

Lymm High School School Improvement Plan: Themes & Priorities, 2015-2018

This document provides an outline of the key themes and priorities for the development of Lymm High School over the next three years. It will be used by senior leadership, middle leaders and support staff team leaders to inform the more detailed action plans that they have for their respective areas. These plans will be reviewed three times a year to ensure that we are making sufficient progress towards our objectives.

The themes and priorities outlined here came about as a result of consultation with parents, students, governors, teaching and support staff in the summer term of 2015. It has also been written with the Lymm High School Charter in mind, which sets out the enduring aims and principles of the school. For each theme, this document outlines our:

- **Key objectives:** what we are trying to achieve
- **Moral purpose:** why we are trying to achieve it
- **Success criteria:** how we will know we have achieved it

The key themes and priorities are:

<i>Achievement for All</i>
<i>Excellent Teaching</i>
<i>An Inclusive School for All Abilities</i>
<i>Professional Learning Culture</i>
<i>Behaviour & Ethos</i>
<i>Extra-Curricular Activities</i>
<i>Community Links</i>
<i>Communication with Parents</i>
<i>Learning Environment</i>
<i>School Finances</i>

The document is intended to be aspirational, but also realistic and very honest. We start from the principle that great schools keep it simple, relentlessly focusing their efforts on getting the basics right. You will not find any highly original ideas here, and we believe this is the right approach. When the basics are right, schools are fantastic places in which to learn and work and students, parents and staff tend to be happy.

Finally, it should be noted that this document is by no means exhaustive; there is a great deal more going on in the school than suggested here and plenty more objectives for improvement. There are also many other measures we use to monitor our performance over time that are not included (for example, figures on attendance, punctuality, exclusions, rewards given to students, parental engagement and destinations of our students in terms of further education, training or employment).

Achievement for All

Objective: Academic outcomes have historically been high at Lymm High School, but we are capable of better and recognise that expectations need to be higher. We want every single one of our students to leave with the very best set of qualifications and grades of which they are capable, regardless of their background or prior ability.

Moral Purpose: Examination results matter hugely to the life chances of young people and, whilst education must always be about more than raw academic outcomes, we make no apology for putting academic excellence at the heart of our vision for a great school.

Success Criteria: We are served by excellent primary schools and tend to have an able intake to begin with. Therefore, our chief measure of success will be comparisons with schools in similar circumstances. Our aim for the next three years is to be in at least the top 20% of similar schools in terms of progress made by all key groups of students in our school.

Review for parents and carers (September 2017):

In line with the moral purpose outlined above, significant changes have been made to performance management systems and other means of holding teachers and leaders to account. Tracking and monitoring of student performance is much tighter and interventions systems are much more focused and comprehensive. Overall, staff feedback (especially from heads of departments) is that we have significantly raised the profile of the importance of academic success. All these things will help to continue improve performance over the next few years.

Recent results have been very encouraging. Government performance measures for schools have changed recently, which makes direct comparisons difficult. However, all the available data shows strong evidence of significant and sustained improvement. This summer, fully 82% of students gained 9-4 grades in the new GCSE English and Maths courses. The equivalent figure (A*-C) last year was 77% and for 2014 was 69%, which clearly demonstrates how far the school has come over the past three years. Our Progress 8 score of 0.08 last year shows we performed better than most schools, even taking into account our students' high starting points and we anticipate a positive score when the 2017 figures are released by the government later this term.

At A' level, 33% of grades this summer were at A*-A, 59% at A*-C and 85% at A*-C (for comparison, the figures in 2014 were, respectively, 24%, 47% and 72%). In 2016, we had an exceptionally strong value added score that showed we were, statistically speaking, significantly above average for the progress our A' level students made and actually in the 10% of all sixth for providers in the country. Value added scores have not yet been released by the government for 2017, but we anticipate a score that again shows our students made significantly more progress than most.

One of our biggest priorities was to raise the achievement of disadvantaged students and we have been hugely successful here over the last couple of year, seeing their performance rise by over a quarter of a grade – a very significant leap in just one year. This summer, 56% of students eligible for the Pupil Premium gained 9-4 grades in English and Maths, compares to 42% in 2015. Along with SEND students, this group remains a key focus for us.

Excellent Teaching

Objective: There are some superb teachers at Lymm High School and the standard of teaching generally is good. The objective here is to ensure that teaching is consistently excellent. This starts with the need to significantly raise our expectations of what young people are capable of, so that lessons contain higher levels of challenge for all abilities (including differentiated work where appropriate) and that all students are fully engaged in the intended learning. Part of this drive to raise expectations will include the regular setting and marking of rigorous homework, something that we recognise is not consistent enough at the moment. Similarly, we want to increase the consistency with which students see their work marked and are given high quality feedback.

Moral Purpose: Students will not achieve their potential without excellent teaching. They only get one chance at a secondary school education and their success or otherwise ought not to be determined by the vagaries of the timetable; they are entitled to the best, whoever is teaching them. Homework is an important part of learning and all students deserve to be taught by teachers who recognise this by regularly setting and marking it.

Success Criteria: Monitoring data (e.g. lesson observations, learning walks and assessment checks) will demonstrate an overall rise in the quality of teaching and assessment, in all subjects and across all key stages. In particular, there will be greater levels of challenge and engagement. Records will demonstrate that homework is being regularly set and marked for all students and parent surveys will recognise this improvement.

Review for parents and carers (July 2017):

The latest visit (May 2017) from our school improvement partner (who is also an experienced Ofsted inspector) have confirmed our view that the quality of teaching across the school is at least good and is clearly improving. She also commented very favourably on the senior leadership team's evaluation of teaching across the school, saying: "Senior leaders know the school exceptionally well. In all cases their evaluations were accurate and firmly linked the learning seen to what caused, or inhibited, it in the pedagogy."

Our biggest priority now is to work at injecting even greater levels of challenge in lessons for all students and we recently launched an initiative called "Take it Further" (TIF) to support this.

The introduction of Show My Homework over 18 months ago now has been a great success, with the vast majority of parents telling us that they have found it very useful. When this plan was originally written, the biggest issue was that insufficient homework was being set, whereas we almost never receive feedback from parents to that effect any more – in fact, we are far more likely to get comments saying we are setting too much. This was confirmed at the Parent Forum event in March 2017, where homework was discussed at length. We will continue to work on

those niggling issues at the margins (e.g. teachers not always remembering to post the relevant information on time) as well as ensuring that all homework is meaningful in terms of the learning it generates. Overall, standards have clearly risen a great deal in this area.

Similarly, our monitoring systems (as well as feedback from parents and students) demonstrate that marking has improved significantly since the introduction of a new policy at the start of last year; there is more of it and of an increasingly higher quality. Again, this has been supported by quality assurance visits from external advisors and headteachers. At the same time, we know it is not as consistent as it could be (the perennial challenge for any large secondary school) and will keep working hard at this.

Inclusive School for All Abilities

Objective: One of the current strengths of the school is the way in which our students are cared for as individual human beings – although we are a large school, students and parents often comment that it does not feel like that. We want to keep this feeling. We also want to keep working hard to ensure that we have a highly inclusive school that meets the needs of **all** individuals within our community, where everybody feels happy and a part of all aspects of school life. This includes a recognition that our academically most able students need to be fully stretched and provided with an enrichment programme that allows them to gain entry to the top universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. It also means making sure that students with special educational needs are similarly supported and pushed to achieve their full potential.

Moral Purpose: As a school that is proud to be comprehensive, we have a duty to represent the whole of our community, to ensure every single student feels part of our school community and is given the opportunity to realise their full potential. This applies as much to the most able students as it does to those of average or below average academic ability.

Success Criteria: Student and parent feedback will continue to say that pastoral care is strong and that students are happy coming to school. A programme for academically gifted students will be in place, with students and parents reporting high levels of satisfaction with this programme and the numbers of students gaining places at top universities (including Oxford and Cambridge) continuing to rise. The progress made by students with special education needs will continue to improve.

Review for parents and carers (July 2017):

Care of our students continues to be a strength, with the results of the 'ParentView' survey in February showing, for example, that 92% of parents say their child is happy at school, 97% saying they feel safe and 92% saying they are well looked after (all figures which are well above national averages). A questionnaire of Year 7 parents in December 2016 showed that 98% felt their child had settled well since September. Regular student voice activities confirm this, with Student Services in particular getting consistently excellent feedback about the way they look after our young people.

We launched the Scholars Programme in the autumn of 2016 and are very pleased with the pace at which that has developed; a large number of trips and activities have already been organised for all year groups and feedback has been positive. We are also doing all we can to improve

the quality of provision for those academically very able students who have just missed out on the formal Scholars Programme –for example the TIF initiative aimed at increasing challenge within lessons and curriculum changes at KS3.

Feedback – including from an external review in September 2016 – shows that SEND students are very well-supported in school, especially those with EHCPs. A key focus now is to improve the academic achievement of other groups of SEND students, which could be more consistent.

Professional Learning Culture

Objective: We want all staff to be part of a culture of honest, critical reflection and desire for continuous improvement. They should feel part of a strong, supportive school community, trusted and invested in as professionals, with access to a wide range of opportunities for high quality CPD, including collaboration with other schools. Monitoring systems should be aimed primarily at recognising and sharing good practice.

Moral Purpose: We owe it to our students to be constantly striving to get better at what we do. Teachers and support staff who are working hard deserve to feel fully supported by leadership and trusted to carry out their roles to the best of their ability.

Success Criteria: Staff well-being surveys will record high levels of job satisfaction. There will be a healthy level of staff turnover, with colleagues generally leaving for positive reasons. The quality of teaching will have improved, as evidenced by lesson observations, learning walks, assessment checks and examination results.

Review (July 2017):

Staff surveys clearly demonstrate that they are feeling valued and that morale is significantly higher. For example, 97% said they enjoy working at the school and 97% said they are proud of the school when asked in February 2017.

Staff turnover this year is again at around 10%, which is a very healthy figure. Teachers are leaving either for well-deserved promotions, because they are re-locating to different areas of the country or – in a couple of cases – for retirement. Even more positive has been the strength of fields we have had when advertising and interviewing for replacements and we are delighted with the new staff we have secured for September. Nationally, there is a genuine crisis in teacher recruitment, but we seem to have been immune to that again this year; teachers clearly see Lymm High School as a very special place to work in and we think this is a direct reflection of the work we have done to improve staff morale, as well as to provide high quality professional development for them.

Behaviour & Ethos

Objective: Behaviour is already a strength of the school, as is the pastoral care students receive. Relationships between students and staff are strong, major incidents (including bullying) are rare and the vast majority of lessons proceed without disruption. We are aiming to build upon this so that no lesson is affected by low-level misbehaviour, conduct on corridors and at break-times is consistently impeccable and every student is wearing our uniform correctly at all times. Furthermore, we want there to be a tangible ethos of aspiration and a thirst for learning amongst all students. Students displaying the behaviours we are looking for will be regularly recognised and rewarded.

Moral Purpose: Every young person deserves to learn in an environment that is free of distractions and where aspiration and ambition are the norm. Excellent behaviour is the foundation for any school's success. Students who consistently behave well deserve to be recognised.

Success Criteria: Behaviour logs, student and staff surveys will all record a decrease in the amount of low-level inappropriate behaviour. It will be very rare to come across a student not wearing uniform correctly. Our rewards system will be high-profile, consistently applied, effective and valued by students and parents. Above all, feedback from students, parents and staff will demonstrate that expectations have risen and that our young people are aiming higher than ever before.

Review for parents and carers (July 2017):

Behaviour is now a real strength of the school and we now have sufficient evidence to be confident enough to say that it is outstanding. Since this plan was originally written, we have worked very hard to reduce low-level misbehaviour in lessons and all the available evidence suggests we have been extremely successful. Systems have been simplified and tightened, with significantly more being expected of students and staff being encouraged and supported to address even the most minor issues. Student voice is unequivocal about the fact that behaviour has improved and staff said the same in the February survey. Despite what is now a very low threshold for an 'exit' being triggered, fewer than 2% of lessons see a student removed for behavioural reasons – and the new systems mean that, when this does happen, it takes place very quickly and without further disruption to the lesson. Several headteachers have spent time in the school over the last year and every single one has commented on how well behaved students are in lessons and how calm and well-ordered the place feels. Of course, none of this means we never have any issues – even if we have far fewer than the vast majority of schools – and we shall never be complacent about the challenge of maintaining consistently high standards of behaviour. However, behaviour is outstanding overall and even the briefest walk around the school shows that the atmosphere is warm and positive as well as calm and orderly.

This year, we have done a great deal of work to recognise and reward the 'silent majority' who do the right things all of the time. The new 'rewards pyramid' has been a huge success, with very high levels of engagement from students. Similarly, the introduction of the Gateway App has helped inform parents when their child has worked well in a particular lesson. We have further plans for the coming year to develop all this.

At the same time, we have made a good deal of progress in terms of developing a culture of academic aspiration; for example, introducing new KS3 exams and reporting percentage scores to parents as well as awarding certificates in assemblies to students who have gained excellent marks in end of year exams, thereby publicly recognising achievement as well as pure effort. We have concrete plans to better recognise students making excellent progress in their academic studies as we go forward.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Objective: The extra-curricular programme is a real feature of Lymm High School already. There is a remarkable range of activities available to students, allowing them to take part to an extraordinarily high level in many cases. The number and range of trips available is fantastic, including many residential trips. However, not all students take full advantage of the opportunities on offer – and, sadly, this applies most to our students from disadvantaged backgrounds, even where activities are free or financial assistance is available. We want to change this.

Moral Purpose: Participation in extra-curricular activities is fundamentally important in helping young people develop vital skills such as teamwork, communication, resilience and responsibility. Every young person, regardless of their financial circumstances, deserves access to the full range of extra-curricular provision and we owe it to them to do everything we can to encourage them to take part.

Success Criteria: All students will be regularly taking part in at least one extra-curricular activity. Participation levels of disadvantaged students (defined, as a starting point, as those in receipt of Pupil Premium funding) will increase significantly relative to those of other students.

Review for parents and carers (July 2017):

The Leadership Ladder was a major new initiative launched back in the autumn of 2016, and has exceeded our expectations in terms of how quickly it has taken hold. Nearly 60% of the school have already gained at least the Bronze awards (and almost 80% in KS3), with many students moving onto Silver and Gold and small number even reaching Platinum. As we expected, the older year groups were a little less keen to get involved immediately, but the popularity and importance of the Leadership Ladder will grow further as the younger year groups move through the school.

Critically, the number of disadvantaged students on the Leadership Ladder broadly reflects the proportion of disadvantaged students in the school generally and, as a result of careful tracking and intervention by Heads of Year, is rising. We are very optimistic that, over the next couple of years, we can meet our ambitious objective of every single student taking part in at least something from the extra-curricular programme. The same applies to trips, with plenty of work now taking place to encourage disadvantaged students to take part in trips and use the support that is available to do so.

Community Links

Objective: We want to ensure that the school remains at the very heart of the local community. We want to build on existing links with community groups, as well as create new ones, to benefit both the community and our students. In particular, students should be playing an active role in improving their own local community. We also want to maintain and develop links with partner primary schools as well as good relationships with other local secondary schools.

Moral Purpose: A large organisation like Lymm High School has a duty to play a role in serving the wider community in which it operates and encouraging our students to help will also help them to develop as decent, well-rounded citizens. Good relationships with other local schools can only benefit the educational provision of young people in the area.

Success Criteria: The range and number of links with community groups and organisations will increase. Students will be taking part in significantly more activities aimed at helping the local community.

Review for parents and carers (July 2017):

This forms a key part of our agenda to encourage 'social responsibility' and we have more opportunities than ever for students to take part in events to help the community – whether that be raising thousands of pounds for local charities, playing music concerts for the Rotary Club or inviting OAPs in for a Christmas party. In particular, we have made a lot of changes to Founder's Day such that it is becoming a big community event again.

We continue to work well with our partner primary schools and are well on the way to achieving our aim of seeing every partner primary student visiting Lymm High School at least 3 times even before they reach Year 6, so that they are better prepared for the move from primary to secondary when the time comes. This has included more work this year looking at the curriculum so that we now have a more secure understanding of what students are studying at primary level – something we will be doing more work on over the coming year. Finally, we have strong links with many other secondary schools in the area and have used these links to good effect in many areas, such as sharing good practice in teaching strategies and support for vulnerable students.

Communication with Parents

Objective: Parents and carers report high levels of overall satisfaction with the school, with the vast majority saying they would recommend it to other families. Generally, they also speak highly of the responses they get when they do need to contact school – with Student Services often getting mentioned positively in parent feedback. However, a significant minority feel that communication from the school could be better. We agree. For example, the website needs improving to better reflect the wishes and needs of parents. In time, we want to move towards a comprehensive Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) where parents and carers can readily access information relating to their child's learning,

progress and homework. An important part of this will involve designing an assessment and reporting system in response to government changes that parents value as accurate and clear.

Moral Purpose: As a school, we recognise that our obligation to provide excellent provision extends beyond the students themselves. Parents and carers are entitled to know what their children are doing at school, how well they are doing and how they can help them at home. This information should be easy to access and should not rely too heavily on the ability of teenagers themselves to readily communicate with their parents!

Success Criteria: Parental surveys will report a clear increase in satisfaction with levels of communication with the school. A VLE will be in place that matches the best provided by other schools.

Review for parents and carers (July 2017):

We continue to work hard at improving communication (always a huge challenge in a school of our size, especially when we have so much going on) and we know we can still be better. However, there is more and more evidence to suggest that parents feel we have improved in this regard. For example, the questionnaire of Year 7 parents in December 2016 showed that 91% we had communicated well with them and the parent forum event of March 2017 also showing that parents are generally very happy with levels of communication now. The same parent forum also suggested high levels of satisfaction with the new KS3 reporting system and the School Gateway App.

As regards a VLE, we have not made much progress here – but this is deliberate. We have always said we are not striving to be ‘innovative’ for the sake of it and are very happy to watch other schools trial different things, waiting until we have seen a model that we are confident will work well, quickly. As it happens, this area does not seem to have moved on quite as quickly as we expected it might do nationally when this plan was first written and so we are happy to continue to monitor what other schools are doing and wait until the time is right for us.

Learning Environment

Objective: We are blessed with excellent facilities in many areas, including our sports fields, leisure centre, many of the main school buildings and Ty'n-y-Felin (our residential centre in Anglesey). Given that the financial climate over the next few years is unlikely to improve, large scale projects in this area are unlikely. However, we can do better with what we have got and there is work to do to make sure that all classrooms and public spaces are clean, vibrant and enriching; they should celebrate the successes of our young people and promote the high levels of aspiration and ambition that we are striving for. We also know that we need to do more to improve the ICT facilities, student toilets and the spaces in which students currently have to dine.

Moral Purpose: Every young person is entitled to a physical learning environment that, as an absolute minimum, is fit-for-purpose, clean and free of litter. At the same time, they are more likely to succeed if their surroundings reinforce and promote the values to which our school community aspires.

Success Criteria: Learning walks and site walks will show that all classrooms, corridors and other public spaces are clean and tidy, that displays clearly reflect our school's values and aspirations and are regularly updated to celebrate our students' successes. ICT facilities will have significantly improved, as will the state of the toilets and overall dining experience for all our students.

Review for parents and carers (July 2017):

A key priority as far as students (especially girls) were concerned when we first wrote this plan was the state of the toilets. Better supervision and maintenance means that things are significantly better now – vandalism has been drastically reduced and they are generally being left in far better condition. Feedback from students (especially girls) has been very positive overall. We also spent a good deal of money refurbishing the boys E block toilets, which were in a poor state 12 months ago. That said, we still do have issues from time-time-time (and, as it happens, we have had one or two in the last few weeks) and are currently reviewing systems again to see how we can improve further.

Our ICT Facilities Manager (Mr Waslin) arrived two years ago and has proved to be a fabulous appointment. The school had had major problems with ICT in previous years but these have been all but eliminated now. The challenge now is to ensure sufficient investment going forward (see next section)

The relatively small size of our dining hall means that feeding all our students will always be a challenge. However, the catering staff (in conjunction with the student School Council) have worked exceptionally hard to re-design the menu, queueing systems and areas where food is served. The impact is clear; queuing times have been significantly reduced and student feedback on the food available has been very positive.

Corridors and public spaces are much more consistently clean, bright and attractive and the next steps here are to ensure all classrooms are the same.

Finally, we have been very successful over the past 2-3 years in winning bids for improvements to basic infrastructure – in particular roofs, boilers, fire alarm systems and drainage. A huge amount of work has gone into securing this funding and, whilst they might not be the most glamorous things to do, they are clearly essential.

School Finances

Objective: School budgets have come under severe pressure in the last couple of years and the financial climate over the next five years is almost certain to be even tougher. Like all schools, we are going to have to make some very difficult decisions and work harder than ever to protect the quality of provision for young people. Our objective here is to make sure that we are always planning ahead and being pro-active in looking for

ways of doing things differently in order to avoid cutting some of those aspects of education that we most value. Part of this will involve trying to raise more money ourselves.

Moral Purpose: Prudent financial management is always central to the moral purpose of any school; we have a great responsibility to use public money in the most efficient way to provide the best possible experience for young people. Over the next few years, which are almost certain to see more substantial cuts in real terms to school budgets, this responsibility becomes more important than ever.

Success Criteria: Our budget will be balanced and stable and parents/students will not notice the impact of financial cuts. We will have been able to maintain our excellent extra-curricular provision in the arts, music and sport. We will be raising significantly more money from external sources, helping to fund projects that improve the experience of our students.

Review for parents and carers (July 2017):

There is no question that school finances are tighter than ever. As a school, we will have up to £1.5million less to spend in 2017/18 than we did in 2013/14 in real terms. On the one hand, we are delighted to have a balanced budget again for next year and to have managed the cuts to school budgets in a way that has not significantly impacted upon provision for students (though staff are having to work harder than ever to absorb the impact).

On the other hand, there is no point in denying the fact that, unless the national picture changes significantly and quickly, more cuts will have to be made and quality of provision for students cannot be protected indefinitely. For this reason, our various fundraising initiatives are going to be hugely important going forwards.