

Head Teacher's Message

June 2017



Dear Parents and Carers,

Reflecting on the last 12 months I can see that the hard work and engagement of pupils, the continued support of parents and the dedication of staff remain key factors in achieving success. In particular, I commend the energy and commitment from staff, which I witness on a daily basis, from teaching staff and classroom assistants to technicians, clerical staff, cooks, janitors and cleaners.

I work alongside three Depute Head Teachers, ten Faculty Leaders, five Principal Teachers of Guidance, and subject leaders in, chemistry, biology, design technology and geography.

Last session we appointed a Principal Teacher (Acting) Developing the Young Workforce and this session we also appointed three Principal Teacher of Raising Attainment (Acting). Together, we meet as the school's Extended Leadership Team to discuss and review improvement priorities.

Improving learning and teaching has been one of our main priorities this session. Staff have been working together, sharing best practice and looking at the importance of feedback to support pupils' progress. We have adopted strategies to allow us to make more effective use of data to support learning and teaching and improve attainment. Through the development of a nurturing environment, making use of a restorative approach, we continue to build strong and effective relationships with pupils, parents, and one another, leading to a more positive and inclusive ethos and a stronger school community. Guidance staff, our Skills Development Scotland Adviser, and our Principal Teacher responsible for Developing the Young Workforce, continue to support pupils into positive destinations, and we have seen the percentage leaving school and going on to university, to college, or into training or employment, rise significantly from 87.9% in 2012 to 98% in 2016. This is a success story we are very proud of at Largs Academy. Positive post-school destinations are achievable for all, and we continue to do all we can to instill an ethos where pupils believe they can achieve their goals and aspirations.

The visit from Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education in January involved intense scrutiny of all aspects of school life and we were delighted to receive an extremely positive report which not only reassured us that we are performing well, but agreed with our own evaluation of strengths and areas of improvement. We are a confident school community, moving in the right direction to deliver excellence and equity to benefit all our young people. [Full HMIE Report is available from Education Scotland website – see link on our home page.]

Planning the move to the new campus in March 2018 is high on our agenda and we have three main work streams in operation to ensure minimum disruption to learning and teaching. We are focusing on SQA and exam preparation, planning the coordination and organisation of SQA course work and exams in detail; we have a team of enthusiastic 'Decant Champions' helping to coordinate the move, supporting each Faculty as they clear cupboards and pack up; and we have a Legacy Group, planning activities around the move, which include an opportunity for former pupils to visit the school before it is demolished. **An Open Evening to mark the closure of the building will take place on Wednesday 15th November 2017. If anyone has any information about the school they would like to share, please get in touch with Mrs Scott, Faculty Leader of Social Subjects.**

Our school motto, 'labore et disce' ('work and learn'), will remain with us as we continue to strive for excellence and equity in all we do. We aim to further embed our school values and continue to do all we can to instill an ethos where pupils believe they can achieve their dreams and aspirations. We continue to develop strong and effective partnership working, and value the support and involvement of parents, carers, partners and other agencies to achieve the best outcomes for all our young people.

The Scottish Government has placed education at the forefront of its agenda and John Swinney confirmed this commitment to closing the attainment gap when the Pupil Equity Fund was announced earlier this year. Pupil Equity Funding has been allocated directly to schools, targeted at those children most affected by the poverty related attainment gap, and just over £60,000 will be provided through the Attainment Scotland Fund to use for additional

staffing or resources in our school. The funding is distributed on the basis of the numbers of pupils in P1-S3 known to be eligible and registered for free school meals.

At Largs Academy, we have developed a rationale for use of this funding, based on a clear contextual analysis which identifies the poverty related attainment gap in our school. We intend a 'belt and braces' approach, adopting strategies which address current issues, while doing all we can to reduce the impact of barriers such as high exclusion rate or poor attendance. Some interventions are universal but most will be targeted on an identified group of young people. Our focus will be on Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing. Although performance across the school is very strong, there are pupils in each yeargroup whose access to the curriculum is affected by their poor literacy and numeracy. We wish to develop strategies to combat a lack of resilience and an increase in mental health concerns. Regular progress up-dates will be provided next session and we believe this plan will strengthen the school community and improve outcomes for all our young people.

Two years ago we introduced the Largs Academy ARC prize – the letters representing each of our school values – to recognise the importance we place on a school ethos based on these core values. We award individual prizes to those pupils who have gone the extra mile, demonstrating commitment to one of these values, and this session all First Year pupils completed a variety of activities to 'give back' to the local community. Monday 22nd May was our first organised Communities Day, and we hope to build on its success next session to improve the school's reputation in the local area, to help develop responsible young citizens, and to embed core values in the life of the school.

We continue to promote dressing for excellence and both the PTA and Parent Council continue to support the drive to encourage all pupils to wear full school dress, including blazers. This session Mrs Blair, PTA Chair, secured grant funding for a new homework initiative to be introduced in August 2017. The traditional homework diaries will be replaced by an online app, allowing pupils and parents to see what homework has been issued, when it's due and how long it should take to complete. As Head Teacher, I believe in instilling a culture based on values and promoting high standards in behaviour, school dress and work ethic, including developing good self-study habits. This all adds up to the type of school we are.

I look forward to continuing to work with you in partnership to deliver a high quality education for all our pupils.

Best wishes

Heather Burns

Mrs Heather Burns

Head Teacher