



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

South
of England

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE REPORT

Buckler's Mead Academy

Presented by Liz Kingdom

Investors in People Practitioner

On behalf of Investors in People South of England

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Acknowledgements

I would like to begin this report by thanking Sara Gorrod for the organisation behind the interview day which ran like clockwork. I appreciate the difficulties in schools of bringing people out of classes (or in this case during an INSET day) and it is rare for everyone to be able to make their allocated time slots. In this you achieved 100% so thank you!

I would also like to extend a big thank you to all those I met throughout the day of the interviews – everyone was without exception open and willing to talk about their experiences of working at your school. It was a real privilege to have the chance to get to know more about our Academy and to meet a good representative sample of your staff team.

Recommendation and next steps

Having carried out the assessment process in accordance with the guidelines provided for Investors in People Practitioner by Investors in People – United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills, the Investors in People Practitioner is totally satisfied that Buckler's Mead Academy continues to meet the requirements of the Investors in People National Standard. This is quite an exceptional achievement given that you have been working with Investors in People over a period of eight assessments and have maintained your accreditation throughout.

Investors in People accreditation is granted indefinitely, with a proviso that an interaction is undertaken within 18 months of accreditation and a full assessment takes place no greater than 3 years apart. Assessments can be undertaken at any time and more frequent assessments are recommended to maintain levels of good practice and continuous improvement.

You can discuss the timing of the next assessment with your Investors in People Practitioner.

Summary

I am delighted to confirm that Buckler's Mead Academy continues to meet the Investors in People Standard having initially achieved accreditation in the 1990's this being the 8th assessment against the framework. I was so pleased to learn from many of the people I met that alongside the challenges for your Academy there remain high levels of motivation and energy to improve and a fierce sense of loyalty to Buckler's Mead among your team.

However what came across most strongly was the very real emphasis on team working. People talked readily about how they were part of teams at department level or other area but more widely people believed they were an integral part of a team comprising of the whole Academy staff. It is rare in my experience for the majority of people in a school setting to feel this – often divisions appear between classroom based and non-classroom based colleagues and/or between teachers and their assistants. At Buckler's Mead this did not seem to be the case and in fact, conversely, people talked about feeling their contribution in whatever capacity was valued equally alongside their colleagues. Most importantly I got a strong sense that it was a whole team effort to deliver a high quality educational experience to your students.



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It was also encouraging to hear from many people about the support they have had from managers – both direct line managers, and in many cases from members of the senior leadership team (SLT). People talked about more senior colleagues always making themselves available to talk through issues with their team and offering advice and guidance on a day-to-day basis as well as supporting people with longer-term goals. This was evident for example in terms of supporting career progression and offering opportunities for professional development as well as in day-to-day support acting as a listening ear or providing advice on a particular issue.



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Findings from the Review – Focussed Objectives

The review focussed on three key objectives identified during the planning process which are central to achieving your Development Plan priorities:

Support in Implementing the New Specifications

In common with all schools and academies, Buckler’s Mead is working to put in place teaching and learning to support the new specifications for subject areas. This has meant staff not only becoming familiar with the new specifications and developing teaching to underpin these but also in parallel teaching to the previous specifications as they work through the system.

“It’s tough but all schools are going through it – here I think we’ve been given time and support”

“Support is second to none”

Clearly this has presented particular challenges and added to workload for teachers. However almost all of the people I talked with felt they were being given the time to develop their teaching as well as having opportunities to meet with colleagues to develop their practice and to share ideas and concerns within subject areas.

In particular mention was made of how INSET days had been scheduled early in the new year to enable people the time to discuss the implications of the new specifications with colleagues and to plan how to work in order to meet these.

Developing Middle Leaders

The support for middle leaders appears to have paid dividends with positive comments made by both middle leaders on the support they receive and positive feedback from members of teams as to how they are managed. The support for middle leaders is a good mix of structured CPD sessions together with other opportunities tailored to individual needs. This mix is highly valued by people with all those I met in middle management roles saying they felt very supported by more senior colleagues – whether that was in terms of talking through how to have a difficult conversation, supporting poor performance or dealing with a specific issue that had arisen.

“There has been support for us as line managers – sharpening our skills, how to be effective leaders”

“My line manager is brilliant – always has time to help get problems sorted”

Team members also spoke very favourably about the support they get from middle leaders indicating that your aim of helping to develop effective middle leaders is working. People talked

about their managers being approachable, good role models and helpful in problem solving, coming up with ideas and encouraging people to work through challenges themselves.

Aspiring middle leaders are offered the chance to take part in structured Middle Leaders Training. Not only does this provide them with a development opportunity but also demonstrates to the wider team the potential for progression within your Academy and contributes in no small way to people feeling valued and appreciated. There were many positive comments made about the development activities available for managers and aspiring managers in particular the sessions with Elizabeth Cooper which were felt to be very valuable.



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Performance Management Supporting Improved Performance

Your Academy Development Plan sets out very clearly targets for performance and what is required to achieve these. Performance management targets are set to link with key priorities within the Development Plan and people are very clear about what they are expected to achieve in terms of pupil achievement. This is also very usefully linked with additional training needs to which costs are attached.

Almost all of those I met with felt that the performance management system was focussed clearly on supporting improvement. The mix of whole school and individual targets enables people to develop towards achieving their own career goals whilst also supporting school improvement. Everyone was able to link very directly how their performance management fed into your Academy Development Plan priorities. As someone commented *“seeing how my role contributes to the whole really helps me to see the bigger picture – otherwise you can get stuck in your own small area of work within departments”*.

One area where performance management is perhaps not delivering as much added value for the time devoted to it is around some of the support areas. This is in no way a reflection of how the process is managed which appeared to be very thorough and gave people the chance to give their views. However it seems that the process does not necessarily meet the needs of all your support teams. Given the amount of resource (particularly in terms of time) that is devoted to the process you might consider whether it would be worthwhile refining to develop a more slim-line process. I fully understand your desire to ensure that all your staff team receive a similar performance management process which is commendable. However if it is not providing the Academy and/or the staff team with added value it could be time to review looking at other options e.g. a short job chat or similar.

The other suggestion around the performance management process relates to regular and structured review of targets. Whilst some people did discuss their targets on a regular basis this was often informal and not, as far as I am aware, timetabled into the performance management cycle. In order to further support the achievement of targets, and possibly refining them if circumstances change, it could be helpful to factor in a half yearly short catch-up review to assess progress towards targets and identify any barriers towards their achievement.



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Other Findings from the Review

The following sections pick up on other key findings from the review mapping these to the specific indicators of the Investors in People framework:

Academy Planning (Indicator 1)

Your Academy Development Plan includes clear targets and strategic priorities for improving performance. Targets are set with measurable achievement aims and these are widely understood by all those I talked with. The fact that departmental plans and individuals' targets feed into the overall Development Plan ensures that everyone has a very clear understanding of how their contribution fits into to the overall strategy.

The priorities in your Development Plan are well understood by every and there was a strong sense that people in all job roles were clear about their contribution to achieving these – whether it be very direct involvement through teaching or more indirect through providing a clean environment or pastoral support.

“The planning process is very clear – from our Academy plan we feed down to departmental and then individual level so all our planning is focussed on our key priorities”

People were readily able to explain their objectives whether that be in terms of pupil achievement, pupil behaviour and/or pastoral support as well as other functions such as maintaining a good working environment through maintenance and cleaning of the premises.

Something that came across very strongly was that people were clearly engaged in your planning process. They understood why things had to change, the external environment and how this impacted on practice and very importantly people trusted senior leaders to be doing the best for the Academy. Much of this is down to strong communication and a shared understanding of what you are setting out to achieve.

Learning and Development (Indicators 2 and 8)

Planning and Delivery of Learning and Development

Planning of development needs is well established at Buckler’s Mead. Almost without exception everyone I spoke with felt confident that if they identified a training need this would be met where-ever possible or an alternative way of gaining the required development found.

“I’m able to adapt how I manage behaviour now “

“It’s given me much more confidence to feel I can support students experiencing bereavement”

Everyone I talked to was able to link very directly what learning activities should achieve for them – this could be in relation to supporting children’s learning, behaviour management or perhaps developing leadership and management skills. A number of people spoke very highly of the very pro-active approach to supporting learning and development. An example of this was someone identifying a need for training in supporting a student with a specific

medical syndrome. The following week they were advised that the training had been arranged and they



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were able to access it very speedily to support their work with that student. People also talked about the benefits they had gained from a range of development opportunities e.g. supporting those going through bereavement, identifying mental health issues and self-harm.

What is a real strength of your Academy's approach to learning and development is the excellent use you make of in-house expertise. This not only provides cost-effective and contextualised development opportunities but also gives those delivering or supporting this learning a chance to feel valued. Many of those I spoke with were very clear that delivering a session and getting positive feedback boosted their confidence in their professional abilities and in many instances the ensuing discussion also gave them additional ideas to tweak and develop their own practice further.

"It can be a bit nerve wracking presenting to colleagues but makes you realise how much you know and their feedback helps me develop my own understanding too"

This focus on in-house expertise is balanced with a very outward looking approach. For example your involvement in the Partners in Excellence (PiXL) which supports improved outcomes for students also offers a range of development opportunities for members of your team. Those attending have the chance to meet with colleagues from a range of other schools and academies to share practice and develop strategies to support improvement in outcomes.

It was good to hear that the office support team are included in development activities as appropriate to their role. In many schools office staff can be over-looked with the emphasis being on the classroom-based team. However at Buckler's Mead people were able to tell me about being involved in Safeguarding and Fire Safety as well as HR and recruitment training. They also attend elements of INSET days which further enhance the feeling of a whole school team ethos.

Induction

The induction process seems to work well overall with people feeling welcomed, being shown around and having the appropriate policies and other information to enable them to quickly assimilate into the Academy way of working. It was also good to hear that people were asked for their feedback on the induction process in some areas – this is perhaps worth rolling out if it is not an integral part of the process so that it forms a final element of the induction for all new starters.

There are a couple of further points to consider as follows:

- Are you confident that everyone understands the information they are given? In particular for non-teaching colleagues who are given a large amount of information relating to premises, health and safety etc? They are asked to sign to say they have read and understood. However in order to satisfy yourselves that they have assimilated the information correctly it could be worth undertaking a quick follow up 'quiz' just to test their understanding so that any gaps in their knowledge can be filled. I am aware that managers in some support teams already do some short 'job chats' running through different elements e.g. safe use of chemicals etc so this could perhaps form part of that process.
- Is there sufficient emphasis placed on providing people with accessible opportunities to learn how various systems work – in particular IT systems that they may not use on a regular or sustained basis? I heard about the provision of drop-in sessions which are very valuable. However some



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people said that it can be difficult to get to these if other commitments have to take precedence. Another option might be to pair up a new starter with someone experienced in the use of systems so that they are their 'go to' person for advice on an informal basis.

People Management (Indicator 3)

The senior leadership team actively promote sharing of ideas through a range of mechanisms e.g. the establishment of small project groups to work on specific areas of the curriculum or a new initiative. Middle managers are well aware of their role in supporting people in their team and encourage sharing of ideas at team meetings and more informally over breaks etc.

“Everyone has opportunities relevant to their role but also planning for future developments too”

People felt that access to opportunities was fair. Everyone is actively encouraged to undertake appropriate learning and development and those I spoke with did feel that there was a commitment to ensuring that everyone had opportunities to learn and develop.

You take a flexible approach to learning and development looking to the longer term needs of both the Academy and individuals. Examples of this approach include offering a member of your team the opportunity to take a sabbatical to undertake an MA. In agreeing this option the Academy has retained a motivated team member who has returned to work with new ideas to share. Another example has been a member of the team seeking promotion who was given the chance to undertake an Academy-wide programme of development enabling them to gain experience in a range of areas.

The introduction of Staff Voice (a group comprising six from the teaching team and six from the support team who meet to discuss issues such as health and wellbeing and other staff matters) has provided a really strong focus for ideas and suggestions for further improvements to the way in which people are managed and supported. This is a very welcome development which should contribute further to people feeling they do have a genuine voice.

“Everyone’s ideas are valued – it’s a very inclusive place”

Other organisations who have made use of similar forums have found that it is really important to give timely feedback on ideas whether or not they are viable so that people can see that they are being actively considered, something I think you will have built into the Staff Voice process. This has been found to maintain interest and engagement in the process and gives people a real sense of empowerment.

Leadership and Management Strategy and Effectiveness (Indicators 4 and 5)

There are clear expectations of managers in terms of their knowledge, skills and behaviours which reflect your core values. Those in leadership roles were able to articulate clearly what they needed to do to lead, manage and support people effectively e.g. being open and accessible, offering support through coaching, advising on future career progression.

Feedback is offered to the teaching team on a regular basis through peer observations and the performance management process. Learning walks also provide an opportunity for feedback, constructive suggestions and identification of good practice. People I talked with felt supported by this feedback and



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found the process positive enabling them to develop their practice and in many cases highlight already good practice.

There were many positive comments about both senior managers and line managers. People felt supported professionally and, often personally, when facing difficulties such as family illness and other problems. A number of people mentioned the understanding and flexibility afforded them when dealing with unforeseen family issues, something that is very much appreciated.

When I asked people how they would describe the culture of leadership in your school they used words like “supportive”, “open” and “trusting”. It was also notable that

many people I spoke with were very appreciative of the time that senior leaders took to support them whether that be day-to-day or helping them to look at their longer term goals. There was also a sense among many people that they respected the way in which your Academy was led and managed – even if at times they did not always agree with decisions that were taken.

“I’ve had so much support and encouragement from senior colleagues – it’s really helped me in my progression”

“My manager is a fantastic listener”

I am aware that the senior team actively seek to be strong role models – being out and about around the school, taking on a teaching commitment and identifying and recognising good practice etc. This approach has clearly paid dividends. In particular people commented very favourably about the fact that members of the senior team continued to work at the ‘chalk face’. This has no doubt led to enhanced levels of trust between the senior team and colleagues as all know that the demands and challenges of the work is understood and they are not being expected to do something that a senior leader would not undertake.

One area which might benefit from clarification is the process of return to work interviews. I am aware that you have a process but in line with your empathetic approach to staff management you judge when and how to undertake these interviews. This of course is a good, flexible approach but can create concerns as to why interviews are not taking place. I would suggest that you may like to up-date the policy to reflect this flexible approach so that people understand the rationale for the process and perhaps give individuals the opportunity to request an interview at an earlier point if they feel this would be beneficial.

Recognition and Reward (Indicator 6)

It is a real strength of Buckler’s Mead that everyone I spoke with was very positive about the ways in which they are appreciated and valued. So often in schools the busy environment can result in people not taking the time to recognise the efforts of peers and members of their teams. At Buckler’s Mead this is clearly not the case. Many people I met with talked about the postcards they receive as thanks for a job well done or for going ‘above and beyond’ – perhaps organising a school trip or other activity.

“Recognition? Oh absolutely – the postcards are great, really make you feel your efforts are appreciated”

People also felt the fact that the senior management team took time at their weekly meeting to consider who should be recognised and why indicated just how important this element of recognition was to the senior team. An occasional small gift was also appreciated e.g. a box of chocolates or a bunch of flowers.



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Your strategy of drawing on the strengths and interests of individual team members also contributes to people feeling valued. It was mentioned that in assigning work the strengths of the team are reviewed so that people can play to their strengths with teaching assistants for example being allocated work which fits with their individual specialism. This enables people to make good use of their existing expertise and they can also be a good resource for colleagues seeking support with specific issues.

There is also a culture of people recognising peers contribution and team members felt valued by colleagues for their input and support. It was also good to see a notice board in the staffroom which was covered with cards and letters of thanks from parents and other external organisations recognising the contribution of the Academy and/or individual team members.

A few people mentioned things such as the health line and gym membership as additional ways in which they are rewarded. Even those who did not necessarily make use of these options felt it demonstrated that there was a wider concern for their wellbeing.

Involvement and Empowerment (Indicator 7)

There are a number of opportunities for people to be involved through projects, working groups and other initiatives. Many people I talked with felt that they were given a level of responsibility and trust that they felt comfortable with, but were still challenging, and which enabled them to develop their skills whilst also feeling supported where necessary.

“This is the first place I’ve worked where I really do think my views are listened to”

Many people talked about their ‘accountability’. People clearly feel that they have been given the autonomy for a particular area of activity within the school and are encouraged to take ownership.

At a more day-to-day operational level people feel involved as they receive emails and the Pink Peril on a regular basis ensuring they are kept up-to-date. Communication is generally felt to work well – it is always a difficult balance to achieve with some people liking more than others and issues about having time to read all that comes out. However the majority of people felt that the level of email communication was generally about right and that this provided people with the information they needed most of the time.

One area where people felt communication could be improved was between Heads of Years and Heads of Departments. It was suggested that a fortnightly bulletin and/or meeting might be useful to keep people fully up-to-date with individual student matters. This might in some way be addressed by the *My Concern* system which records information on specific students. There was also felt to be some scope for the Pastoral Management Group to be used to share information.

The Staff Voice forum mentioned earlier in this report is an important element in people feeling involved and empowered. Whether or not they are actively part of the forum everyone was aware of its work and how they could feed in through colleagues who were part of the group.

Performance Measurement and Continuous Improvement (Indicators 9 and 10)

Your senior team have a clear understanding of the Academy’s investment in learning and development with a dedicated learning and development budget to which people can apply. Your learning and development strategy is directly linked to your Academy Development Plan and therefore focuses on key priorities.



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“We don’t stand still – we know we can improve and we put a lot of energy into making that happen”

Feedback following development activities enables you to review what has worked well and to adapt your strategy for improving performance in the context of this knowledge.

At an individual and team level people were able to give examples of how learning had improved performance – e.g. about how understanding behaviour management strategies had helped to improve classroom management or training on specific medical conditions to support work with individual students.

Self-reflection is an integral part of what you do as an Academy – something that was recognised in your last Ofsted report as a strength and which enables you to quickly identify areas for improvement and provides a focus for further development.

People also confirmed ways in which improvements have been made to learning and development – identifying the most effective development activities through feedback from participants and equally important identifying what has not worked well so that alternative approaches can be put in place for the future.

Summary of Suggestions for Further Improvement

Below is a summary of the main suggestions contained in this report.

- Consider whether the current performance management process meets the needs of all non-teaching staff
- Explore how you might incorporate a mid-year review of key performance management targets
- Review whether the induction process meets the needs of everyone particularly around introduction to systems and processes
- Seek feedback from all new starters on their experience of the induction process to inform future developments
- Ensure new starters understand the information they are given – particularly in relation to non-teaching roles
- Review whether greater opportunities for meetings between Heads of Year and Heads of Department would be beneficial
- Explore whether there could be more opportunities for the Pastoral Management Group to share ideas
- Consider whether the return to work interview process needs to be adapted to reflect practice so that people fully understand what to expect



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Finally I would encourage you to begin exploring the new Generation Six Investors in People framework. This will be the framework against which all organisations will be assessed from April 2017 and will therefore be applicable for your next review.

And to sum up here are a few general comments about how people feel about working at Buckler's Mead Academy:

There is a great staff team here – very supportive

I've always been happy to come to work - even after all these years

I genuinely feel appreciated here

It's an enjoyable place to work

I'd say we're a real team

Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire

Your Investors in People Practitioner and Investors in People South of England would welcome your feedback on this assessment and you will shortly be supplied with a Client Satisfaction Questionnaire from Investors in People to complete. Particular importance is placed on the feedback given by client organisations on Practitioners, therefore we would very much appreciate it if you would complete the questionnaire.

Promoting Continuous Improvement

We support organisations at every stage of the Investors in People journey, helping them to realise the power of their people, optimise their performance and achieve their full potential. We see Investors in People as the People Partner for sustainable people solutions.

Details of the support available to you can be accessed by contacting Investors in People South of England via: -

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E: enquiries@IIPsouth.investorsinpeople.co.uk

W: <http://IIPsouth.investorsinpeople.co.uk>



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Outcomes table - evidence requirements framework matrix

Core Standard										
Total number of core evidence requirements assessed - 37										
Total number of core evidence requirements met - 37										
	Indicators									
ERs	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	n/a	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	
5	n/a		✓						✓	
6	✓									

Wider Framework										
Total number of additional evidence requirements assessed - 6										
Total number of additional evidence requirements met - 6										
	Indicators									
ERs	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
4	Core	Core	Core		Core				Core	
5	Core		Core	✓					Core	
6	Core				✓					
7										
8										
9										
10				✓	✓					
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