



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE REVIEW REPORT

Lower Farm Primary School

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Key Information

Assessment Type	Review
Investors in People Specialist Name	Gordon Stopani
Visit Dates	14/01/2014 and 16/01/2014
Assessment Enquiry Number	ENQ-92050-R5STK8

Assessor Decision

Lower Farm Primary School continues to meet the requirements of the Investors in People Standard. It therefore continues to be recognised as an Investor in People organisation.

The School has many effective practices in place that indicate it is working above the Evidence Requirements of the Investors in People Standard. Appendix 2 highlights 34 additional Evidence Requirements from the higher levels of the IIP Framework that have been met, which means that the School has now attained Bronze Level Investors in People accreditation.

The Assessor would like to thank everyone in the School who took part in the process for their co-operation and contribution and for the excellent arrangements which ensured that the assessment activities ran to plan.

Congratulations on this excellent achievement.

Milestone Dates

18-Month Review of Continuous Improvement Plan	Week commencing 14 th July 2015
Date Next Full Assessment Due	Week commencing 9 th January 2017

Investors in People Specialist: Gordon Stopani.

Date of Report: 30th January 2014.

Introduction

Lower Farm Primary School in Bloxwich, Walsall has been the subject of a number of changes since its last Assessment.

The Senior Leadership Team has changed with the appointment of a new Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher. There is an integrated curriculum that helps to inspire children, develop real world and social skills and enhance Maths and English skills.

As is the case currently with all schools, Lower Farm Primary is investing heavily in a range of activities that aim to raise teaching and learning standards in line with nationally prescribed targets.

Assessment Objectives

As part of the assessment planning activities, the following objectives were agreed:

- To determine how investment in staff development activities and CPD is helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to raise pupil progression and attainment levels.
- To determine whether there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the School meets the Evidence Requirements for Bronze Level Investors in People accreditation.

The evidence identified during the on-site interview process can be found in the Feedback Section of the Report that follows.

Feedback Against the Assessment Objectives

Business Strategy

The School has clearly defined its purpose and vision and has made use of the latest Ofsted Inspection Report to focus its attention on the creation of the School Development Plan (SDP). Staff at all levels interviewed had an understanding of the School's current Priorities and were able to explain how they believed their role contributed to these.

A number of values have been developed to help foster learning within the School. These have a direct impact on Staff and how they engage and behave within the wider School community and are outlined below:

- To develop thinking...
in order to acquire a broad knowledge base and embrace our own unique style of learning.
- To role model...
in order to show others the high standards of behaviour which lead to our personal best achievement.
- To have an impact...
in order to make progress in all areas of our lives and in turn to have a positive impact on the lives of others.
- To challenge ourselves...
in order to achieve the highest possible personal goals; always demonstrating high expectations.
- To be engaged...
in order to ensure that our attitudes and behaviour are conducive to learning at all times.

These values have an impact on a number of the Evidence Requirements of the Investors in People Framework and are being used to good effect to direct the efforts of Staff and also helping to clarify expectations and behaviours.

The SDP in turn, has been used as the basis for identifying the School's Priorities for 2013/14. The latter were very clearly defined, could be explained by Staff and have clear measurable objectives and targets, together with indicators of performance that were being used to monitor progress.

The whole process of planning within the School is made all the more robust by the fact that both the SDP and the School Priorities have been informed by the detailed analysis that has been undertaken through the completion of the School's Self Evaluation process (SEF).

Progress against objectives and targets is very carefully monitored and Staff and other stakeholders are kept informed on the progress that is being made towards the defined targets. Teaching and learning Staff inevitably had a much stronger sense of the latter, since they have the greatest impact on them as a Staff group. The School should give further consideration to how all Support Staff can be included more within the overall planning activities of the School, for example during INSET days.

Recent developments such as the involvement of Governors in Learning Walks / Classroom observations are to be congratulated. Such approaches will help to ensure that Governors have a more detailed appreciation and understanding of the School and how their role contributes to its overall success. Support Staff groups could equally be involved in appropriate activities that would help them also to further their insight and understanding.

Learning and Development Strategy

The Senior Leadership Team had a very clear understanding of the School's learning and development needs. This is an area of strength. Learning needs are directly aligned to the School's Priorities for 2013/14 and include the desired measurable performance improvements required in respect of each of its 3 key Priorities, one of which relates to the quality of teaching and learning within the School.

The actions and resources needed for all Staff learning and development activities have been clearly identified, along with details of how they will be monitored and by whom. In respect of the quality of teaching and learning within the School, a range of development needs have been identified including:

- Approaches to differentiation.
- The Teaching and Learning policy.
- Developing skills in the use of questioning.
- The development and implementation of consistent approaches to target setting.
- Mentoring.
- Observations.

Through this range of flexible and blended approaches, the School aims to be able to show improvements each term in the quality of its teaching and learning. This is helped by the fact that there are very clearly defined measurable targets which are regularly monitored and reported on.

Staff interviewed were in no doubt that learning and development is a central feature of their role at Lower Farm Primary School and confirmed that their own personal learning and development needs are regularly discussed with their line manager. These are then reviewed through approaches such as the appraisal process meetings that take place each term, which is in fact more frequently than the local authority requires of the School.

A number of Staff interviewed described how their personal development needs had, in the past, been identified but never followed through. This is certainly no longer the case, with Staff reporting that learning and development is very much on the day-to-day agenda.

People Management Strategy

There is no doubt that the School's leaders and managers clearly understand the need for Staff to be engaged within the roles they perform and interviews demonstrated that this is indeed the case.

Throughout the School there is a general culture of inclusion at all levels. There is strong encouragement from the Senior Leadership Team to ensure that all Support Staff have a 'voice' within the School. This approach has been successfully incorporated for example amongst Teaching Assistants, who receive the same training as teachers during INSET days.

Constructive feedback is very much part of the everyday culture in the School and Staff reported this to be supportive in nature. This feedback is linked to the personal objectives and targets that a range of Staff are responsible for achieving and so it makes the feedback much more meaningful.

Access to and involvement in learning and development opportunities were widely reported by Staff as a positive aspect of School life. It is evident that discussions with line managers about learning and development, regularly takes place in the context of improving job performance and career opportunities / aspirations.

Work-life balance practices were identified during the Assessment and a number of Staff interviewed spoke highly of the School in respect of the flexible approaches adopted to support personal aspirations, commitments and working preferences. The latter includes support for unforeseen family-related commitments which, for those Staff affected by this, reported that the School is extremely helpful and accommodating in such circumstances.

Leadership and Management Strategy

Leadership and management is currently one of the School's Priorities. Measurable, time-bound targets have been identified in respect of improving leadership and management capabilities and also performance, in the context of improving teaching, learning, behaviour and achievement.

The leadership and management Priority includes Governors and careful consideration has been given to how their role can help the School to meet its aspirations and targets. Actions have been defined which include classroom observations and reviewing data on pupil performance to ensure close links are maintained between pupil teaching and learning quality, alongside pupil achievements and progress.

A distributed approach to leadership has been implemented within the School in line with the internal re-structuring that has taken place. There are clearly defined expectations of leaders and managers at all levels including; Headteacher, SLT, Subject Leaders, Phase Leaders and the Governing Body. The School makes use of a broad range of flexible approaches to supporting and developing Staff and Governors in these roles in order for them to realise their role expectations. This includes:

- NPQH.
- Middle Manager leadership development programmes.
- Coaching and mentoring.
- Sharing best practice, knowledge and information.
- Peer learning.
- Classroom observation.
- Learning walks.
- Collaboration with a Teaching School.

Management Effectiveness

Staff interviewed spoke highly of the School and were praiseworthy of the support that they receive from the Senior Leadership Team. They identified a noticeable change in pace and focus since the appointment of the new Leaders. They also reported more effective communications and day-to-day support from line managers, who were regularly described as: "Really helpful", "Open" and "Encouraging".

Two instances of where the latter was not the case were identified during interview and this has led to some personal frustration in the role. However, both people indicated that they did feel they would be able to bring the matter to the attention of the School and would do so.

Overall, Staff were extremely positive in their views about the effectiveness of their line managers, often referring to them as: “Supportive”, “Good listeners” and “Approachable”. Staff have developed productive working relationships with their line managers and throughout the School there was a very strong sense of teamwork, shared ownership and responsibility. It is evident that Staff believe that leaders and managers are genuinely ‘living’ the values of the School through their day-to-day actions.

For those Staff who go through it, the School’s appraisal process was reported as a very positive and worthwhile experience. There is scope for the School to cascade these practices to the other parts of the School that are not currently using this type of approach. The wider inclusion of Staff in an appraisal process should help to ensure that all post holders have an even clearer understanding of how their role impacts the overall Priorities of the School and help them to gain an even greater sense of inclusion / ownership.

Recognition and Reward

There is no doubt that Staff feel valued in their roles within the School. They indicated that there is regular positive feedback and congratulations being acknowledged during forums such as; Staff Meetings, Phase Meetings, Assemblies and perhaps most commonly, through everyday contact. What also helps Staff to feel a part of the overall team is the broad range of personal development and learning opportunities that they are able to access.

Everyone interviewed was clear in their own mind about how their role contributes to the School and were demonstrably proud of the work that they do. However, if all Staff were appraised and had measurable targets, they would have an even clearer understanding about the impact of their contribution. In discussions with leaders and managers, there’s no doubt that they understand the different needs of people and why it is important to recognise and celebrate Staff achievements both personally and publicly, which is something that happens on a very regular basis.

Involvement and Empowerment

Staff report that they feel very much part of the decision-making process within the School and are regularly being asked for their views and opinions during the School’s broad range of meetings that take place. Additionally, the School conducts a Staff Opinion Survey to get a broader understanding of Staff views. Staff were very much of the opinion that they have a ‘voice’ within the School.

High levels of energy and enthusiasm were demonstrated by Staff which is a very good indicator of the fact that they gain enjoyment and personal satisfaction from their role. Engagement levels have risen since the new SLT took over and whilst inevitably, in the early stages there were quite high levels of direction from SLT, Staff now feel high levels of ownership and responsibility for the work that they do. As such they spoke freely about the fact that they are supported and encouraged to take growing levels of responsibility in their role.

There is no doubt that the SLT leads by example and provides excellent role models for others. One such aspect of School life for Staff which has seen noticeable changes in this respect, is the way in which knowledge and information is being used and shared internally. This allows for a means to exist for both informing and supporting Staff, whilst at the same time empowering them to make good decisions. Staff are proud to be working for Lower Farm Primary School and were very vocal about this fact.

As already indicated, there is scope to further involve Staff, particularly Support Staff, in a broader range of activities for example; School planning and objective setting and cascading objective setting to all levels in the School to ensure that everyone's talents are being truly harnessed.

Learning and Development

A variety of approaches to Staff learning and development are being used within the School. These vary according to the jobs people do and it is good to see that consideration is given to peoples' learning styles. The range of approaches covers; mandatory training, induction training, professional development and personal development in the context of the School Priorities linked to the SDP.

A budget for Staff development has been allocated within the School, which has risen considerably over a relatively short period of time. The budget is directly aligned to School Priorities, which include the quality of teaching and learning and so ensure a direct link between School objectives and the learning and development needs of the Staff responsible for achieving them.

Effective use of the finances available for Staff learning and development is being made through the sharing of knowledge and information. Staff who have attended learning and development activities are regularly being given the opportunity to share the learning within the School. This not only makes best use of available budgets but in sharing their insights, enables other Staff to benefit from feeling greater levels of engagement through their valued contributions.

It is evident that Staff learning and development is very much an everyday activity in the School and plays a significant role in helping the School to achieve its desired levels of performance. Teaching Staff performance has steadily increased as investment in training around the quality of their teaching has been made and therefore targets for 'Good' and 'Outstanding' lessons are being realised.

Performance Measurement

What was noticeable during the Assessment visit was the very good understanding of the cause and effect relationship between investment in learning and development and the impact this is having on the School's performance levels. This is because the investment that is being made is tightly linked to the required performance levels of the School.

Very close and strong linkages have been developed in respect of this within the School and it is an area of strength which the School should continue to capitalise upon. The way in which the School's; plans, priorities, evaluation, appraisal and learning needs have been integrally linked is highly systematic and extremely logical to follow, thus making it easy to understand and monitor.

The results speak for themselves. The quality of teaching has seen increases of over 20% over the course of 2 academic terms, which is ahead of the milestone target set.

At the individual level, Staff had a very good understanding of the ways in which learning and development is helping them in their role and many good examples were identified including; increases in teaching observation results, ability to interrogate performance data and make better decisions and learning new techniques and methods to support classroom learning.

Continuous Improvement

The School has developed a strong ethos of continuous improvement. Staff indicated that they are regularly encouraged during meetings, briefings and appraisal to find better ways of doing things. Suggestions are very much welcomed from Staff and that's because an inclusive and conducive working environment is being nurtured.

Continuous improvement has become part of the School's culture and all policies and procedures for example, are the subject of review and evaluation to ensure that they continue to meet needs. Staff who go through appraisal for example, indicated how it is a positive experience for them and they are able to draw comparisons with how it used to work, when learning and development needs were only ever talked about but not actioned.

SLT is consciously developing a working environment in which people have the opportunity to give of their best because it's an environment which they wish to be part of and feel welcome in. One in which their views and opinions are welcomed, listened to and acted upon wherever possible.

There is no doubt that Staff are very proud to be a part of the School and the work that it does. They derive a great sense of personal satisfaction from being part of it and the ever-increasing improvements in performance that are being realised.

Conclusions

The audit trail of evidence identified during interviews indicates that the School is fully deploying the Evidence Requirements of the IIP Standard. Sufficient additional Evidence Requirements are being met to demonstrate that Bronze Level accreditation has been achieved.

A number of areas of strength were identified during the Assessment. The practices / approaches in question are both robust in nature and systematic in their deployment and include:

- Clear purpose and aims.
- Values which underpin how the School and its Staff operate.
- Robust and systematic identification and resourcing of School Priorities, which include measurable targets.
- Detailed self-evaluation which is integrally aligned with and used to inform School planning activities.
- Staff Appraisal and giving Staff regular constructive feedback on their performance.
- Learning and development / professional development.
- Sharing of knowledge and information across the School.
- High levels of involvement and engagement amongst Staff.

The School should ensure that it continues to capitalise on its existing practices by working towards achieving Silver or Gold Levels of Investors in People accreditation. A 'top-up' Assessment process can be used to achieve this. The School can build on the evidence identified during this Assessment, which is deemed valid and sufficient for a 12-month period from the date of the Assessor's on-site visit and add to its existing Level accreditation.

improving performance

It should be feasible for the School to achieve Silver Level accreditation in the next year if it continues to strengthen and develop its working practices. Achieving this will require the School to ensure that all Staff are actively involved in the full range of approaches being used to lead, manage and develop them.

Areas where the School can quickly capitalise on this have been identified in Appendix 1, an Outline Continuous Improvement Plan. The latter will be used by the Assessor during the 18-month continuous improvement meeting to ensure that the School continues to improve its approaches. The Plan can be added to and used by the School to focus its improvement activities.

Appendix 1 – Outline Continuous Improvement Plan

Area for Development	Benefit	Suggested Action	Timescale	Resources
School Development Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear understanding of role contribution to School Priorities. • Increased ownership and engagement through inclusion. 	Establish ways in which all Staff can play a greater part in the range of activities that are used to help create the School Development Plan and the resultant priorities. Involvement in INSET activities of this type should be considered as one possibility.		
Staff Appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear understanding of role contribution to School Priorities. • Increased ownership and engagement through inclusion. • Streamline efficiency / delivery of the process. • Supports pay progression. 	Implement appraisal for all Staff roles in the School, providing the opportunity to cascade measurable targets to everyone, thus reinforcing expectations and their contribution to the success of the School. Investigate the possibility of the appraisal process being put into an online format such as 'Blue Sky' which is currently being used by many other schools.		
Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient use of Staff development budget. • Deployment of internal expertise. 	Investigate the use of deploying a broader range of learning and development approaches for all Staff such as peer coaching and mentoring which are equally suited to Support Staff.		
Collaborative Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to a broader range of working practices used to enhance existing methodologies. 	Continue to forge links with other Schools and organisations (inc. Teaching School) in a collaborative way to gain new insights and perspectives. Maximise the use of internal expertise through more widespread sharing of knowledge, understanding and practise amongst teams.		

Appendix 2 – Assessment Results Summary

The Investors in People Framework - Evidence Requirements

	Ind.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
Business Strategy	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓				✓											
L & D Strategy	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓																					
People Mgt. Strategy	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																									
L & M Strategy	4	✓	✓	✓																											
Management Effectiveness	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																		
Recognition & Reward	6	✓	✓	✓																											
Involve. & Empowerment	7	✓	✓	✓																											
Learning & Development	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Performance Measurement	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																									
Continuous Improvement	10	✓	✓	✓																											

The number of Evidence Requirements met is **73**.

Key:

-  The Core Investors in People Standard
-  Your Choice from the Investors in People Framework (leads to Bronze, Silver and Gold Levels of accreditation)
-  Not part of the Investors in People Framework.