



Regent House School

Improving educational outcomes through staff development and evaluation strategies

Regent House is a co-educational grammar school, situated in the town of Newtownards. Currently 1450 pupils attend the school and there is a small preparatory department. The current Principal has been in post since 2014.

The focus of this case study is the school's investment in staff development, the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation strategies and the resulting improvements in educational outcomes.

The school was inspected in 2015 and the quality of education was evaluated as 'satisfactory'. Identified areas for improvement included the quality of planning, teaching and assessment linked to inadequate levels of attainment in public examinations, the effectiveness of self-evaluation at all levels, the evaluative role of governors and curriculum provision to meet the needs of all pupils.

A follow-up Inspection in December 2016 concluded that the school had demonstrated "the capacity to identify and bring about improvement".

Achievements and standards were reported as 'good' with significant improvements in outcomes at GCSE and A level. Noted was the 12% increase at GCSE in seven subjects at A*-C, including maths and English, with pupils achieving 'well above' the Northern Ireland average for grammar schools at 96.2%. There was a 35% increase in five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C with 99.1% of pupils achieving this indicator.

At post-16, there was a significant increase in A-level outcomes with 74% of pupils achieving A*-C, bringing the school into line with the Northern Ireland average for schools of similar profile. There was also a 5% increase over a two year period, of pupils staying on at the school post-16.

The Principal, on taking up post a few months prior to inspection in 2015, was very clear about his priorities for the school and used the inspection findings as one of the evaluative tools to support his plans for school improvement.

Developing a leadership team

The starting point was to create a stronger and more devolved leadership structure.

Historically, the management structure was hierarchical with job descriptions and professional discourse focusing on the administration of tasks rather than strategic development and pedagogy.

Management structures at the school have become more efficient with more clearly defined levels of accountability and authority. Job descriptions have moved away from task-centred administration towards more developmental approaches with a focus on learning.

The Principal has retained three Vice Principal posts that are focused on managing the curriculum, the school's pastoral provision and the use of data.

There is a joined-up approach to the associated responsibilities of each role. For example, the pastoral Vice Principal has a significant contribution to make to the academic support of pupils. Data management involves all staff, both within the classroom and within their pastoral groups.

The Vice Principals are supported by four senior teachers on the leadership team and all middle managers, i.e. heads of department and heads of year are linked to particular senior teachers, ensuring that clear lines of responsibility, accountability and communication are maintained.

Building capacity

During his first year in post the Principal conducted one-to-one interviews with all members of staff and these allowed for a discussion of staff roles and an appropriate matching of skills to these roles.

Alongside clearer structures at senior leadership level came revised roles and responsibilities for subject teachers and pastoral staff.

Pastoral staff now have a responsibility to link with subject staff to oversee pupil performance. Two further members of staff serve on the leadership team, non-remunerated, for a two year period, taking on responsibilities that match their skills or are identified as key school priorities.

Staff apply for these positions and this has been crucial in developing staff professionally and creating a culture of professional awareness.

Using data to improve outcomes

Regent House School has improved its use of data. There is a more rigorous approach to tracking and recording pupil progress with sharply targeted intervention and support for underachievers. The school's analysis of outcomes and comparative data is shared with staff, parents and Governors.

High expectations are set for pupils and staff. One of the Principal's priorities, in collaboration with staff, is to record the performance of pupils on entry to the school at 11 with their subsequent performance at A level. Staff understanding of the concept of 'value-added' has therefore improved alongside an understanding of the value of more robust monitoring and assessment. The Vice Principal with data management responsibility at a whole school level also manages all aspects of staff data use including appropriate training.

A more rigorous programme of pupil assessment has been put in place with the results of four recorded assessment tasks communicated to parents throughout the year. Assessment tasks are tightly linked to pupil outcomes and comparative data, encouraging not only review and evaluation of pupil performance but also the development of teaching resources and assessment tasks.

Underachievement is now identified early and the appropriate interventions are put in place which include eight-week mentoring programmes at key stages four and five plus meetings with parents.

Celebrating achievement

Celebration of positive achievement has been reviewed and pupil improvement, at key stages three and four is rewarded with lunch passes, cinema vouchers and whole-class celebration days. With an increased focus on data analysis, it has been necessary to have a co-ordinated approach.

Improved governor communication

Improved communication with governors is a key feature of the school's improvement. Governors are now much more involved and aware of their role in supporting the school's development. Middle management and senior staff meet with governors to report on aspects of the school development plan (SDP) according to a set annual schedule.

Each governor is linked to a particular strand of the SDP and there is devolved responsibility. There has been a definite shift in the role of governors and they have become much more knowledgeable about development planning, the school's priorities for improvement and learning and teaching. There has been a move away from a focus on the administration of the school to a more pronounced focus on its development and improvement.

Governors are regular visitors to the school and meet with individual staff, often in a learning capacity to talk about particular areas of current practice.

There is improved information sharing between staff and governors. Not only has this improved relationships but it has provided an opportunity for individual staff to share the good work that is ongoing and to celebrate the school's success. This is very important in a large school setting.

Summary

While the school is obviously very pleased with the improvement in pupil performance in public examinations, what is more significant is the cultural change in the school. There is a more collegial approach to establishing priorities for development with input from all staff, pupils via an active School Council, parents and governors.

The Principal believes that the promotion of a culture of high expectations with accountability for all built into a clear management structure has been the key to this recent success. He believes that school improvement is not finite; it is a process, not a destination and this acknowledgement is important.

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