



REPORT of the Excellence in Professional Learning Award (Schools and Learning Communities) Panel meeting held at North Berwick High School, East Lothian Council, on Tuesday 21 May 2019 at 9.00 am

Present: Carole Wilkinson, GTCS Council Member (Chair)
Angela Milton, Headteacher, Glasgow City Council
Alan Pithie, Headteacher, Fife Council
Ann Gallagher, Retired Headteacher
David Sheerin, Depute Headteacher, East Dunbartonshire Council
Geraldine Armstrong, Education Officer, West Lothian Council
Alison Dakers, Professional Learning Officer, Fife Council

In Attendance: Sharon Smith, GTCS Senior Education Officer (Servicing Officer)

Introduction and Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and made the introductions.

1 Summary of Event

A GTCS Panel was convened at North Berwick High School, East Lothian, to review their nomination for an Excellence in Professional Learning Award.

The open and inclusive approach to the event enabled the panel to gain insight into the school as a learning community. In addition to key documentation submitted in advance, the panel members were provided the opportunity to join the following focus groups:

- Overview from Senior Leadership Team
- Professional Learning Communities x 2 (PLCs)
- Classroom visits: History, Art, Spanish, PSE, PE and English
- Strategy groups: Literacy, Mental Health, Equity and Attainment, Developing Young Workforce,
- Learning and Teaching
- PLaCE (Professional Learning as Critical Enquiry)
- Pupil Leadership
- Partners: Youth Project, Herb Space and Fresh Start
- Leadership for Learning,
- NQTs and MSc TLT Students
- Leading from the Middle – Faculty Leaders and Pupils Support

2 Background

The Excellence in Professional Learning Award is now in its third year and recognises the central role that leadership at all levels play in creating and sustaining professional learning environments where teacher professionalism can flourish and bring about sustained impact on learning and learners. The GTCS Award will be held for a 3 year period and celebrates and recognises schools and learning communities which promote, support and lead professional learning which has significant and sustained impact on teachers, classroom practice and pupil learning.

3 Key Strengths

The following key strengths were noted:

- (i) The Professional Standards

School self-evaluation happens regularly at North Berwick High School which helps to influence and support the growth of teacher agency and professional development.

There are regular opportunities for staff to provide feedback on specific discussions and these help to critically analyse the needs of the school and inform next steps.

During Professional Review and Development discussion coaching wheels are used, plus feedback from 360 evaluations and from critical friends to help shape teachers' understanding of 'where they are' and 'what's next?'

(ii) Leadership of and for learning

There is a strong leadership of learning culture at North Berwick High School with the Senior Leadership Team all leading by example, engaging in extended professional learning themselves. Furthermore, some teachers are engaging in Masters Level learning and Professional Recognition has been achieved by some colleagues.

It is the expectation at North Berwick, even from interview stages, that North Berwick staff will be reflecting practitioners who see themselves as learners on their learning journeys.

There are many opportunities at North Berwick for all to be leaders of change, not only within their classrooms but across the wider school, through Professional Learning Communities and/or Strategy Groups. The Strategy Groups include teachers who are developing as leaders, giving them opportunities to take up leadership roles in a supported and trusted manner, with an appointed Coach to challenge.

Clearly there is an embedded culture of trust that allows for innovation and risk-taking, where staff feel comfortable to discuss both successes and failures. Value and commitment are given to recognising the importance of developing individual and collective knowledge. The working time agreement has time prioritised for PLCs, but staff have shown a high degree of willingness to work together over and above this protected time and space.

The professional learning skills and dispositions developed to date will continue to grow and refine through engagement with the PLaCE engagement next year, and colleagues within the school will be able to embark on additional CLPL credited courses that are being offered in conjunction.

Systems are in place for the induction of new staff with masterclasses run to share North Berwick's approaches to being an enquiring professional.

(iii) Learning by enquiry

At North Berwick High School there is a strong culture of enquiry, where all teachers engage in Practitioner Enquiry with the time and space allocated in the school calendar.

Over the last two years, enquiries have been undertaken by teachers, either individually or in Faculties, to explore 'stone in their shoe' challenges within their contexts. There have been a variety of opportunities to share the good practice, whether it be through presentations within and across Faculties, showcase events, washing lines of 'enquiries' or individual table discussions. Opportunities for shout outs and take-aways are there for all, as are opportunities to observe each other. All staff know which enquiries are happening in and across the school and departments through online forms.

Teachers question their own and others' practice regularly, using data and reading to support evaluations. They use each other as critical friends to question and challenge assumptions of self and others.

(iv) Learning that deepens knowledge and understanding

Ongoing professional learning is pivotal to ongoing improvement at North Berwick High School. Teachers see themselves as learners and use enquiring approaches to support the improvement agenda in the context. Solution focused approaches are adopted to support this agenda and to help deepen your knowledge and understanding.

There have been opportunities to learn from others outwith the school to help develop learning further, whether that be with the strong community partnerships that you have, from visiting guest speakers, or visitors from other countries. Additionally, East Lothian's First and Next Steps Leadership courses are supporting middle leaders in their professional learning.

Some teachers linked to Developing Young Workforce undertake real life placements to enable them to teach their vocational courses better.

The learning opportunities at North Berwick no longer have an instructional focus, but now have a clear developmental focus, as teachers engage in research projects, enquiries and PLCs. These are used to support the deepening of professional knowledge and to challenge teacher understanding through critical thinking.

(v) Learning as collaborative

Collaboration is a strength at North Berwick High School where there is a clear shared vision, achieved through collaborative consultation with all school stakeholders.

Parents and partners from across your community are regularly invited to contribute to the self-evaluation agendas and provide feedback on the next steps for improvement. Every faculty has a 'strategy day' to explore areas of focus going forward and information gathered from these days informs next steps – currently there is a whole staff consultation on 'developing a shared understanding of what makes an effective lesson at NBHS'. The Senior Leadership Team regularly seek feedback from staff to ensure the professional learning models of engagement are meeting staff needs.

There is a strong ongoing culture of collaborative learning which originated in Teacher Trios and has, over the last two years, moved to Professional Learning Communities. There is a strong social capital in North Berwick High School both within Faculties and across Faculties. Going forward into next session, the School Improvement Plan will focus around the interventions and supports of PLaCE for whole-school improvement from colleagues at the University of Edinburgh.

Teachers have identified that sharing learning and practice is the way of 'being' at North Berwick, with opinions from all learners listened to and valued, both bottom up and top down.

Pupils feel listened to at North Berwick High School. The Pupil Learning Council, has been 'persistent' in ensuring their requests are actioned and talk proudly of the strong Committee – teacher relationships. The Pupil Health and Wellbeing Committee have developed and led PSE lessons on 'managing school from a pupil's perspective', and created a 'teacher compliment' scheme where pupils can share their thanks to their teachers. The pupil leaders appreciate the free reign, support and trust that the school allows them.

Strong, effective partnerships have been established with Youth Workers and Herb Space to support some children develop coping strategies. Both the Support for Learning staff and Guidance staff demonstrate the school values through the work that they do in these working partnerships. Further partnerships with the museum of Flight and the Scottish Seabird Centre support learning in the school.

4 Conclusion

The panel would like to thank North Berwick High School for the work they put in to preparing for our visit and the warm welcome and hospitality we received throughout the day. We appreciated the honest and professional input and the willingness to engage with us as we built up a picture of the school community. The voice of all learners was clearly heard and the pride in their school was consistently demonstrated.

5 Outcome of Panel

The panel agreed that North Berwick High School be successfully awarded the Excellence in Professional Learning: Award for a School.