

Getting Familiar

with

The Highland Council ECS

Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy

a pack to promote staff discussion

Getting Familiar with the Highland Council LTA Policy

Learning Leader's Notes

Aims and Contents

The pack aims to encourage staff to reflect and discuss the Highland Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy and its implications for their practice. It is recommended that school managers and other leaders of learning use the pack flexibly with staff, promoting discussion over time and encouraging further investigation and research using the Highland LTA Toolkit, and Framework available on: www.hvlc.org.uk, and the Highland Council website. Such professional development will complement work undertaken by staff engaging in the Highland Literacy Project and Cooperative Learning Academies.

The pack comprises:

- these Notes (with 'Discussion Points' below to help the learning leader to inform discussion about the first five sections of the Policy)
- six sets of key questions for reflection and discussion corresponding to the Policy's sections
- the Policy.

There are links to other resources which will help to inform discussion. These may be used as prior reading to inform discussion or as follow-up and research.

Activities on the first five sections of the Policy may be deemed as 'familiarisation' and undertaken with staff relatively quickly. The final section on The Highland Model of Engagement leads staff to more considered reflection about how they operate as learners and teachers in their classrooms and beyond.

Discussion Points

Section: The Introduction

The crucial idea in this section is that staff, too, are learners.

In order to be successful learners, then, all sections of the Policy apply to them. The implications of this for individual mindsets and the organisation and delivery of CPD need to be thought through. In this respect the list of school manager/learning leader responsibilities set out in the Introduction should be helpful.

It is no accident that the Introduction pins its colours firmly to the Curriculum for Excellence mast. All four capacities (not just successful learners) apply to staff just as much as pupils and should inform the self-evaluation and CPD of all.

Section: Getting it right for all learners

The crucial idea in this section is that you can have all the teaching strategies in creation in the classroom, but without mutual respect and good relationships amongst learners, high quality learning cannot take place.

The section may provoke controversy around the idea of ‘respect’ and ‘disrespect’ – for example pupils tend to have strong feelings about staff who use sarcasm (often quite mild and often used in ‘fun’) as a control tool. Some staff do not see this as ‘disrespect’. The section also presents a list of attributes which *young people* believe important in making a good teacher. Teachers may, quite rightly, assert that this is a two-way street – these qualities apply to ‘good pupils’ also. The crux, though, is that the teacher has prime responsibility for modelling these attributes and setting a standard in relationships.

Section: The Principles

Each principle is crucial. It seems advisable, then, to take time to discuss each individually with the focus on understanding and thinking through the implications for practice. However, there is significant overlap and facilitators will wish to be flexible in their approach in this section.

Engagement – learners need to be motivated; the idea of ‘rewards’ lies at the heart of motivation and these may be intellectual, emotional, social, financial, tangible, intangible . . .

Participation – learners need to be active in their learning; making choices, discussing, moving physically at intervals, self and peer assessing, leading . . .

Dialogue – meaningful conversation should lie at the heart of the learning process; the dialogue may be led by the teacher with the class, a group, an individual; it may not involve the teacher directly at all . . . but ideas should be talked through in order to maximise opportunities for meaningful learning . . .

Thinking – all learners are thinkers; learners should not accept ideas unthinkingly; teachers should create situations where pupils ask ‘why?’ ‘how?’ ‘To what extent do I agree/disagree?’ and think through and exchange possible answers . . .

Section: Assessment is for Learning

The crucial idea in this section is that all learners must understand the three assessment purposes and how they complement each other – but formative assessment is the staple diet of the classroom and self and peer assessment are just as important as that done by the teacher.

Individually and collectively staff may wish to focus on one side of the triangle at a time and discuss meaning, levels of understanding and needs. In total, assessment is a huge area for staff development, best undertaken collectively ‘in-house,’ with other schools in the ASG, and with Local Authority support.

Section: Key Characteristics

The crucial idea in this section lies in how staff interpret the phrase, “most of the following most of the time”. Some staff may view these words as mealy-mouthed and uninspiring; others may view them as a sensible attempt to reflect the reality of the classroom.

Discussion may focus on individual characteristics and how each manifests itself in learning. It may also focus on how the teacher knows these ‘things’ are happening and how well they are happening. The starting point must be teacher self awareness and self-evaluation but this self-knowledge must be supplemented by information from other sources – especially the pupils and other professionals.

Section: The Highland Model

The crucial idea in this section is that our goal is the development of autonomous learners – able and eager to take responsibility for their own learning. In order to achieve this, our four principles (engagement, participation, dialogue, thinking) must inform the way all involved shape and organise learning experiences. In addition, we must evaluate these experiences (through self and peer assessment), providing feedback to the learner and further refining our own principles and practice.

Getting familiar with the
Highland LTA Policy

LTA Policy Section: The Introduction

Key Questions

Staff are asked to read the section of the Policy and consider these questions with a view to discussing their opinions with colleagues. Agreed next steps will focus on improving the quality of learning in the school.

- The Introduction identifies staff (as well as pupils) as learners. What are the implications of this for the organisation and delivery of CPD in your establishment?
- The Introduction identifies key roles for managers/leaders in promoting staff learning. To what extent do managers/leaders currently fulfil each of these roles?
- The Introduction emphasises the importance of the Toolkit and Framework. To what extent are you familiar with these resources? To what extent are they used in your establishment to facilitate individual and/or collective CPD?
- Given your conclusions to the key questions about the Introduction, what should you do next?

Next steps

Getting familiar with the Highland LTA Policy

LTA Policy Section: Getting it right for every learner

Key Questions

Staff are asked to read the ‘Getting it right . . .’ section of the Policy and consider the questions below with a view to discussing their opinions with colleagues. Agreed next steps will focus on improving the quality of learning in the school.

In the consultation on the draft Policy, the ‘Getting it right . . .’ section proved to be the most controversial, provoking comments which ranged from ‘ringing endorsement’ to ‘an outrage against my profession’. The controversy centred on the idea of staff ‘disrespecting’ pupils.

- Why do you think the ‘disrespect’ statement (final point in the young people’s list) caused controversy?
- The section presents young people’s views about what makes a successful teacher. To what extent do you agree with this list of qualities? Are some qualities more important than others? Are there any qualities missing?
- Given your conclusions to the key questions about the ‘Getting it right’ section, what should you do next?

Next steps

Getting familiar with the
Highland LTA Policy

LTA Policy Section: The Key Principles

Key Questions

Staff are asked to read the Key Principles section of the Policy and consider the questions below with a view to discussing their opinions with colleagues. Agreed next steps will focus on improving the quality of learning in the school.

- To what extent do the statements about **Engagement, Participation, Dialogue and Thinking** apply to my personal learning needs in relation to CPD?
- To what extent do the statements about **Engagement, Participation, Dialogue and Thinking** apply to my approach as a teacher?
- Are the Principles equally important?

- Given your conclusions to the key questions about the Principles, what should you do next?

Next steps

Getting familiar with the
Highland LTA Policy

LTA Policy Section: Assessment is for Learning

(including the AifL School diagram)

Key Questions

Staff are asked to read the AifL School section of the Policy and consider the questions below with a view to discussing their opinions with colleagues. Agreed next steps will focus on improving the quality of learning in the school.

- To what extent are you confident about your knowledge about and skills in formative, summative and evaluative assessment?
- To what extent does your school meet the description of the AifL School in relation to formative, summative and evaluative assessment?

- Given your conclusions to the key questions about the Assessment is for Learning section, what should you do next?

Next steps

Getting familiar with the
Highland LTA Policy

LTA Policy Section: Key Characteristics

Key Questions

Staff are asked to read the Key Characteristics section of the Policy and consider the questions below with a view to discussing their opinions with colleagues. Agreed next steps will focus on improving the quality of learning in the school.

- What does ‘most of the following, most of the time’ mean?
- Choose any single characteristic e.g. Learners ‘making choices’ – what does the phrase mean in practice?
- Are there any missing characteristics in your view?

- Given your conclusions to the key questions about the Key Characteristics section, what should you do next?

Next steps

Getting familiar with the
Highland LTA Policy

LTA Policy Section: The Highland Model of Engagement

Key Questions

Staff are asked to read the Highland Model of Engagement section of the Policy and consider the question below with a view to discussing their opinions with colleagues. These questions explore the three main aspects of the Model. Agreed next steps will focus on improving the quality of learning in the school.

- To what extent are interactions in my classroom based on high quality dialogue?
- To what extent do I provide learners with structured, regular opportunities for self and peer assessment?
- How do I show pupils that successful learning requires effort and purposeful thinking?
- Given your conclusions to the key questions about the Highland Model of Engagement section, what should you do next? You may find this link to the Framework materials useful:

<http://hvlc.org.uk/ace/aifl/highlandmodel.htm>

Next steps

The Highland Council Education, Culture and Sport Service Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy

Introduction

This first revision of the Highland Learning and Teaching Policy reflects changes in educational thinking since the launch of our original version in 2003. It now includes assessment and has been written for Education, Culture and Sport staff, parents, pupils and others involved in lifelong learning.

The revised Policy is complemented by a (refreshed) Learning, Teaching and Assessment Toolkit and also the Highland CPD Reflection Framework which informed the Future Learning and Teaching project undertaken in various Highland learning communities during 2005-8. These are available as an integrated package on the Highland Virtual Learning Community www.hvlc.org.uk

Experience shows that this package is best used collectively. School and establishment managers have a crucial role to play in this process. In relation to continuous professional development, teachers and other staff are learners. Managers and other leaders of learning, then, should apply the principles and foster the characteristics of the Highland Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy when organising and facilitating the learning experiences of staff. Cooperative and active learning opportunities will lie at the heart of these experiences.

Managers/ Leaders of learning should:

- Provide a strategic stimulus through LTA Policy development
- Encourage informal dialogue and peer observation amongst staff to engage with principles and improve practice
- Facilitate and resource various groups (learning communities) within the establishment and with staff from other establishments
- Organise and resource systematic 'in-house' observation and action research in order to improve individual practice and refresh collective policy
- Advertise and facilitate attendance at appropriate external CPD events followed by debriefing and identification of next steps.

Our LTA Policy endorses wholeheartedly for pupils and staff the educational purposes described in *Curriculum for Excellence*. We aim to develop ourselves and those we teach as: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors. Our success in this aim will depend on how far all involved feel secure and valued, and the extent to which we all learn how to think effectively in different contexts.

Getting it right for every learner

No learner can be fully effective if he or she feels unhappy or troubled or insecure. It is the responsibility of the school community – school staff, pupils, parents and carers, professionals from partner agencies and others in the local community – to work together to ensure that each learner feels safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Young people think that the teacher has a central role in this process, working with others in the school community to create the right conditions for effective learning.

Over the last sixty years, young people's ideas about what makes a successful teacher have been surprisingly consistent. These focus on personal qualities – how the teacher (*i.e. any person who provides a learning experience including auxiliary staff and youth workers*) acts as a role model – building relationships with individuals and the class as a whole, fostering relationships amongst learners.

According to young people, successful teachers are:

- Aspirational - genuinely believe that all learners can succeed
- Assertive - decisive and confident, firm but fair
- Encouraging - positive, supportive, welcoming genuine error as an opportunity to learn
- Enthusiastic - believe in what they are teaching and enjoy the job
- Humorous - show humour naturally and put learners at ease
- Open - prepared to challenge their own thinking and admit they may be wrong
- Respectful - genuinely like young people, care about them, listen to them, enjoy their company and do not disrespect them individually or collectively.

Before we engage with the key principles and characteristics of our policy, we should consider fully the crucial importance of establishing and maintaining good working relationships if successful learning is to take place.

Key principles

What are the key principles which inform learning and teaching in our schools, learning centres and beyond in the community? Our starting point is inclusion. Learners should not be subject to discrimination, intentional or otherwise, on the grounds of their social circumstances, gender, race, religion, cultural beliefs, disability or sexual orientation. *N.B. In the statements which follow, 'teachers' comprise all staff undertaking a teaching role.*

Our key principles for all learners are:

Engagement

Learners need motivation. They should have a significant reason for engaging in the learning process and positive feelings about involvement.

Learners – especially the young – are often self-motivating; they are desperate to find out, know, understand – it's as natural as breathing. Learning brings its own emotional and/or intellectual reward. Equally often, though, learners require an external incentive to provide motivation – an award, a certificate, a prize, praise, promotion. To be effective, such incentives must be meaningful to the learner.

As teachers – often through personal example – we should foster a love of learning by nurturing self motivation. But we should also motivate – inspire, challenge and praise. We should show that we value all learners, creating an ethos of achievement and organising tasks which will bring rewards that matter from the learner's point of view.

Participation

Learners need to participate in the learning process. They should be active and take as much responsibility as possible for their own learning.

Learners should lead whenever possible. They should make informed choices about what, where and how they learn; they should self and peer assess. Learners should be aware of themselves as learners, conscious of their own preferred styles of learning, confident enough to seek help, perceptive enough to know where help may be best sought, skilful enough to access help readily.

As teachers, we are lifelong learners – a state of mind which should inform our professional practice, development and our own wider learning. Through collegiality, we should create learning communities in our classrooms, establishments and beyond.

Dialogue

Learners need to communicate through verbal and/or multi-sensory dialogue. Research and empirical evidence demonstrate that real understanding takes place when learners work through with someone else what is to be learned and how far they have been successful in their learning.

Learners, where possible, should talk through their learning regularly with their teachers, their peers, parents and others. They should question, answer, expound, challenge assertions, support propositions, offer alternatives, suggest solutions, peer assess ...

As teachers – through personal example and setting standards in our questioning and provision of feedback – we should create the conditions in which communication and dialogue can thrive, where self confidence and respect for others underpin all interaction, where achievement is celebrated and error welcomed as a stepping stone to success.

Thinking

Learners need to think. This thinking should be critical and creative, robust and flexible in order that all may understand and achieve their potential whatever the context.

Learners should be positively critical: questioning, investigating, testing, seeking after the truth about themselves, others and the world in which they live. They should be creative: imagining, expressing, exploring the boundaries of the possible so that there are no limits to ambition.

As teachers we should be thinkers: reflective professionals – self aware, systematically evaluative, focused on our own improvement and that of those in our care. We should use the language of thinkers, ask the questions that matter, enable and empower other learners to ask those questions, so that they and those who respond may make their thinking explicit. Crucially, despite the pressures, we ourselves should take time to think.

Assessment is for Learning

Effective assessment informs and supports the learning and teaching process, helping to raise attainment and achievement. All involved should understand and take appropriate account of the three main types of assessment:

Assessment *for* learning is essentially formative. It is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence so that learners, parents/carers and teachers can decide, through high quality dialogue, where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go next and how best to get there.

Assessment *as* learning is essentially evaluative. It is about using assessment to learn how to learn and thus encourage the development of autonomous learners. In effective assessment *as* learning, learners through self and peer assessment identify and reflect about their own evidence of learning. Personal learning planning provides a supportive framework for these processes.

Assessment *of* learning is essentially summative. It is about measuring, analysing and reporting performance. Effective assessment *of* learning provides information about individual skills and knowledge leading to awards which are passports to opportunities in life, work and education.

For further information about what a school does in order to make its assessment system effective, see the Appendix (c. Assessment is for Learning).

Key characteristics

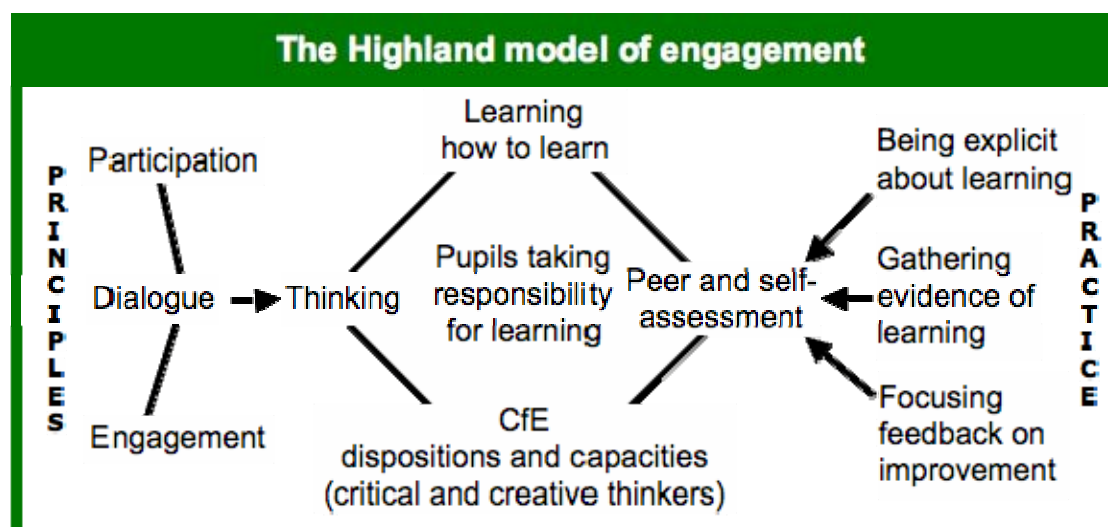
An excellent learning experience, one informed by the relationships, principles and assessment practices described in this Policy, will include most of the following most of the time:

- People welcoming other people, enjoying each others' company and having fun through challenge and hard work
- Learners reviewing prior work, making choices and agreeing what needs to be done, how it is to be done, where and when it is to be done using appropriate resources including ICT
- Learners leading - asking each other meaningful questions which require thought, engaging in dialogue as a class and in groups, modelling processes and demonstrating knowledge and skills to each other and other audiences
- Learners understanding and sharing standards, self and peer assessing, receiving meaningful feedback about what has been achieved and agreeing next steps to improve.

We can find more detailed descriptions of very good practice in *The Journey to Excellence* Parts 2 and 3, in *The Child at the Centre, How Good is our Community Learning and Development?* and in the seven principles of *Curriculum for Excellence's Building the Curriculum 3*.

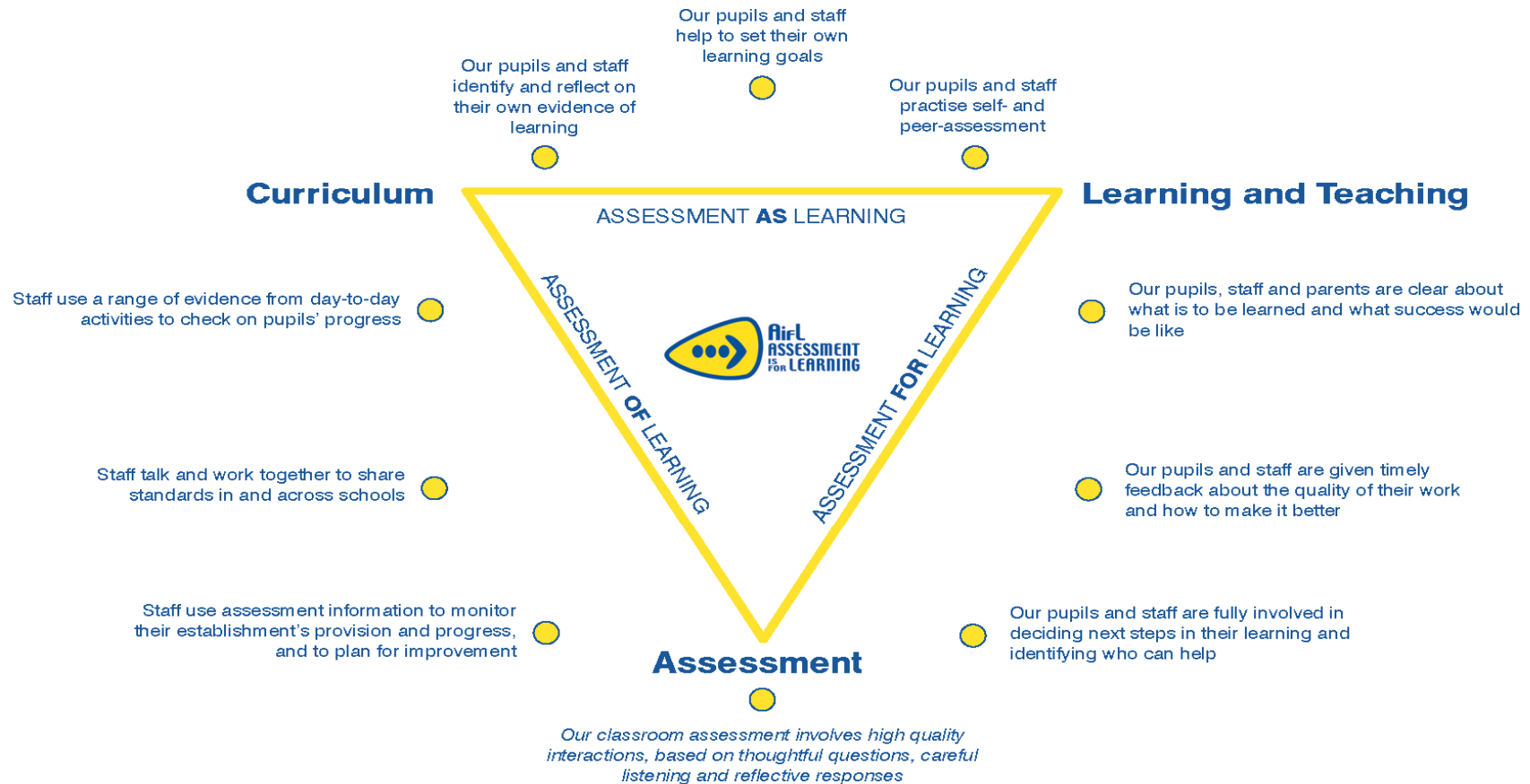
The Highland Model of Engagement

The Highland model of engagement was developed as a fundamental element of the Future Learning and Teaching Project in Highland 2005-8. It illustrates the relationship between the principles and practice described in this policy and how these impact on learners, supporting them to take greater responsibility for their own learning.



APPENDIX

What is an AifL School? A Place Where Everyone is Learning Together



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