



Head Teacher's Newsletter

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1

DECEMBER 2015

WHATS INSIDE?

- **Putting ourselves on the world map.**
- **Lead Learners**
- **Access to Education Fund success**
- **ELLI**
- **Assessment developments**

Putting Ourselves on the World Map

Tobermory High School was recently the subject of an article in the Times Educational Supplement and a BBC Television news item. Both highlighted the innovative work the school was doing through its Visible Learning programme and associated developments and the fact the school is featured in an international book publication by Professor John Hattie. His work over the last twenty years or more has looked at research into multiple areas of education and assessing statistically what strategies are more likely to be effective in improving learning in the classroom.

John Hattie uses a special

measure called *effect size* that enables you to tell to what degree things are effective and allows some relative comparisons to be made. This work tells us what works on average and is based on standardized tests before and after students have been subject to a specific teaching strategy. Interestingly, his work tells us that some of the things we might think are important are not as useful in improving learning as we might think. Some examples are; class size, Primary school homework and ability grouping. Professor Hattie has worked with a New Zealand company to produce a specific evidence based programme that incorporates his research

findings and guides schools to think about the evidence around learning in their context. The school is then able to develop an action plan to improve learning. The Visible learning programme at Tobermory High School is looking at several key areas:

- feedback in class
- dialogue in class
- developing assessment capable learners
- using data to improve learning

While these areas are a focus, a number of other innovations such as assessment rubrics, Lead Learners and the ELLI tool (see page 3) are integral to improving learning, as is our renewed focus on high expectations and setting consistent standards in class and homework. The Visible Learning work is not always straightforward but it is worthwhile working with staff and students to focus on making learning really visible so it can be discussed, evaluated and

... Parent Survey Results

Late last session the school carried out a survey of parents, staff and students in the school to look at how we are doing. These were based on the survey used by HMIE. Unfortunately we had a very low return rate for parents which makes it hard to gauge the level of any concern and

how we might change certain aspects of the school. However, we are including a summary of the responses with this newsletter. We remain committed to improving and will look for ways to survey a wider cross-section of parents in 2016.



Valuing Achievement, Valuing Community



One of the key tasks in improving learning in the school is to create more dialogue both between students and students and teachers.

Lead Learners

One of our key initiatives in 2014-15 was training 20 lead learners in S1-3. The trainer was Fiona Carnie who has worked across a number of schools in the UK to promote student voice in learning. The training over two days allowed the students to identify what a good learner looked like, how a lead learner might act in school to promote learning and how they could build relationships with staff that promoted mutual respect and a partnership that was positive for learning. The students looked at the

types of roles they might undertake; including helping with starters, identifying learning outcomes and success criteria and introducing them to the class, observing lessons, giving feedback to teaching subject areas through consultation with learners and running plenaries at the end of lessons to check for understanding. The lead learners system has been in place for a pilot year and is managed by Ms. Blair. It was reviewed late last session. There is some positive

evidence of involvement but there is still much to be done to fully develop the opportunities offered by this programme. We also need to train a new group of S1 students this session.

Lead learner programmes in other UK schools have shown positive results for learners and staff and have helped model the idea that learners should be actively engaged in working with staff to ensure they maximize and support the opportunities for deeper learning for all students.

Engaging in dialogue

One of the key tasks in Improving learning in the school is to create more dialogue both between students and students and teachers.

This is because research has shown that for students to learn at a deeper level they need to discuss ideas and share knowledge in a way that allows them to check

understanding and create new ways of looking at the information. Talk in the classroom can be different types and teachers need to use talk in a balanced way that is not only about management of students or teacher dominated. The aim is to work on talk over the next few years.



Service Choices

The Council needs to make major savings over the next three year and has put together a package of proposals called Service choices. These consider how the council will save up to £26 million over the next three financial years. The Education Service choices are part of this consultation and involve

proposals that will effect delivery of educational services in schools. The proposals include removal of the school librarian, reductions in ASN and classroom assistant support, reduction in music instructor hours, further reductions in janitorial and clerical hours and cuts to school budgets

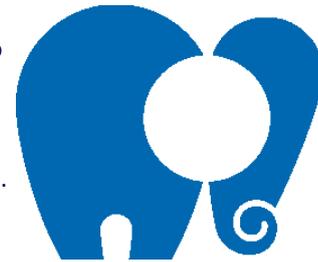
The parent council is communicating on these proposals and asking you to give your views so they can be shared with elected members to inform their deliberations on the service choices packages that will be used to cut the Council budget.

ELLI—Effective Life-Long Learning Inventory

Parents of Primary age children at Tobermory High School would have heard a lot about ELLI or the effective life long learning inventory over last session. This on-line tool is based on UK research that looked at the key personal characteristics that were present in good learners. **The seven key characteristics identified were : resilience, creativity, critical curiosity, strategic awareness, making meaning, working alone and together and changing and growing.**

At Primary level students are taught to understand the language of the ELLI tool using animal metaphors and asked to consider what characteristic they need to use to help improve learning in certain tasks in the classroom. The ELLI tool involves an online questionnaire or inventory that older students are able to complete to assess their strengths in the 7 areas. They obtain a printout in the form of a spider diagram that shows their relative strengths in each area. The teacher

takes a coaching role with students based on their profile and tries to work with them to improve their understanding and use of the weaker personal learning characteristic. Last session P3/4 parents were invited in to have a look at this tool and we hope to repeat that for more parents.



This on-line tool is based on UK research that looked at the key personal characteristics that were present in good learners. The seven key characteristics identified were : resilience, creativity, critical curiosity, strategic awareness, making meaning, working alone and together and changing and growing

Assessment Developments

Over the last few years the school has developed a unique assessment system across Primary and lower Secondary that involves using assessment tables or rubrics that outline different levels of performance in assessments. These may be designed by teachers or in some cases directly by students who decide the parameters for success. The outcomes for assessment are reported

using common descriptors of performance at the relevant curriculum level. Students may achieve, achieve with merit or achieve with excellence in an assessment and in this way we can track students and look at under performance or improved performance at a level. A fourth level—progressing to achieved indicates where a student needs to improve to

reach a curriculum level. The rubric system is very good at telling students and parents their strengths in subject areas and what they need to do to improve. This ties in with making students more assessment capable learners.

Access to Education Fund

In September we were pleased to hear from Education Scotland that the school and it's associated Primaries in the North Mull cluster were successful in an application to the Access to Education Fund to help develop the ELLI tool (see above). The cluster bid was granted £4200 to implement to online tool in all the Primaries and also develop

the tool into Secondary at S1 level in 2015 –16. The ELLI tool developments across the cluster are being led by Lilian Mitchell Stephen. She will be running twilight sessions in January for all Primary staff and the trainers, Vital Partnerships will hold full days sessions during our school inset day in February. It is hope that the clusters

will develop the language and test students during the session in order to work with them on developing the seven key learning characteristics. Work will also occur across the cluster over the next few years to build teacher skills in using the tool. Work will also take place to develop the tools use in Secondary.





Tobermory High School

Tobermory

Isle of Mull

PA75 6PB

Telephone: 01688 301 000

Fax: 01688 301 002

Email:

enquiries@tobermory.argyll-bute.sch.uk

Website:

www.tobermory.argyll-bute.sch.uk

Tobermory High school is a 3-18 learning community in Tobermory on the beautiful island of Mull. It may be a small school but it has a big heart . Students achieve at a high level academically and participate in a wide range of activities within school and the wider community. We are focused on valuing achievement and our improvement planning is informed by the latest research on best evidence practice and international ideas on assessment. If you would like to visit please contact the school office 01688 302062 during office hours.

Valuing Achievement, Valuing Community

THS Learners are:



- Successful learners
- Effective contributors
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens

We are assessment-capable learners who:

- Know the criteria for quality work
- Know how to use these criteria to compare and evaluate our own work
- Know where we are in our learning
- Know what our next steps will be
- Can work with the teacher to set success criteria
- Know what to do or change when something in our learning isn't working