

The school Improvement Plan and Standards & Quality Report

Edinburgh Steiner School is expected to compile and publish a 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.

Edinburgh Steiner School's whole school Improvement Plan has tended to include a range of priority points which represent all parts of the School. These have been considered every autumn by The College of Teachers and drawn together by a small working group.

Until 2024, the whole school Improvement Plan was reviewed, revised and republished annually. However, in autumn 2024, during an engagement visit from Education Scotland, it was suggested that we begin to reflect the practice of many other schools by moving to a longer-term plan covering 2-3 years. This approach would allow the plan to focus on broader strategic priorities (which often take several years to be fully implemented) while smaller projects and improvements could be tracked and evaluated via an internal Quality Assurance Calendar. The School has accepted this advice. The next Improvement Plan will therefore be published in spring 2025 and cover the years 2025-2027.

Irrespective of the dates printed on their header, Improvement Plans all have a similar purpose. They set out some of the School's key priorities for changes—usually no more than three or four—and explain what benefits those changes are expected to deliver to learners in particular. 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: The Student Council; Growing Spaces Project; the introduction of a Senior Management Team; Early Years expansion. It should be stressed, however, that Improvement Plans are 'working documents' and subject to updating throughout the school session and from year to year.

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 on the day of an inspection.

How Good is Our School? applies to every school in Scotland, not only 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') every 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. Sometimes projects that were expected to last a year begin to stretch out over two years, and are therefore carried over into the subsequent plan in a revised form—or not. Sometimes a priority is 'ongoing' and so the timescale may be open-ended. Just because a project appeared in the last year, but not the current plan, it doesn't mean that project has been abandoned.

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. As such, 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. This will continue to be published annually. The latest version (2024) will be published in January 2025. It opens with statements that summarise the School's philosophy and character. On later pages there are statistics on pupil attendance, and exam results (from session 2023/2024) and a longer list of points under the heading 'Progress and Achievement' which summarise what has been going on in each part of the School, from Early Years to the Upper School during 2024. The report also gives a précis of the Improvement Plan so that the two documents are linked together.

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