

# HOW GOOD IS OUR SCHOOL LIBRARY?

A companion guide to *How good is our school?* (4th edition)  
Endorsed by Education Scotland





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# Introduction

## A vision for school libraries

*How good is our school library?* is a companion guide to the main *How good is our school?* framework which aims to support library staff and senior school leaders to evaluate the specific contributions the library makes to school improvement.

It aims to support school libraries in realising their full potential as key resources in the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence.

A great school library plays a central role in helping children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for learning, life and work. It offers a flexible learning environment where library staff support and enthuse young people on reading journeys. The skills honed in the library will stay with pupils throughout life – equipping them with the skills needed to translate information into knowledge.

The library supports all curriculum areas and subjects, and underpins interdisciplinary learning. It provides young people with the transferable skills which create opportunities for personal achievement through life. An inspiring and nurturing space, the library fosters wellbeing and creativity across the school community. It has the capacity to make a positive contribution to both the educational ethos and life of a school.

School libraries offer access to a range of high quality information resources which are tailored to meet the specific learning and teaching needs of the school. As information professionals, library staff play a crucial role in supporting learners. They not only curate collections of both print and digital resources, but lead learning programmes which support information and digital literacy.



***There is a considerable body of international evidence showing that school libraries impact on: higher test or exam scores equating to academic attainment; successful curriculum or learning outcomes, including digital and information literacy; and positive attitudes towards learning.***



Impact of School Libraries on Learning, Robert Gordon University (2013)

The principle of equality of opportunity is fundamental to libraries of all types and is essential to closing the attainment gap in Scotland's schools. School libraries have an inclusive ethos and contribute to wellbeing on all levels. They provide supported access to information – assisting pupils in making informed choices about health, employment and life more generally.

Well-supported libraries are at the forefront of digital innovation and provide spaces within schools where pupils can access the internet and technology. Students can then take advantage of the benefits these bring in education, creativity and employability. Learning programmes which are led by libraries focus on embedding digital and information literacy across the school, with library staff providing guidance on navigating digital sources effectively and safely.

*How good is our school library?* aims to support every school to embark on a journey of improvement in order to deliver this vision for their school library.

## Acknowledgements

*How good is our school library?* has been developed by the Scottish Library and Information Council with the support of a working group bringing expertise from the school library sector. The working group members were:

- Anne Noble (Chair), Greenwood Centre Librarian, North Ayrshire Council
- Yvonne Barclay, Young People's Librarian, Aberdeen City Council
- Gillian Daly, Head of Policy and Projects, Scottish Library and Information Council
- Cleo Jones, Manager: Information and Learning Resources, The City of Edinburgh Council
- Yvonne Manning, Principal Librarian, Falkirk Council





## Education Scotland

I am very pleased to endorse *How good is our school library?* as a companion guide to *How good is our school?* (4th edition) (HGIOS4), Education Scotland's quality improvement framework for schools.

Education Scotland has worked with the Scottish Library and Information Council to ensure that *How good is our school library?* links clearly and effectively with HGIOS4.

*How good is our school library?* encourages its users to refer back to HGIOS4 for general guidance on self-evaluation and the gathering of evidence.

*How good is our school library?* then selects six of the 15 HGIOS4 quality indicators, those agreed to be of most relevance to school libraries, and customises them to support library staff and senior managers in evaluating the contribution of the school library to the work of the school, and in planning for improvement. Each of the customised quality indicators includes: a vision statement for excellent practice, provision or performance in the context of the school library; features of highly-effective practice; and a series of challenge questions to support professional dialogue and reflection.

I am confident that, used well, *How good is our school library?* will help ensure that the school library is included in whole-school self-evaluation and improvement activities. I would encourage headteachers, senior school managers and school librarians to work together to consider this important guidance in the context of their own school. We want school libraries to make the strongest possible contribution to developing learners' literacy skills, to help to foster a love of reading that will last a lifetime and to support excellence and equity for all children and young people.



Graeme Logan  
Interim HM Chief Inspector, Education Scotland



## Engaging with the self-evaluation process

The introduction to *How good is our school?* provides a detailed overview of the role of self-evaluation in schools. It also presents clear guidance on effective approaches to self-evaluation which can be applied to the school library. Library staff should refer to this content in order to inform their practice.

### Triangulation of evidence

Self-evaluation should be embedded in the work of the library and supported by a strong evidence base. The ongoing collection of evidence helps to establish an accurate view of existing performance, and will also support the identification of meaningful improvements that are responsive to the school's needs.

The type of evidence collected in the library may differ somewhat to sources used across other departments, however, the basic principles are the same. *How good is our school?* recommends the triangulation of evidence to include quantitative data sources, the collection of people's views and direct observation.

This approach can also be applied within the context of the library to create a rounded perspective of how the service is performing, and to identify opportunities for development. This is demonstrated in the diagram below, which has been adapted from *How good is our school?*

#### Quantitative Data

School libraries collect a range of quantitative data via the Library Management System and by recording attendance at library events/activities or the completion of library led learning programmes. These data sets should be interrogated alongside relevant local or national data sources to identify emerging issues and determine when specific interventions are necessary.

#### People's Views

Staff, pupils, parents/carers, partners and other stakeholders should all have regular opportunities to share their views about the school library. Examples of how people's views can be gathered include through surveys, focus groups, ongoing professional dialogue, learning visits and minutes of relevant meetings.



#### Direct Observation

Direct observations of practice can take place within the school in collaboration with teaching staff or externally as part of a learning visit to another library. Observations should be linked to agreed criteria and a shared understanding of their purpose. Library staff should engage in these structured observations and use feedback to support self-evaluation.

### Engaging with specific self-evaluation questions

*How good is our school library?* can also be used to answer specific questions that may emerge over the course of the self-evaluation process. An example of how this might be approached within a library context is shown below.

What is the question we want to explore?	Which quality indicators will support our work?	Who can provide evidence for this self-evaluation?
How well does the library collection support the curriculum?	1.5 Management of resources to promote equity 2.2 Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners</li> <li>• Teaching staff</li> <li>• Library Management System usage data analysis</li> <li>• Peer observers</li> </ul>



## The *How good is our school library?* framework

The *How good is our school library?* framework is an adapted version of the wider *How good is our school?* framework which has been tailored for application in the school library. This will enable libraries to participate in collaborative self-evaluation within the school.

*How good is our school?* consists of a set of 15 quality indicators (QIs) linked to important aspects of the work and life of your school. *How good is our school library?* focuses on six key indicators where the library is likely to have a strong role in supporting improvement. The quality indicators are divided into three categories:

- **Leadership and management:** How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?
- **Learning provision:** How good is the quality of care and education we offer?
- **Successes and achievements:** How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?

In some cases school libraries will make significant contributions to indicators other than the six set out within this guide. In such cases, libraries may choose to follow the general principles of self-evaluation and include additional QIs from the main *How good is our school?* framework as part of the self-evaluation process. It is recommended that this is discussed and agreed locally in order to fit in with the whole school approach.

### The school library quality indicators

There are school library specific QIs within each of the three categories. These can support you to take a closer look at specific aspects of your work within the library.

#### What is our capacity for improvement?

Leadership & management	Learning provision	Successes and achievements
How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?	How good is the quality of the care and education we offer?	How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?
1.5 Management of resources to promote equity	2.2 Curriculum  2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment  2.5 Partnerships	3.1 Improving wellbeing, equality and inclusion  3.3 Increasing creativity and employability

## Vision statements

The vision statements are included to offer a broad overview of what very good practice, provision or performance relevant to the quality indicator would look like.

The vision statements in this document are equivalent to the illustrations which feature in the wider *How good is our school?* framework. These broad generic illustrations are intended to support professional dialogue and critical reflection during ongoing self-evaluation. You may find it useful to refer to the whole school illustrations featured within *How good is our school?* alongside the vision statements in order to support your self-evaluation process.

A range of school library specific case studies have also been compiled for illustrative purposes and these are available on the Scottish Library and Information Council website.

## Exemplar features of highly-effective practice

The features of highly-effective practice included alongside each quality indicator are there to help you identify the sorts of evidence which support self-evaluation. They are specific examples of practice that have been found to be successful in some schools, but they are not a definitive list of the sorts of practice which might evidence each particular quality indicator.

They might not apply to your context. As part of your ongoing self-evaluation, rather than try to replicate these features of highly-effective practice, you should gather similar examples from your own setting to indicate the strengths of your work which has been adapted from *How good is our school?*

## Challenge questions

Alongside each indicator there is also a starter set of “challenge questions” to support professional reflection and point to aspects of practice which might require further improvement. Again, they should not be regarded as the only questions that can be asked.



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## Section 1 Leadership and Management

How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?

### 1.5 MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES TO PROMOTE EQUITY

#### Vision statement:

The library is a central learning environment which promotes equity of experience for all learners and removes barriers to learning. The management of school library resources is underpinned by a clear and inclusive collection development policy which reflects professional standards. The library learning space is reviewed and refreshed on a regular basis to ensure that it offers a flexible environment for learning which is inclusive and stimulating. The needs of learners are central to decision making and to resource allocation, supported by sound risk assessment.



### Features of highly-effective practice:

- Expenditure is in line with the library's aims and vision to achieve planned priorities, as set out in the library improvement plan.
- There is a clear and consistent approach to measuring the impact of library expenditure on improving outcomes for learners. Evidence is used to support future resourcing.
- Resource acquisition is informed by professional standards and a clear collection development policy, with a focus on obtaining best value and ensuring sustainability of outcomes.
- Proactive approaches to financial management ensure finances are available, and are used most effectively, for library service development.
- The library provides access to a range of resources – both digital and print – in order to provide appropriate support and challenge for learners.
- Library resources are organised in line with professional standards and are well maintained.
- The library space is an inclusive and stimulating learning environment which offers flexibility.
- Library led learning programmes enable learners to identify, evaluate and make effective use of print and digital resources.
- The library is safe and welcoming for all.

### Challenge questions:

- How effective are mechanisms for ensuring that library expenditure is aligned to the stated priorities for the library and to the library service improvement plan?
- What procedures are in place to measure the impact of library expenditure on outcomes for learners?
- How effectively is evidence from previous activities used to inform service development?
- To what extent does collection development follow professional standards and practice?
- How effectively are digital resources assimilated into the library collection development policy?
- How effectively do library staff use professional networks and partnerships to support service developments?
- What measures are in place to ensure that the library learning environment is inclusive and stimulating (in line with whole school policy on health and safety)?
- To what extent does library led learning adhere to professional standards in supporting digital and information literacy?
- How well do we work collegiately with pupils, teaching staff and partners to inform appropriate resourcing decisions?

## Section 2 Learning Provision

How good is the quality of the care and education we offer?

### 2.2 CURRICULUM

**Vision statement:**

The library supports the successful delivery of the curriculum and facilitates the flexible approach to learning that is central to Curriculum for Excellence. The services and resources provided by the school library are directly linked to the curriculum, and library staff participate in curriculum development activities at whole school and departmental level in order to ensure effective alignment. Library led learning programmes in digital and information literacy provide learners with the critical thinking and evaluation skills that are necessary for success in learning, life and work.



### Features of highly-effective practice:

- Library staff take part in staff development meetings, and work closely with teaching staff, in order to align library services and resources with the curriculum.
- Library staff are able to talk about how the unique features of the school community inform the support for the curriculum delivered through the library.
- Library staff are ambitious and expect high levels of attainment and achievement for all learners.
- Library staff use information retrieval approaches, in line with professional standards, to identify resources to support staff and partners in curriculum development.
- The library provides access to pedagogical information and support materials drawn from a range of local, national and international resources to support practitioner enquiry and informed debate on curriculum development.
- There is a clear focus on developing literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, creativity, digital and employability skills in library led learning activities.
- The library has a strong focus on developing the skills our young people need in the world of work.
- The library provides access to a diverse range of careers resources.

### Challenge questions:

- To what extent do library staff make effective use of support material and information, and share this with colleagues to work together on curriculum development?
- To what extent do library staff ensure that all library led learning promotes equity and raises attainment? What examples can they provide?
- To what extent do library staff ensure that there are opportunities for pupil personalisation and choice? For example, through user driven acquisition approaches, or library focus groups.
- To what extent do library staff contribute to interdisciplinary learning approaches within their school?
- To what extent do library staff make the best use of partners to be able to provide rich learning opportunities? What examples can be provided?
- How knowledgeable and up-to-date are library staff about career and employability pathways?

## Section 2 Learning Provision

How good is the quality of the care and education we offer?

### 2.3 LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

**Vision statement:**

The school library is a highly effective whole-school resource that provides a stimulating learning space with access to a wide range of resources to support learning and teaching. The library environment is engaging and library programmes enthuse children and young people about learning. The library provides instruction in digital and information literacy skills enabling all learners to develop critical thinking skills and to use digital technology ethically. The library promotes reading for pleasure and supports the development of enthusiastic readers.





### Features of highly-effective practice:

- The library environment is built on positive, nurturing and appropriately challenging relationships which lead to high-quality learning outcomes.
- Learners' achievements in the library are recorded and recognised. They understand how these achievements help them develop knowledge and skills for life, learning and work.
- Learners play an active role in the school library and regularly take on leadership roles, including leading learning.
- Learners receive high-quality feedback on library led learning activities and have an accurate understanding of their progress in learning and what they need to do to improve.
- Learners are able to give effective feedback to peers on their library led learning and suggest ways in which they can improve.
- Professional literature informs the work of the library.
- The library works collaboratively with teaching staff to plan appropriate access to support materials to meet pupils' learning needs.
- The library produces robust data gathered from the library management system and relevant assessment systems, together with national data, including the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and Pupil Enquiry Funding statistics to inform improvements.
- Library staff have well-developed skills of data analysis which are focused on improvement.

### Challenge questions:

- How well do we support learners to gain digital and information literacy skills, enabling them to select and make use of high-quality resources and equipment, including digital technologies?
- How well do we motivate and engage all learners in wider school life, for example through offering voluntary roles in the library or by providing facilities and activities outwith class time?
- How well are we enabling learners to become independent learners and develop the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence?
- How confident are we that all learners experience library led learning activities which are varied, differentiated, active, and provide effective support and challenge?
- How well do we communicate the purpose of library led learning activities, such as digital and information literacy programmes, and give effective explanations on information processing skills for all learners?
- How well do our questioning strategies enhance the learners' experience and enable higher-order thinking skills, including how to research, evaluate and compare information?
- How do we deploy a wide variety of innovative and creative resources and approaches in the library to enable learning, including provision and support for digital technologies?
- How well do we apply the principles of planning, observation, assessment, recording and reporting as an integral feature of learning within the library?
- How effectively do we involve learners and parents in planning digital and information literacy and other library led learning experiences?

## Section 2 Learning Provision

How good is the quality of the care and education we offer?

### 2.7 PARTNERSHIPS

**Vision statement:**

Strong partnerships across the school enable the library to fulfill its role as an interdisciplinary resource and space for collaborative learning. The library's position at the centre of the school also supports the development and promotion of partnerships. Externally, the library engages across professional and community networks to establish and maintain partnerships which enhance the library service and improve outcomes for learners.



### Features of highly-effective practice:

- The library works in partnership with teachers and other staff, and with stakeholders, including parents and carers, the local community, third sector, public sector and other organisations. Library partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect.
- The library supports parents and carers to actively engage in their children's library led learning and achievement.
- The library and its partnerships have clear agreements where the purpose, aims, roles and responsibilities are clear and understood by all involved, and can demonstrate the impact that the partnership working has on learners.
- The library and partners share skills, knowledge and experience and take part in joint professional learning opportunities.

### Challenge questions:

- How do we ensure that relationships with parents, carers and families, the local community and partners are characterised by trust and respect, and contribute to library improvement?
- How effectively do we support parents and carers to participate in, contribute to and understand their child's library led learning and achievement?
- How well do we understand our local community? Does the library provide signposting to appropriate community activities and resources to highlight out of school opportunities?
- How well do we seek out and respond positively to potential partnerships which will lead to better outcomes for the children and young people we work with?
- How clear are the partnership agreements we enter into? Do we involve partners at the earliest stages of planning and meet with stakeholders as part of wider partnership planning?
- How well do we identify priorities, communicate, plan, monitor and evaluate our work with partners? Do we reflect on our partnerships and evaluate impact?
- How well do we share skills, information, knowledge and experience across partners and partnerships? How well do we learn from successful partnerships? Do we engage in shared professional learning opportunities with partners?
- What opportunities do we provide our learners to work with others, within the library or elsewhere, to contribute effectively as active citizens?

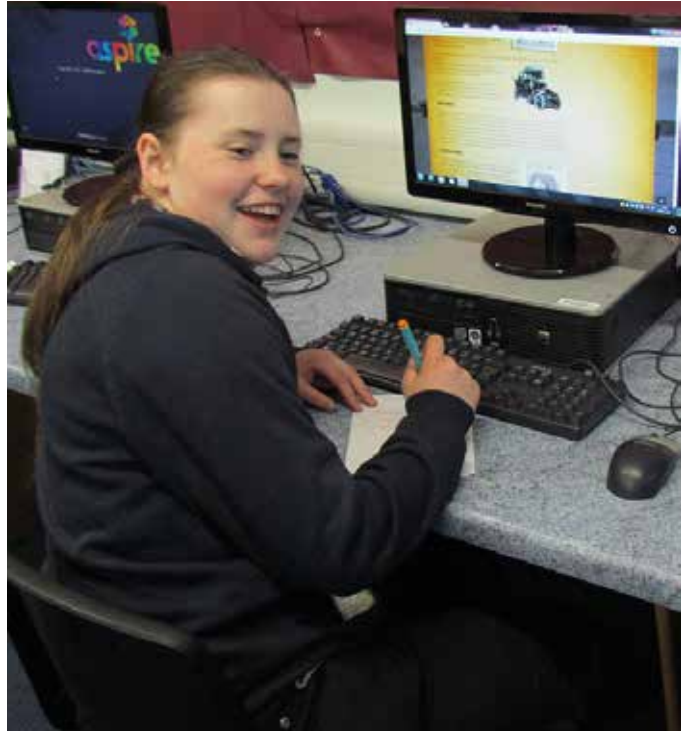
## Section 3 Successes and Achievements

How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?

### 3.1 ENSURING WELLBEING, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

**Vision statement:**

The school library is an enriching and nurturing space which offers equality of opportunity to all learners. The library is available outwith class time to provide a supported space for study and collaborative learning activities. The library provides access to resources which offer guidance on a range of health and wellbeing topics. The library offers a programme of events and activities to support general wellbeing and increase opportunities for cultural participation. Library staff are sensitive to the individual needs of children and young people and are supported to apply wider school policies within a library context.



### Features of highly-effective practice:

- The library has an understanding of wellbeing and the children's rights, taking due account of the legislative framework related to wellbeing, equality and inclusion.
- The library promotes a climate where children and young people feel safe and secure.
- Library staff are sensitive and responsive to the wellbeing of each individual child and colleague.
- The library is an environment where children and young people feel listened to and are secure in their ability to discuss personal and sensitive aspects of their lives because they feel cared about.
- The library provides children and young people with the opportunity to access resources which explore diversity and multi-faith issues, and to challenge racism and religious intolerance.
- Library staff embrace opportunities for professional learning to ensure they are fully up-to-date with local, national and, where appropriate, international legislation affecting the rights, wellbeing and inclusion of all children and young people.

### Challenge questions:

- How well do staff know and understand Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), the wellbeing indicators, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?
- To what extent does the library provide the environment and resources to support learners' health and wellbeing?
- How effectively is evidence collected and used to demonstrate that the steps taken have improved outcomes for children?
- What procedures are in place to ensure that the library has established and maintains an inclusive learning environment?
- How effectively do the library's environment and resources celebrate diversity?
- How well can the library demonstrate targeted support for groups and individuals facing barriers to learning, including poverty?

## Section 3 Successes and Achievements

How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?

### 3.3 INCREASING CREATIVITY AND EMPLOYABILITY

**Vision statement:**

The library offers children and young people the opportunity to acquire a range of skills for learning, life and work. Creativity is embedded in the services the library offers, and encouraged by the resources the library provides. The library is supported to serve as a digital technology hub, providing whole school access to a range of digital technology. Digital literacy is a core feature of library led learning programmes and learners are confident in navigating the digital information landscape safely, effectively and ethically. Learners understand the importance of digital literacy for future life opportunities. The library provides access to careers information and offers work experience opportunities to support the development of employability skills.



### Features of highly-effective practice:

- Creativity skills are recognised, articulated and valued by practitioners and learners.
- Partnerships are used effectively to deliver highly-engaging creative learning.
- Library led learning programmes in digital and information literacy enable young people to make informed choices about the way digital technology can and should be used.
- The library supports a proactive approach to addressing gender imbalances across the curriculum and challenging any prejudice-based choices about future careers and learning pathways.
- The development of digital skills enables children and young people to be creative and use digital technologies for learning, life and work.
- Library policies and practice prioritise the raising of attainment in order to offer children and young people the best possible choices for their future options.
- The library offers a range of careers resources, and supports the development of skills to access these, so that children and young people can be involved in decision making about their future careers

### Challenge questions:

- In what ways are library staff involved in the development of creativity skills?
- How well are learners supported to demonstrate and apply their creativity in the library and in wider contexts, such as participating in national initiatives?
- To what extent does the library support young people to develop an understanding of digital and information literacy in order to make the most efficient use of digital resources while ensuring personal safety?
- Does the library make the best use of digital technologies to support and improve communication and collaboration with others to achieve a common goal?
- How well does the library work with all learners, parents and carers, employers, colleges and other partners to develop an effective approach to careers education which supports learners into sustained positive destinations?
- Does the use of digital technologies enhance learning and give young people the skills to understand, apply and create new digital solutions of their own?
- Is the development of digital skills underpinned by computing science, enabling children to be skilled users and creators?
- Do young people develop an understanding of the general principles of digital and information literacy that underpin the use of digital technology?
- To what extent does the library assist young people to make effective use of relevant digital and online resources to help them make informed decisions about future pathways?



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