

Assessment Report

Investors in People (Silver) Assessment Report for Bell Lane Academy

Undertaken by

Mark Crowther

On behalf of Investors in People North of England

Project Number: 15/0637

Date: 18th October 2015

Accreditation Date	18-month interaction due	Accreditation Expiry Date
14/10/2015	14/04/2017	05/07/2018

Commercial in Confidence

Assessment Decision

I am very pleased to report that following a rigorous assessment process Bell Lane Academy not only continues to meet the requirements of the Investors in People standard but that assessment against a range of additional indicators across the Investors in People Framework now results in you achieving the **SILVER** level of recognition, Congratulations! Silver represents a significant step forward and reflects incredibly well on both the staff and Senior Leadership Team. This report seeks to set out the next steps in your development by identifying both areas of strength and areas for further consideration as well as setting in place the transition arrangements to the new Investors in People standard.

As part of our sustainable approach to Investors in People I will undertake a midterm 'review' after 18 months and this will ensure that you continue to pursue the ethos of the standard and are progressing with the Continuous Improvement Plan.

18 month visit

Scheduled for April 2017, I will undertake the 18 month visit at which we will review your CIP and discuss your next full assessment which will be against the new Investors in People standard. At this point it will be helpful for you to complete our online self diagnostic which will give us an initial insight into how Bell Lane matches to the new standard. We can then discuss the outcomes of this and set things in train for your next full review in 2018.

Background Context

This review takes place following a period of cultural change within Bell Lane and subsequent to the latest OFSTED visit which rated the school as GOOD. The cultural change process has enabled

the school to move from a previous OFSTED rating of satisfactory/requiring improvement and has now embedded across the school a significantly more positive and engaging approach to both people management and the delivery of a values based approach to primary education. This review has enabled Bell Lane Academy to be assessed against a broad range of initial indicators and achieve the **SILVER level of Investors in People recognition** and is testimony to the hard work done across the school in recent years and in particular, the inspirational and engaging approach to leadership adopted by the Head and Senior Leadership Team. Whilst there are still areas that require further investigation and potential improvement, there can be little doubt that the school is not only achieving against the OFSTED framework, but has now put in place a philosophy and ethos which ensures that all staff are fully engaged, motivated and indeed, proud to work at Bell Lane Academy.

Areas of Strength

- There is a clear School Development Plan which is fully integrated across the school. The plan focuses on the key areas of the OFSTED regime but is actually all about the ethos of **“what we need to do next”**.

This philosophy of what we need to do next is evident and spoken about by many people and is a direct result of the Head’s intervention to ensure that people are focussed on continuous improvement and ensuring that the educational provision and day to day atmosphere within the school is one of positivity and encouragement. The School Development Plan (SDP) is reviewed on a regular basis, is clearly communicated to all staff and forms the basis for regular discussion through a whole sequence of team and staff meetings and individual performance management.

Performance management is highly regarded across the Academy and staff will typically visit their own performance management discussions two or three times in the academic year. Each individual member of staff has three specific targets to meet, two of which dovetail directly with the SDP, the third one being focussed on their own individual personal development but which is again a product of **“what we need to do next”**.

Evidence from the staff room demonstrates that the SDP is visible and available for all at all times as well as being featured and a focus within the aforementioned meetings structure. People clearly recognise and understand the SDP and its relevance to them in their own individual roles. It is based upon and part of a very clearly understood and shared values base and ethos. This values base is now thoroughly embedded across the Academy and whilst there is some work to do around potentially explicitly highlighting the core values, it is nevertheless true to say that they are understood, shared and embedded in the way in which all staff think about and operate within the school environment.

The values are simply **“A part of who and what we are”**.

The level of people involvement within Bell Lane Academy is significant, not only through the aforementioned one to ones and team meetings but also through regular communication structures and the opportunity to informally be involved in discussions about what is going on within the school on a day to day basis.

People readily talk about the values and ethos and commonly state the following; **“We are a welcoming school and we demonstrate that we care”**, **“We believe in a happy atmosphere at all levels”**, **“The school is built on trust”**, **“We very much work as a team”**, and **“The whole school is about creating a friendly environment for people to be a part of”**. One person did additionally comment that the values are, **“Based on inspirational shared leadership which about what we all think about what needs to be done next”**.

- There is an undoubted and evidently clear commitment to learning and development. This commitment is supported through a broad and varied range of resources, including both time and effort as well as hard work and money.

People are involved in the identification of their training needs through the performance management process but also on an individual and team basis through team and staff meetings. There is a clear culture of continuous learning which is as much informal as it is formal. Much of the learning takes place on an in-house basis, for example, through INSET, but equally there is the opportunity to access external training and development as is required.

It must be stressed however, that the learning and development strategy is very clearly linked to fulfilling the SDP and is all about building the capability of the team to deliver that plan to the best of the school's ability. What is equally impressive is the opportunity that people have and encouragement to take personal responsibility for themselves and their own learning. This ensures that an informal culture of learning is very evident across the Academy and therefore, people do take it upon themselves to engage in a whole raft of learning related activity and apply this learning into practice. As one person commented, **"Our INSET is fantastic, it is based on what staff need"**.

- It is becoming increasingly well accepted that effective and transformational leadership is about creating an environment that people 'want to be a part of'. This is about ensuring that a clear sense of purpose and vision is present and yes, based on a sound set of core values.

At Bell Lane Academy, this is very much the belief of the Head and SLT and in recent years they have gone out of their way to transform the culture of the school in order to achieve this real sense of a positive environment. People readily talk about there being an open culture which encourages ideas and contribution where feedback is valued and where performance management, and in particular lesson observations, whilst essential and required for development, are not seen as a negative and off-putting experience but are approached informally. This informality ensures people engagement and that people feel involved and a part of, not just their own development but the way in which the school itself develops over time.

A good example of the openness of the culture is the fact that people within teams are encouraged to be involved in some way in the recruitment process for new staff and this goes a long way to ensuring that people feel valued and recognised for the contribution that they make.

As people readily commented, **“We are able to put forward our ideas without hesitation”**, **“I now feel a lot more supported”**, **“What do you think is a function of what we do”**, **“I definitely feel involved”**, and from the perspective of the Head, providing an environment of positivity and personal ownership, **“What do you feel you need to do”** is a common question that is asked.

- Leading on from the comments on leadership, there is now a clear sense that the SLT has developed as a management team and in so doing the capabilities required of managers have become clearer. Managers are reviewed regularly against these requirements and there is a very clear and deliberate approach to integrating leadership into the culture of the school.

There is also a very clear approach to succession planning and a positive focus on enabling people to enhance and develop their careers within the school as well as supporting people to inevitably move on should that be the case.

- Building on the already mentioned inspirational approach to leadership and the lead provided by the SLT, the aforementioned culture of openness is a very clear asset to the way in which the school has developed of late. This openness is based on a high degree of respect and particularly trust, high levels of information and knowledge sharing being encouraged and the management team leading and operating in line with those core values of team and family as well as openness and willingness to share.

On a more informal and regular basis this is evidenced as much through an approach to supporting and coaching people, which again, proves incredibly positive when talking to staff across the school. People readily confirm that coaching as an approach is very definitely used but much more so on an informal basis, indeed a formal approach to coaching was trialled some time ago and it was felt that this didn't work as it didn't quite fit within the culture of Bell Lane, hence the skills of coaching have been adapted and have been applied readily through informal means.

- As a consequence of all that has been mentioned so far in this report, there are high levels of people feeling recognised and valued. Whilst this is clearly achieved through people's individual contributions being recognised through performance management, it is equally measurable through the high levels of informal approaches that people discuss and talk about when discussing feeling recognised and valued. As one person commented, **"I like feeling appreciated and this is very much part of why I come to work at Bell Lane"**.

- People readily report being consulted and involved as well as being able to contribute to decision making processes through the way in which the school is managed and led.

People recognise the significant change in culture over recent years and talk about the high degree of openness that now exists and, whilst again this may be clear through more formal means of communication, it is also evident through much more informal means, the staff room, for example, is an excellent instance of how people are encouraged to be involved in the fundamental aspects of the school with the SDP and minutes of meetings being evident for all people to see.

There is very much a focus on continuous improvement and again, this fundamental idea of **“what do we need to do next”** and **“the feeling that we are striving for something”** is an excellent illustration of this in action.

As people commented, **“I have lots of freedom to do what I want, how I want to do it”**, **“We are allowed to lead on what we are doing”**, **“There is a high degree of freedom to visit other classes and learn from what they are doing”**, and again, this last comment was made in the context of people taking personal responsibility for **“simply getting on and doing this”**.

It was telling when asking people about what gives them a sense of ownership and pride in working at Bell Lane Academy, and the answers demonstrate the level of commitment and ownership that people genuinely do have for the work that they do and the opportunities that they are providing for the children in their care. As people commented, **“I just love working here, I love the people”**, **“I feel so valued; my input always counts for something”**, **“Whether it’s a teacher or the Head your opinion counts because they listen”**, **“I simply just feel very valued”**.

- Whilst the learning and development strategy and commitment to learning and development is clear, the investment in that area is also very evident. The school has gone from being satisfactory and requiring improvement to now being good and it is very clear that there are outstanding features now within Bell Lane based on particularly teaching and learning and leadership and management. It is though, the cultural impact of this investment that is paying most dividends as the whole school now ensures a feeling of togetherness and belonging, partly wrapped around the importance and essence of the SDP as a key strategic direction tool but also on levels of engagement that people feel and the way in which people's learning is a key part of the development of the whole school.
- One person commented that **“there is now much more structure within the school but that this should be seen in a very good way”**.

This exemplifies what was needed as part of the cultural change process and, indeed, more structure was needed and has been put in place to enable people to feel, not just part of the school, but facilitate engagement and contribution. There are now, as already mentioned, clear and effective meetings, people readily state that Bell Lane is a great place to work and there is a degree of consistency and stability to the way in which the school is operating.

Continuous improvement is part of the lifeblood of Bell Lane and improvements to approaches to management and leadership are obvious. This goes through the structure that has been implemented, the opportunity for people to be more involved in decision making processes, the opportunity for work to be delegated appropriately and people empowered to act and the way in which meetings are very much about a community approach rather than a top down approach to both decision making and actions.

Areas for further development

Whilst Bell Lane Academy fully deserves its Silver recognition within Investors in People, there are clearly and importantly further areas which can provide focus for the next steps in terms of attempting to truly embed more in-depth and meaningful approaches to management and leadership. It may well be that Bell Lane Academy decide to consider Gold accreditation, but regardless of this, at this stage in the school's development, it is about cultural progression and the embeddedness of core and key practices. The following areas for improvement are offered to support the school's SLT and governing body in considering its next stages of organisational development.

- As can be seen from this report there is a very clear and evidential ethos and value base within Bell Lane Academy. However, it may now be time to more explicitly pull out the absolute key values and use these as a basis for promoting Bell Lane, not just internally but particularly externally, now that the school has Academy status.

The challenge moving forward and as is being experienced by many organisations, is the whole debate around how core values become truly embedded within behaviours. This will demand further searching work to further integrate core values in to day to day practices and in particular, such processes as recruitment and performance management.

As an aside, this will also begin the work of future proofing Bell Lane Academy for the new Investors in people standard against which the school will be assessed in 3 years time.

- The school engages in a very broad and varied range of community based activities and thus, it could be argued, that the Corporate Social Responsibility agenda is high in the minds of the school. However, it may be worth now stepping back and considering the development of a deliberate strategy for social responsibility and having a truly open debate about, where does Bell Lane Academy sit within its local community?

To date, much of the activity that takes place, whilst positive and well regarded, is probably more reactive to external request than it is proactive. A stimulating debate around how a robust CSR strategy could support the school in the future, not least of which in terms of its reputation within the local community, could add value to the Academy.

- Much has been made within the school, and indeed within this report, of the informal approach to coaching staff, which is exemplary. Mentoring, however, is possibly not used as much as it could be and tends to be the domain of more formal approaches to teacher support and individual educational development.

One area of note could be to consider how the school mentors new starters, particularly within the first few weeks. There can be a tendency for people to be “**partly left to their own devices**” because there isn’t a specific identified approach to mentorship of new staff. This could add significant value in terms of, not just early performance, but also staff wellbeing.

- Bell Lane Academy is clearly very responsive to, and indeed committed to, feedback from external sources, the obvious ones being OFSTED and indeed, the Investors in People report. However, it would be timely to now consider the opportunity for some self and internal review processes to be established.

This would enable staff to provide feedback on how they are managed, what their expectations and their needs are and for the school to consider how this information can be gleaned in a quantifiable manner. This will in turn add further value to the way in which management and leadership develop in the future based on feedback from staff.

- An additional debate the school may wish to engage in, particularly the governing body, is how it reports return on its investment in people to its main stakeholders. This is about closing the loop in terms of the investment already made in people management and development but particularly focussing on the thread that runs from that investment through to its impact.

The school has clearly progressed from satisfactory to good but can the school quantifiably demonstrate the contribution that learning and development, for example, has played in that process. Often we take this for granted and recognise that a commitment to learning and development does indeed add value and is seen in the results. However, a focus for the school now would be to consider how that is evidenced and how that evidence is then reported back to, for example, the governing body. How does this then lead to closing the loop on an absolutely clearly defined approach to evaluating the impact of learning and development on the progress of the school.

The above points for further development should in no way be seen as criticism of the way in which the school is currently operating, indeed, this assessment process has highlighted the impressive way in which Bell Lane Academy is managed and led and the equally impressive way in which staff engage in and contribute to the life of the school. These areas for development are very much about challenging the school in line with its own core value base to consider “**what do we need to do next**”.

Continuous Improvement Plan

Bell Lane Academy

Business Issue What	Suggested Action(s) How	Potential Benefits / Impact of Taking No Action Why	Suggested Timescale When	Potential Solutions / Support Available Who
Impact on performance internally and reputation and 'brand' externally	Explicit clarification of the absolute core values of the Academy to enable a clear focus to be provided for staff and key stakeholders	Specific means of measuring performance and future behaviours as well as explicitly stating 'what Bell Lane Academy stands for' in the local community.	3-6 months, early adoption now that Academy status is established.	SLT with staff support to identify and define.
Linked to the above point a clear CSR strategy will help stakeholders to recognise and support the Academy's place in its local community	Development of a clear and robust CSR strategy that embraces and promotes a proactive approach to the community role	Presence, reputation and standing in the local community as well as attracting both new staff and potential children and families	6 months	SLT to design and implement
Maximising the impact of new starters to their role and thus school life	Establish a mentoring process for new starters to ensure 'ways of working' are clear and shared rather than assumed.	Early impact and effectiveness of new staff along with helping them to settle into school life and develop an early sense of well being.	3 months	SLT in consultation with recently appointed new staff
Availability of internal feedback	Consider developing an internal	Promotes staff engagement and	6 months	SLT in consultation with

to support the SDP, management and leadership	staff survey tool focussed on how staff feel about the ways in which they are manage, developed and led.	facilitates valuable feedback to the SLT.		the staff team.
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Investors in People Framework Topic Map - The areas for which you have been recognised are shaded in grey and green

PLAN				DO				REVIEW	
01: BUSINESS STRATEGY	02: LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY	03: PEOPLE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY	04: LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT STRATEGY	05: MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS	06: RECOGNITION & REWARD	07: INVOLVEMENT & EMPOWERMENT	08: LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT	09: PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT	10: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
THE STANDARD TOP MANAGERS SHOULD MAKE SURE (AND THEIR PEOPLE SHOULD CONFIRM) THAT:									
The organisation has a vision / purpose, strategy and plan (1,2) People are involved in planning (4,5,6)	Learning priorities are clear and linked to the plan (2) Resources for learning and development are made available (1,3) The impact will be evaluated (4)	People are encouraged to contribute ideas (1,5) There is equality of opportunity for development and support (2,3,4)	Managers are clear about the capabilities they need to lead, manage and develop people (1,2) People know what effective managers should be doing (3)	Managers are effective and can describe how they lead, manage and develop people (1,2,3,4)	People believe they make a difference (2) People believe their contribution is valued (1,3)	Ownership and responsibility is encouraged (1,3) People are involved in decision – making (2)	People's learning and development needs are met (1,2,3)	Investment in learning can be quantified (1,2) Impact can be demonstrated (3,4,5)	Evaluation results in improvements to people strategies and management (1,2,3)
YOUR CHOICE TOP MANAGERS SHOULD MAKE SURE (AND THEIR PEOPLE SHOULD CONFIRM) THAT:									
Clear core values relate to vision and strategy (7,11,13,17,19,23, 24) Key performance indicators are used to improve performance (9,15,21) Social responsibility is taken into account in the strategy (10,12,16,18,22, 25) People and stakeholders are involved in strategy development (8, 14,20)	The learning and devt strategy builds capability (5,8, 12) Plan take account of learning styles (10,15) People help make decisions about their own learning (9,13,14,16) Learning and development is innovative and flexible (6) There is a culture of continuous learning (7,11, 17)	The recruitment process is fair, efficient and effective (6,11,14,19,22, 27) A diverse, talented workforce is created (7,12,15,20,23, 28) A work-life balance strategy meets the needs of its people (8,13,16,21,24, 29) Constructive feedback is valued (9,17,25) The structure makes the most of people's talents (10,18,26)	Leadership and management capabilities for now and the future are defined (4,9) Managers are helped to acquire these capabilities (5,6, 10,11) Leadership and management strategy link to business strategy, taking account of external good practice (7) Everyone is encouraged to develop leadership capabilities (8, 12,13)	Managers are role models of leadership, teamwork and knowledge sharing (5,6,7,9,10,13,14,1 5,16,17,20,22, 23) Coaching is part of the culture (8, 12,19,25) People are helped to develop their careers (11,18) There is a culture of openness and trust (21,24)	Reward and recognition strategies link to business strategy and are externally benchmarked (4,6,8,9,12,15, 18) Representative groups are consulted (where appropriate) (5, 14) What motivates people is understood (10, 16) Success is celebrated (11, 17) Benefits strategy goes beyond legal requirements (7) Colleagues' achievements are recognized (13,19)	Effective consultation and involvement is part of the culture (4,6,7,12,13,17) People are supported and trusted to make decisions (9,15) Knowledge and information are shared (5,10,14) People are committed to success (16) There is a culture of continuous improvement (8, 11) People can challenge the way things work (18) There is a sense of ownership and pride in working for the	Learning and development resources are used effectively (4,8,13) Learning is an everyday activity (11,18) Innovative and flexible approaches to learning and development are used (5,14) People are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential (9) All learning is valued and celebrated and is an everyday activity (6,10,17) Mentoring is used (7, 20) Personal development is supported (12,15,16,19)	The contribution of people strategies is measured and evaluated (6,10) Impact on key performance indicators can be described (7) Performance improves as a result (11,13,14) Career prospects improve (12) Flexible and effective approaches to measuring return on investment are used (8) Return on investment in people is reported to stakeholders (9)	Self review and information from external reviews are used (4,5, 10) Effective feedback methods are used to understand people's views on how they are managed (6,7, 11,12) Internal and external benchmarking are used (8) People's views on how they are managed improves (9,13, 14) People believe it's a great place to work (15)

						organisation (19)			
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