

Parental Responses to Learning and Teaching Questionnaire

Sharing Classroom Experience (Update)

As you will be aware, we are currently running a pilot project at Leith Academy involving teachers sharing classroom experience both within and out with subject departments. The aim within this is to develop our staff as they learn teaching methodologies and techniques from each other which in turn should impact on the quality of learning and teaching our pupils receive. (This type of professional development is very important and because it is happening in the school, should mean that the experience is specific to our needs.)

In order to involve pupils in discussions about Learning and Teaching at Leith Academy, all pupils completed a questionnaire, asking them to give their views on various aspects of the process at Leith Academy. The collated results were then discussed by staff and pupils at Tutor Groups and also by staff with other staff, in subject departments. This really opened up dialogue about roles and responsibilities within the process of learning and teaching, as well as ensuring pupils had a voice in the process.

Further to this the Sharing Classroom Experience Working Group felt it was very important to hear the views of parents of the school. Therefore, a focus group of twenty five parents were surveyed on the topic of Learning and Teaching (mainly using an electronic questionnaire) and asked to give their points of view on some general aspects of the process as well as some specific feedback about how they feel learning and teaching operates at Leith Academy. The key points are summarised below. The Sharing Classroom Experience Working Group will discuss these responses and take them forward within their faculties and in their discussions with pupils in order to further advance learning and teaching at the school.

It is interesting to note that the expectations that parents and pupils have in regard to learning and teaching are very similar and therefore highlights the need for pupils, parents and the school to work together and foster strong home and school links in order to ensure that pupils at the school attain their true potential.

Q1. What do you think the qualities of a good/effective teacher are?

- Respect
- Listening to and communicating well with learners
- A genuine love of teaching their subject
- Engaging well with pupils and having a sense of humour
- Good relationships with both pupils and their parents
- Good discipline – a firm but fair approach

Q2. In what ways do teachers help pupils learn?

- By using a variety of learning and teaching styles to ensure all pupils' needs are met
- Inspiring pupils and helping them set challenging yet achievable goals
- Listening to pupils and taking time to ensure they understand the work (this can be done through discussion and assessment)
- Regular homework
- Praise

Q3. What type of classroom makes for good learning?

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- A well-disciplined environment
- Mutual respect and good relationships
- A teacher with a sense of humour
- A variety of teaching styles or approaches
- A motivated teacher, with an interest in the pupils and their subject
- Small class sizes

Q4. What can pupils do to help improve their learning?

- Behave in class
- Listen to the teacher and their peers
- Study at home and complete homework – taking more responsibility for their own learning
- Attend supported study / extra lessons
- Come equipped

Q5. What can parents do to help encourage their child to learn?

- Offer support and encouragement – asking their child about their school work and showing an interest in this
- Offer support with homework and ensuring they complete it
- By encouraging them to work hard at school and rewarding success
- Ensure that their child attends school regularly
- Seek discussion with teachers about any concerns in their child's learning

Q6. What are your views on homework?

- It is an essential part of school life and a necessary part of the learning process
- It teaches self-discipline and encourages pupils to take responsibility for their learning
- It allows parents to see what their children are learning at school
- It should be relevant and interesting
- It should be consistent, marked quickly and returned with constructive comments
- It should not be repetitive and needlessly long

* Parents also commented/asked

- That homework at Leith was very 'feast or famine'
- Could departments coordinate better to ensure a better spread of work over the year
- That could reading be actively encouraged as part of homework

Q7. In what ways do you think supported study contributes to improved attainment for pupils?

- It is a positive and beneficial experience for pupils
- It is helpful at exam time and to support homework
- It can be a better learning environment than home
- It is an opportunity to seek specialist advice
- 1:1 support available which isn't often available in class
- It help boost a pupil's confidence

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Q8. What are your views on teachers observing each other as a method of improving their own teaching and the pupils' learning?

- It is an excellent idea and is essential for staff development
- It allows teachers to learn from each other and share ideas
- It allows teachers to observe different styles of teaching and strategies for classroom discipline
- It is a useful way of allowing teachers to explore a specific aspect of teaching
- It is a good way of learning through colleagues through constructive feedback and discussion

* Parents also commented

- It has to be carefully managed as some teachers may feel slightly intimidated by having another member of staff watching their lesson. Positive experiences would allay fears.
- Feedback has to be constructive

Q9. Do you have any ideas on how Leith Academy can involve more parents in discussions about school issues such as learning and teaching?

- Many parents felt that Leith Academy actively tries to engage parents through Parents' Evenings, Information Evening and Leith Links. Some parents who completed this survey stresses that attending parents' evenings was vital for discussions about learning and teaching to take place and that parents had to be active within the process
- Information could be sent out by email to parents
- A discussion forum on the Leith Academy website could be set up with monthly or bi-monthly opportunities given for the discussion of learning and teaching issues
- Online questionnaires

Q10. Is there anything you would like to ask the working group about learning and teaching or are there any comments you would like to make?

Questions from Parents:

Q1. Are teachers regularly assessed as to their teaching competency?

Leith Academy addresses assessment and competency of staff through:

- A 'no blame' culture
- Quality Assurance of Faculties and Departments through SMT Reviews (every 2 years)
- Cross Curricular Links
- Faculty Heads who observe their staff, giving feedback on performance
- Staff share best practice across faculties as a means of Continued Professional Development – developing Learning and Teaching.

Q2. Do schools actively seek out and listen to the real views from pupils on what their learning experience has been like?

Leith Academy listens to pupils through:

- Pupil Council

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- Learning and Teaching questionnaire. Responses by pupils discussed in Tutor Groups, Assembly and in subject departments.
- Quality Assurance in Leith Academy. Departments do listen to pupils' views but more in-depth listening is required.
- Teachers ask pupils to review them (in some departments) about their learning and teaching methods, and do change things as a result of this.
- English. S1 evaluated new course last year. Senior School was also evaluated. Pupils need to be helped to understand, know and be realistic about what they are talking about and commenting on.
- Course context. Often defines course of action by the teacher – there are exams to be passed.
- Tutor Group gives and offers options for students to make their views known. As does the Pupil Council – the school has good support in school.

Q3. Is all the assessment based on exam passes and grades, or is the wider experience considered?

Yes – wider experience is considered. Exam passes and grades are important but education is about development of the whole person well beyond attainment. Achievement is recognised in many ways at Leith Academy e.g. 100% Attendance Club, Praise Stamps, Merit Certificates, School Sports Team etc. to name but a few. Also, Leith Academy's curriculum flexibility approach allows pupils to gain wider experience through – vocational classes; extended Work Experience; college in S3/4; Transition Groups; Work Experience and Telford/Stevenson College. Also, pupils are afforded opportunities to participate in:-

- Pupil Council
- Various school groups (Sport, Music, Supported Study etc)
- S6 School Service

Q4. Does pupil peer assessment happen at Leith and if so, can you give some examples?

Pupil and Peer Assessment does happen at Leith Academy. There is Target Setting- self evaluation in all year groups.

- Peer evaluation is regularly used in classes as a method of learning and teaching
- Talks in English – peer evaluation
- Maths –marking each others' jotters
 - Formative Assessment
 - Commenting on each others marks
 - Pupils set their own targets
 - Studywiz Supported Study
- Modern Languages – Peer assessment into English only
- Science – Swapping jotters and assessing other pupils work
- PE – Happens a lot. Watching the body in action and commenting on this.
- Bus Ed – Pupils doing projects and assessing each others projects in relation to criteria
- Admin – Peer assessment is very difficult
 - Looking and assessing each others work once they have the knowledge to do so

Comments from Parents

C1. Relying on the pupil to give information to the parent is not always the best form of communication as

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not everything seems to get back

C2. As a parent it can be difficult helping your child when their knowledge is greater than yours! I'm not sure how to change this but could a little more information be sent out to parents about the content of courses and what the pupils are studying. This may allow the parents to do some research and enable the parent to open up discussion about learning.

Website – Leith Links could offer an article on 'How to help your child with their homework' - this information has been forwarded to the Working Group at the school which is focusing in , 'Working with Parents.'

C3. I would like to see more life-skills being taught e.g. letter writing, opening a bank account, working out your cash. I know we teach life skills but just feel that we need to 'hit' youngsters with basic facts on survival in the outside world.

Schools do teach a lot of life skills but it is the dual role of the parent and the school to help teach life skills.

C4. Having introduced the wearing of school uniform has raised the standards of the school considerably

C5. Many thanks for continually trying to improve Leith Academy.

C6. I feel the big challenge for schools is to try to create a culture where learning is not uncool – where it is OK to be good at something and acceptable to need extra help.

Evaluation of Sharing Classroom Experience (Staff at Leith Academy)

Initially staff from the five pilot faculties (English, Maths, Modern Languages, Science and Business Technology) were given the opportunity to share classroom experience (SCE) during a few identified weeks in May. Most staff shared classroom experience both within and out with their faculties and spent time discussing the lesson afterwards (often out with school hours). This discussion is highly important to ensure that members of staff reflect on and evaluate their practice in order to further develop their own learning and teaching skills and abilities.

100% of all staff evaluations (24 out of 29 staff made a return) reported sharing classroom experience to have been both an enjoyable and beneficial experience in terms of their development. The main benefits were deemed to be (in order):

- Sharing good practice
- Observing how pupils with behavioural issues interacted and worked with other staff and in other departments
- Reassurance

The benefits of SCE out with their own departments (cross curricular) were seen as an opportunity to:

- See new and innovative ideas and approaches in other areas of the school by other departments and staff
- Share ideas with other teachers
- See how other teachers dealt with discipline issues

All staff who returned their evaluations (88%) stated that they would like more opportunity to share classroom experience. Some comments from staff were:

- It has been hugely valuable, not just for Probationers but also more experienced staff

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- It is some of the most useful CPD I have had
- I enjoyed it very much – it is an essential part of leadership and should be seen as a supportive mechanism
- A positive experience which re-assured me
- Excellent. It contributes to positive professional relationships and reinforces professional development as well as department identity
- An excellent experience which I would like to continue
- It was done in a supportive way - It was not about criticism but support

Given the positive ethos Leith Academy staff have the SCE Working Group now hope to take this project forward as a whole school initiative, developing staff on site and impacting directly on our quality of learning and teaching at the school. The working group will raise Sharing Classroom Experience as a whole staff consultation in January 2008 and take some proposals forward at this stage. This should allow SCE to become part of our staffs' day to day experience, offering both support and development to staff as well as having a direct impact on the quality of learning and teaching at the school, benefiting pupils, staff and parents.

If you would like to comment on any of the responses from our parents, the responses of the Sharing Classroom Experience Working Group or the results of the staff survey on SCE, please contact me directly either by phone or email at susan.cook@leith.edin.sch.uk