

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT SERVICE COMMITTEE
13 NOVEMBER 2008

Agenda Item	
Report No	

A CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE - LITERACY PROJECT

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Summary

This report updates members on progress of The Highland Literacy project and its central place within the development and implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence and its contribution to other Council and Scottish Government key priorities.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Highland Literacy project focuses on methodologies which encourage and support pupils to become independent learners who can successfully apply their literacy skills across the curriculum and in real life contexts beyond school. It draws on current national and international research and well as good practice across Highland schools. The project's contribution to managing change effectively was recognised at the Council's Quality Awards in 2007. The website for this development which can be located at <http://www.hvlc.org.uk/hlp/> attracts a significant number of enquiries both nationally and internationally.
- 1.2 The introduction of a Curriculum for Excellence seeks to ensure a continuous coherent and progressive curriculum from nursery education through to 18. The Highland Literacy project makes an important contribution to this.
- 1.3 Through the Literacy Strategy (2008 – 2011)¹ the Project also seeks to make effective connections with other Council and Scottish Government priorities including:
- A curriculum for Excellence: transitions, key learning outcomes for English and Gaelic language, cross-curricular working and development of the four capacities in each child
 - 16+ Learning Choices and Skills for Work
 - The Gaelic Plan
 - Adult Basic Education developments
 - "Assessment is for Learning"
 - Getting It Right: inclusion in learning
 - Library Services support for literacy including "Bookstart"
 - the role of Youth Development Workers in supporting literacy

2. Progress to date

- 2.1 Begun in January 2005, initially the project focused on supporting a small number of identified primary schools to raise attainment in reading. Two literacy officers were seconded to train school staff, model lessons and offer professional support

¹ Appendix 1

and advice during school visits. After eighteen months, almost all participating schools had increased attainment in both reading and writing and had reduced the gap between the school's attainment and the Highland average. Boys continued to do less well than girls but showed a great increase in attainment.

- 2.2 Primary schools in phase 2 (2005 – 2007) were nominated by the Council's Quality Improvement Officers. The same model of engagement was deployed. Almost all of these schools significantly improved their attainment compared to the improvement in the Highland average. In addition staff, pupils and parents reported increased enjoyment and engagement in literacy work. Additional training for schools not directly engaged with the literacy officers was very well attended and received by colleagues.
- 2.3 From phase 3 (2006 – 2008) applications were invited from schools who themselves had identified that teaching of reading was an aspect for improvement. In most schools, this shifted the focus onto improvements in learning and teaching. To increase the number of schools involved a mixed model of engagement was developed. Core schools received full training and support, whilst associated schools nominated a lead person from within their school who would support staff. Initial evaluations indicate that two thirds of the core schools showed improvement with associated schools doing slightly better.
- 2.4 Support for Gaelic medium schools featured in phase 4 (2007 – 2009). Staff across 60 primary schools received training and support visits. To build capacity in each school, literacy coordinators received extensive training and support with resources to help whole school implementation. The literacy officers continued to make a major contribution to the authority's Continuing Professional Development programme for probationers, teaching and support staff. Training was also provided for library staff.

3. Current Developments

- 3.1 During the current school session the authority has undertaken to engage with schools in five associated schools groups, seven secondary schools and a further 22 primary schools. In addition a small number of special schools and establishments are involved. A further number of schools with a Gaelic medium element are included.
- 3.2 Primary schools continue to engage through their literacy coordinators and receive support through the training package previously developed for all staff. Identified staff in secondary schools jointly train with primary colleagues, with a focus on collaborative learning and development of literacy skills required for effective reading for information. Thereafter, the Literacy officers jointly agree further input for each secondary school.
- 3.3 Additional training is available for Subject Supporters, additional support needs staff in secondary schools and probationer teachers. To help sustain improvement in schools in earlier phases, training is provided for newly appointed literacy coordinators and staff new to the school since their direct involvement. A major focus on improving writing will feature in training for 2008/09.

3.4 A small number of schools are currently trialling a reading intervention project, developed by the Literacy officers, aimed at young learners who struggle to read by the end of Primary 1.

3.5 Links with other aspects of the service are being developed this session involving Adult Basic Education staff, Youth Development Workers and Business Development staff.

4. Next Steps

4.1 The authority's literacy strategy increasingly seeks to involve others beyond its initial focus on primary school pupils and staff.

4.2 By the close of phase 6 (2009 – 2010), all primary schools and the majority of secondary schools will be expected to have engaged with this major development. Clearer connections with other service providers with responsibility for supporting literacy skills will continue to be made.

4.3 Beyond phase 6 the project will downsize. The emphasis will be on supporting schools and other service providers to maintain and refresh good literacy practice which equips all learners to function effectively in the real world. Identified key aspects of literacy will be supported through continuing professional development opportunities and targeted support for associated school groups and learning communities therein.

5. Recommendation

5.1 Members are requested to note and comment on the key stages, progress and future development of the literacy project.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 30 October 2008

Author: Quality Improvement Team

Ref:

Background Papers:

Highland Literacy Project – Literacy Strategy 2008 – 2011

<http://www.hvlc.org.uk/hlp/>



Highland Literacy Project



Literacy Strategy 2008 – 2011

<http://www.hvlc.org.uk/hlp/>

Working together to inspire learning and achievement in Highland communities.

A' toirt piseach còmhla air ionnsachadh is coileanadh ann an Coimhearsnachdan na Gàidhealtachd.

Introduction

The Highland Literacy Project was initiated in January 2005, with the aim of raising attainment in reading in twelve identified schools across the region.

The project proposal stated:

“ Both schools and the authority have identified the need to support attainment in reading through a focussed approach to the teaching of reading skills at all 5-14 levels. Highland Council’s recent programme of study emphasised this approach. The aim of this proposal is to identify and support Highland schools where reading is an area of concern, and improve attainment of pupils”.

This was in the context of

- a gradual decline in reading attainment in Highland schools
- an improving trend for writing attainment due to an authority focus on this aspect
As a result, the gap between reading and writing attainment was widening in favour of writing.

What began as a reading project quickly evolved to become a literacy project as it was apparent that the four key areas of literacy - Reading, Writing, Talking and Listening - were intrinsically linked.

A rationale

‘To work with staff in identified primary schools to raise attainment through the development of whole school best practice in the teaching of reading.’

The work was informed by;

- HMI advice
- Good practice in other authorities, including North Lanarkshire Council
- Current research
- Highland Council’s Learning and Teaching Toolkit
- The National Priorities for Education
- HC Programmes of Study for Reading, Writing, Talking & Listening.

HMI advice and research findings on the teaching of reading indicated that staff should;

- Improve questioning and discussion skills to improve comprehension
- Develop reflective questioning strategies for children
- Spend time teaching whole class reading as well as group reading
- Provide more thoughtful, focused reading activities
- Provide uninterrupted teaching time with each group
- Teach children to use information texts more frequently
- Teach children to make their own notes
- Provide lesson aims which should be clear and shared with the children
- Provide a wide selection of texts and genre which children use effectively to develop a reading habit
- Teach children how authors use language (Writer’s Craft)

The methodology, support and practical advice remain firmly based on these findings, but the project has evolved to reflect national and local initiatives such as Curriculum for Excellence and Assessment is for Learning.

Project Priorities

Targets

- To teach Reading using a direct, interactive approach.
- To develop and promote a whole school approach to the teaching of reading through the use of collaborative learning strategies.
- To encourage children to make the link between Reading, Writing, Talking and Listening.
- To promote pupils success through training in self and peer assessment.
- To provide training for staff to enable them to teach Reading using a wide variety of strategies.
- To promote parental involvement in supporting their children in reading at home.
- To identify and provide any additional resources to further support the reading project.

Criteria for Success

- An improvement in attainment in reading across the school.
- Direct and interactive strategies in the teaching of reading are adopted and taken forward by staff.
- An increase in staff confidence to apply these strategies in the teaching of Reading.
- Pupils can apply skills and collaborative strategies across the curriculum, which enable them to become more independent learners.
- An increase in confidence that allows pupils of all abilities to be able to and to enjoy engaging with texts.
- An increase in the number of pupils actively involved in reading for enjoyment.
- Parents actively involved in supporting reading at home.

Supporting schools to succeed

Key features of the authority's strategy to date include:

- a focus on core reading, reading for information, writer's craft and reading for enjoyment,
- a very clear methodology to be adopted by all staff in each school for each of these aspects,
- the teaching of reading using a variety of levelled materials and genre,
- the explicit adoption of collaborative learning approaches to ensure that all learners are engaged, active and increasingly independent in their learning,
- making clear the connections between listening & talking, reading and writing,
- training for all teaching staff, and support staff
- additional training for Literacy Coordinators (from Phase 4)

- modelling of best practice by Literacy Officers and (from Phase 4) school's own Literacy Coordinators
- regularly updated, practical advice on the authority's website,
- extensive "open training" events for staff whose schools are not within the direct scope of the project
- additional advice to staff on phonics, spelling, literacy through play, literacy through media, Scots language, supporting parents and Gaelic learning.
- support for the sharing of best practice within, and across schools
- the enhancement of each primary school's capacity for Literacy improvement (from Phase 3)
- regular evaluation of project experiences and learning and making improvements based on evaluation evidence.

The current situation

Three Literacy Officers (2.5 FTE) plan for, and drive the authority's Literacy strategy. Additional support is also received from two previous Literacy Officers (some 40 days total per year) and a classroom practitioner with very good practice in Gaelic language.

Phase 4 developments include:

- engagement with almost all the authority's Gaelic provision, including Bunscoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis,
- full engagement with 50 primary schools, agreed partial engagement with three schools and engagement with one Associated School Group (secondary with 8 rural primaries),
- match funding for agreed reading resources for both core and associated schools,
- training for core school Literacy Coordinators (2 days) and for associated schools Literacy Coordinator (4 days)
- training for all core Phase 4 teaching staff (1 day) and support staff (0.5 day)
- planned support visits by Literacy officers to core and associate school classrooms
- the provision of collegiate activity sessions (CAT),
- "open training" events for teaching staff not directly involved with the project
- "catch up training" for those new to Phase 1-3 schools,
- literacy training for the authority's probationers (2 days), and
- additional support for Phase 3 schools designed to support parents with reading for information activities as part of their children's homework.

Future Phases

It is the authority's intention that there will be a further two phases of this development which will be a main driver to ensure that the authority meets key national objectives. Thereafter, the development will move to a position where appropriate central support will be provided to assist schools and other centres maintain best practice, and to develop specific aspects of literacy.

Phases 5 & 6 rationale

Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning, as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate is central to an individual's development and wellbeing.

The authors of the Key Learning Outcomes, define literacy as “the set of skills which allows an individual to engage fully in society and in learning, through the different forms of language, and the range of texts, which society values and finds useful.”

On this premise, all those supporting children and young people have a role in developing literacy at every stage in their learning. In these next phases the project will engage more with early years and secondary colleagues to promote this.

Using the model of engagement for Phase 4 schools, this model will widen the scope of development to contribute to the authority's commitment to improving experiences for all through:

- A Curriculum for Excellence
 - transition at early stages and primary/secondary and
 - Key learning Outcomes for Literacy and Gaelic (Learners)
- More Choices, More Chances
 - improved literacy skills for all learners at P2 and secondary
 - exploring links with Adult Basic Literacy developments
- Taking account of the development of vocational education
 - to support pupils to learn the appropriate language and industry terminology for the courses they are taking.
- Assessment is for Learning
 - integration of best practice in literacy modelling and advice
- Getting It Right For Every Child
 - taking account of inclusion issues for learning & teaching
- Initial Teacher Education Courses – taking account of:
 - current training and advice in literacy given to student teachers
 - The Standard for Initial Teacher Education Courses
- taking account of the advice in a range of national documents, including:
 - The Standard for Full Registration (2006) & Guidance (2007)
 - “How Good is Our School 3” (2007) and “Child at the Centre 2” (2007)
 - “Improving Scottish Education” (HMIe 2008)
 - “English: A portrait of current practice in Scottish schools and pre-school centres” (HMIe 2008)
 - “Leadership for Learning: The challenges of leading in a time of change” (2007)
 - “How Good is Our School: Evaluating Educational provision for Bilingual Learners” (2006)
 - Education & Training: “Group Work: Transition into Secondary” (2007)
 - “Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy” (2007) and “Preparing for Work: Skills for work pilot programme” (2007)