



“Leadership for Learning” focus day

Vale of Leven Academy – 19<sup>th</sup> November

## Validation points

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Note: The points in this validation summary are intended to provide a helpful response to the reflections and activities arranged on the “leadership for learning” day. This is not an attempt to re-report what was shared on the day, but instead to highlight areas that resonated with the visiting team and to provide useful challenges to your school’s thinking to help with effective school improvement planning.

It is expected that the school will respond to this document with what action it intends to take resulting from these points for consideration.

Results:

- The key messages identified by the school from its own detailed STACS analysis are accurate and show a detailed understanding of the key performance indicators.
- The key positive trends in overall attainment levels were pleasing and where there were continuing negative performances, these were identified.
- Evidence of a solid performance against SIMD background was accurate and rightly celebrated. (Overall performance relative to Scottish average must still be the driver as that is the world that learners will emerge into).
- Noted that Vocational Education has had a positive impact on pupils within the subjects offered and in other areas of the curriculum too. Pupils are more engaged, attendance and behaviour is also better.

Department focus:

- Choice of department seemed an appropriate improvement focus
- Attainment of boys seemed accurately identified as a key weakness in the department. Uptake clearly stronger for boys, which is unusual in Business and Administration. Performance of boys although identified as a key challenge was not yet being clearly explained. Focus groups or other learner surveying had not been undertaken to gain more insight into the experiences of learners.
- Noted the focus on better tracking going forward. Homework was also identified as a priority going forward, however, it may be good to tie this to a learner survey of what was effective for home learning in their experience as well as their class experiences.
- Options choice information was an interesting plan to attract more girls to the subject. Given that boys predominate at present, the focus should be strongly on how to build

effective learner-experiences for all. Moving more girls into the subject may only improve faculty attainment at the expense of other departments.

- Other strategies such as visits to other schools, staff rotation, prelim writing, targeting paper skills etc all reasonable, however, they might be better targeted after some honest learner focus group evaluation. It could result in a more manageable plan.

## Raising attainment

- Your focus on the sharing of exciting and strong practice between Principal Teachers was very promising as an approach. Celebrating success while building shared-commitment to improvement was impressive to observe. It may be useful to generalise and formalise some approaches as successful techniques emerge. E.g. The shared criteria with learners as “rubrics” shared by some of the PT’s; if they are effective in two departments, could they become a common approach?
- The revised management team structure seems to be effective at ensuring a more strategic approach to overall planning for improvement. There is less narrow focus on “silo” areas of responsibility with more strategic overview.
- Boys under-attainment is a critical challenge for the school, and it doesn’t seem to be fully understood. Some “action research” around this would seem to be urgent.
- Use of data, and in particular the Raising Attainment teacher’s skills in this area really helps the school to deeply understand where it is. It is interesting to note the huge variance in the performance of some departments as a challenge to those staff who may still believe that their own teaching may not make much of a difference compared to SIMD predictions; outcomes are clearly strongly influenced by departmental performance.
- Could there be a clearer strategic focus on 2 or 3 core Raising Attainment strategies e.g. improving supported study provision, evaluating and improving the mentoring programme, developing pupil voice?
- Good connections with CLD but early stages of partnership working with positive outcomes for young people. Perhaps a mismatch at this stage between school desired outcomes and CLD input models?

## View from students:

- Continuing focus on “growth mindsets” and on “limiting beliefs” is important and real improvement can’t happen without staff and learners continuously challenging their own perceptions. There is a question for the school around “how to avoid the message getting stale”. One learner focus group mentioned that this was an appropriate focus but that “it could begin to get old” quickly.

Another group of learners felt that targets are sometimes set too low. Consistency of high expectations is perhaps an area to explore?

- A “calmer message” going out to the learners about new qualifications would be very helpful. Many teachers apparently passing on their own sense of stress or worry.
- Learners noted that there was insufficient reward for improvement as opposed to higher attainment. This is a positive challenge for staff!
- Learners noted that they themselves were not sufficiently conscientious in taking up mentoring or study support options available to them. A cultural problem?

The organisation of the day was very much appreciated. The preparatory work that had been done was very apparent and indeed extensive. We found the school to be very honest and evaluative. The passion that many of your colleagues demonstrated for improving the school on the day was inspiring. Thanks also for the generous catering arrangements!

Actions:

1. Take part in local sharing of approaches to boys’ underattainment. In addition there could be some action research developed internally to better understand the local reasons for the problem.
2. Review the strategic focus on Raising Attainment approaches to achieve better focus on a few highly effective actions.
3. Review Raising Attainment arrangements including mentoring to achieve more consistency in expected standards for all. (For example in target setting).
4. Review the work on “mindsets” to ensure that the message stays fresh and that teachers and learners alike have not become “immune” in any way.
5. Review any reward schemes to check that improvement is appropriately rewarded.