

◆ EDINBURGH ◆

THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

JAMES GILLESPIE'S HIGH SCHOOL

FOLLOW THROUGH REPORT

1. The inspection

HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) published a report on the quality of education in James Gillespie's High School in March 2010. Subsequently the school with support from the education authority amended the school improvement plan to take account of the findings of the inspection.

An education authority team recently visited the school to assess the extent to which the school was continuing to develop the quality of its education including the areas identified for improvement and produced a progress report for parents.

This report tells you about the quality of education provided by the school since the original inspection. It also comments on the progress made in the agreed areas for improvement.

The main areas of focus are on learning and achievement, meeting the learning needs of the pupils and leadership to help the school achieve its aims.

2. Improvements in the quality of education provided

2.1 *Learning and achievement*

Young people in S1 and S2 are making good progress in their broad general education, preparing them well for later stages of learning. They build well on previous learning across a good range of subjects, developing important skills and knowledge. Standard Grade and National Qualification results have been sustained in both S4 and S5 with the attainment of young people in S5 being particularly strong. The school's performance in national assessments has been consistently well above national averages and continues to compare well with schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds.

The school has made good progress in developing its systematic and accessible monitoring and tracking system for young peoples' progress and achievement. This is now in place for all learners. Young people involved in National Qualification courses were very clear about the use and purpose of their targets and there were increasing opportunities for these to be negotiated in a meaningful way at more frequent intervals. The school had effectively used this information to introduce intervention strategies, such as the assertive mentoring programme, to ensure individual learners and groups of learners were supported to achieve their academic potential. Young people spoke very positively of the way staff provided opportunities for extra support when they were having difficulties.

All learners with additional support needs were involved in developing and reviewing their educational plans and were clear about their targets for learning.

Learners were very positive about the wide range of opportunities available which allowed them to take part in activities which promote wider achievement. The school actively encouraged participation in these opportunities and continues to extend the scope of these activities to develop the variety of talents and skills of their young people. Learners clearly

described how the school celebrated their achievements. The school is at an early stage of tracking this more systematically.

The school has made a good start to developing its new curriculum in line with both national and local developments. All S1 and S2 courses have undergone changes designed to reflect national guidance and make them more stimulating, challenging, relevant and enjoyable. Teachers had been engaged in exploring a number of interdisciplinary learning opportunities and were engaged in discussions to integrate these more closely into school planning.

2.2 *Meeting pupils' learning needs*

There is a very positive and respectful relationship between staff and learners. Almost all young people were motivated and engaged in the learning process and contributed very well in lessons. Learners enjoyed the increased opportunities to learn together and work collaboratively with their peers which was now a feature in most classrooms. They worked confidently both individually and in groups and were increasingly involved in discussions about the purpose of their learning and what they need to do to improve. Lessons were well planned with a range of tasks and activities to support learning. Teachers had increased the range and quality of teaching and learning strategies and these are being applied more consistently across the school. The use of information and communication technology has increased in the school and all learners now benefit from the improved use of interactive whiteboards throughout the school.

The practice of sharing classroom experience is now recognised by teachers in the school as a mechanism for improving learning across the school. Staff spoke positively of the usefulness of this activity and it was now integrated into the departmental improvement processes. A significant number of staff had also involved themselves in an initiative to develop improved and more consistent teaching strategies. This initiative has involved staff in focused training and peer observation of each other's lessons. The school senior managers had effectively supported this development and are aware of the need to maximise the impact of this activity.

The school was very good at identifying barriers to learning and devising strategies to overcome them. Clear procedures were in place to ensure staff had a coherent understanding of learners' needs and the support strategies which were put in place. Learners with additional support needs were very well supported by the support for learning and the support for pupils staff. These staff worked closely with parents and effectively communicated the needs of these learners to all staff. Educational plans provided clear guidance to staff on how to support specific young people's learning.

The school had continued to review its provision in the senior school to ensure that appropriate choices were available for those young people involved in the new curriculum. Increased opportunities for physical education in the senior school and more explicit arrangements for religious observation continued to be part of this ongoing development.

2.3 *Leadership and direction*

The acting headteacher and his senior managers had provided a very positive lead in the school. They worked effectively as a team and were committed to meeting the needs of their learners as well as creating a culture of continuous improvement. They had sustained and developed the very positive working atmosphere in the school.

The school continues to develop leadership capacity at all levels. The school's senior managers had successfully engaged with the principal teachers to increase their ownership of the improvement priorities and the self-evaluation of the work of the school. This had had a significant impact on the consistency of the learners' experiences across the school.

Staff felt able and confident to show initiative and take on lead roles within and beyond the classroom. They had contributed well to the progress with the improvement plan priorities and

the implementation of aspects of the new curriculum. Particular staff had taken the lead in the development of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across the school. Other staff were involved in the provision of professional development opportunities by delivering or supporting a number of in-school activities designed to share and improve teaching practice across the school.

Self-evaluation was now providing a more rigorous base for the school's improvement procedures. The school had a number of examples of effective self-evaluation strategies in place both at school and departmental levels. Improved communication combined with an improved understanding and sense of responsibility and accountability throughout the school was having a significant impact on the quality of the process.

The school continued to develop leadership opportunities for its young people. Students in the senior years helped to improve the school through their work with younger learners and their involvement in leading and supporting many of the wider achievement activities. The student council had an increased profile across the school and had devised a sub-committee structure to focus more effectively on particular aspects of the school's work. The remit of the sub-committees combined with the use of student focus groups had created a more effective student voice.

3 Conclusion

With support from the education authority, James Gillespie's High School continued to provide a very good standard of education for its pupils. The school had progressed well since the inspection and had made the necessary improvements in terms of the inspection findings. The current improvement plan had had a very positive impact on the work of the school. The leadership and teamwork in the school provided a very good basis for continued improvement. The education authority will publish no further reports in connection with the 2010 HMIE inspection.

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