



Ghuch Tla Community School Review Report

Ghuch Tla Community School

School Principal: Larry Keisling

Date of Review: May 15 and 16, 2012

School Review Team:

Carol Coote Executive Director AYSCBC

Lizzie Hall – Elder Selkirk First Nation and First Nations Education Advisory Committee

Shereen Hill- First Nations Programs and Partnerships DOE

Ashraf Mahmoud- Data Coordinator, DOE

Lina Radziunas – Vice-principal, Vanier Secondary School

Susan Woolridge- Teacher Christ the King Elementary School

Judy Arnold- Director, DOE

Meetings with the School included:

- Staff
- Students
- Carcross Tagish First Nation Executive Council
- School Council representatives and community
- Classroom visits

School Context

Ghuch Tla Community School is nestled in the southern lakes region of the Yukon. The school serves approximately 52 students from the Carcross Tagish area most of whom are from the Carcross Tagish First Nation. The primary aim at Ghuch Tla Community School is to provide a positive learning environment that encourages each child to grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically to the best of his or her ability.

The school recognizes the importance of the collective role of parents, school and community in developing within students the foundations for later learning. The school has high expectations for each student and respects the various needs and different learning styles of students.

Norms and Culture:

Characteristics:

Continuously improving schools are socially and culturally inclusive with high expectations for each learner. A focus on continuous improvement is evident.

Observations of the Team:

- The atmosphere at the school is relaxed, positive and welcoming and the Team noted the many ways that the staff demonstrated that they care deeply about the students. The school is clean and organized with art and student work on the walls. First Nations culture was evident throughout the school,
 - Staff commented that they were working toward cultural inclusion across the curricula,
 - There are Elders in the school who interact well with the students and are much appreciated;
- Students appeared comfortable at the school and attendance has significantly improved recently;
- Students suggested that there was bullying at the school but it was “better than before”,
 - However, the Team was unclear as to what the definition of bullying was for the students and staff,
 - Staff commented that suspensions had decreased but behavioural expectations were not as clear or consistent as they might be and dealing with behaviours in a restorative approach and using the Social Responsibility performance standards was also inconsistent,
 - Staff also commented on the need to support the social emotional development of students;
- From discussions with School Council, community, Carcross Tagish First Nation (CTFN) Executive, the Team noted that the community was not clear about the vision for and values of the school,
 - CTFN Executive expressed a desire to work with the school to set high standards for all students, support social emotional development and address issues of bullying and racism.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Engage in ongoing conversations about philosophy, goals directions and strategies so that parents, CTFN as well as home schoolers understand that the school has high expectations for each learner in a socially and culturally inclusive environment;
- Establish clear and consistent expectations for behaviour and social responsibility which includes a restorative approach and the use of performance standards. This include but is not limited to:
 - Developing consistent classroom and school wide student friendly rubrics so students can self-evaluate,
 - Exploring connections between the rubrics and the CTFN values,
 - Talking to student leaders about bullying, cultural sensitivity and ways to address issues,
 - CTFN stories about values and virtues may be helpful,
 - Engaging CTFN and the community so they can understand the processes and procedures and assist in supporting students;
- Work with the Department and CTFN to explore access to counselling to support the social emotional development of the students.

Community

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools build a shared commitment to success for each learner. The school collaborates with parents, students, school council, First nations and community to support student learning. Ongoing parent/community involvement is embedded in school culture and the school communicates about progress and challenges in multiple ways.

Observations of the Team:

- Staff works as a team and seem very willing to collaborate to support student learning.
 - They would appreciate more time to work together to address issues and build consistency;
- It was clear to the Team that the staff welcomes parent and community involvement,
 - The staff appreciates the parents that volunteer but would like to see more involvement and understanding of the work of the school;
- CTFN Executive and community expressed a desire to further enhance the partnership with the school and other agencies to support the students;
- Although there are classroom newsletters sent home there does not appear to be consistent school level newsletters which could be posted at CTFN office or on the school website,
 - The website needs to be updated on a regular basis;
- The CTFN Executive would like to be confident that:
 - The school has high standards for all students,
 - There is support for students to be successful in their transitions to Whitehorse,
 - Some students who go into Whitehorse struggle and return to the community and there needs to educational support in place when they return to the community,
 - Parents and community understand the strategies in place at the school to support vulnerable learners and challenge those capable of fully meeting and exceeding expectations,
- The school has an outstanding breakfast program with members of the community, school council, RCMP, nurses, and staff preparing the food each day. Some community members commented that students might be getting two breakfasts one at home and one at school. However, staff suggested that breakfast was a good time to connect with students build relationships and address issues before the day begins;
- The School Council would like to receive ongoing information about the work of the school as well as data on attendance, behavioural issues, and student performance.
- Staff and community commented that the liaison work done by the CELCs had not been in place in the 2011-2012 school year and it was greatly missed and much needed.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Find ways to further connect with the community and enhance relationships. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Newsletters shared with the community and posted at the First Nations office and on the school website,
 - Holding school events or student led conferences in the community;
- Schedule collaboration time for staff to develop consistent approaches to academic and social directions;

- Provide ongoing information sessions so that parents, School Council and CTFN Executive understand the work of the school and what is being done to support the development of literacy and numeracy skills for all students including those not meeting grade level expectations and those needing to be challenged to fully meet or exceed grade level expectations;
- Support the role of the CELC in building relationships with staff, parents and community;
- Work with the Department, School Council and CTFN to:
 - Enhance the transition to secondary school,
 - Begin planning student transitions at grade 7 so that students are prepared to go to secondary school. This could include annual visits, collaboration with students in grade 8 and 9 as well as online or virtual connections to secondary classrooms learning,
 - Explore interagency support for students i.e. counselling.

School Organization

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools organize structures, actions, and interventions to ensure success for each learner. Work in the school is coherent and aligned to focus on improvement. Actions and interventions include effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The Department supports the school and makes connections across the Territory to build capacity.

Observations of the Team:

- The school provides many opportunities for students to engage in sports and extra-curricular activities including First Aid courses,
 - Parents suggested that sometime Tagish students miss out on after school activities because of busing;
- Staff members appear to be very open to trying new approaches to support students and there is flexible grouping of students for math,
 - A promethean board and Ipads are in use at the school to support engagement and learning;
- The school works hard to use space effectively to support learning and educational assistants provide significant instructional support to students;
- Staff is beginning to use assessment for and as learning. Some are using classroom goals, co-constructed rubrics in literacy and the BC performance standards,
 - There is some use of the Reading Power strategies but staff are interested in more consistency across the grades;
- CTFN Executive commented that they were unsure of whether the resources/curricula developed to support understanding of Carcross Tagish culture was being used in the classrooms,
 - Staff and CTFN also suggested that the Department explore Tlingit in secondary for students that go into Whitehorse in 2013,
- Staff, School Council, and CTFN Executive are interested in experiential and on the land approaches to meeting prescribed learning outcomes,
 - A fall moose hunt is being considered and using it to address prescribed learning outcomes across the grade would be very positive.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Work with the Department and CTFN to review the First Nations local curricular resources to clarify connections to prescribed learning outcomes;
- Work with the Department, CTFN and potentially the college to explore an Individual Learning Centre or alternate approach so that students have options to continue secondary education if they are unsuccessful in Whitehorse;
- Continue to build staff capacity in the use of formative assessment, criteria referencing or rubrics, and student self-assessment;
- Consider how the transportation of Tagish students could be modified to allow for fuller participation in after school activities;
- Explore:
 - An individualized approach to learning across the grades in order to better meet the needs of all students both vulnerable and capable,
 - Further online or virtual courses for grades 8 and 9 to connect with students from other schools,
- Work with the Department to:

- Embed professional development at the school which includes an outreach component to the community,
- Explore a variety of sites for land-based learning
- Monitor the use of space at the school to maximize learning,
- Explore sharing specialist teachers in rural communities particularly for science.

School Processes and Progress

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools take responsibility for improving outcomes for students. They use evidence to guide decisions and actions and have processes in place to collectively monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work. They demonstrate improvement over time – for individual students, groups of students, and the school.

Observations of the Team:

- The Team noted that some students at the school have very strong academic skills while others struggle;
- School Council and CTFN Executive suggested that there is a need to strengthen the literacy and numeracy skills of students;
- It was unclear to the Team how evidence of student performance is used to make decisions about the work of the school and areas requiring growth;
- The 2011-2012 school growth plan did not appear to function as a road map to improve student outcomes.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Ensure that reporting to parents is accurate in relation to the outcomes for each grade and that parents of students on IEPs understand the implications in relation to meeting grade level expectations;
- Work with the staff to consistently use evidence for academics as well as attendance, social responsibility guide decisions and actions,
 - Evidence is essential in monitoring the effectiveness of actions;
- Work with the Department to develop individual student profiles to address the needs of those who need ongoing support to meet expectations and those who need to be challenged to excel;
- Use the school growth process as a road map to improvement and set realistic, student performance-based targets.

Conclusions:

Ghuch Tla is a warm and welcoming school with a caring staff that works hard to focus on the success of each learner. School Council is supportive of the school and members of CTFN Executive are eager to engage with the school and other agencies to support all learners, especially those that struggle with the transition to secondary school in Whitehorse. With a focus on open and ongoing collaboration, the use of evidence to guide decisions and actions and the use of creative approaches to learning that include First Nations perspectives, the Team is confident that the school will enhance the success of all learners.

Practices to share:

- Welcoming atmosphere
- Community involvement in the breakfast program