

27 March 2012

Dear Parent/Carer

George Watson's College, Edinburgh

HM Inspectors recently visited George Watson's College. The visit was part of our professional engagement approach with independent schools. Professional engagement visits complement the general programme of inspections. The approach allows us to maintain our knowledge of schools in the independent sector throughout Scotland, and to work with them in bringing about continued improvement in meeting the needs of all learners. It also provides assurance to parents on the schools' capacity for evaluating its own work and making improvements which have a direct impact on the quality of experiences for its young people. Our visit was based firmly on the school's self-evaluation and the priorities identified for school improvement. During our visit we talked to staff and young people and worked together with the headteacher and senior staff about the planned future direction of travel for the continued development of the school.

How does the school ensure consistently high standards for all?

Across the school and nursery, children and young people participate in an extensive range of activities which help them to develop personally and academically. Staff encourage children and young people to have a balanced programme of activities, emphasising the importance of health and wellbeing to high quality learning. Children and young people with particular creative or sporting talents are allowed to flourish in a professional but caring environment. Staff and pupils have a great deal of pride in the school and their collective achievements. This helps everyone to work to the highest standards. All achievements are valued and celebrated in many ways. The school and nursery continue to develop systems to record children's and young people's achievements in order to build a picture of their strengths and areas they may need to work on.

The Principal and Heads of Senior and Junior Schools promote the importance of teachers reflecting on their practice. The systems to support teachers in this process now have more rigour and an emphasis on the impact of their approaches. Teachers share best practice, watch each other teach and are supported to plan their own professional development to focus on improving learning and teaching. These systems are becoming embedded as part of the culture of the school and nursery. Teachers take every opportunity to talk to each other about children's and young people's progress in learning. Heads of Department in the senior school have very effective processes to track young people's progress in learning. The development of tracking systems for children as they move through the new Junior School curriculum will help ensure their attainment and achievement is monitored effectively from nursery to P7 and on into the Senior School.

¹ This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as this will not connect.

Across the school and nursery, teachers are pro-active and innovative in looking for ways of addressing individual concerns and needs. There are many opportunities for children and young people to seek extra help with their learning and personal and social development. Teachers regularly hold extra lunchtime support classes and provide individual help after school. The Year Group Leaders, Guidance team and Year Heads know the children and young people they work with very well and provide helpful support and advice, particularly about possible careers. The support for learning team identifies and plans support for children and young people with additional learning needs very effectively, including the needs of more able learners. Overall, the very positive relationships across the school, underpinned by the school charter, support children and young people to learn in a happy and caring environment.

Curriculum development is well organised and starts from the aims and values of the school. Improvements to literacy and numeracy across learning are impacting positively across the school. In the Junior School, innovative use of information and communications technology such as class blogs is helping children to improve their learning. In the Senior School, teachers' planning ensures opportunities for young people to develop learning across subjects. For example, the lecture programme on 'The Renaissance' ties together effectively learning in art, classics and history. Teachers recognise the need to continue to develop systems that help young people in S1 build more effectively on what they learn in the Junior School.

How does the school continue to improve?

In consultation with a range of staff and stakeholders, the Principal and Senior Management Team developed a clear five year plan to continue to improve important aspects of the school. Increasingly, teachers are leading improvements to learning and teaching across the school and nursery. The Principal's commitment to improvement through self-evaluation is well supported by teachers. There is a clear focus on measuring the impact of developments on learning and teaching. Overall, the school has rigorous systems in place to continue to improve.

We discussed and agreed with staff those areas on which they might focus in continuing to improve the school. These included:

- Continue to develop the curriculum based on a clear whole-school and nursery plan.
- Further improve approaches to recognising achievement, profiling and reporting young people's progress in learning.
- Continue to embed the approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning which have been developed over the last two years.

We are confident the school has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and board of governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the progress of the school.

David Gregory
HM Inspector

To find out more about quality improvement through professional engagement visits please click on the link below.

<http://www.hmie.gov.uk/NR/exeres/88B650F4-DB5E-4CE7-9FBD-3C4787AA137A.frameless.htm>

Additional information about the visit can be obtained from the school.