

QA Review Area of Excellence

School:	Beaconsfield High School
Context	This report is the result of a virtual one-day review of the school's proposed area of excellence by a Challenge Partner consultant. Consequently, this was not a quality assurance review. The day focused solely on the school's 'Getting Life Ready', potential area of excellence. During the day, the consultant spoke with groups of staff, students, and parents and analysed school documentation.
Consultancy Review Date:	18/09/20

What is the title of the proposed Area of Excellence?

Please use a short clear title with key words which can be searchable on the online School Support Directory.

The effectiveness and impact of the school's 'Getting Life Ready' curriculum, linked to its praise and sanctions systems. These are designed to reinforce the best behaviours for happiness and high achievement within the school environment.

Why has this area been identified as a major strength?

What makes this special or distinctive enough for leaders from other schools to travel to your school if they need your support to improve their school? What have you achieved to establish expertise in this area?

The Getting Life Ready (GLR) curriculum is designed to address the complete needs of students, not just academic, and prepare them for their life journey ahead. It fully recognises the range of skills required by young people as they grow, both to support their wellbeing and to enable them to be successful in employment. The curriculum specifically focuses on the skills of creative and critical thinking, being a collaborative and committed worker, resourcefulness, resilience, risk taking and reflection. The alignment to the school's praise system helps ensure that students are more highly accredited for developing all skills, improving holistically, rather than just in a particular area.

The curriculum was carefully designed and involved the full range of stakeholders, especially the students. Initially, 'student learning teams' were set up, and supported to methodically research best practice. To determine the life-ready skills required for effective employment, students worked with teachers to research three top performing universities, employers, and outstanding business individuals. As a result of student engagement in the design process and subsequent evaluations of the curriculum, the school has found that the young people are eager to participate in lessons and achieve their rewards in the praise process.

The GLR curriculum is not just a timetabled lesson but is embedded throughout the school day. It is timetabled to be taught fortnightly in Year 7 and throughout the school in tutor periods. It is intricately linked to the rewards system so that the students are motivated to put into practice the skills that they are taught.

Furthermore, the alignment to the reward system means that the competencies taught are an ever-present feature of the classroom. A common language exists so that all involved regularly talk about 'resilience', 'resourcefulness' and 'creative thinking'. Classroom posters and resources further support teachers and students to explore the concepts daily. Highly positive evaluations of the effectiveness of the curriculum have encouraged the teaching of skills across all subject areas. For example, resilience techniques, such as mindfulness, are taught in physical education, and creative thinking, used in problem solving, is taught in mathematics. Consequently, staff constantly hone their expertise and pedagogy so that the curriculum is both well taught and embedded. Ultimately, the school believes this has led not only to more confident, happy students, but to an improvement in academic performance.

In addition, students themselves have become ambassadors for the curriculum; they talk enthusiastically about the process. One young person said:

'The school has really helped me gain confidence and I am thankful for that. Our GLR system is a great way for students to show their skills and be proud of what they have achieved. It makes us feel proud when we look back at all our GLR stickers and think about our achievements.'

Within the school, students take on many mentoring roles such the 'Blossom' programme, which supports students to achieve academically and the 'Roots' programme, which supports the wellbeing of young people. In both these programmes, students actively use the skills taught in the GLR curriculum to mentor others, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

What evidence is there of substantial and sustained impact on students' outcomes?

A repeated phrase so often heard in Beaconsfield High School is that 'the GLR curriculum is in the DNA of the school'. It runs throughout the school and is present not just within the curriculum and assessment system but in the daily language used by students and staff. In a recent student survey, 94% of students 'agree or strongly agree that the GLR curriculum helped them understand the ethos of getting life ready'. As a result of GLR, 98% of students believe they can 'get better at stuff with practice and effort' and 91% not only thoroughly enjoyed the GLR lessons but were clear it 'supported them in their learning.'

One student said, 'I have learnt how important being organised is and I have also learnt how you can learn from your mistakes. I have also learnt that you have to put 100% effort into everything you do in order for success'.

Students understand the core elements of the curriculum and are well-practised in recognising them. Students' comments show that they self-evaluate. Teachers encourage them to do so in lessons and through their five-minute reflection homework. Year 13 students told how they used the language of the GLR curriculum throughout their personal statements when applying to university.

Parents were also familiar with and enthusiastic about the curriculum. One parent explained how her Year 10 daughter referred to the need to be 'resourceful' when getting lost in a field during a hike. The parents spoke of how the skills within the GLR curriculum had increased their 'child's confidence and ability to keep going when things were difficult'.

Moreover, the curriculum has helped students to support one another. Older students spoke knowledgeably about how they use the skills taught to support students lower down the school, both academically and with pastoral issues. As a result of the success of these mentoring schemes, there has been a significant number of new requests for support from younger students. In addition, 98% of students said that they found the mentoring programmes 'useful and could see positive changes in their learning and knowledge' as a result. Many students ask for ongoing support once they have completed their cycle of sessions.

The success of the curriculum is also due to the value placed on this area by the headteacher and governors, who created an assistant headteacher role to focus on developing a sequenced GLR curriculum. A high weighting is given to GLR roles and responsibilities amongst the senior leadership team. Governors receive frequent reports on the impact of the GLR curriculum and the headteacher and other members of the leadership team have appraisal targets set around this area. As a result, a comprehensive record of evidence is available for the impact of the programme. Frequent quality assurance visits to timetabled and tutor lessons show that delivery across all year groups is strong. Appraisal targets (for all teaching staff in the first year of implementation) and aligned professional development are linked to the GLR curriculum. Teachers have training on how to develop skills within the GLR curriculum, as well as the praise system that sits

alongside it. They have also worked within their department teams to develop subject specific resources, so that the GLR curriculum enhances each subject area.

Improved exam success is also an indication of the impact of the GLR curriculum. Internal school data shows that there have been significant improvements in the 'A' level value added scores since 2017 when the curriculum was first introduced. In addition, at GCSE, the school has improved in all areas, including the average point score for the EBacc, the Attainment 8 score and the Progress 8 score. The Progress 8 score has been significantly above schools nationally.

The school carefully aligns the skills taught in the GLR curriculum to significant calendared events and, in doing so, increases the value of the skills and the students' motivation to engage. For example, before tests and exams, teachers encourage students to carefully reflect when considering different ways to study. As one student/ students said:

'The lessons have taught me a lot about ways to revise but also about revising little but often. Not only am I now much more motivated to revise, but I also know how to revise, and I believe that will be extremely useful.'

In Year 8 study skills feedback, 85% of students felt that their confidence to use study skills had improved as a result of a GLR, tutor time, lesson.

What can the school offer to other schools to support their development in this area?

What would leaders from other schools gain from a Leadership Development Day on your proposed Area of Excellence? What would they take away to help them make changes at their own schools?

Outside of Challenge Partners, the school has been supporting other schools for a long time and considers very carefully how best to help them. Leaders have developed an approach to training that is sustainable and bespoke to meet the needs of a variety of schools within different contexts. A range of training approaches and resources have been devised. For example, whilst leaders may deliver a 'presentation' type training session, they believe they should supplement such training with coaching and talking to the different stakeholders involved, including the students and teachers. Different options are available, including staff development in one skill area, such as critical thinking, so that training can meet a specific identified need. Resources, such as teaching plans, lesson materials and posters, enhance the training delivered. Finally, staff at all levels have been developed to deliver training. The school has several specialist leaders in education (SLEs), who have been enabled to be flexible in the training they offer.

How has the school already shared its practice beyond the school? What has been the extent of the impact of this?

Beaconsfield High already has a significant record of supporting other schools and helping them to improve.

Recently they have worked with five schools to help them develop practice. A project, funded by the local authority, has enabled Beaconsfield High to support another school once a fortnight, which it has been doing for the last two years. The project has focused on challenging the most able and, particularly, on the GLR curriculum skill of 'thinking harder'. The supported school has stated that middle leaders have 'bought into' the concept and the work 'has reaffirmed the importance of challenge and independence'. The partner school has seen improvements both in academic performance and a reduction in the exclusion rates of its students.

Another school, supported by Beaconsfield High, stated that:

'The support offered by the Beaconsfield High School staff has helped us to improve the quality of teaching and learning within history and especially geography. We look forward to continuing the partnership'.

The school's results show that students' attainment in geography has improved significantly.

In addition, Beaconsfield High has also run a full day 'Ofsted' conference, receiving many strong evaluations for the day, and worked with a teaching school on the Leadership and Equality Programme. Nearly three quarters of aspiring senior leaders who attended the course have found a promotion.

How will the school ensure that it remains at the forefront of excellence in this area over the three year accreditation period?

Beaconsfield High understands the importance of keeping up to date with educational research. Leaders encourage all staff to join professional networks, such as the institute for music, the mathematics hub and the historical association.

Middle leaders make the most of the local networks available and the school operates initiatives such as 'Read of the Week' and a 'pedagogy corner' in the library. These initiatives supplement the regular professional development offered to staff, which is carefully aligned to school priorities and appraisal targets.

The school has been judged highly by many external organisations. It is outward facing and wants to continue to support others well. The school knows that to do this it needs to place great emphasis on staff development.

Who is the staff lead in this area?

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