

The school Improvement Plan and Standards & Quality Report

Every year the Edinburgh Steiner School is expected to compile a working document that describes how we plan to improve our educational provision in the near future. This is, of course, a broad front: ‘educational provision’ can be affected by many factors, such as teaching resources, facilities, leadership, communication and the quality of the environment—among many others.

Evidence and ideas for each year’s ‘Improvement Plan’ has come from across the School. All parts of the School are consulted and individual colleagues are canvassed. Anyone can submit a proposal. The ideas are then considered by The College of Teachers and drawn together by a small working group, usually in the late autumn. As a ‘working document,’ however, it is constantly subject to updating throughout the school session.

The Improvement Plan sets out some of the School’s key priorities—usually no more than four or five—for the coming year. It’s a sampling exercise, with a view to helping us clarify our planning and communicate our sense of purpose across the School. We generally try to identify key priorities from different parts of the School so that a priority for the early years might be contrasted with a priority for finance or administration. In recent years key priorities have described projects that eventually delivered visible benefits to the School: Growing Spaces Project; Early Years expansion; The Student Council.

Each key priority must be articulated in a form of language that the schools’ inspectorate (Education Scotland) understands and approves of. The go-to document for this language is entitled *How Good is Our School?* It sets out how a good (or outstanding) school would look, based on three sets of Quality Indicators under broad headings: Leadership and Management; Learning Provision; and Success and Achievements. Each QI is subdivided into half a dozen more specific phrases, so ‘Learning Provision’ is broken down into ‘personalised support’ and ‘curriculum,’ among others. And each of *these* subdivisions is articulated through a number of ‘themes,’ so that ‘curriculum’ is matched with themes including ‘skills for learning, life and work’ and ‘rationale and design’. It is against the QIs—and the ways in which we as a school interpret and deliver them—that we will be judged come the day of inspection.

How Good is Our School? applies to *every* school in Scotland, not just to those in the state sector. It also applies regardless of the type of education being delivered. Most schools follow Curriculum for Excellence, but there isn’t any mention made of it in the Quality Indicators. So although our school delivers the ‘Waldorf Framework’ (or ‘Steiner Curriculum’) each QI can and does still apply to us. The QI ‘Management and Leadership,’ for example, does not prescribe a particular way to structure a school—but it does make clear that whatever that structure is, it should work effectively!

Another important aspect of the Improvement Plan is ‘timescale’. Key priorities generally require at least a term to come to fruition; others take a year, and one or two might take longer than that. In this year’s Improvement Plan we have identified a number of projects that are now in progress. Preparation for the plan began back in June 2019 with a review and evaluation of the previous year’s key priorities. Sometimes projects that were expected to last a year begin to stretch out over two years, and are

therefore carried over into the subsequent year's plan in a revised form, or not. Sometimes a priority is 'ongoing' and so the timescale may be open-ended.

Further sections of the plan are devoted to 'resources' (what will be needed to implement the idea) as well as a space for who, exactly, will take responsibility for it happening. But these things, like the timescale, are not set in stone. The Improvement Plan is therefore a bit like a perpetual 'rough draft'. Priorities change, as do finances and staffing and pupils' needs. So the Plan is never really 'finished'. Nor does it tell us everything that's going on to make the School a better place: it's just a snapshot.

To complement the Improvement Plan there is a wider-ranging and more discursive document that takes a 'reflective' look at how the School is doing annually. This is the Standards and Quality Report, something Education Scotland also expect us to have at the time of inspection. The latest version (2019) opens with statements that summarise the School's philosophy and character. On later pages there are statistics on pupil attendance, exam results and a longer list of 'action points' summarising what is going on in each part of the School, from Early Years to Upper School. The report also gives a précis of the Improvement Plan so that the two documents are linked together.

In recent years, we have chosen to share both documents as widely as possible, and especially among parents. This is particularly important in our school since parents play such a central role in making the School a successful learning community. Parents are directly responsible as 'stakeholders' for many aspects of school life. Parental involvement in our school is invaluable in areas such as trips, extra-curricular activities, fundraising (including, of course, the Christmas Market), projects, plays, music and festivals. It is for these reasons that we hope our parents will begin to feel that the Improvement Plan, and documents like it, belongs as much to them as to staff and pupils.

If you have any questions about any aspect of improvement planning, please contact Alistair Pugh via the School Office.