internally and externally with parents and the wider community has also been crucial to effecting school improvement.

Effective use of data

A key component in raising the standards achieved by children has been the effective use of assessment data.

Standardised tests are used to identify low and underachievement and to inform priorities for action.

Whole school, year group, and individual pupil scores via CAT/PTE/PTM/GL Reading are robustly analysed. A clear distinction is made between low and underachievement, and appropriate interventions instigated.

The PASS test is used from primary four to primary seven to highlight individual barriers to learning and has proved to be a very effective evaluative tool.

The use of classroom assistants is a valuable support for underachievers, as is the appointment of a teacher to target literacy and numeracy through class withdrawal.

Improvements in literacy and numeracy

The inspection in 2009 targeted the need for improvements in KS1 literacy and numeracy and the school has risen to the challenge.

Whole staff training in iXL took place in 2017 linked to the sustained improvement objective of providing extension for the more able. In P2 and P3 the catch-up in number programme has been successful.

There has been a whole school focus on guided reading, particularly the progression of skills. The Bookworms programme after school on one afternoon a week seeks to provide literacy support for underachieving pupils in primary two to primary five.

An enthusiasm for reading is promoted by pupils in primary four to primary seven who attend junior classes on a termly basis to talk about their reading.

A renewed management structure, linked closely to the SDP, with clear lines of responsibility and accountability have led to a more devolved style of leadership in the school and stronger professional relationships. The monitoring schedule has been central to improved staff understanding of action-planning, monitoring and evaluation, allowing the SDP to really become a working document.

The Principal of Bocombra Primary School, Mark Vallely, offers his reflections on the school's progress in recent years.

Identifying one aspect of professional practice that has contributed to past success at Bocombra Primary School is very difficult as it has come about through a complicated web of drivers.

One area that is crucial, in our opinion, is 'organisation'. How we organised ourselves as a school over the last ten years has formed the basis on which school improvement has been delivered.

Initially it was important to agree and communicate to staff, parents and pupils a shared vision for the school, the notion of striving for excellence permeates all aspects of our school life. Being realistically ambitious when identifying areas for further improvement, forming a strategic, sharply focussed SDP and associated action plans. These plans have been informed by rigorous analysis of evidence generated from our comprehensive monitoring schedule.

The powerful collegial approach to working practice is a key strength, the shared responsibility for school improvement is recognised by staff and pupils alike, for example the pupils lead the School Improvement Council.

The distributed leadership harnesses the full potential of our combined expertise, with all teaching staff from all three key stages serving on curriculum teams for literacy, numeracy, WAU and UICT.

During our recent ETI visit in September 2016 the Inspectorate was impressed by the professional approach these teams demonstrated, taking personal responsibility for driving present and future improvement. This organisation of our management structures and achieving buy in from the entire school community has in our view yielded the success experienced to date.

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