Learning Together: Opening up learning

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leasachadh foghlam na h-Alba

Learning Together:
Opening up learning

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Foreword:

Graham HC Donaldson, HM Senior Chief Inspector

In *Improving Scottish Education*,[1] I said that HMIE will assist national and local bodies as they consider the implications of that report for their work. I am pleased to provide an immediate follow up for teachers with this first instalment in a new series of *Learning Together* guides which will draw on effective practice identified in inspection to stimulate wider thinking and development.

This guide is published as *Curriculum for Excellence* moves into a new and intensive phase. Staff in all sectors and all settings will be considering how they will construct a curriculum for each learner which meets the values, purposes and principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*[2] and provides the range of experiences to which he or she is entitled. Following the publication of the experiences and outcomes for learning from age 3 to 15, teachers will be considering how they will plan activities which will lead to sustained, motivating learning and high levels of achievement for all.

This guide is intended to support the process of turning the aspirations of *Curriculum for Excellence* into reality. It explores how teachers, by working together and with learners, parents and members of their communities, can increase the impact of learning. It illustrates existing good practice in 'opening up learning' – that is, gathering evidence on learning and its outcomes, engaging in professional development with colleagues, and planning improvements in response.

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[1] *Improving Scottish Education: A report by HMIE on inspection and review 2005-2008.*

[2] The four capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence* are: successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; and effective contributors.

'Learning together' is one of the hallmarks of professionalism and will be essential if the aspirations of *Curriculum for Excellence* are to be achieved. Learners' success in developing high levels of skills, knowledge and understanding depends upon them experiencing effective and engaging learning and teaching. The greater emphasis on developing learners' confidence, discernment, resilience, teamworking skills, creativity and personal responsibility, for example, means that teachers will need to work together to identify successful approaches which can be developed and reinforced across the curriculum.

Curriculum for Excellence is dependent upon skilled and creative practitioners who are able to capitalise on the flexibility of broader guidance to develop exciting and relevant experiences for learners. It needs reflective teachers with a commitment to their own development, learning collaboratively and sharing effective practice with each other, improving their work through self-evaluation in partnership with learners, their parents[3] and their communities. Our evidence shows that such sharing is becoming a growing strength in Scottish education. It will be fundamental to the successful realisation of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

HMIE recognises that self-evaluation which leads to effective action can be a powerful way of improving learning. We also recognise the part which inspection can play in the process of professional learning. With this in mind, we have 'opened up' the inspection process in a number of ways. Inspections start from and build on self-evaluation evidence. HMIE inspection teams include associate assessors who are practising teachers, headteachers[4] or education authority

[3] The term *parents* should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

[4] The term *headteacher* refers also to centre managers and other heads or managers of establishments or services.

staff, as well as lay people who do not have a professional background in education. Inspectors spend a high proportion of their time in lessons, with learners, and in professional dialogue with staff. Inspectors use the same evaluation tools as teachers, which helps them to develop a shared understanding with teachers as they evaluate the impact of learning activities.

Scottish children, young people and adults face unprecedented, uncertain and as yet unrecognised challenges posed by fast and far-reaching change. In particular, much more needs to be done to improve life opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. I have no doubt that collaborative professional learning has an essential part to play in achieving our aspirations for all learners. HMIE will continue to gather examples of good practice and share these through our website and through case studies as part of *The Journey to Excellence*. We will publish further reports in this new series of *Learning Together* guides which will focus on different aspects of learning. I hope that you will find these resources stimulating, informative and helpful.

Graham HC Donaldson

HM Senior Chief Inspector

Learning Together

Learning Together

Section 1: Introduction
Learning together, opening up
learning

The aim of this guide is to stimulate professional reflection, dialogue and debate about learning and how to improve it, at this time of important curriculum change. It draws together themes, features and characteristics of effective improvement through self-evaluation,[5] and descriptions of good practice. It is a reference point for teachers who are working together to improve the impact of their work and plan for the changes which will be necessary as *Curriculum for Excellence* is adopted. It can be used alongside the many examples of good practice published at **www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk**, the quality indicators and illustrations described in *How good is our school?*, *The Child at the Centre*, and *How good is our community learning and development?*, and the series of self-evaluation guides and portraits published at **www.hmie.gov.uk**.

Teachers have been making substantial progress in improving learning and teaching by sharing practice with each other and by involving children, young people, parents, adults and communities.[6] Staff are reviewing their classroom practice in the light of the *Curriculum for Excellence* experiences and outcomes in order to identify approaches to learning and teaching which will lead to deeper, more sustained learning. Opening up learning in these ways can lead to more confident, effective teaching[7] and better and broader outcomes for learners.

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[5] For further advice refer to *Improving outcomes for learners through self-evaluation: HMIE 2008* and *Improving the curriculum through self-evaluation: HMIE 2008*.

[6] In this guide, the terms *learners, children, young people* or *adults* are used to describe all of those engaged in the learning process as appropriate to sector or service, as distinct from practitioners or professionals who provide the service.

[7] The term *teaching* is used in this guide to describe the act of leading and/or facilitating learning experiences and activities in all educational environments, as appropriate to sector, establishment or wider service provision, including learning in the community.

How well do teachers explore their understanding of learning together?

'When groups of teachers get together to discuss how to improve learning for children, young people and adults, the conversation often revolves around courses and programmes of work. For example, they might talk about structure and sequence, whether of topics or sections or modules, or the texts or worksheets used. All of these considerations are very important. However, there is often less discussion about what learning is and how it takes place or, adopting the learners' perspective, how learning can be organised for the best possible outcomes – the professional craft of teaching. In schools and pre-school centres, you might sometimes hear people say, 'that was a good lesson' or 'that was a good activity'. How did they know? What did the learners think about that particular lesson? Are we sure it was a successful lesson from the learners' point of view?'

How good is our school? *The Journey to Excellence. HMIE 2006*

One of the reasons that learning improves is because staff at all levels have taken greater ownership of improvement through self-evaluation, involving learners and their parents. Headteachers and senior staff recognise their accountability for the overall impact of the learning they lead. They have a key role in ensuring professional development of learning. Their leadership establishes the climate for professional learning in their establishments.[8]
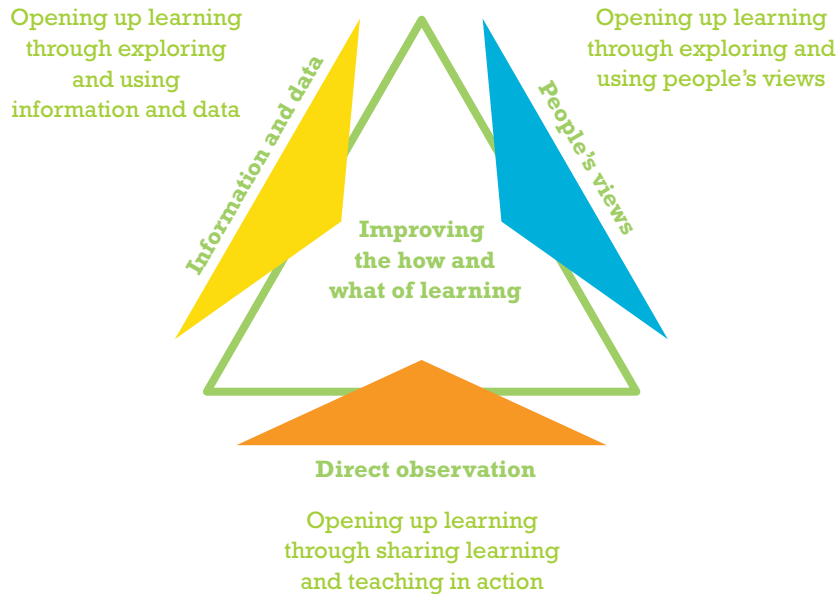
[8] The terms *establishment* or *school* are used in this guide to refer to all pre-school centres, schools, community learning contexts or other places where learning happens, as appropriate to sector or service.

How do they achieve this focus on learning?

A headteacher leading learning

The headteacher interviews whole year groups every year. Some young people take part in small groups and others are interviewed individually. The headteacher shares the findings with all staff, describing the thoughts of particular year groups or classes to inform professional dialogue across the school. The headteacher makes whole-day learning visits to subject areas to triangulate young people's views with evaluations of learning and teaching in action, which leads to the sharing of good practice. Teachers share aspects of their work in learning and teaching teams, and the team leaders share this practice more widely across the school.

For self-evaluation to give an accurate, rounded view, it must triangulate evidence from people's views, direct observation of learning and teaching, and quantitative data, as illustrated in the following diagram from *How good is our school?*.

Opening up learning
through exploring
and using
information and data

Opening up learning
through exploring and
using people's views

Information and data

People's views

**Improving
the how and
what of learning**

Direct observation

Opening up learning
through sharing learning
and teaching in action

A rounded view of self-evaluation

The pre-school centre's approaches to improvement through self-evaluation were excellent. The staff used a range of highly effective methods to involve children, staff and parents in evaluating the quality of provision. They evaluated learning regularly and constructive professional dialogue ensured consistently high standards. The staff worked closely together to monitor children's progress and learning experiences. A range of committees and focus groups, which also involved children and parents, examined areas of practice. Staff implemented improvement priorities effectively and secured continuing improvement in children's learning. They were committed to continuous professional development, and a coaching culture had been established amongst them.

The following sections of this guide take each of the three sources of evidence in turn, exploring the ways in which teachers are working together to improve learning. Section 2 explores how teachers use information on learning drawn from a range of people's views. One of the most powerful means of professional learning is through direct observation of teaching and learning between colleagues and subsequent debate and reflection. Section 3 therefore offers advice on good practice for such 'learning visits' to classrooms, and how these visits can be blended with other processes to bring about improvement through self-evaluation. Section 4 considers how other sources of evidence can be used to illuminate the experiences of learners and contribute to development and improvement.
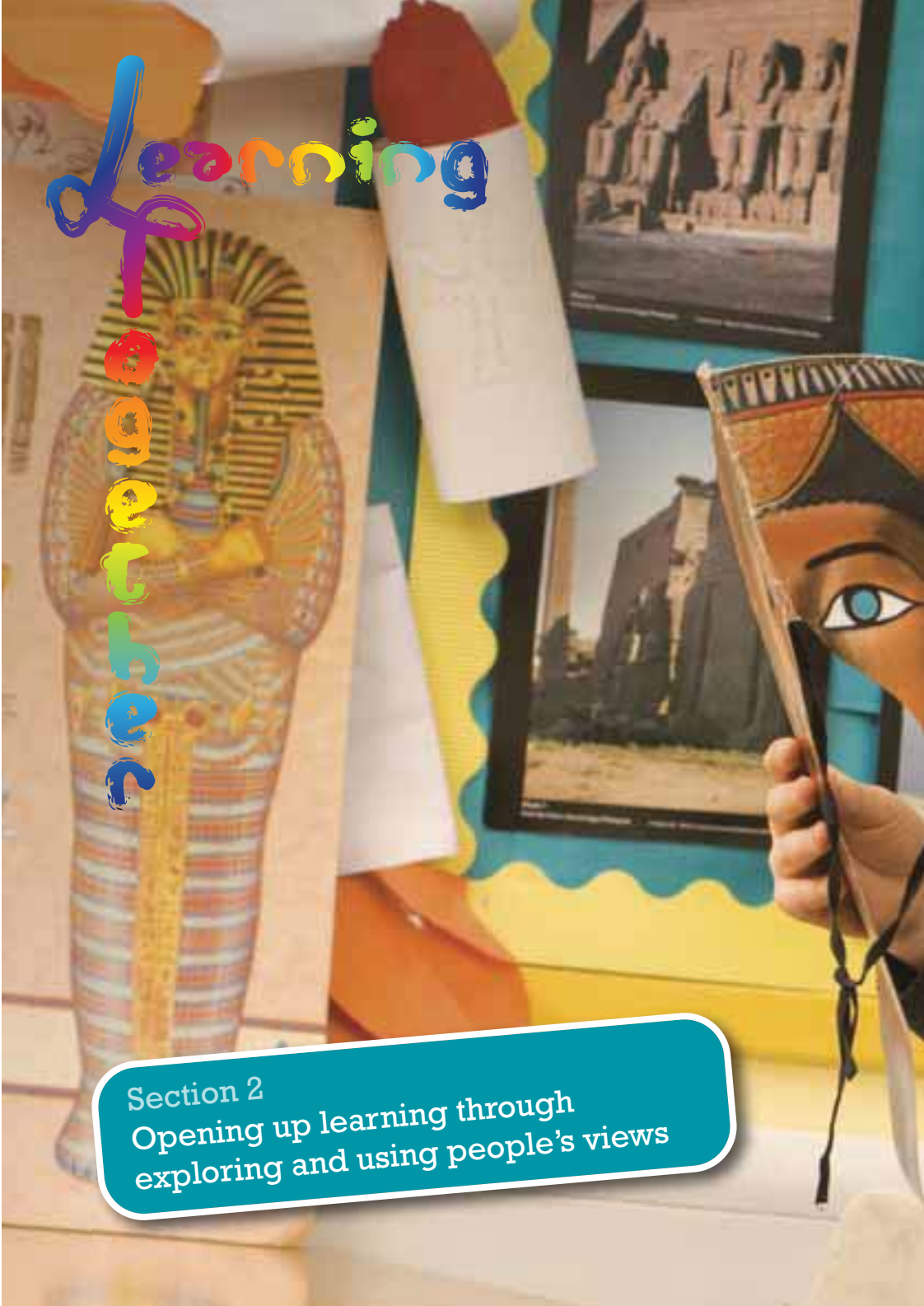
Reflective questions: Annex 1 contains reflective questions for headteachers and their staff, exploring further the issues covered above.
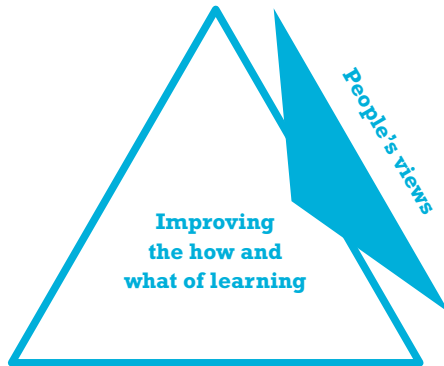
Learning Together

Learning Together

Section 2
Opening up learning through exploring and using people's views

People's views

Improving
the how and
what of learning

Staff, children, young people and adults, parents, education authority personnel, and colleagues in partner agencies all have important perspectives on learning. Individually, each perspective is valuable and can contribute to successful change. Taken together, people's views can be a major force for innovation and improvement.

Asking young people about learning

Staff have developed a whole-school approach to evaluating learning, including the use of electronic questionnaires. Young people from S1–S6 complete individual questionnaires about their experience of school and specifically about the learning that takes place in each of their subjects. Results are collated so that the information can be discussed by individual teachers, departmental heads and senior managers to help improve learning and teaching. Teachers share the findings within their departments and with other departments. A school-wide analysis is undertaken and the results are used in departmental and whole-school improvement plans as part of the annual cycle of improvement. Staff feel this helps them to exercise their professional responsibilities for improvement and contributes to their professional development.

What do learners think?

Children, young people and adults have daily, first-hand experience of learning and teaching and can be responsive and perceptive when encouraged to express their views. The best contributions emerge when they feel confident that their views are valued. Learners generally want to be successful. They have a distinct view of how their teacher and school is helping and challenging them to learn, and a clear view about how learning and teaching builds their confidence and skills.

> **Children improving learning and behaviour**
>
> Children in this special school have very good opportunities to express their views, leading directly to improvements. Together, they have made up a school Bill of Rights and Responsibilities to help them become more responsible citizens. This has helped children to understand what is expected of them and leads to greater fairness and equality. Children's views contribute to improving the learning environment in different ways. For example, they discuss behaviour and how it can be improved, and also contribute ideas for improving their own and their peers' learning experiences.

Teachers use both informal and formal ways to elicit and share learners' views: informally as they work with individuals in lessons or in learning experiences outwith the classroom; or by gathering views more formally through daily, weekly, monthly or longer-term arrangements.

Children evaluating learning and teaching

Teachers involved children in a variety of effective ways to help them evaluate learning and teaching. They asked children what they looked for in a challenging and enjoyable lesson and analysed the results. Some children carried out an end-of-unit self-evaluation exercise where they indicated what they thought they had achieved. They were asked what should be done to make it a better experience, what had challenged them, what they had enjoyed, and what they had not enjoyed. As a result, the learners increased their understanding of the complex relationships between challenge and enjoyment of learning.

The findings of such conversations can be used to help to improve learning and teaching. The process helps learners to reflect on their own learning and so develop their learning skills as well as their communication skills and confidence.

Using views to focus support

Each young person worked with their teacher to rate what they had achieved in knowledge and understanding, organising their own learning, behaviour and cooperation with others, and their attendance. Teachers used the information as the basis for focusing support.

Encouraging learners to discuss their views about learning with each other and with their teachers, including their successes and disappointments, can provide powerful evidence for self-evaluation.

Young people's views improving learning

Young people talk regularly about and reflect on their learning in classes through discussions, questionnaires and peer assessment. The school is also developing innovative ways of engaging young people in understanding their own learning through applying for class 'Enterprise Awards'. In order to achieve these awards, young people have to demonstrate that they are engaged in enterprising and creative learning activities in which they play an active role, learn independently and are developing their skills, confidence and contributions. Together with their teacher, they plan and reflect on learning. They supply evidence which may include, for example, film of their learning activities.

Blending of learners' individual and collective views with other information can help to ensure high-quality and improving experiences for them.

Young people informing professional dialogue

Teachers used feedback from young people to inform their dialogue with colleagues, leading very quickly to improvements in learning and teaching approaches. Interactive whiteboards had been introduced to help improve learning across the school and cluster. Teachers and young people enjoyed using them to develop and try out new ideas. Young people gave feedback to their teachers on how the boards had helped them to learn, informing professional discussions amongst teachers and leading to improved practice.

Reflective questions: Annex 2 provides some question for staff to reflect on when considering engaging children, young people and adults in evaluating their learning experiences.

What do parents think?

Gathering parents' views on their children's learning helps to strengthen the partnership between school and home and reinforces the key role which parents have in their children's learning. Not all parents are confident about being involved, but by involving parents in all aspects of their children's learning, seeking out their views and aspirations, and enlisting their help, advice and support, the likelihood of successful outcomes for their children is increased.

> ### Involving parents and children in making decisions about learning
>
> Staff evaluated their approaches to involving parents in the life of the centre. They set out to engage parents and children much more in making decisions about what happens in the centre. Staff made innovative changes, including setting up a web forum for parents to talk directly with other parents. Parents and children now take part in discussing changes in curriculum programmes, staff child interactions, and in designing spaces. Parents and children have benefited through learning together, being more reflective and being able to ask questions about learning.

Parents provide a distinct perspective on learning and teaching which can help staff to improve learning for young people and also, in some cases, for the parents themselves. Some parents will have regular involvement in encouraging, supporting or sharing their children's learning, at home or in the community. Some will have an astute understanding

of their children's progress. They will know exactly what they want for their children and what their children expect, and will have a keen interest in homework, assessments and all other indications of progress. Other parents' perspectives may rely on varying degrees of informal feedback from their children following a day at school, or from formal reports from teachers. Some parents will have faced considerable difficulties themselves as learners and may not feel well placed to engage with their own children's learning.

Wherever parents are starting from, it is important for teachers to engage with them to discover and share their views to help the parents to support their children's learning and foster success.

Engaging parents on home study

Following an effective consultation with parents, homework was redefined as home study. The librarian compiled a home-study TV guide and home-study planning calendars, which avoided clashes of subject deadlines, and shared these with parents. At an 'Engaging Parents' afternoon, staff presented a range of home-study approaches including the use of web search, looking at art, the cinema and TV.

Parents' views are further informed and refined when they are shared with other parents. Parent groups, forums, councils and associations rightly want to discuss and debate learning and their children's highs and lows. As groups they have the potential to engage in important dialogue with staff. By combining parents' individual and collective views with those of learners and their teachers, together with information from other sources, teachers can gain a fuller understanding of how successful learning is.

Reflective questions: Annex 3 contains some reflective questions for you to use when considering how to engage with parents to find out, share and use their views in self-evaluation for improvement.

What do staff think?

Curriculum for Excellence defines the curriculum as the totality of experiences which are planned for each child and young person. The *Getting it right for every child* approach places increased emphasis on child-centred partnerships and collaborations. The curriculum and support for some children may involve contributions from a wide range of staff. It is important that all contributors to a child's or young person's education are fully involved in self-evaluation and improvement. This will include staff from health and police services, other council services, colleges and other educational establishments, youth work and community learning and development services, voluntary organisations, businesses, and employers.

> **Effective operational planning from self-evaluation**
>
> The community resources manager and other staff use approaches to operational planning that enable staff to engage fully in planning and self-evaluation. The systematic approach they take to developing programmes and projects leads to more effective targeting of resources and operational delivery based on reflective practice. Staff at all levels are confident about their roles and have a strong understanding of links between national and local policy and practice. Self-evaluations and analysis are used well to inform future practice, and staff and partners have high levels of trust which enable them to be clear about aspects of work which have not been good as well as to recognise success.

Teachers have a detailed knowledge about the quality of learning and teaching based on their professional expertise and day-to-day experiences. Some members of staff have a particular role in improving an establishment's or service's overall performance. Other colleagues may be responsible for improving specific aspects or for an individual learner's progress. At all levels, teachers have a key responsibility for evaluating the impact of learning and teaching and applying their findings as they develop their practice further to meet the expectations of *Curriculum for Excellence*. They need to bring their professional knowledge and skills to bear to ensure that the methodology chosen is appropriate for the outcomes to be achieved and, collectively, they need to ensure that each learner experiences coherence and progression across all learning.

> **A culture of improvement through self-evaluation**
>
> The school has developed a culture of innovation through self-evaluation for improvement, involving all staff and young people. A clear, well-planned programme of self-evaluation activities is well established, including learning visits to class, sampling of coursework, detailed analysis of attainment data, evaluations carried out by young people, and themed audits. This evidence is combined to inform development priorities across the school, and contributes to a continuous process of improvement in learning and teaching throughout the school year.

It is important to capture and combine all of these perspectives and use them to inform development. Some establishments and services use a combination of questionnaires, meetings, workshops and working groups to:

- explore strengths in learning and teaching approaches and the ways particular learners and groups of learners respond to different approaches;

- plan changes to learning and teaching required to promote the higher order learning skills embedded in the *Curriculum for Excellence* experiences and outcomes and, for example, in planning to develop literacy and numeracy across learning;

- gather detailed evidence from staff to help evaluate establishment-wide approaches to improve learning and teaching, such as analysing data about learners' progress;

- establish and collate staff views on aspects of the life of the school such as ways of promoting health and wellbeing;

- explore the impact of different kinds of support, including aspects of pupil support or other resources deployed to help meet learning needs; and

- identify examples of effective practice for sharing more widely.

Sharing best practice with colleagues

Staff share best practice in learning and teaching with their colleagues as a key aspect of the school's improvement agenda. Departmental meetings, which are held every two weeks, focus on this agenda. Valuable face-to-face discussions at departmental meetings focus on what teachers are learning from seeing one another in action, and from trying new approaches themselves to improve learning and teaching. Staff report regularly on the progress they are making and their feedback is gathered into a regular school-wide report on progress.

The combination of staff views together with those of learners and their parents, and a range of other information, enables staff to gain a better understanding of a school's strengths and aspects where changes are needed.

Cross-sector professional dialogue

In the light of an important emphasis on continuity in the 3-18 curriculum, education authority staff gathered teachers from all sectors to work alongside each other to develop advice on curriculum areas. They created 'Experiences and Outcomes' teams for different curriculum areas. Each team consisted of professionals from different sectors. They discussed the draft *Curriculum for Excellence* outcomes and experiences, recognising through that process just how much they had to learn from dialogue with colleagues working in other sectors. They planned tasks to try out in their classrooms. After eight weeks, they met again to share their experiences and to develop changes to subject courses and multi-disciplinary studies. The strength of this approach was in the richness of professional dialogue stemming from the combination of pre-school, primary and secondary expertise to plan a curriculum which was based on key principles which other practitioners could use.

What does the community think?

Members of the community can be both learners themselves and supporters of learning. Their perceptions can add a further important dimension to the process of evaluation.

A community's approach to learning can have a direct effect on the attitude, commitment and ultimately success of learners. Learning experiences that take place in communities can be supportive of each other, and of formal or statutory learning. For example, in disadvantaged areas, successful regeneration work can create more aspirational communities and aspirational learners. Community capacity building work helps communities to provide learning opportunities for themselves, such as through groups of young parents or adult evening classes.

Widening perspectives

The headteacher and staff worked together to lead improvement, using effective professional and interpersonal skills. Staff had engaged with parents and community leaders to support the work of the school. The headteacher joined members of the local police force on their beat to better understand the home circumstances of some of her learners. A programme of sampling parents' views was in place. Learners' views were sampled bi-monthly. Teachers regularly visited each others' lessons, other learning activities and the associated nursery.
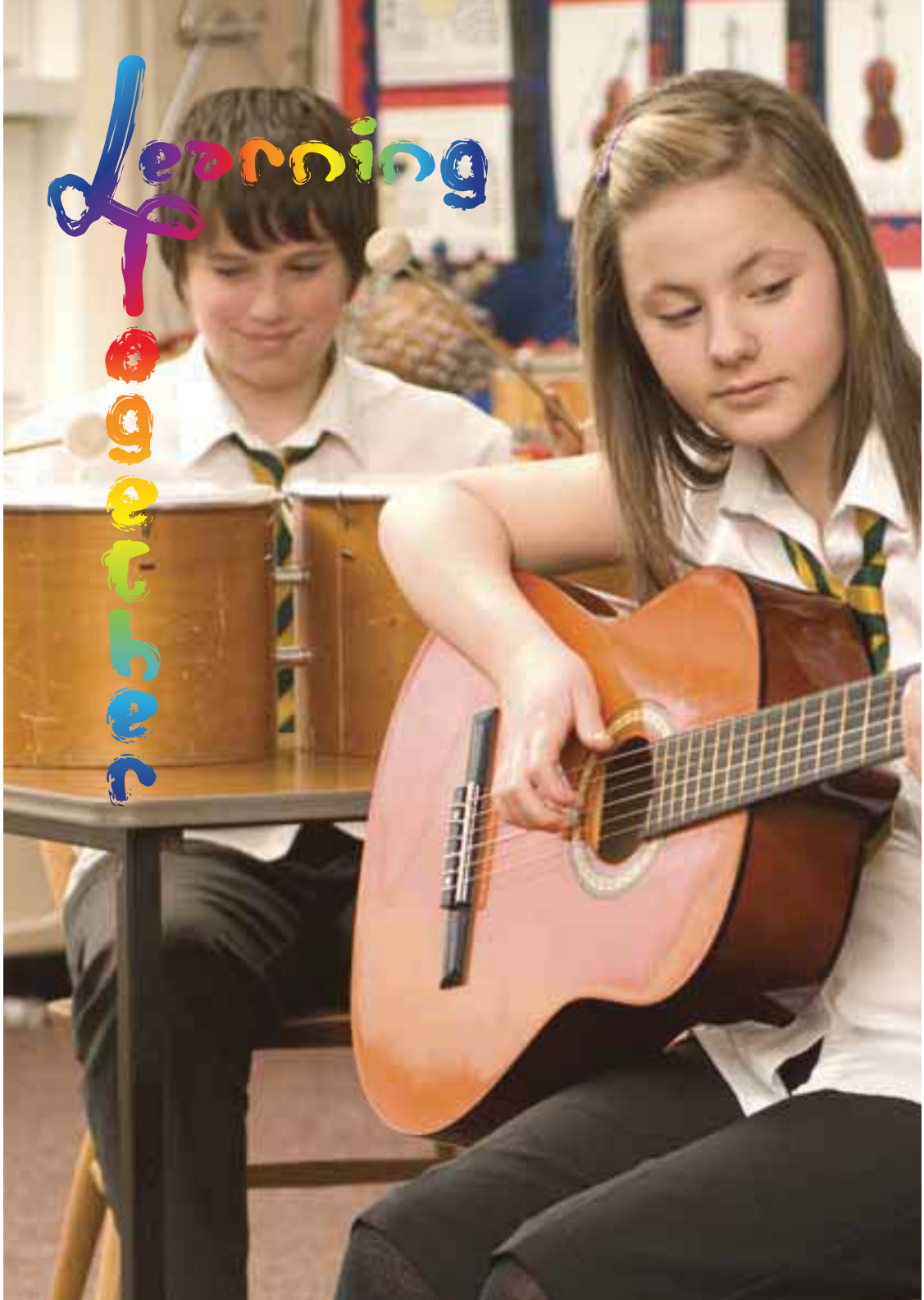
Reflective questions: Annex 4 contains some reflective questions for you to use when considering how people learn together in their community, sharing and using views to contribute to self-evaluation for improvement.

Annex 5 contains examples of reflective questions for staff who are evaluating the impact of the curriculum and innovations.

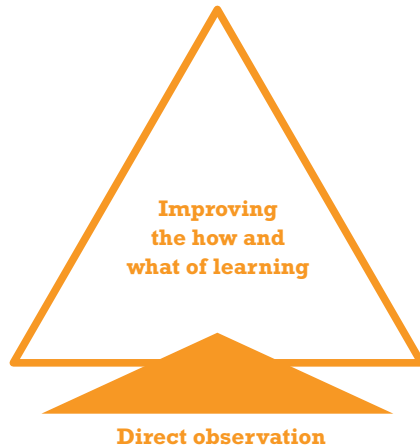**Drawing the strands together – identifying priorities**

Contributions to decisions about priorities are an important part of professional practice for all staff. The process of establishing priorities for development is more effective when it is based on a clear picture of current practice, drawn from a range of sources of evidence. It also requires a shared understanding of the purpose and expectations of learning and the curriculum. It should always have a focus on the impact of decisions on learners' progress and achievement.

Learning Together

Opening up learning through sharing learning and teaching in action

Improving the how and what of learning

Direct observation

In this section we consider approaches which focus on improving learning and teaching through direct observation of learning and teaching in action.

Increasingly within *Curriculum for Excellence* it will be essential for teachers to understand how their work relates to the whole curriculum experienced by each learner and how the learning and teaching approaches which a child or young person experiences fit together. For example, the extent to which the expectations and best features of children's learning experiences are maintained and built upon as they progress into the next stage of their learning. Working with colleagues enables teachers to share and reflect on these aspects, consolidate innovations and sustain improvement.

Teachers can increase the depth of their understanding of what makes for successful teaching and its impact on learning through evaluating the quality of learning directly in each other's lessons and learning activities. They can develop shared expectations, increase their own expertise in the art and craft of teaching, gain a deeper understanding of how people learn, and contribute to a collegiate purpose by reflecting with each other on what they learn from seeing learning in action.

Sharing findings from learning visits

Senior staff sampled learning across the school. The headteacher then shared the findings with all staff to build on the identified strengths in learning and to open up reflection. Here is a summary of the headteacher's findings, shared with staff.

"The focus of the visits was to sample learning experiences and the extent to which pupils' needs were being met. A strongly positive picture emerged. Class teachers were clearly committed and genuinely interested in the wellbeing and development of pupils. A range of professional skills were clearly evident and being used to good effect to support pupils. In the vast majority of lessons, aims were shared with pupils in line with the principles of *Assessment is for Learning* …..The vast majority of lessons offered direction and instructions to pupils to good effect. Explanations and expositions were presented clearly. In a high number of instances there was a highly skilled use of questioning to support pupil learning. …….Lessons were generally well paced. Most pupils were fully engaged in their learning. …..Some pupils would have benefited from increased challenge from activities, and questioning that demanded a more evaluative response. Pupils' written work showed a mixed picture in terms of the level of correction. The use of formative comments was inconsistent. …..Some pupils had the opportunity to show their ability to work independently or in collaboration with others. Relationships in class were very good. Pupil behaviour was also consistently good. Class teachers modelled positive expectations.

The headteacher then invited departments to reflect on the following and respond as appropriate – the extent to which: the sharing of learning outcomes is embedded in classroom practice; prior attainment is being taken into account in planning lessons; questioning encourages pupils to think for themselves and make judgements; class teachers are making connections between what is being taught and previous learning; pupils understand the relevance of the curricular content and learning activities; tasks/activities are planned in such a way as to meet all pupils' needs; differentiation reflects the ability levels and learning needs of all pupils; target setting is in use, with pupils having an understanding of what they are aiming for and what is expected of them; and formative comments are supporting pupil learning."

Visits to lessons should be part of a formative approach to improvement in learning and teaching and for evaluating the impact of changes in practice. Successful approaches to direct observation of learning depend upon careful preparation and discussion about sensitivities or potential misunderstandings.

It is important that learning visits are constructive and have a positive impact. Professional dialogue is essential in all cases and it needs to be both exploratory and formative. It is important to focus a learning visit clearly on outcomes for learners and to avoid becoming overly engaged by processes.

Before a learning visit, teachers will find it beneficial to have discussed the purpose and intended outcomes of the visit, and may have explored how the visit will be carried out, for example:

- how they will manage the visit and engage in constructive professional dialogue that leads to improvement;

- how the visit might be complemented by future learning visits, perhaps with visits to and from the teachers involved to other classes or subjects;

- whether the nature of the lesson will enable the visitor to work alongside a colleague, for example in a cooperative teaching approach; and

- ensuring a shared understanding and expectation about key aspects of teaching, such as recognising and addressing learning needs.

Making a learning visit to class

"The teacher is in the lead in their classroom so I try to be as unobtrusive as possible and as supportive as I can of the learning that is taking place. When the teacher is talking to the class, I show that I am listening attentively. When the learners start working on activities, I move around and join in, talking to them, looking at what they are working on, observing how they are responding and how well they work together. Do I help someone who is struggling? Yes. Although this might distort a little what would normally happen in the lesson, it goes against the grain for a teacher to refuse to help a learner needing help and it shows we are a professional team all committed to supporting learning. I wouldn't, however, take over the teaching of a group unless it was understood in advance that I would work cooperatively with the teacher."

Starting a learning visit to class: 'what is it like to be a learner in this lesson?'

Initially, staff visiting lessons may find it helpful to identify and consider the likely impact of important contextual features which can influence the quality of learners' experiences; features such as the environment for learning, or ethos. Then, by moving quickly to focus directly on learners themselves, they can recognise the extent to which each is engaged in learning, perhaps autonomous in learning or, on the other hand, when they might have withdrawn from learning.

As an example of the kind of things staff may want to consider in an initial lesson visit, here are a few prompts that might be used in a visit to a lesson in mathematics. Not all of these features are straightforward, and staff would want to ensure they focused directly on the impact on learners of each of these aspects.

- The classroom is well managed, with resources that are readily available, well organised and appropriate to the activities being carried out.

- The lesson has a clear objective. It is well structured with an introduction to share the objective with young people, and explain the main points clearly, and an ending to review the key ideas and issue any homework.

- The pace of work is brisk. Young people's interest and attention is sustained through interactive teaching and group and individual work.

- Young people are well motivated and work conscientiously.

- Teachers use questioning effectively to: involve as many young people as possible; give young people time to think before providing an answer; seek extended explanations rather than one-word responses; allow time to explore reasons for wrong answers; and take account of prior learning when questioning individuals.

- Teachers set high standards for young people's work.

- Where appropriate, teachers take opportunities to ensure that learners develop skills in mental calculation and in solving problems, practise and apply mathematical skills in real life contexts and situations across the curriculum, and use ICT effectively.

- Teachers listen carefully to young people's answers to questions and modify their teaching accordingly. They give constructive feedback on oral and written work.

- Young people are supported according to their needs, groupings are appropriate, the work is sufficiently challenging for all young people and they are helped when they experience difficulties.

As staff visit each other's classes, they will be analysing how well learning and teaching is leading to the development of the skills, attributes and capabilities embedded within the experiences and outcomes. They will want to consider, for example, how the learning activities are addressing the development of: skills in literacy and numeracy; being creative; learning independently and in groups; evaluating; reasoning; self-awareness; assessing risk; critical thinking; developing informed, ethical views; applying learning in new situations; problem solving; using technology; taking the initiative and leading; and understanding their own and others' cultures.

Professional development through learning visits

The very strong culture of professional dialogue, trust and collegiality ensures that learning and support for young people are at the heart of the school's work. Staff focus strongly on developing their own understanding of the craft of teaching and current educational thinking through well-structured professional development sessions on the practical application of effective learning and teaching strategies. These strategies provide the focus for learning visits to class by peers and managers. Because of the positive climate for improvement through teamwork, staff feel comfortable about supporting and challenging each other's ideas. They feel empowered to take risks and try new approaches in making curriculum changes and improvements in classroom practice, and they are supported to take on leadership roles of working in pairs and teams.

Sometimes staff may identify the need to look at the impact of learning on longer-term outcomes, perhaps related to the school improvement plan. In that case, they may focus a learning visit and related discussions with learners on areas such as:

- how literacy and numeracy are being developed, extended and reinforced across all learning;

- how learning activities promote the aspects of health and wellbeing which are the responsibility of all staff;

- how learning in upper secondary education can address both examination requirements and wider aims;

- the extent to which learning currently addresses a broad or narrow range of outcomes and how to extend this to cover the broader range of outcomes intended within *Curriculum for Excellence*; and

- whether learning is sufficiently active, practical and applied.

The areas being explored should be shared and discussed in a climate of trust and professional partnership.

Senior managers making learning visits

The regular presence of the headteacher and other senior managers in classes, supporting and challenging the work of learners, helps them to keep up to date on the progress being made. They are then better placed to direct resources where they are most needed, and where teachers can use them to take learning to a higher level.

It is important for teachers to both undertake learning visits to others' classes and to have others visit their class. By doing both they learn from and with those around them. All involved need to know the intentions of the lesson or learning activity to be observed, to enable them to discuss the extent to which the experiences led to the intended outcomes for learners.

This collective commitment to the positive impact of learning visits to colleagues' classes is a growing strength in many educational establishments.

The following examples feature in effective approaches to learning visits.

- Learning visits take place with a shared understanding of purpose and in a climate of professional respect.

- Learning visits vary in format, are proportionate to circumstances, range from short episodes or 'walk-throughs' to more extended stays, and help staff to gain a fuller picture of the strengths in learning and teaching on which to build improvement.

- Learning visits involve teachers from different stages, subjects or levels of responsibility, and teachers learn from each other by observing and discussing practice.

- Visits are regular enough to provide ideas for improvement and then to follow these up to assess impact.

- Professional dialogue is interactive, constructive and effective, and results in a shared understanding of strengths and steps for further consideration and follow up. Visitors reflect on the extent to which their learning visit has had a positive impact and created a climate for ongoing professional dialogue.

- Learning visits focus on outcomes and on how lessons consolidate and develop confidence in learning.

- Senior staff use information from learning visits to guide and support improvement planning, for example through identifying the need to increase the scope in lessons for a wider range of learning skills.

- Visits help ensure that resources are deployed effectively to meet learners' needs, for example through using the Internet, interactive whiteboards or computers.

- Professional dialogue helps teachers to take personal responsibility for planning how to meet their own development needs.
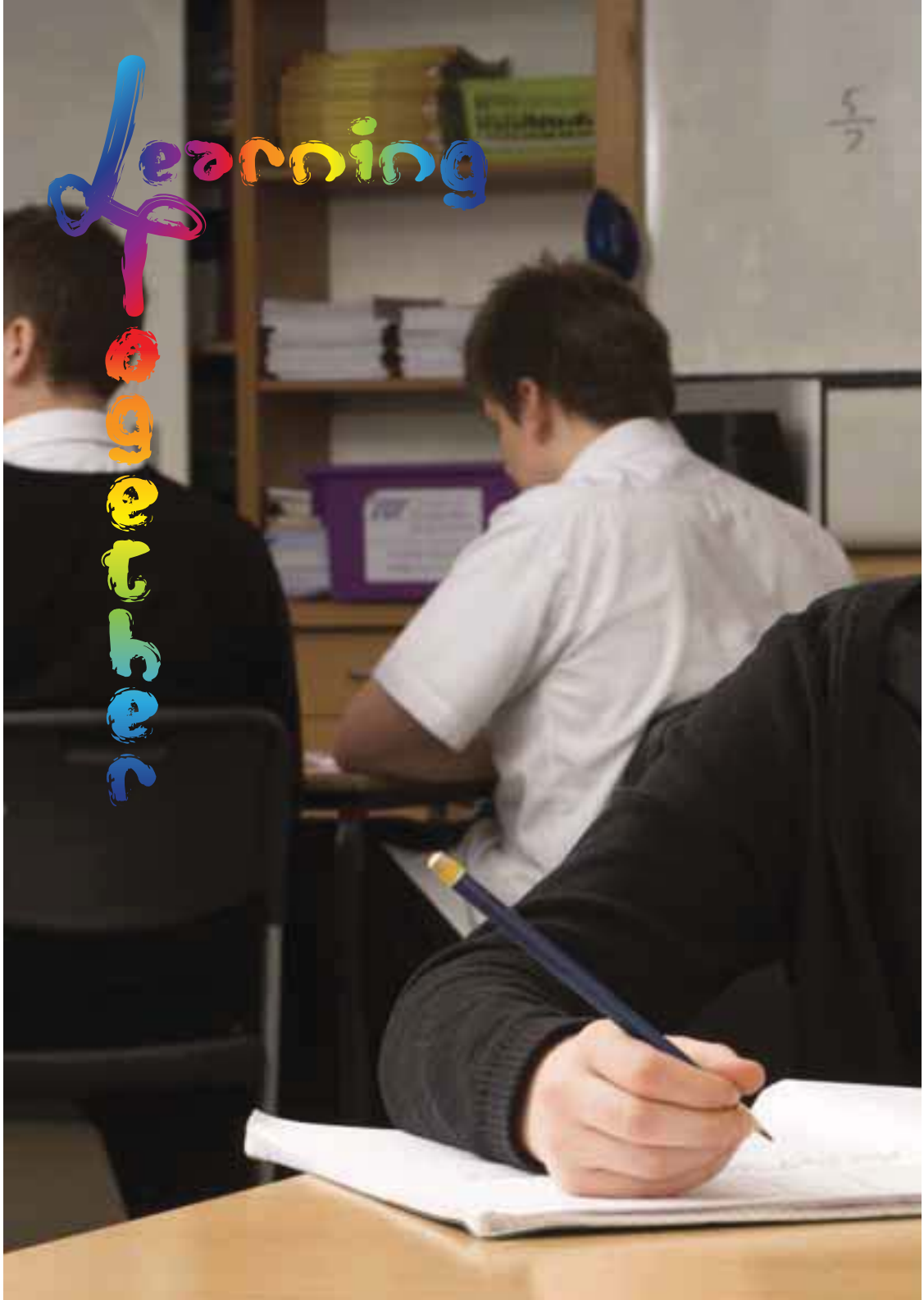
A full departmental review

The school's team approach to departmental review is constantly being improved. Initially, the review team was made up of a member of the senior management team, a principal teacher from another department, and an unpromoted teacher. Each had a defined role and was given specific tasks. They made visits to lessons over a period of one week and discussed them with the department staff. To date, five departments have taken part and the school intends to carry out one review per term as part of its cycle of improvement. The review reports provide a very detailed and accurate evaluation of the quality of education provided by the reviewed departments with detailed individual feedback being offered to all teachers following a learning visit. More recently, the review team has been extended to include a newly qualified teacher and, in some cases, a subject specialist from a neighbouring school. In addition, all link members of the senior management team are included in the team unless they teach in the department being reviewed. A greater degree of flexibility has also been introduced, allowing departments to identify a focus for the review on year groups, teaching and learning, classroom management, departmental organisation or other specific developments. Through this exercise, principal teachers and unpromoted teachers feel they are now making an enhanced contribution to the management of the school, and all of the staff involved as reviewers or reviewees learn a great deal about self-evaluation.

More generally, when planning learning visits, staff may find helpful the following selection of prompts used in learning visits by HMIE.

- Learning climate and teaching approaches
- Curriculum content
- Teacher-pupil interaction, including learners' engagement
- Clarity and purposefulness of dialogue
- Judgements made in the course of teaching
- Equality and fairness
- Pupil-teacher interaction
- Lesson aims shared with pupils
- Explanations and instructions
- Skilled use of questions
- Pace
- Resources
- Praise and feedback
- Use of ICT
- Expectations of staff and pupils
- Pupil involvement in learning/decision-making
- Behaviour and motivation of pupils
- Homework
- Pupil responsibility
- Independent learning skills
- Group/collaborative working

Reflective questions: Annex 6 contains some questions that you might reflect on when considering the priority areas being explored through the context of learning visits.

Learning Together

Information and data

Improving
the how and
what of learning

The next aspect of the self-evaluation triangulation process involves the use of a range of information and data. Evidence about learners' progress and their success in undertaking the experiences and achieving the outcomes within *Curriculum for Excellence* will be gathered from various sources. It will comprise information from wherever the learning takes place and across all aspects of learning. Such information is particularly valuable when combined with the other perspectives covered in this guide, namely from people's views and learning visits. It forms an important backdrop to enable staff to identify priorities for development within *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Much of the information and data that schools have will come from assessment practice. Assessment is an integral part of learning and teaching and flows from the planned curriculum. It provides an emerging picture of a young person's achievements and can be a motivation to do better and progress further in learning.

Across all areas of the curriculum, teachers will gather evidence of progress as part of children's and young people's day-to-day learning. Evidence can be drawn, for example, from discussions with learners, and observations of their skills in communicating in different ways and settings, solving problems creatively, and justifying their opinions of their own and others' work. Children and young people can demonstrate their progress in skills, knowledge and understanding as, for example, they develop their practical skills, express increasingly complex concepts and ideas, apply their creative skills to produce more complex pieces of work and demonstrate increasing skills and confidence in presentations.

Assessment should apply to learning outside the classroom. Schools have information about success in an increasingly wide range of achievements. They may be working to develop resilience through aspects of health and wellbeing. They may be striving to ensure that every young person is engaged in some form of out-of-class learning, club, sport or activity and that they progress in such activities as they learn and mature. Monitoring such a wide range of achievements can be new to schools and is not without challenges. However, information about engagement in activities beyond the classroom can help to support discussions with individual young people about their learning and development across the attributes and capabilities of *Curriculum for Excellence*. All of this in turn can lead to greater success.

For the individual teacher, information on learners' success supports reflection on their own practice and planning the next steps for learners and groups, curriculum experiences and teaching approaches. Collectively, the information can provide insights, for example into how particular groups, such as vulnerable young people, are achieving. In turn the information allows teachers as a team to reflect on issues such as the school's level of aspirations and expectations. Having access to a wide range of data and information provides schools with the opportunity to give parents and others an open and transparent account of their success in meeting their planned objectives for the school and its young people.

Information and data about learners' success and progress can be gathered at different points. Some will come from the day-to-day interactions during learning and teaching that help to build up a picture of learners' knowledge, understanding and developing skills. Teachers have a great deal of experience in these aspects through developments such as assessment for learning. The information can also come from periodic monitoring of coursework such as through specially-designed assessment tasks used at the end of a topic or on the completion of a project. Or it can come from periodic reflection on success in activities beyond the classroom.

Benchmarking

The headteacher considered teachers' forward plans and analysed learners' attainment data, giving written and oral feedback. The headteacher also used cluster arrangements to share ideas and expertise with other headteachers, and to closely benchmark her school's attainment against that of other schools and pre-school centres.

Data and information on progress and achievements at points of transition such as transfer from class to class, stage to stage, or school to school are particularly important. Through being rich in information and data about learners' progress at these times, and basing judgements on knowledge of individuals, teachers can ensure that learning takes full account of prior achievements and of individual needs. Improvements in progression across transitions bring about real and lasting improvements to learning.

Comparative information can be particularly helpful for teachers. It can help them to 'benchmark' aspects of the school's achievements. Benchmarking involves learning from others. It helps to identify strengths and aspects where levels of success might be improved. Often, such comparisons are made using data about learners' success shared across schools, perhaps schools with learners of similar needs and backgrounds and sometimes using national data. Using information in these ways helps teachers to learn from others who may be facing similar challenges in meeting learning needs, and allows them to learn from a range of different solutions and approaches. Increasingly, staff are making effective use of sophisticated data which can help them to reflect, for example, on how well learners are achieving in one area of the curriculum compared with how well the same learners perform in other areas, or how well learners progress from one course to another at a higher level.

Any such approach is most powerful when it focuses on improving the outcomes of learning and teaching. Evaluation of learners' coursework can help to:

- show the rate of learners' progress over a given period of time;

- indicate how successful the learning experiences have been in achieving the intended outcomes, and at what pace;

- show the degree to which learning and teaching innovations and policies are being implemented and how they may be impacting on learning; and

- indicate the level of personalisation that needs to be planned for learners.

The nature of information will be different in, for example, a pre-school setting, a secondary school and a community learning context. To achieve maximum impact from useful data, it is important that staff share the same language and expectations about learning. For learners aged 3 to 15 these will be based upon the experiences and outcomes. Staff may use:

- baseline or entry achievement information to identify learners' strengths and needs and identify the next steps towards realistic but challenging outcomes, and to ensure continuity of learning across key transition points particularly in literacy and numeracy;

Using recorded evidence of progress in children's learning

Staff were already recording evidence of progress in children's learning, but further training helped them to think much more about the principles behind the approach and to debate the pedagogy of early years education. The recorded evidence made children's successes and achievements more visible to parents and, most importantly, to the children themselves. This approach also engaged children in the planning process and allowed many opportunities to revisit learning, making play more relevant and purposeful.

- statements of achievement developed by learners;

- negotiated targets with learners to inform teaching approaches;

- information about onward progress, including future successes as learners move from stage to stage, including post-school leavers' destinations;

- discussions about learners' progress with colleagues and with learners themselves, exploring progress in learning and the full range of their achievements, across all aspects of the curriculum;

- comparative assessment information from: internal or external assessments or other sources; learners' performance in other subjects; other schools which serve children and young people with similar needs and backgrounds; national performance information; and

- data about attendance, exclusions from school or lessons, and referrals for achievements and behaviour and for particular achievements.

Targets to guide learning

All primary class teachers set individual targets for the children in their classes. Children helped to set their own targets, linked to personal learning plans, monitored and evaluated by a working group of teachers. Regular assessment was used to track progress. Children's jotters and class work were sampled each month.

Many teachers find it helpful to assess jointly or compare their marking and feedback approaches with colleagues. Such approaches help them to agree and confirm standards and to clarify expectations and take steps to promote improvement. They can also use external assessments to reflect on their establishment's internal assessments of the levels achieved by learners. Overall these approaches help to share and set standards across the profession.

Setting personal goals

Learners at all stages were beginning to be involved in regularly setting their own targets in consultation with class teachers. The headteacher engaged effectively with teachers to discuss examination data and to identify areas for improvement.

No single source of information can give a full or accurate account of the impact of learning and teaching on learners. By combining information on what people think about learning, information about the quality of learning and teaching in action and information from assessment and other sources, teachers can reach a secure foundation on which they can build sustained improvement for their learners.

Reflective questions: Annex 7 provides examples of reflective questions for discussion about using achievement information and data.

Learning
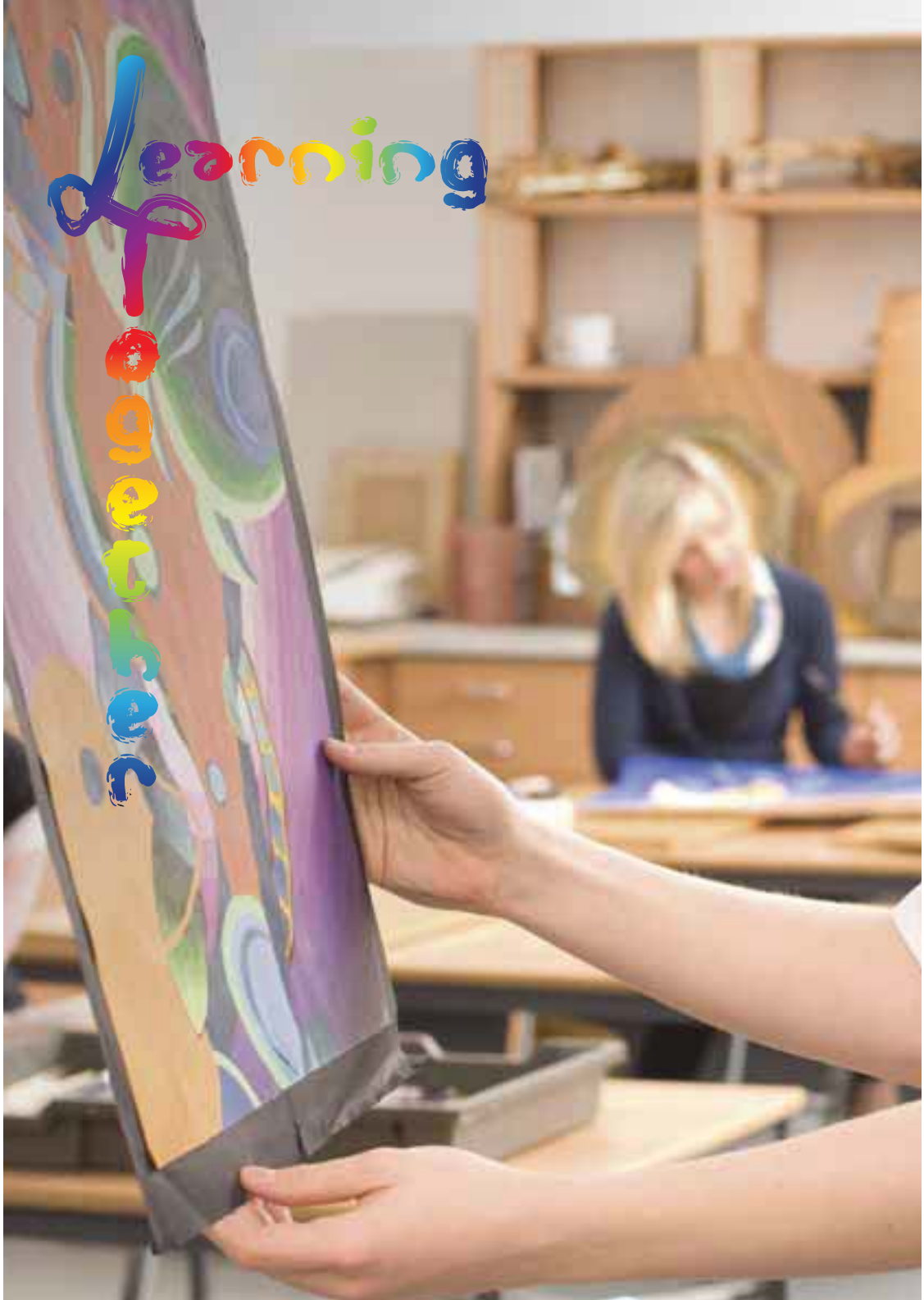
Together

Conclusion

Successful establishments and services recognise sustained improvement in learning as their core business.

By opening up learning, parents and staff have grown in confidence about preparing children, young people and adults for a changing world. By learning together, we become more confident, open, objective and transparent about our work. Establishments build momentum in which key outcomes relate to high motivation and success for all learners and staff. An atmosphere and ethos in which teachers readily share their experiences with colleagues and have a hunger for growing their own learning, has now become one of the hallmarks of mature self-evaluation in Scottish education.

The aim of this guide has been to stimulate professional reflection, dialogue and debate about the how and what of learning, and how, by learning together, we will continue to improve them as the means of achieving the aspirations of *Curriculum for Excellence*. As we work together to do this we will explore what it means to 'open up' learning. We will increasingly recognise what 'opened-up' learning looks like through its impact on children's, young people's, and adults' learning and life opportunities.
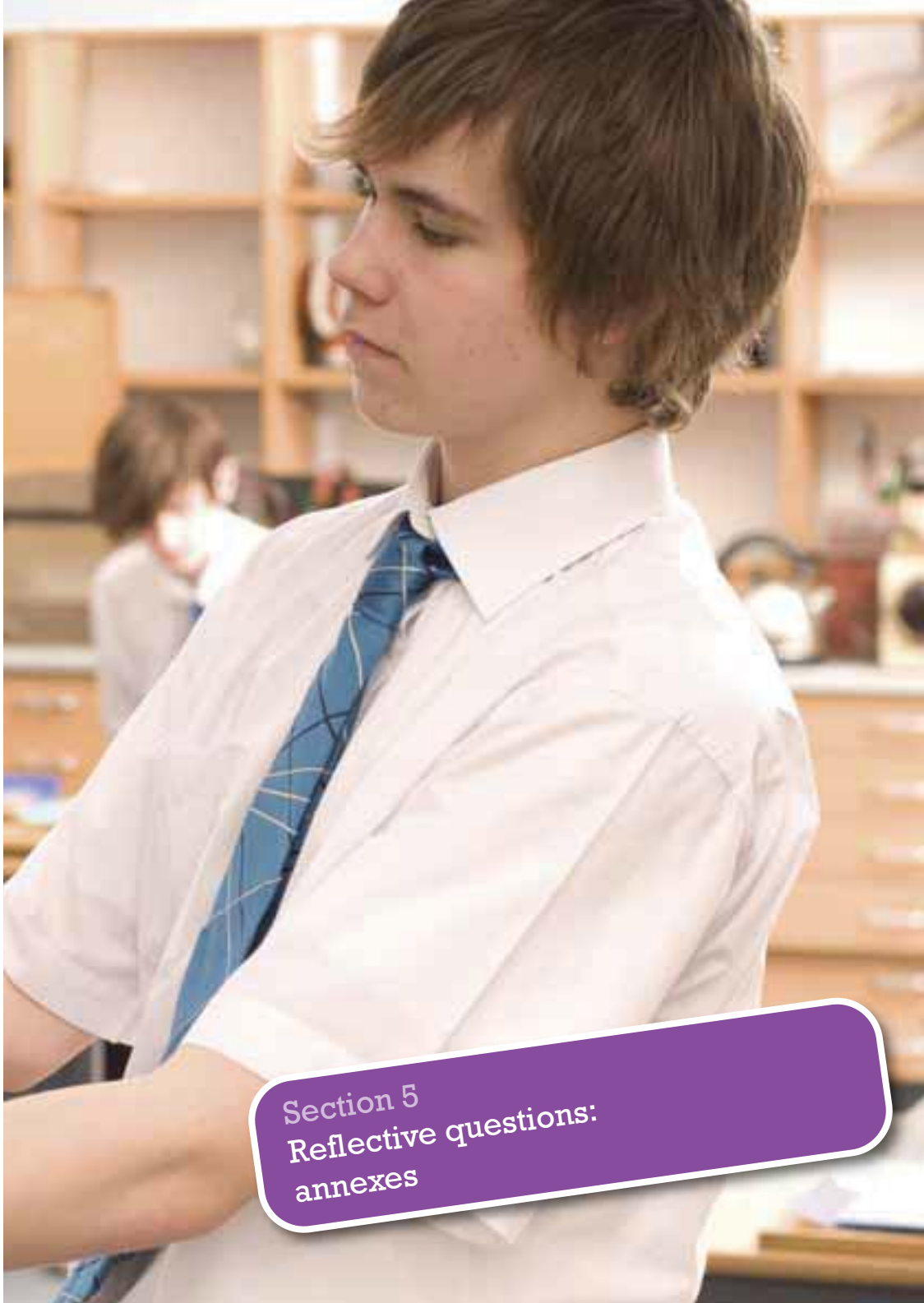

Learning together

In a new shared campus, children from the special school, primary school and secondary school formed a learning community. They joined together to form a 'rights respecting group' in which representatives from each school supported each other to share views and make suggestions about learning together in the future.

Learning Together

Section 5

**Reflective questions:
annexes**

Section 5:
Reflective questions: annexes

The following annexes provide, for reflection, examples of key questions, issues and features of opening up learning. They cover some of the issues and ideas raised in sections 1 to 4 of this guide. They are intended to be used as a starting point to stimulate and inform discussions and raise debate, with a view to increasing shared understanding and promoting improvement. Some of the questions may also help to inform discussions with learners, their parents and other members of the community.

Annex 1 (see page 12)

Examples of key reflective questions for headteachers, managers and staff

- How do we explore together what effective learning is?

- As headteachers, managers and senior staff, how do we demonstrate leadership for learning through our daily actions, including through visiting learning activities and leading subsequent professional dialogue?

- In what ways do we track improvements in learning and teaching over time and ensure high quality across the school, including in inter-disciplinary contexts?

- In what ways do we explain the purpose of exploring learning, and offer ready means by which all views can be communicated?

- To what extent do we use a range of approaches for exploring views, including through parent groups and councils, focus groups, individual meetings, working groups, electronic media and written questionnaires?

- In what ways do we address the communication needs of those whose views we seek, including where confidence, disability, language, motivation, understanding or other difficulties may be barriers?

- How do we build on the creative ideas which may emerge from the views we gather?

Examples of reflective questions for staff on exploring learners' views

- To what extent do learners understand how learning takes place?

- How do we encourage learners to comment on the quality of their experiences?

- How well do learners understand the objectives or intended outcomes of a given task, and can they evaluate their own progress towards them?

- What do learners think about the quality of teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions and relationships?

- How confident do learners feel about influencing decisions about the management and structure of their learning experiences? What choices do they have about lesson priorities and their preferred approaches to learning?

- How effectively do we make use of learners' views about pace or challenge, active learning or learning independently, to improve learning and teaching?

- How confident do learners feel about identifying other issues which may impact on learning such as behaviour, home study, teachers' empathy and expectations, or ethos?

- In what ways do we ensure our pupil councils and youth forums discuss learning, its strengths and how it might be improved?

- To what extent are youth forums exploring the relationship between learning in the community and school?

- How do children, young people and adults with representative roles stimulate discussion about learning amongst their peers, for example by using focus groups, assemblies, displays, debates, or class time?

- To what extent do learners feel that discussions about learning are open and transparent, inclusive, rigorous, influential, and carried out in a trusting environment?

Examples of reflective questions for staff on exploring parents' views

- How do we value and use views and contributions from all parents?

- What do we do to provide the means for all parents to communicate their views, irrespective of any barriers they may face?

- How wide a range of media do we use for exploring views, including discussion groups, individual meetings and questionnaires?

- To what extent are the views that parents offer informed by their understanding of children's learning, as might have been explained to them through open evenings, curriculum events, information leaflets, or the school or service website?

- To what extent do parents' views match the establishment's own view of learning and teaching?

- How well does consultation help to identify wider issues which affect learning, including aspects of ethos or access to opportunities for wider achievement?

- How confidently can we show how we have used parents' views constructively to improve learning?

Examples of reflective questions for staff to use when considering how they learn together

- To what extent do we value the views of the community about the learning opportunities and institutions in their area?

- How extensively is our school involved in its community, for example through local community planning?

- To what extent do we consider all learning providers as part of a learning community, and involve them fully when we are evaluating progress?

- How well do we involve partners in learning in developing local learning plans such as school improvement plans?

- How well do we recognise and value the learning experiences that children and young people achieve in their community?

- To what extent do we consider how learning opportunities in the community can support learning in school?

- How well do we recognise the value of families learning together, and the positive benefit this can have on children and young people's learning, and on all other family members?

Examples of reflective questions for staff who are evaluating the impact of the curriculum and innovations

- To what extent do parents feel encouraged to broaden their children's curriculum out of school, complementing the work of the school?

- Do we fully involve all learners, their parents and staff in reviewing the extent to which changing curriculum arrangements meet learners' needs?

- Have all views been gathered, shared and used to inform a shared rationale for curriculum change, with clearly defined outcomes?

- What measures of success do we have to monitor improvements in achievement following innovations and change?

- Do we know who misses out on out-of-class learning activities, how they feel, and to what extent they may be disadvantaged as a result?

- What evidence is there that our curriculum motivates, promotes self-esteem, and encourages good attendance and discipline?

- How well do permeating aspects of the curriculum such as enterprise and citizenship impact on learning?

- How well do we use partnerships to enhance the curriculum we offer and ensure effective support for identified learners?

- How effectively do our curriculum and partnerships deliver our shared vision and values?

- To what extent does our teaching pedagogy and curriculum promote equalities for all?

Annex 6 (see page 41)

Examples of reflective questions for learners and staff, relating to learning visits and longer-term issues in an establishment's or service's improvement plan

- What variety is there in learning over the course of a lesson, day, or a week? To what extent is learning active, challenging and enjoyable?

- What opportunities do learners have to think and reflect?

- To what extent do learners have choices in what and how they learn? Do they make good use of the choices?

- Is learning made practical, applied and relevant?

- Do teaching approaches encourage individuals to take responsibility for organising their learning with others, working collaboratively in groups and teams, and giving presentations to their peers?

- In seeking to improve achievement, how well do we know how deeply learners are engaged in learning?

- How well does the balance of whole-class direct teaching, questioning and interaction, group work, thinking time and other approaches meet all learners' needs?

- How well do learning experiences challenge learners and involve thinking skills such as designing, constructing, producing, inventing, hypothesising, critiquing, experimenting, and judging?

- How well do learning experiences build on prior learning and use assessment information to help inform progression?

- What have learners gained from the lesson or learning activity?

Annex 7 (see page 50)

Examples of reflective questions for teachers exploring information and data

- To what extent do we seek out and use benchmarking information to help to evaluate outcomes?

- How well, and how often, do we ensure all staff understand how to interpret assessment information and data?

- Are all of our staff confident in their own professional judgements and ability to assess learners' progress to shared standards?

- How well do we assess progress in cross-curricular learning, such as literacy and numeracy?

- Are the approaches we use to report learners' progress consistent in referring to strengths and areas for improvement?

- How well do we use assessment information to plan improvements?

- How effectively do we use learners' self-assessments to inform next steps?

- How effective are our arrangements for informing all teachers about the prior learning of individuals and groups of learners?

- Does the information we gather from assessment cover all key outcomes?

- Does the assessment information we use combine the contributions of teachers and learners?

Learning Together

Section 6:
Acknowledgements

This publication draws from inspections of establishments and services during the period 2000 – 2009. HMIE would like to thank all learners, parents and staff who contributed to these inspections, along with those from the following establishments which were visited to gather some of the specific examples of good practice included in this guide.

Canmore Primary School	Fife Council
Livingston Village Primary School	West Lothian Council
St Joseph's RC Primary School	Fife Council
St David's RC Primary School	Edinburgh City Council
Castle Douglas High School	Dumfries and Galloway Council
Cathkin High School	South Lanarkshire Council
Culloden Academy	Highland Council
Dunbar Grammar School	East Lothian Council
St Thomas of Aquin's High School	Edinburgh City Council
St Luke's High School	East Renfrewshire Council
Cumnock Academy	East Ayrshire Council
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