

Report on secondary thinking groups 30 March 2008

Introduction

A series of five meetings was held with secondary headteachers and senior managers from January to March 2008 to gather information on changing practice in S1–S3 and to harness ideas for future innovation. All EAs were invited to make nominations for these thinking groups which were attended by participants from 25 EAs and SCIS.

While a number of participants spoke about developments in S4–S6 and early presentation, this report concentrates on steps taken specifically in response to *Curriculum for Excellence* and ideas for the future. Examples of changing practice, described by participants, highlighted areas secondary schools have chosen to focus on in taking forward *Curriculum for Excellence*. In all cases, schools had taken stock of existing strengths, such as learning and teaching initiatives, enterprise and global citizenship, and used one or more of these as a springboard for developments. The management of change was a recurrent theme across all discussions, with school leaders describing strategic planning of CPD to support developments outlined below. Learning and teaching, draft experiences and outcomes, and leadership were areas identified for particular attention in terms of CPD.

Discussion around the transition between primary and secondary demonstrated that steps have been taken to develop current practice further. Many of the participants described joint planning and CPD within clusters.

The headings below indicate the main areas of discussion which arose from the starter questions provided in advance. Some of the points refer to practice which is already taking place, others to plans or ideas for the future. Where points under each heading were mentioned more than once, these have been summarised in one bullet point. In other cases, the example provided applies to one school. As CPD was a theme which arose under several headings, it is included where it was mentioned rather than as a separate heading.

Strategic leadership and management

- *Curriculum for Excellence* embedded in the improvement plan
- aims, values and school policies revisited
- remits of senior managers realigned
- encouragement of leadership at all levels, for both staff and pupils
- changes in working groups in light of *Curriculum for Excellence*: literacy across the curriculum; sustainable development education; ICT; numeracy; PE and health and wellbeing; CPD; recognition of achievement ; learning and teaching; interdisciplinary learning; citizenship; Eco Schools
- all core policies demonstrate the vision of the four capacities
- *Curriculum for Excellence* a theme at all parents' nights

- *Curriculum for Excellence* leadership group of SMT plus six PTs who are coached by SMT members
- range of programmes led by teachers, for example, health, finance, animation and film
- learning from primary school approaches to planning and working
- utilising skills beyond the confines of school: local community, business, and environment

Pedagogy

- learning and teaching policies revisited
- focus on learning and teaching through developing collaborative learning, co-operative learning, peer assessment, active learning; critical skills; Assessment is for Learning (AifL): teaching for understanding; methodology to develop the four capacities
- programmes for S1: critical skills tasks; thinking skills; learning to learn
- all CPD in last year has been on learning and teaching. About half of staff involved in coaching, mentoring
- CPD for staff led by two teachers in partnership with Stirling University; based on coaching, mentoring and tutoring sessions for groups of staff
- structured staff discussion in cross-curricular groups
- more active quality assurance processes for learning and teaching being introduced
- wikispace for maths and computing to support independent learning
- survey of pupils regarding learning and teaching
- joint teaching and learning research programmes between primary and secondary staff
- S2 audit of learning and teaching against QIs 2.1 and 5.2
- big investment in classroom ICT
- digital cameras around departments for pupils to record their work for uploading to the school websites and plasma screens
- learning and teaching co-ordinators in each department
- learning mentors for young people and staff

Values, purposes and principles

- audit of four capacities in all departments; S1 and S2 courses
- awareness raising of values, purposes and principles. Map developed across all curriculum areas, showing methodologies and four capacities per department
- CPD focus on values
- CPD provided by staff, sharing practice with a focus on the four capacities
- four capacities assemblies and staff meetings regularly held
- developing software with Scottish Government for the 'Winning Game' – a games-based approach to learning to develop the four capacities.
- principles of curriculum design: focus on depth and challenge and enjoyment last session; this session focusing on all principles
- S1 successful learners day

- confidence building through cross-curricular curriculum inserts P6–S1
- considering what personalisation and choice means within subjects

Outcomes and experiences

- have been preparing staff to use the experiences and outcomes
- INSET days on science and on numeracy
- in February modern languages teachers led workshop on how they unpacked the outcomes
- some staff beginning to use the draft outcomes and experiences

Literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing

- whole school focus on health and wellbeing
- literacy and numeracy committees to develop school policies, action plans and approaches
- cross-curricular literacy work this year, numeracy next year
- health and wellbeing in S1 across all subjects
- literacy: nursery to S1 text focus
- numeracy audit underway with primary schools.
- health course developing in HE, PE and science
- PE for all
- will increase PE time and have themed PE/HE/PSE
- have focus months in the school calendar for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in all subjects

Assessment is for Learning

- AifL has been a major focus for CPD activities
- AifL seen as main vehicle for driving *Curriculum for Excellence*
- formative assessment in S1/S2
- AifL across whole school
- team of facilitators support departments
- PLPs being developed as appropriate to sectors and curriculum areas
- involvement of pupils has been developed alongside CPD for staff
- two staff working 0.4fte, focus on AifL strategies across the school, working with other staff. Have developed a core group of 6–7 staff
- strategy in place to develop literacy through self-assessment of writing across a range of subjects
- cross sector working group on formative assessment

Curriculum organisation

- have moved to 32 periods per week
- review of the curriculum structure leading to 33-period week to give additional time to English in S1–S2 and maths
- next session S1 will have a choice of 40 electives; each pupil will experience four in the course of the year

- planning a two-period elective in S1 next session
- electives in S1 and S2 for choice and enjoyment
- introducing choice from P7 to S1; plan is to roll this approach into S2
- skills for work courses introduced
- new subjects such as dance and Chinese are being introduced to increase choice
- possibility of an integrated social subjects course in S3
- ASDAN courses provided for S3 and S6 (accreditation for mentoring)
- teams of teachers working together S1–S3
- about to begin planning a two year HNC on countryside management
- modern language and science taught from nursery onwards (3–18 school)
- a new design course for S1 in 2008–09 across technologies and expressive arts, to be jointly taught
- developing flexibility in the curriculum for S3–S4 with Duke of Edinburgh, Asdan, XL, Prince's Trust options
- event weeks: suspended timetables S1–S3
- new course in S1 for all with elective element; has more focus on health and wellbeing
- all S3 pupils following ASDAN course for core/life skills; aim is bronze award for all, followed by silver and gold as they progress through school
- outdoor education for all S1 pupils
- vocational courses with colleges and in school options, for example, hospitality, hairdressing
- compulsory S2 and S6 Scottish Studies courses
- all communication subjects (English, MFL, drama etc) amalgamated to develop personalisation and choice
- considering elective/choice models for 2009–10 to increase flexibility and choice.
- looking at S4–6 timetable
- considering longer time blocks to assist approaches to learning and teaching; AifL
- thinking about the 33-period week but concerned about this distorting the learning and teaching focus
- EA thinking about the 33-period week, 4.5 day timetable giving 0.5 day per week for CPD activities

Transitions

- Primary and secondary staff working jointly on numeracy and literacy
- every English and maths teacher to be linked with a teacher from one of the 19 primaries
- cross sectoral working for all staff
- reciprocal visits programme developed between primary and secondary with jointly planned lessons and peer assessments
- common learning and teaching policy developed across the ASG

- planning a 'virtual middle school' with primaries to span P6–S1 and possibly S2
- staff meetings always include cross sector developments
- developing bridging units P7–S1 for curricular transitions
- have agreed on a policy, vision and values statement for cluster; now working on joint plan to include numeracy, language and science
- *Curriculum for Excellence* active learning day planned for P7s, to be led by S6
- mapping of Early Years to S2 social subjects curriculum across the ASG
- transition programmes for P6–S2; P7/S1
- joint primary/secondary projects developed for science, ICT, PE and HE
- primary/secondary working groups for each curriculum areas
- shared ASG Inset Days – recent theme: Teachers for Excellence
- common learning and teaching policy developed across the ASG
- 'Transition Passport' in place for each pupil in S1

Interdisciplinary learning and connections

- projects, for example, art, home economics, languages; two-week 'Rapid Response Engineering Challenge' for S1; S1 music, art, and PE; Afghanistan's children in crisis project involving maths, English, science, RE, with focus on developing the four capacities; 'Scottish Scientists' with science, English, RE, art; Fair Trade project involving RME, history and PSE; S2 animation programme; S2 anti-sectarian study across the curriculum
- Queensland Rich Tasks adapted to *Curriculum for Excellence*
- interdisciplinary experiences provided through electives and stand alone events.
- departments collaborating over joint working for example English, PSE and science
- theme days/events: anti-sectarian; health; enterprise; the holocaust
- one or more cross-curricular themes embedded in subjects: enterprise, citizenship; international education; environmental sustainability
- 'Making Connections' course for S1 and S2 to develop a challenge based approach to learning and teaching involving co-operative skills, teamwork and making connections with other subject areas.
- considering a themed middle school approach
- social subjects teachers working together on integrated course
- projects planned for S1/S2/S3 with one carrying through from primary; every department to be involved eventually
- international education and global citizenship: links with China; Malawi; South Africa; Denmark; Rwanda; S3 connecting classrooms project with African schools; Comenius exchanges with schools in France, Norway, Spain and Singapore
- planning in place to build on existing outdoor education programme for all S1/S2 pupils, to incorporate the John Muir Award and integrate cross-curricular work

- INSET day used for collaborative planning of theme based projects in S1

Achievement

- record of achievement in electronic format, updated regularly
- S1/S2 activities week for all
- achievement record for S1–S2
- awards for participation and degree of success; bronze, silver and gold presented at regular assemblies
- system for tracking achievements.
- Asdan Bronze certificate for all in S1
- looking at recognition of achievement to build on work in areas such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and sports

Support for pupils

- working towards all staff becoming pupil support teachers for a small number
- all age tutor groups from S1 to S6
- using business partnerships to improve student leadership
- pupil voice established on the timetable, on SMT agendas, etc.
- secondary pupils have organised theme days such as enterprise day for primaries; S1–S3 pupils supported primary P4–P6 pupils
- pupil voice across the school, for example, ICT champions – pupils who assist with ICT across the curriculum
- student leadership: buddying, local projects; international links

Innovation

For further innovation the following points will require consideration:

- practical assistance and advice for SMT and CPD on managing change
- CPD for staff to ensure focus on the learner not courses
- CPD on literacy and numeracy
- need to continue winning the hearts and minds of staff
- collaboration amongst staff
- balance of subject and interdisciplinary learning
- a curriculum framework within which local needs can be met
- coherence and articulation between primary and secondary
- methodology which takes account of the modern child
- extended choice in S1–S3
- engagement of the disengaged
- appropriate structures
- use of pairings of departments and faculty groupings to plan interdisciplinary learning
- allocation of time for planning across departments

Conclusion

While participants spoke about the challenges of planning for the future when important questions, such as the nature of future of qualifications, remain unanswered, most have begun to consider opportunities for enriching the S1–S3 experience. Changes to the structure of the school week, and to the ways in which staff work together, were seen as important factors in future innovation.

Participants welcomed the opportunity to meet and share their views. Follow-up visits will be made to some of the schools to find out about their practice in more detail, with the intention of featuring these schools as case studies in the near future.