

Howick Central Public School

Avon Maitland District School Board Gorrie, Ontario

CONTACT INFORMATION

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About the school ...

Howick Central Public School is located in Gorrie, a small town nestled in the farmlands of Howick Township in southwestern Ontario. The school serves approximately 300 students, Kindergarten to Grade 8, all bused in from the villages and hamlets of Huron County. With the recent downsizing and closures of local industries, many families are experiencing job losses and economic challenges. They appreciate Howick's efforts, in the words of a parent, "to partner with us to bring out the best in our kids." Not just parents and guardians, but students, too, recognize the school's open door policy, know they will be listened to and are comfortable bringing forward concerns or issues.

The core of Howick's philosophy is that it is the job of the school to make a difference for students, "to hone skills where the child is strong and support them where they need it." This philosophy, says the principal, makes us ask "How can we do this? How can we make

Some Snapshots

Students ...

- write (and draw) for the school's online newsletter, compete in an annual public speaking contest, bring home medals as "mathletes"
- support fundraisers not only for their school but for the broader community as well (e.g., took part in a "30 hour famine" for WorldVision, Terry Fox Run)
- enjoy a full range of athletic activities from skating, skiing and hockey to basketball, volleyball and cross-country running

Parents ...

- are involved in their school council
- raise funds for the school (e.g., Snack Program, new playground)
- volunteer for family days
- maintain school gardens

a difference?" – and then come back to a challenge "until we make it work for kids." Staff members engage in "productive conflict" as they keep moving student learning and the improvement agenda forward, earning a reputation in the board as they do as leaders in using innovative technology to connect with other schools across the board. Teachers not only "stretch each child to get them to the next level" but stretch their own learning as well.

Ongoing improvement ...

The most recent EQAO results reflect significant improvement in all six EQAO assessments over the last three years. In all Grade 3 assessments, at least 75 per cent of the students are achieving at or above the provincial standard. Increases between 10 and 35 percentage points have been achieved in the Grade 6 assessments, reflecting a focus on improving student learning and achievement.

Success after struggle ...

Howick staff used data from both formative and summative assessments to zero-in on student strengths and areas of continuing need. One area of concern was the lack of progress boys seemed to be making in the literacy program. Staff began to focus on improving instruction in writing, introducing anchor charts, performance walls, graphic organizers and peer discussions as key strategies to help close the gaps in achievement. They also engaged in moderated marking to create more consistency, school-wide, in assessment criteria and standards. "We find moderating student work exciting," says a teacher, "because we got our ideas of next steps out on the table and the results were good for the kids." Over several years, Howick began to observe higher levels of achievement in student work samples and more spontaneous writing on the part of all students, including boys.

Learning for teachers at the school has been fostered by the opportunities funded by the district school board to meet in professional learning communities. Teachers express appreciation for this formalized embedded learning time and feel that PLCs are what has really made the difference in moving student achievement forward. Additionally, the principal is part of a "principal squadron" – three principals visit one another's schools on a regular basis, do walk-throughs, discuss evidence-based strategies and bring back their learning to their PLCs.

Teaching, learning and leading ...

Comprehensive literacy. The entire staff has focused on implementing a comprehensive literacy program in every classroom. Their professional learning communities, which meet across grades and divisions, provide a learning environment that has resulted in a richer classroom learning environment throughout the school. Literacy has been the focus of the entire school and the components of a comprehensive literacy program are visible in every classroom. Performance walls in every classroom show students what good work looks like. Non-fiction writing has been a school focus and staff members have noticed that particularly the Grade 6 boys are both more engaged and achieving better results.



"The teachers here are open to discussing options – they think outside the box to try various strategies." *Parent*

"The PLCs this year have been the most valuable experience in my whole career." *Teacher*

"We adapt so that kids can learn." *Teacher*

"People used to feel like they were stepping on each other's toes when they went into each other's classrooms – now they are comfortable." *Principal*

"When you talk to kids in the classrooms they can articulate how to use anchor charts and other aids to learning in the classroom." *Supervisory Officer*

Moving into the future

- ◆ learn more about how to support the learning of boys
- ◆ explore additional strategies for differentiating instruction
- ◆ do more networking for learning, particularly networking strategies for rural schools