

Roman Catholic Schools Education Provision in the Scottish Borders

August 2016

Introduction

There are four Roman Catholic (RC) Primary Schools in the Scottish Borders: Halyrude RC Primary School in Peebles, St Joseph's RC Primary School in Selkirk, St Margaret's RC Primary School in Galashiels and St Margaret's RC Primary School in Hawick. In September 2011 the Education Executive agreed to conduct a strategic review of Roman Catholic Education in the Scottish Borders in response to continuous staffing and school performance challenges. The following recommendations were made as an outcome of the strategic review:

1. Carry out work to attract and maintain RC teaching staff to Scottish Borders and continue on-going dialogue between the Authority and the Church to address specific difficulties which arise;
2. Hold consultations to find out if the current model of partner schools should be maintained or have a single Headteacher for the RC schools;
3. Direct the Headteacher(s) to explore ways of building strong links with nursery providers, including exploring the possibility of hosting a nursery;
4. Further develop links between Scottish Borders secondary schools and their local RC parishes.

Following the 2012 review, a single Headteacher was appointed across the four RC schools and the new management structure across the four schools consisted of the Headteacher, a non-class committed Depute Headteacher and two principal teachers. There has been continued partnership working with the RC Church and Scottish Borders Council (SBC) to try and address the difficulty of recruiting RC teaching staff. There are no nurseries within the four RC schools as there is currently sufficient provision within each learning community.

The challenges currently facing the RC schools are similar to those identified in 2012: difficulties in recruiting and retaining RC staff including leadership.

There has been a significant amount of time dedicated to try and recruit RC teaching staff for the four RC schools, including attendance at national events, but despite this we continue to have problems recruiting RC staff. This issue is replicated across many parts of Scotland, particularly in rural authorities. SBC have worked closely with the RC Church in securing approval for non- RC teaching staff to work in RC schools. There were only two applicants for the post of DHT for the four RC schools in 2015, which further demonstrates the difficulty in recruiting RC staff. It has proved problematic for the Headteacher to work across four schools and this is partly due to the time it takes to travel the considerable distance between the schools. Parents in one of the schools have raised concerns about the proportion of time the Headteacher is in the school. Staff have also raised concerns about the difficulty of having only one Headteacher across the 4 schools. The current structure is particularly challenging, as we have no Headteachers in SBC on standby who are RC approved who can provide supply during periods of leadership absence as we are able to do in our non-denominational schools.

It has been extremely challenging recruiting RC teaching staff to the schools, thus making the delivery of RC religious education problematic. In one school with no RC teaching staff, religious education has to be delivered by an RC teacher from another school. There needs to be professional learning opportunities for the RC staff in relation to teaching the Catholic curriculum and the Church has planned opportunities for staff in the year 2016-17.

There was an inspection of one of the RC schools in 2013 and the outcome raised concern about the school's capacity for improvement and there has been continued engagement with Education Scotland for a three year period because of the slow pace of improvements. This is highly unusual. The capacity for improvement is definitely affected by the staffing challenges and leadership structures currently in place.

Background

The 1918 Education Act stated that RC schools were to be transferred to an Education Authority and would be maintained and managed by the Education Authority. The four RC schools in Scottish Borders provide statutory Roman Catholic education based on this Act. The current roll of each RC primary is: St Margaret's, Galashiels 72 pupils; St Margaret's, Hawick 15 pupils; St Joseph's, Selkirk 21 pupils and Halyrude, Peebles 93 pupils. The percentage number of RC pupils within each school is: St Margaret's, Hawick 75%, St Margaret's, Galashiels 46%, St Joseph's, Selkirk 14%, Halyrude, Peebles 40%.

School Improvement

St Margaret's Primary School in Galashiels was inspected by Education Scotland in 2012 and grading on the five key quality improvement indicators, included 3 satisfactory ratings and 2 good ratings. The Senior Lead Education Officer from the Council worked closely with the school to continue its capacity for improvement. At the time of the inspection, there was a Headteacher in St Margaret's for 3 days per week. The self-evaluation carried out by the school evidences steady improvement.

St Joseph's Primary School was inspected by Education Scotland in October 2013 and the grading for the 5 key quality indicators were 3 unsatisfactory ratings and 2 weak ratings. This inspection demonstrated the need for the school to increase its capacity for improvement. An action plan was drafted in order to take improvements forward. Education Scotland carried out a follow through inspection in 2014 and reported that there had been improvements made in learning and achievement and in meeting children's needs. Although some improvements were evidenced in the 2014 follow through report, there was continued engagement with Education Scotland in order to further evaluate the school's capacity for improvement. The 2015 follow through inspection reported that the pace of learning for pupils was too slow and that children reported that they had had too many teachers over the year. The turnover rate in staffing was identified as a problem within the school. The report intimated that the capacity for improvement had to be increased and an

additional leader was put in place by SBC in order to address this. Education Scotland will carry out another follow through inspection in Autumn 2016.

Parents at Halyrude raised a number of concerns about a range of schools issues during the period 2013-2015. The school stabilised during school session 2015-2016 with the appointment of new staff and the appointment of a permanent Depute Headteacher to the four RC schools. The appointment of the extra leader to the four schools in August 2015 also enabled the Depute Headteacher to focus on school improvement at Halyrude. At the end of school session 2015-2016 the Parent Council reported a much improved picture in terms of previous issues having now been addressed. Self-evaluation from the schools and SBC indicates steady improvement in the quality indicators.

St Margaret's in Hawick, as with Halyrude, has benefitted from the enhanced leadership put in place by SBC. Again, there are signs of steady improvement.

In order to support the RC schools capacity for improvement, SBC had to appoint an additional senior member of staff as a Headteacher support. This person has been in post for the last school year and will continue in post into new school session. The Headteacher support has worked well with the Depute Headteacher for the four schools in providing leadership and has spent a significant amount of time working in St Joseph's Primary School, in order to ensure that the school has the capacity to make improvements. The stability of the teaching staff has improved with the appointment of a permanent class teacher. Following on from concerns raised by staff and parents of one school about the current leadership model, a meeting was held with staff from all four RC schools, Joe Walsh, SBC RC representative, SBC staff-Donna Manson, Michelle Strong, Anne-Theresa Lawrie, RC Church Education Officer, Patricia Carol, and two parents from Halyrude Parent Council. The outcome of the meeting was the request for a review of the current model of leadership across the four RC schools due to concerns raised by all attending the meeting, that the substantive model put in place following the review of provision in 2012 is not effective in sustaining school improvement and high quality educational benefits for the children attending all four RC schools.

In summary, the current model of leadership across the four RC schools presents many challenges: the demands of one Headteacher managing four RC schools are too high; the distance that the management team have to cover travelling between the 4 schools results in a loss of time which would be better invested in the schools; the capacity to lead improvement across all four schools is not realistic in the current model and results in a decrease in capacity for improvement. A further challenge is the recruitment and retention of RC staff across the four RC primary schools and although this is a national challenge, it is further exacerbated by the rurality of Scottish Borders. Due to the lack of RC teaching staff, it is difficult to plan leadership succession for the RC schools. The school rolls at St Joseph's Primary School in Selkirk and St Margaret's Primary School in Hawick have decreased over recent years, resulting in only one composite class for p1-p7. Having only one teacher in schools which are geographically isolated results in fewer opportunities for both ongoing professional engagement and collaborative working, which are both identified as being important in developing professional learning for teachers. In 2012 there was concern raised in relation to St Joseph's Primary School having the most restricted accommodation, but at the time the school roll was only 19 and in 2016 the roll is only 21. There are additional concerns about the education provision at St Joseph's which will have to be considered, especially within the context that the RC pupil population is only 14%.

Proposal

Taking into the account the challenges facing the RC schools in terms of recruitment and retention of RC staff, leadership capacity across the four schools and the current lack of capacity in the substantive structure to take forward improvements, it would be an appropriate time to carry out a review of RC education provision in the Scottish Borders. This initial review will act as a pre-consultation in advance of possible statutory consultation.

As SBC will be looking at the status of existing education provision, then any forthcoming proposals would be subject to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended (the Act).

AT Lawrie

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