

## **Report on Section 66 Special Inspection George Watson's College, Edinburgh**

**Monday 4, Tuesday 5 and Wednesday 6 of September 2017**

### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Mary Berrill HMI (Lead Officer for Inclusion), Elizabeth Montgomery HMI and Aileen Monaghan HMI carried out a special inspection of George Watson's College on 4, 5 and 6 September 2017 as requested by the Registrar of Independent Schools on behalf of Scottish Ministers in accordance with section 66(1) of the 1980 Act.

1.2 Specifically, and in accordance with section 66(1AA)(b) of the 1980 Act, the Scottish Ministers would like advice and a report on the following matters:

- the quality and implementation of the school's policies for promoting and supporting wellbeing, provision of additional support for learning and ensuring the safety of children and young people; specifically:
  - the school's ability to identify children and young people in need of support either as a result of learning or physical needs;
  - the quality and consistency of that support;
  - school staffs' knowledge in their roles and responsibilities in relation to the above;
  - what action the school has taken to review and improve its child protection policies and practices in the last two years;
- the role of the Governing Council and school leaders in ensuring governance around the development and implementation of policies and practices related to additional support for learning.
- the school's approach to complaint handling and investigation;
- the school's recording and handling of staff disciplinary matters; and
- governance at the school in general.

1.3 HM Inspectors were also asked to report on any other issues of concern found by them.

1.4 George Watson's College is a co-educational independent school in the Colinton area of Edinburgh. At the time of the inspection, the total school roll was 2361, with 88 children in the nursery, 898 primary-aged children and 1375 secondary-aged young people.

1.5 Inspectors observed a sample of lessons in the nursery, junior and senior schools; scrutinised a range of relevant documentation, including a random sample of individual pupil records; and engaged in discussions with the following staff:

- Principal
- Head of Senior School
- Head of Primary
- Chair of the Governing Council
- Head(s) of Support for Learning
- Head of Guidance and Year Heads

- Support for learning teachers
- Individual class teachers
- Support staff on duty in the playgrounds
- Head of Human Resources
- Quality and Administration System Manager
- Chair of Education Committee

## **2.0 Evidence**

### **2.1 The quality of promoting and supporting the wellbeing of pupils**

- Last session 2016-17, through self-evaluation, the school identified health and wellbeing as a school improvement priority. The areas of improvement include supporting those potentially overlooked learners to ensure they feel valued, recognised and supported. As a result, the school has developed a whole school strategic approach to promoting health and wellbeing. At the start of August 2017, the revised health and wellbeing policy was implemented across the junior and senior school.
- The revisions to health and wellbeing approaches include an anti-bullying policy which references the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). As the revised health and wellbeing policy is implemented, there is a need to monitor the impact using measures that demonstrate progress and improvements in outcomes for children and young people across the school. There is a need to ensure children and young people are knowledgeable about factors that impact on their wellbeing and are able to reflect on their own progress. Questionnaire responses from stakeholders, focus groups, direct observations and quantitative data will provide triangulated evidence and clear benchmarks to evaluate the progress of the policy rigorously.
- In the senior school, implementation of the new anti-bullying policy and practices includes preventative and reactive strategies including a “no fault” (now no blame) policy which is monitored carefully by guidance staff. They log all examples of low level bullying or incidents, demonstrating actions and resolutions agreed. We have advised staff that more work is needed using the data and information gathered to analyse any emerging patterns of bullying behaviours appearing in any particular year group or class. This enables staff to keep a strong strategic overview of whether their anti-bullying systems in place are having the necessary impact over a period of time. Staff comment that the use of the new digital monitoring system is helping them to improve their knowledge and understanding of any particular learner’s circumstance. We have also asked staff to keep a clear, easily accessible log of all learners included in the bullying systems to enable regular follow-up checks to be carried out. In addition, all senior staff should make regular checks on the overall recorded data linked to bullying, checking for any increase or changes to behaviour patterns across the school. Training on anti-bullying strategies have included useful Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) workshops for staff.

- The junior and senior schools maintain a bullying log and issues of bullying are recorded. For session 2016-2017, 15 incidents were recorded in the junior school and 30 in the secondary school (on the no blame/fault log). The sharing of the revised definition of what is deemed bullying across the school has been helpful to staff in understanding unacceptable behaviours. Support staff on duty in the junior school playground were familiar with the policy and understood their responsibility in keeping children safe from harm. There is a need to continue to monitor the impact of the revised approaches to anti-bullying across the school.
- The junior and senior school promote health and wellbeing through the values of tolerance, respect, equality and good citizenship to promote healthy relationships. The visual representations of these values across the junior school are supportive in ensuring a shared understanding for children. In addition, there is a Children's Rights based approach to anti-bullying where children, young people and staff demonstrate behaviours in line with the UNCRC convention. There is a need to reflect this approach clearly within the written policy and specify the involvement of individual children, young people and parents in monitoring the outcomes of actions taken by the school.
- Junior school children in the focus group clearly defined bullying and explained reasons why some children may bully others. They knew what to do if they were experiencing this type of behaviour within the school and described some of the supports in place. They distinguished the characteristics of bullying and general disagreements. They described strategies to resolve disagreements with peers if they arose. As the revised health and wellbeing policy is implemented there is a need to ensure all children and young people have an understanding of restorative approaches to repair relationships where there has been conflict or a breakdown. This needs to be monitored to provide additional interventions if required.
- Children in the junior school's focus group described the school values and were aware of the health and wellbeing indicators. At the start of the session each class creates their own charter based on the school values. Staff in most of the classroom observations had wall displays with the school charter and/or aspects of health promotion. As the school continues to implement the new approaches to health and wellbeing there is a need to ensure the aspiration that health and wellbeing is a responsibility of all permeates the life and work of the school.
- There are examples of effective practice in the junior and senior school of staff promoting open, positive, supportive relationships across the school community. Staff should continue as planned to monitor the impact of professional learning. The need to and ensure that all adults in the school community are aware and understand it is the responsibility of all to promote the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of the children and young people in their care.
- Approaches to promoting positive behaviour are shared with staff and visual displays in the junior school support children to achieve the weekly reward of Circle Time. Children in focus groups and in observed classes are motivated by this approach. The universal approach to delivering health and wellbeing outcomes is suitably flexible to meet the needs of more vulnerable learners.

- Through self-evaluation, the school identified aspects of health and wellbeing that caused issue for individuals within the school community. These related to making healthy choices about food and homework. To improve practice and inform approaches, medical staff attended professional learning relating to healthy eating. In addition an audit was undertaken in the junior school to evaluate the impact of homework on children's leisure activities. As a result changes to the types of homework and the schedule for distribution and return were shared with parents. The junior school plans to identify clear measures of success as a result of the changes.
- The wide range of after-school and lunchtime clubs is extensive and all staff are expected to deliver at least one club. Sports, culture and expressive arts take place and the children make choices about what to attend. The school should continue with its plan to audit attendance to identify children and young people who may not be participating to ensure quality of opportunity for all.
- The Health and Safety committee oversees any issues arising in relation to property and buildings, school classrooms and teaching activities. Accident forms are completed and submitted to the principal and the safety officer. Incidents are logged and summary reports of accidents shared with the relevant committee. Corrective action takes place if clusters of incidents occur and the identification of the root cause established. For example, as the result of an analysis of the data, the school made improvements to protective clothing in practical classes and to the boundary fence. The school operates a "near miss" practice where any incident that could have led to an accident is investigated and mitigating actions are instigated to prevent a reoccurrence.
- The school promotes a culture that encourages respect and promotes positive relationships. Children and young people recognise the school values and opinions are valued. This is good practice in relation to making it difficult for bullying behaviour to flourish. The school needs to continue to develop approaches to children's voices and celebration of differences. As the policies are implemented, the school should develop further approaches to measure the understanding of children, staff and parents in relation to bullying.
- Commendably, during 2016-17, the school achieved Level 2 Rights Respecting School Award which recognises a whole-school approach to embedding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The school needs to continue to embed this work within the school and revisit the revised data gathering approaches outlined in the programme.

## **2.2 The quality of the provision of additional support for learning (including the school's ability to identify children and young people in need of support, either as a result of learning or physical needs; and staffs' knowledge in their roles and responsibilities)**

- Recently, the school developed or updated a range of key core policies and procedures relating to inclusion and safeguarding including anti-bullying, Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and school attendance. The documents articulate well with national guidelines and legislation. The new policy on support

for learning clearly explains to staff the principles and approaches to identifying, assessing and evaluating the additional support needs of learners. The changes within the policies now require time to be fully implemented into all aspects of school life.

- In the senior school, the evolution of the role of form tutor into first line guidance provides a valued opportunity for young people to discuss their learning and personal development with an adult who knows them well. A key aim of the new role is to ensure that the “missed middle” cohort of learners are supported and nurtured successfully. The school is tracking and monitoring through its data systems to identify learners who would benefit from enhanced support by first line guidance. Staff are now more aware that the wellbeing of learners is the responsibility of all. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of the new role.
- Across the junior and senior school, there is an extensive range of highly committed and competent specialist staff within support for learning and guidance teams. A named support for learning teacher is allocated to classes or year groups to be responsible for children and young people requiring additional support. Support assistants provide effective universal and targeted support for individual and groups of learners. The school recently increased the number of support staff in the primary school.
- Children and young people are assessed and their needs met through the effective application of a three-stage intervention process. The stages move from universal support provided in class to more intensive targeted support provided by specialist staff. Specialist staff use competently a range of assessment toolkits to identify learning difficulties including dyslexia and screening and English as an additional language. Across the school for 2016-17, there are 604 learners recorded as requiring additional support which represents 25% of the school population. The national figure (2015) is 22.5%.
- Across the school, an identified cohort of children and young people benefit from targeted support from the school’s Educational Psychologist, movement specialist, Life Skills Psychology, and/or the National Health Service’s speech and language therapist. The medical needs of learners are supported well by a team of trained medical staff, distributed across the school, managed by a recently appointed team leader.
- The support for learning team is resourced to a high standard. There are well equipped bases across the junior and senior school which are used for direct tuition or extracted group work.
- Guidance and other specialist staff use a wide range of documents to plan specific aspects of education requiring to be personalised for learners. The plans include separate plans for English as an Additional Language (EAL), behaviour support, GIRFEC - wellbeing concern forms and Individual Educational Plans. The development of a streamlined single planning framework for use across the school would help staff to more easily understand their role in supporting curricular targets and wellbeing outcomes.

- Staff are able to access information on certain pupils via the pupil profiles available on the secure digital portal. However, staff would benefit from easily accessible profiles and helpful strategies for all learners on the school's ASN register.

## **2. 3 Approaches to reviewing and improving policy and practice in child protection in the last two academic years.**

- The school has revised its Child Protection Policy taking into account guidance issued by Scottish Council for Independent Schools (SCIS) in 2015. In October 2016, the school used an external consultant well to evaluate the efficacy of its policies on protection, care and wellbeing which included the Child Protection Policy. The guidance includes clear advice to staff on how to deal with safety and welfare concerns arising from a child or young person. A useful check list for staff to use in any potential child protection situation, *Recognise, Respond, Report and Record*, is included. The policy should be adapted further to include more advice on safeguarding. This is a much wider concept than child protection and refers to promoting the welfare of children.
- Building on the insight provided by the external consultant, during the session 2016-17, the newly appointed heads of the senior and junior school mapped how well the Child Protection Policy articulated with other relevant policies including those providing advice and guidance to employees. The Child Protection Policy was subsequently streamlined and simplified to make it more accessible to staff.
- All staff including supply staff, after-school care and volunteers are registered on the Protection of Vulnerable Children scheme. All staff are issued with small laminated cards stating their child protection responsibilities.
- All staff regularly attend child protection training and their attendance is logged and recorded. The senior staff are trained to a higher level of training to equip them with the competence, skills and knowledge to undertake the role of Child Protection Co-ordinators.
- Staff use assemblies well to share aspects of anti-bullying policies such as how to be a good friend, how to avoid on-line issues and how to report any worries. The school has a useful link to a local community police officer who provides helpful information especially around the area of social media bullying. The school also uses "Childnet" offering parents presentations on how to ensure their children stay safe on-line. Further work should be done to maximise the role that pupils can play in supporting their peers and younger learners as buddies or mentoring leaders building on the S6 mentor programme.

## **2.4 The role of the Governing Council and school leaders in ensuring governance around the development and implementation of policies and practices related to additional support for learning.**

- Specialist staff including year heads and guidance have recently been modernising their systems to take account of current legislation and best advice.

The Governing Council has sight of draft policies and support and challenge staff on areas they consider can be developed further. The new Chair of the Governing Council recognises that more time needs to be spent perusing and commenting on emerging policies to ensure the school delivers best practice.

## **2.5 Approaches to complaint-handling and investigation:**

- The school understands that complaints management needs to be an integral part of the school's operations designed to work well for all stakeholders. They conducted a recent scoping review to consider whether the present complaints policy is fit for purpose, clear and robust. The analysis from this review has supported a complete revision of all future handling of complaints. This four stage process is now ready to be finalised and put in place subject to senior management and Governance approval. We advised that the school should move quickly to update and implement the new complaint handling system with one addition showing follow-up procedures in place beyond the agreed resolution date. This is to be added to any of the four stages after the resolution phase.
- School managers want all staff to resolve any grievances informally where possible and employees are all encouraged to raise any issues at an early stage. The grievance policy for staff is being revised and updated to take account of modern management practices including a clear timeline for completion and outcomes. This policy has recently been passed to staff for perusal and comment with minor feedback received in responses. All grievance complaints follow Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) procedures. Senior managers and school governors now need to ratify the new updated procedures and put them in place. We advise that this should be done as soon as possible.
- Managers agree that any complaints against Human Relations (HR) would be dealt with as a result of an external investigation. The school now has a membership of Quality Scotland and information from this agency is helping the school to put better systems management in place to improve performance.
- Policies such as the school's new anti-bullying policy are appropriate, providing clear information on the rights and respects for the school community based on the school's motto *ex corde caritas* (Love from the heart). The policy relates better to the rights of children and young people both in the complaints system and the resolution (often through restorative approaches). Staff have clear sight of the new three stage bullying policy through their access to the staff digital "kiosk" which stores all school policies. We have asked the school, through their quality assurance processes, to check that every member of staff is aware of and uses the new staged anti-bullying policy's procedures at all times.

## **2.6 Approaches to recording and handling of staff disciplinary matters**

- The staff's four stage disciplinary and dismissal process needs updated to increase clarity and improve systems management which the school has plans to complete by the end of this year. The school presently adheres to the standards set out by ACAS and includes its guidance for any staff member involved in a disciplinary matter. All paperwork, including any transcribed conversations linked

to any staff disciplinary measures is logged carefully, formally and stored in a confidential and secure area. We have asked staff to add a clear and dated summary paper demonstrating all the stages overtaken during any disciplinary process including all outcomes decided. We have also requested that an additional section is added to log any on-going pastoral support given to anyone involved.

- A decision has been taken to move all the recruitment processes into HR. This is providing better consistency and streamlining in the recruitment recording systems.

## **2.7 Approaches to school governance in general**

- The Governing Council led by the new Chair avoids micro-managing, instead providing leadership, support and challenge. The council has trust in the professionalism of senior managers. Governors are proud of supporting and encouraging a school ethos based on the provision of a family oriented school. The Governing Council is assisted by three committees which leads scrutiny on education, property and finance. Governors are visible in the school and take an active interest in many of the activities throughout the school year. The composition of the Governing Council is broad with a membership including parent and staff nominees. They demonstrate a very strong mix of experience, skills and knowledge to support and challenge the school well in future.
- The Governing Council understands its responsibilities for driving forward school improvement through supporting and challenging school policy and all other development work. The Board and senior managers recently participated in an “away day” to review their strategies for governance and exchange views. The themes discussed included people, property, finance, education, external development and relationships. The event also gave the new team opportunities to understand the skills offered by each Board member. We agree with the Board that they now need to distil the ideas generated and take forward a governance development strategy with clear specific, measurable and significant targets. In addition this improving group would benefit from linking up with experienced governors from other independent establishments to develop self-evaluation and monitoring of their own procedures and outcomes. We have asked the school to research the best practice in school governance and put in place tight systems to take forward improvements in this area. The new chair understands the need to put in place a more codified governance system to ensure tighter monitoring of all the school’s systems. To ensure best success, the governors should consider whether the addition of more regular meetings, both with the main group and with any subsequent sub-groups, could improve the pace of change in all that school governance can achieve.
- Communication systems for governance are appropriate. Agendas for meetings and the impact seen from previous meetings are shared. Meetings are well organised and minuted ensuring that everyone present can contribute and be heard. Governance business is heavily focused on the consideration of all the priorities within the school’s improvement plan.

- Governors have benefited from valuable training sessions including with SCIS. The chair of the education committee recognises the benefits from governance becoming more pro-active in future rather than being merely reactive to the ongoing challenges facing the school.
- The governors seek the views of parents through the parent liaison group. It will be beneficial for governors to develop their systems further to enable them to meet with and know the wishes and views of parents, pupils and staff better in order to assure these stakeholders that their comments are acted upon robustly. Young people have had positive opportunities to present their ideas to the governors such as the work shared by the LGBT group. Governors recognise they can improve their systems further to enable learners to have a bigger part in school decision making.
- The Governance Council has previously set out key roles and responsibilities for the Education Committee. This has led to the committee being responsible for a very wide range of responsibilities. The Education Committee recognise they need to review, revise and re-energise their work with tighter objectives, ensuring they have the correct committee members in place with suitable expertise to provide the school with a well organised critical friend. In addition, clearer terms of reference for this committee need to be completed to ensure on-going improving results. The committee would also benefit from putting in place a number of sub-groups who can focus on particular aspects of curriculum policy development becoming more expert in particular areas for focus and thus providing stronger opportunities to support and challenge staff.

## **2.8 Any other issues of concern found as a result of the inspection**

- The controlled entry system code is known and used by all children and young people to access areas of the school buildings. During the school day, a member of the inspection team observed the assembly door in upper primary was open providing unsupervised access to the upper primary school building. This practice should be reviewed. There is a need to risk assess the procedures to maintain operational aspects of the school and children's safety.
- It is important that all children in the Galleon building are supervised at all times. For a short period of time a junior class remained unsupervised in the Galleon building while waiting for a teacher to escort them to their next lesson

## **3.0 Conclusion**

3.1 There is evidence that the school is addressing the required areas of improvement in a focused manner taking into account the holistic wellbeing needs of all children and young people. HM inspectors are satisfied that the school supported by the Governing Council has identified the correct blend of priorities to deliver improved wellbeing outcomes for learners including those requiring additional support. HM inspectors are satisfied that the school is reviewing and improving its safeguarding procedures appropriately including the important area of addressing bullying behaviours through the use of more effective systems and procedures.

3.2 A good number of the school's policy statements are new. It is too early to measure impact from the use of these new policies at this early stage. Other policies such as Equality and Diversity need revisiting and updated and a few are almost ready to put into practice soon. Senior managers should put in place a clear system of version control revisiting policies, updating them regularly and evaluating the impact from their implementation.

3.3 HM Inspectors found that the approaches and systems in place for the administration for governance are appropriate. However, further work is needed to maximise the impact of governance. The Education Committee requires to state its core purpose and mission clearly. The new Chair and the board members are beginning their work to refresh their systems and make clear their overall purpose. They now need to take a more critical and analytical look at all their present systems. This should include, looking inwards using self-evaluation indicators, looking outwards using the latest academic research on high quality governance systems and from there looking forwards completing horizon scanning to prepare for unexpected school change. Further developments should include how the governors themselves are supported and challenged in their own decision making through, for example, the use of partner governors from other establishments who can moderate decisions taken and share creative ideas for consideration.

### **Recommendation**

Because of the number of policies and approaches recently implemented further support is required. The relevant Lead Officer will visit the school within a year to discuss progress. The link HM inspector for the school will continue to engage with the school, as is normal practice

**Education Scotland**  
**06 September 2017**