

Leadership Development in Renfrewshire

Supporting and Sustaining Senior Leader's Resilience in partnership with Drummond International

The Scottish Attainment Challenge has provided a significant opportunity to focus on the importance of school leadership in our attempts to tackle poverty and close the poverty related attainment gap. We have made significant strides as an education authority in supporting our school leaders within an empowered system to lead their establishments with confidence and competence.

High quality school leadership is vital if we are to see the systemic changes we need to embed over the coming years in order to secure equity and excellence. Our education workforce needs to understand the role that they play in disrupting the pattern for those living in poverty. Within Renfrewshire, our sustainable leadership strategy, for staff at every level, reinforces the importance of high-quality career long professional learning at its centre and is based on the principles of social interdependence theory. This is particularly significant as we recognise that collaboration is at the heart of high-quality leadership at all levels.

Our 'outstanding' leadership development approach, both for aspiring senior managers and for those already in such posts was recognised by Education Scotland in our Attainment Challenge inspection in February 2019. One aspect of our approach, The Step Back programme, in partnership with Drummond International, was extremely highly evaluated with a significant number of senior leaders requesting further opportunities for the development of reflective practice.

Step Back Programme – Drummond International (Nov 2016 – Oct 2019):

The Step Back programme was based on the work of Professor Norman Drummond. Through his wide experience as a headteacher, as a minister and as an internationally respected coach in life and business, he learned the fundamental lesson for both himself and for others: we can't hope to achieve our potential unless we take time out to work out what is most important to us. Most importantly, the programme focused on the rich rewards of stepping back: clarity of thought, stronger objectives - and the ability to discern the true priorities of your own heart.

The programme consisted of a number of 2-day workshops for senior school leaders from across all sectors – early years, primary and secondary. Almost all workshops took place in Ardoch House, Loch Lomond, but all settings were equally relaxing and tranquil and very much supported the ethos the local authority aimed to create. An ethos very much shared by the Drummond approach and our Head of Schools who co-planned and delivered the programme

During the 2 days, groups of senior leaders from across sectors were given the opportunity to take two days away from their establishment to reflect on their leadership style, develop co-coaching approaches and consider strategies for leading change. In addition, the approach allowed the time to learn from one another and engage with research evidence on strategies which positively addressed the attainment gap.

There were a number of key elements to the approach taken in the Step Back programme. These related primarily to the importance of listening to one another to understand rather than to respond. The programme built on the effective use of

questioning and active listening skills in order to build capacity in co-coaching. Co-coaching 'partners' were then able to continue supporting one another following the workshops using the skills they had further developed during the 2 days.

Impact:

- Enhanced relationships amongst the senior leadership cohort within the authority
- Widened senior leader's knowledge of effective leadership strategies and styles
- Supported senior leaders to be more self-reflective in relation to their leadership style/s
- Helped senior leaders prioritise what was most important within the school change agenda
- Encouraged senior leaders to have those 'difficult' conversations and take the right action rather than the 'easy option' which is often a short term fix
- Supported senior leaders to balance personal and professional life

In addition, participants expressed how these workshops made them feel valued, supported and cared for by the local authority. This was one of the main objectives of the work with Drummond International from the outset.

As a follow up to this work, we planned and facilitated learning days with a focus on further developing senior leaders' knowledge and understanding of leadership in the wider context and utilising the co-coaching methodology which was developed in the initial programme. Over the past 2 years we have also established HT/DHT learning sets. These are working well and providing a strong and sustainable approach to continuing to reap the benefits of the Step Back programme over the longer term.

Sustaining Head Teacher Resilience – Drummond International (session 2020-22):

At a time of significant change across the public sector, our commitment as a very good employer remains a high priority. The investment we make in our workforce will have a direct impact on the outcomes achieved by our schools. In our second programme planned with Drummond International, we seek to continue to focus on supporting our senior leaders in their role in order that we can maintain our focus on ensuring collective impact of the learning and teaching approaches being taken across the other workstreams within the attainment challenge.

Brighthouse highlights four stages of being a head teacher¹. These are entitled: initiation, development, stall and decline. In order to ensure we support our head teachers and senior leaders and ensure they never reach these latter stages, we have planned a new programme of leadership retreats be programmed over the next two financial years funded from within the SAC leadership workstream. These will focus on building resilience, perseverance and ability to sustain effective leadership over an extended period of time and provide an opportunity to focus on the mental health and wellbeing of our senior leaders so that they in turn are then best placed to effectively lead in an empowered system.

¹ Brighthouse, S. "How Successful Head Teachers Survive and Thrive" (RM 2007) 13

The approach will be based on the highly successful Step Back programme with the Head of Schools working in partnership again with Drummond International to deliver a bespoke programme to build sustainable improvement in senior leadership capacity. By continuing to work in partnership with Drummond International we will be able to build on current success and ensure the programme is suitably tailored to meet our particular requirements as we move towards greater empowerment in schools and a more self-supporting system.