

S15. Education Scotland Inspection Report and Action Plan – Slamannan Primary School and Heathrigg Nursery

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children’s Services presenting the findings of Education Scotland’s inspection of Slamannan Primary School and Heathrigg Nursery together with the action plan to address the key findings of the recommendation.

Following its inspection of Slamannan Primary and Heathrigg Nursery in January 2018, Education Scotland had issued its inspection report together with a detailed summary of findings.

The inspection identified areas of strength, however, areas for improvement were identified. Of the 4 quality indicators measured – 2 (leadership of change and raising attainment and achievement) had been evaluated as weak.

Areas for improvement included:-

- to develop more effective strategic leadership and self-evaluation approaches which lead to improved outcomes for all children across the nursery and primary school. This should include a focus on continuing to develop effective partnerships, with parents and the local community, which will enhance and support children’s learning.
- to improve learning and teaching across the school, ensuring an appropriate level of pace, challenge and differentiation. Children should be given opportunities to lead their own learning and be more involved in evaluating their own progress and next steps.
- to review the approaches that support children’s learning across the school. In doing this, the school needed to improve the planning of learning, teaching and assessment for children requiring additional support in their learning.
- to raise attainment for all children. Approaches to raising attainment should include making effective use of relevant data, and robust tracking and monitoring of children’s progress in learning and achievement.

In addressing the findings the priority of Children’s Services was to establish a strong and consistent leadership team. Ms Ghislaine Tait, Head Teacher of Moray Primary School had been appointed acting Head Teacher.

Other actions had included:-

- within the school the Principal Teacher and the Early Years Officer have been given additional temporary responsibility arrangements as Acting Depute Headteacher and Acting Senior Early Years Officer respectively with their new remits clearly focussed on the development areas identified in the inspection.

- to further increase the capacity of the Senior Leadership Team to address the improvements required, the Service and School Improvement Team had temporarily seconded a centrally based education officer to provide additional support. This would give quality and consistency over the course of the improvement journey and was supernumerary to the core staffing allocation.
- the Team Manager had been working with, and would continue to work with, the Head Teacher and the Leadership Team on a direct and intensive basis to effect change. This work had involved regular review and evaluation of the action plan, to challenge and drive the improvements from the authority perspective.
- the Team Manager provided regular updates to the Service Manager and Head of Service on continuous planning and progress to date.

In response to questions from the committee Ms Tait summarised the key priorities of the action plan. This focussed on 3 key areas - raising the attainment in reading, improving staff morale and assessing support needs for each child. Ms Tait highlighted successes thus far, noting that there had been no staff absences since she joined the school.

Members commended the work undertaken by Ms Tait and colleagues within Children's Services but nonetheless expressed concern that the lack of leadership, identified in the inspection, had been able to occur without Children's Services being aware. The Head of Education stated at the time Children's Services was in flux and a number of key staff posts had been unfilled, in particular within the Quality Assurance Unit. The Service had been aware, but unable to react to, early indications that there was an issue within the school. The situation at the school had been much worse than Children's Services had been aware of. The Service recognised the need to learn wider lessons but importantly to provide support to the school and pupils, which have been significantly affected. The Service had reacted positively since the inspection but was still unpicking the lessons.

Members stated that the pupils, who had been let down, were the priority and sought assurance that they would be able to catch up. In response Ms Tait said that they could although whether all would could not be answered. She explained the work carried out and processes which had been put in place to support progress. This had included additional support assessments, staff meetings, pupil progress meetings. She identified the need for staff to plan – where are the pupils and what pace of teaching is required – and to hold progress meetings 3 times a year to ensure that progress was adequately monitored. There was a need to develop staff capacity. Children's Services had provided an acting principal teacher as an additional member of staff who would work alongside class teachers to observe and give advice to upskill class teachers. In addition Ms Tait anticipated further additional staff joining – for example two additional support needs (ASN) teachers for numeracy and literacy.

She also summarised the work with pupils which had included a literacy recovery programme. The majority of pupils had made good grades and would move from the programme. Those who progressed more slowly would be provided with additional support.

Following a question, the Head of Education expanded on the additional resources put in place to support the teaching staff. He cited the teacher transfer programme which had been in place for approximately 2 years and which allowed teachers to move from or into a given school. In terms of additional support, he reiterated that the acting principal teacher had strong experience of supporting teaching capacity. This resource would be in place for approximately 2 years. In addition the school could tap into resources at Sealock House. Members acknowledged and welcomed the support and additional resources but sought assurance that a similar situation would not arise in other schools. The Head of Education stated that intelligence suggested that the situation would not occur elsewhere. He repeated that resources were in place at the centre, which was not the case as the issues at Slamannan and Heathrigg had developed.

Ms Tait expanded on the teaching resources. Two teachers would join the school to replace 2 who had moved on. This in itself would change the dynamic of the establishment. In regard to class allocation, Ms Tait stated that staff had been asked to identify their preferences. This had allowed her to deploy staff according to their strengths and preferences.

In response to a question on whether support would be in place for those pupils who had been affected and who were now transferring to the secondary stage, Ms Tait stated that support would be in place at Falkirk High School to ensure that the correct support was in place. It was, she considered, an inspiring learning place.

Members asked whether the school had been able to utilise Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to address issues relating to attainment. Ms Tait confirmed that £53k PEF had been used to appoint time from the Family Support Service, buying programmes for literacy recovery, to buy external staff development for teachers. PEF would be used in 2019/2020, to continue inclusion work from the Pupil Support Service, to improve attendance and to support families with home school learning. She intended to build on resources which support learning and teaching. It was not a case of buying in resources, but rather what was important was how the staff teach and how resources are used.

Members repeated that it was regrettable that the issues within the school had not been picked up earlier by the centre. Lessons would need to be learned and a repeat elsewhere must be avoided. The Head of Education stated that the Service was committed to learning the lessons. Members asked that, after the conclusion of the inspection follow-up, a progress report is brought back to committee.

Decision

The committee noted:-

- (1) the findings of Education Scotland's inspection of Slamannan Primary School and Heathrigg Nursery and associated action plan, and**
- (2) that the Director of Children's Services will monitor progress towards meeting the areas for improvement contained in the inspection report and report back to the committee.**