

The Learning Quality Framework



Bedford High School

Report of the Assessment conducted against the Silver Level Indicators
on 9th and 10th November 2015

Assessor

Steve Watson

Executive Summary

The Bedford High accreditation visit took place on the 9th/10th November 2015 against the Silver Level Indicators of the Learning Quality Framework.

The assessment involved:

1. interviews with senior and middle leaders, and with teachers;
2. a tour of the school to examine the 'learning environment';
3. lesson observations across all year groups to examine the practitioners' orchestration of learning and to talk to students about their learning;
4. conversations with individual students and practitioners;
5. a meeting with students and members of the school council;
6. scrutiny of documentary evidence and student learning products;
7. a closing session with senior leaders to triangulate and agree outcomes.

Recommendation

The objectives of the assessment were fully met and, given the strength of the evidence available, the assessor recommends to the Awarding Body that the Silver Level of the LQF Award be awarded.

Headlines

- The vision is pervasive and the impact (on teaching and learning) is significant and growing
- The school's teaching and learning Framework is giving a strategic direction to developments and the impact is extensive and well-understood
- The school's chosen learning language is used with fluency and precision by senior and middle leaders, by practitioners and by students.
- A culture of experimentation and risk taking is evident in the school.
- The school itself functions as a professional learning community. Better Together and the Outstanding Teacher Programme are catalysts for deep change and reflection
- Learning behaviours are included in curriculum plans and infused, split screen teaching was evident in the observed classrooms
- Active, collaborative learning is the prevailing culture. Displays are interesting and varied throughout the school and reinforce positive messages about the process of learning
- Students feel involved in and consulted by the school and opportunities to co-design and co-deliver learning are increasing
- The school makes parents and carers aware of the school's learning framework and commitment to Building Learning Power in a variety of ways
- The school's learning lines are in their infancy but are already having a significant impact on teachers and students
- The school pursues its goals with tenacity and attention to detail; it approaches its own growth with an appetite of enquiry and curiosity
- The school, as a community, is learning its way forward with a strong sense of 'shared endeavour'

Aspect 1: Commitment - The school is committed to using the learning sciences to develop its peoples' learning dispositions, and equip itself as a learning organisation.

Principle 1 - Vision for Learning:

The school has an engaging vision for 21st Century education based on social, economic, moral and personal learning imperatives that guides the school and its community:

Senior leaders explain with clarity and conviction the core values of learner empowerment and the growth of independent learners, and how these are woven into the vision and aims of the school. The vision was developed over time from existing practice, from the ideas of staff, refined by senior leaders and Governors in January 2015 and subsequently agreed by all practitioners. The impact of the discussions has been to enable the school to look critically at itself in terms of its strategic direction. Senior leaders believe that negotiating the vision 'has enabled all stakeholders to contribute to and own the vision, which cemented existing values and captured good practice'.

The school's vision is pervasive – it is in the school's vision statement, widely referenced on the school website, in display in both classrooms and public circulation areas and embedded in policy and practice. Senior leaders give examples of the various ways that have been used to spread this vision, and practitioners describe and give examples to show how 'how we do things round here' has evolved and continues to shape practice. CPD demonstrates the school's ongoing commitment to developing learning. Evidence from senior leader and classroom staff interviews revealed that this vision, rooted in Building Learning Power and Growth Mindset, is also a learning model for adults and for the organisation as a whole.

Teachers say that the focus on teaching and learning 'is tremendous and is leading to raised achievement'. The open and sharing culture 'means that we are going from strength to strength, resulting in increasing buy in'. One teacher considers that as a result 'I have grown as a person and as a teacher'.

- ***The vision is pervasive***
- ***The impact (on teaching and learning) is significant and growing***

Principle 2 - Learning Framework:

The school has adopted a coherent approach to building traits that affect how people go about learning based on a combination of Building Learning Power and Growth Mindset and this drives learning in the school and its community.

Senior and middle leaders explain the rationale and validity of the Teaching and Learning Framework, which is on the school's intranet and details the school's learning vision, aspirations and working practices, and illustrates the school's commitment to high quality teaching and learning. The framework has been distilled for parents in the Parents' Handbook.

Senior leaders talk of how the Framework drives practice and was the focus of whole-school CPD in September 2015. Middle leaders consider that the framework is leading to high aspirations for all. Middle leaders and teachers appreciate the school's approach which is predicated on refining existing good practice – all value the 'tweak of the week' approach.

Teachers believe that the 'quality of teaching is on the rise because of the strategic direction given by the framework'. Students understand and are able to explain the school's learning intentions.

- ***The Framework is giving a strategic direction to developments***
- ***The impact of the Framework is extensive and well-understood***

Principle 3 – Language for Learning:

The school has adopted a rich language of learning recognising its emotional, cognitive, social and strategic dimensions, and this language permeates learning across the school and its community.

The language for learning is derived from the Building Learning Power framework. The language is used with fluency and precision by senior and middle leaders, by practitioners and by students. The school has moved beyond using the 'R' words and uses language at the level of the 17 BLP 'capacities', although students are currently misunderstanding both Revising and Absorption – something that the school has already noticed for itself. In classrooms, the language is evident and feels 'natural'.

The common language is highly visible in display around the school and consistently evident in classroom practice and teacher discourse. Teachers routinely use the language to alert students to the required learning behaviours, and this is further written into lesson plans. The language is used most frequently by teachers in lessons, while students are less frequently required to discuss the learning process. That said, at interview students were able to explain the nature of the school's learning language. The school has recently been exploring the nature of progression (see section 11 of this report) but this has yet to impact on the language used by teachers or by students. While not a requirement at Silver level, the subtlety that progression inevitably introduces will, in time, enrich and deepen the learning language. Teachers talk of the 'deepening understanding that the work on learning lines will bring' but acknowledge that this has yet to impact in most classrooms.

- ***The language is used with fluency and precision by senior and middle leaders, by practitioners and by students.***
- ***Teachers routinely use the language to alert students to the required learning behaviours, and this is further written into lesson plans.***

Aspect 2: Plans and strategies. Leadership approaches, plans and strategies are aligned to enhance learning development across the school and its students.

**Principle 4 - Leadership of Innovation and Learning:
Leadership for learning throughout the school supports innovation, experimentation and risk taking, building individual independence and responsibility.**

Senior and middle leaders explained why they believed that creating a culture of experimentation and risk taking was, and remains, important to enable the evolution of best practice within classrooms and the wider school. During conversation with practitioners they spoke of how important it is for them to be allowed to try things out and learn from their successes and mistakes, and particularly valued the opportunities to talk about and explore new strategies afforded by the recent Easter Extravaganza. The Better Together programme, in which all teachers participate, and the Outstanding Teacher Programme (around 50%) are seen as important strategies for creating dialogue and enabling exploration. A clever leadership 'device' of encouraging teachers to 'try something 10 times' reinforces that change requires practice and getting it right first time is unlikely.

As a result, a culture of experimentation and risk taking is evident in the school: senior and middle leaders explain how this has been achieved and can give examples of such experiments; practitioners can describe the ways in which they feel they have been empowered to be creative and to take risks, and describe with enthusiasm risks that they have taken and how this has impacted on their practice, provision and outcomes for learners. Middle leaders feel that the responsibility to explore is delegated to them, and that they also delegate this to individual members of their teams. Middle leaders talk of high levels of student engagement convincing staff to make changes, and feel that peer-review is triggering change. Teachers feel that they 'have permission to act'. The school intranet provides ample evidence of these changes and how they are being shared.

Faculty level monitoring (or 'drop-ins', as the school calls them) is evident. A teacher commented that 'my HoF is interested in our schemes of learning and how they stretch learning behaviours', and added that this is monitored also through work scrutiny.

- ***A culture of experimentation and risk taking is evident in the school.***
- ***The Better Together programme is enabling peer-review that is triggering change.***
- ***Staff feel empowered to be creative and take risks.***

Principle 5 – CPD Policy and Strategy:

The school's CPD policy and strategy stimulates and supports a community of enquiry and research in the promotion of effective learning habits for all.

The school has a well-designed and highly personalised CPD structure. The Better Together initiative that forms the basis of professional learning communities, plus the Outstanding Teaching Programme that has already been accessed by around half of the teachers, are providing highly effective opportunities for professional development. One middle leader commented that 'up until a few years ago we were offered little in development terms – now they are investing in us and trusting us to grow as professionals'. Another that the OTP 'enabled me to reflect on myself as both a teacher and a learner'.

Professional learning communities are to the front in developing teaching and learning, and a number of middle leaders and teachers commented that the peer-review element enabled them to seek support with their most challenging classes, something that would not have been so readily done in a more top-down support model.

Whole-school coaching training is spreading through involvement with the OTP and this is helping Better Together to be successful. Cross subject pairings are considered particularly effective and illuminating. The impact of such coaching approaches are beginning to be seen in many classroom interactions.

Keeping learning under review is perhaps the least well-developed aspect of principle 5, but senior and middle leaders know their school well and 'drop-ins' are proving effective at taking a snapshot of learning. It would be good to get a baseline measure of the state of learning across the school before the learning lines have real impact, so that longitudinal progress can be plotted in future years.

The school is relentless in its pursuit of outstanding learning and carefully plans and values professional learning. Professional learning uses and promotes research to inform classroom practice based in the belief that the school is capable of learning its way forward. There is extensive supporting documentary evidence of all of the aspects mentioned above, and I suspect that much of principle 5 is already meeting the Gold standard of the LQF.

- ***The school itself functions as a professional learning community.***
- ***Better Together and the Outstanding Teacher Programme are catalysts for deep change and reflection***

Aspect 3: Action – Learning opportunities within and beyond the school build, broaden and strengthen people’s effective learning habits for lifelong learning

Principle 6 - Curriculum:

The curriculum is effective in cultivating and progressing a set of generic learning habits and attitudes.

A cross section of teachers can explain how the coverage of learning skills and attitudes are being implemented. Schemes of Learning have been adapted to include (BLP) learning outcomes, but as yet there has been no attempt to build the *progressive acquisition* of learning behaviours into curriculum plans. This will doubtless be remedied once the school has developed trajectories for its key learning behaviours and this will inevitably lead to refining existing curriculum plans. Equally, this will be an opportunity to look again at the depth of language in everyday use (see comments in principle 3 above). Middle leaders recognise that classroom practice in relation to ‘going public’ with learning behaviours in lessons is not yet consistent in all classrooms. Students understand that most lessons have the twin intentions of both developing subject knowledge and helping them to make progress as learners and appreciate that this is helping them to become more effective learners.

School routines, including enrichment activities, are used to develop dimensions of learning habits that are more difficult to attain through classroom activities, and/or to help students to transfer their emerging learning into new settings within and beyond school. Senior leaders are able to give examples of transition days and planned Enterprise days to illustrate where and how this is happening. This is not yet an area of strength and will doubtless improve as the school’s learning lines begin to backwash into curriculum planning.

- ***Learning behaviours are included in curriculum plans and made public in most classrooms***

Principle 7 – Teaching Methodologies:

Learning opportunities intrigue and motivate learners, develop effective learning habits and enhance content acquisition.

A cross section of teachers is involved in the introduction and training of students in learning skill development which happens initially at transition and subsequently through form time and the BLP course which operates in years 7 and 8. Students confirm that they value these opportunities to reflect on learning.

Planned opportunities for students to develop their learning habits are in evidence in schemes of learning and observed in classrooms. The development of curriculum content and learning capacities were seamlessly interwoven in all observed classrooms. Students say that this is routine practice in many/most of their lessons. As importantly, the learning behaviours that are identified link accurately to the curriculum content / activities and are not, as it is in some schools, an attempt to get behaviour management ‘by the back door’.

Teacher commentary is currently restricted to mentioning / explaining the key learning capacities that will be required in the lesson, and occasionally nudging students to employ these behaviours. A major impact of the school’s deepening

understanding of progression will be to refine and deepen this language as teachers and students become increasingly fluent in the complexities of how to get 'better' at a particular learning behaviour.

Teachers are confident to show themselves as learners. They give examples of learning aloud, deliberately getting things wrong, and use phrases like 'I've never done this before either'. Students are able to give examples of their teachers talking about their own learning histories during form time.

- ***Infused, split screen teaching is planned into medium term plans and evident in classrooms;***
- ***Teachers model the learning behaviours they intend their students to develop***

Principle 8 – The Learning Environment:

The Learning Environment is used constructively to promote positive learning behaviours and reinforce messages about the nature of learning.

Teachers presenting knowledge as provisional in order to encourage thoughtful, critical, inquisitive learning was rarely observed, but this may be a function of the small number of observed lessons. The school might consider the extent to which this aspect is evident in their own learning walks / observations.

Students experience challenging learning opportunities which are carefully constructed and differentiated according to student needs.

The school demonstrates that it values effort and resilience through teaching routines, assessment and reporting structures, and examples of a 'can-do' outlook were observed in lessons. The school's commitment to Growth Mindset is evident in both display and teacher commentary. As one student said: "You don't get told off for making mistakes. Here you are encouraged to learn from them".

Active, collaborative learning is the prevailing culture in classrooms, and students work and learn effectively together.

I did observe one amazing example of collaborative learning in English, stimulated by the school's collaboration learning line, in which students were challenged to work in unfamiliar groups to analyse the language used in a passage of Shakespeare. The lesson pattern was:

- Think Pair Share – Can you define collaboration ?
- Think Pair share – Why is collaboration important ?
- Use the learning line to reflect on your own skills and place yourself on the line.
- What are the potential barriers to successful collaboration in your team ?
- What steps will you take to overcome these barriers ?
- Then came the introductory (Tarsia) Shakespeare task
- Reflect on your individual contributions to the task – how effective were you ? How could you improve ?
- Create a personal collaboration target
- Analyse the opening scene of Macbeth collaboratively
- Final reflection on both Macbeth and Collaboration.

In the course of the lesson, one lad was overheard saying "I never knew collaboration was so complex" !

As a model for bringing the learning lines into the classroom to enhance content acquisition, it was faultless.

Displays are interesting and varied throughout the school and reinforce positive messages about the process of learning and learning habit development, and students appreciate the learning walls as a means by which they can take control of their own learning. Learning Lines which have recently been displayed in public circulation areas further enhances this. As one student said: "I use the walls (in classrooms) for ideas about BLP".

- ***Active, collaborative learning is the prevailing culture***
- ***Displays are interesting and varied throughout the school and reinforce positive messages about the process of learning***

Principle 9 – Learner Engagement:

Young people actively co-participate in the design, management and evaluation of learning and contribute to the powerful learning culture.

Students mention how they feel involved in and consulted by the school, and those who were engaged in developing learning lines took great satisfaction from this aspect. Ideas boxes for improvements are valued. Middle leaders mention how the introduction of BLP has heralded massive differences to engagement / atmosphere and in particular to extent to which students take personal responsibility for their own learning.

Students can give examples of occasions when they design their own learning – by creating powerpoints to teach others, through peer teaching, and when planning experiments (in Science). Teachers mention co-planning and student delivery, using lead learners to support C3B4ME, designing quizzes and jigsaw type group work.

- ***Students feel involved in and consulted by the school***
- ***Opportunities to co-design and co-deliver learning are increasing***

Principle 10 – Parents and Community:

The school works in partnership with parents and carers to develop learning dispositions.

The school makes parents and carers aware of the school's learning framework and commitment to Building Learning Power in a variety of ways – the school website has information for parents and for students, and the Parents' Information Booklet details the learning behaviours that the school is seeking to develop in students. At transition, parents are introduced to the school's interest in and commitment to building learning powered students.

Reporting to parents has yet to capture fully the school's growing interest in building powerful learners, although the learning lines will surely accelerate this process. Templates for a revised reporting structure are being developed to reflect this shift, and the school might usefully consider how it is going to build student self-assessment into reports – as one student observed in relation to the learning lines "there is only you who knows where you are and how you can build yourself up to higher levels".

- ***The school makes parents and carers aware of the school's learning framework and commitment to Building Learning Power in a variety of ways***

Aspect 4: Keeping learning on track: The school, its people, its students and its community understand the impact on the investment in growing learning habits.

Principle 11 – Tracking Strategies:

Tracking and authenticating the growth of learning dispositions (with regard to when, where and how well they are used) builds learners' motivation and informs learning design.

The school is considering a variety of formative methods of assessing, recording and reporting progression in learning habits. Senior leaders have already detected students becoming better able to self-evaluate and use the language to describe their learning. The planned Year 7 Assessment and Progress document will deepen students' ability to track and record their own learning development.

The school's progression map as expressed by the learning lines, is in its infancy. Thus far, 8 learning lines have been developed by teachers in consultation with students, and the school is aware of the need to complete the remainder. Given that these lines were only developed in the summer term, it is not surprising that they have yet to back-wash into the school's learning language or teacher planning. However there are encouraging signs – already many students have noticed the displays and some are being engaged in them by form tutors.

Students say:

“You can use the learning lines to create targets for yourself”;

“They help you to reflect personally”;

“The lines motivate you to get better”;

“The lines have helped me to appreciate that I am not as good as I thought I was”.

Teachers say:

“It was fantastic to be part of the learning line creative team”

“The lines have helped to improve my teaching – ten fold”.

There is already evidence of students recording and reflecting on their progress as learners within the y7/8 BLP course, and the presence of learning lines will inevitably make this more precise and effective. Senior leaders consider this to be an important factor in narrowing the performance gap between boys and girls.

- ***The school's learning lines are in their infancy but are already having a significant impact on teachers and students***
- ***The school is keen to further develop / refine its learning lines and this will be key to moving towards LQF Gold Accreditation.***

Principle 12 – Evaluation Strategies:
A monitored set of organisational learning indicators guide continual improvement in provision, practice and the achievement of objectives.

Consultation with all practitioners is extensive and school leaders, through listening carefully to feedback, know their school well. There is an ongoing commitment to sharing best practice through both formal and informal means, and this sustains a culture of experimentation and innovation. The appointment of three T&L post holders to 'research, evidence and share best practice' illustrates the school's commitment to learning its way forward.

The school improvement plan indicates that the school monitors performance across a wide range of indicators relating to all aspects of development.

The school, as an organisation, displays the learning characteristics that it seeks to build in its students – it pursues its goals with tenacity and attention to detail; it approaches its own growth with an appetite of enquiry and curiosity, is inventive and flexible yet rigorous, seeks novel ways to link things together for greater effect and exploit the possibilities that exist; it behaves as a community of enquiry, explorative, attentive to others, willing to adopt best practice and capable of going it alone when necessary; it is reflective, thoughtful, strategic and evaluative.

The school, as a community, is learning its way forward together, and the very strong sense of 'shared endeavour' is evident at all levels.

- ***The school pursues its goals with tenacity and attention to detail; it approaches its own growth with an appetite of enquiry and curiosity***
- ***The school, as a community, is learning its way forward with a strong sense of 'shared endeavour'***

Continuous Improvement.

The LQF assessment approach embraces the five key features of assessment of a quality mark in that it should be:

- diagnostic – assessing practice against specified performance indicators in the Framework;
- evaluating the quality of provision to achieve specified outcomes;
- summative – summarising practice against the whole Framework at the target level;
- formative – revealing areas for continuous improvement;
- able to inspire confidence in the Awarding Body to accredit the school at the target level.

Areas for Continuous Improvement:

In line with the school's journey to excellence, the following development points are offered as ideas for further enhancing excellent practice:

- Complete remaining learning lines
- Use the learning lines to fine-tune the school's learning language (for both teachers and students) and strengthen existing strategies for infusion, teacher commentary and target setting;
- Keep the school's teaching and learning framework under constant review in light of developments on progression;
- Further devolve responsibility for conducting learning reviews to practitioners and students, and use this as a means of monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's work on progression;
- Review all aspects of Assessment, Recording and Reporting in light of the above;
- Continue to work with TLO to secure the journey towards Gold.