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A visitor to the school cannot fail to notice the following mission statement and aims:-

Graphical user interface

Description automatically generated

This is visible in every room, every corridor and every classroom. Visitors on arrival virtually trip up on the visual display on the school building.

The purpose of this report is to discover whether children do actually care about others, whether they grow and develop in school so they are equipped for the next stage in their learning and beyond, and whether all have the opportunity to shine at something and at some stage. I have had the privilege to spent time in class, hold informal interviews with senior leaders, staff, Governors and parents. I have looked at subject leader files, examples of children’s work. And most importantly, I have spoken to a considerable number of children of different ages who are the greatest ambassadors for the school. They are articulate, proud of what they are able to achieve, proud of their school and are enthusiastic learners.

Care, Grow and Share is evident across the school. It is in planning at all levels (from lesson planning in the short term to long-term strategic planning). Aspects of care, grow and share are repeated in all year groups across the school, where experiences and opportunities build on those previously provided at a greater depth. Involvement of the children in this journey is no haphazard undertaking. Opportunities to lead, to work together, to represent the school or learn something different is carefully orchestrated. Outside expertise is used to augment curriculum opportunities. The curriculum expands and develops across all year, delivered at progressively deeper levels. This ambitious curriculum does not lose sight of the very highest expectations of standards. Staff and Governors freely talk about the aspiration for high standards amongst all learners. It is more a 3-D ambition of having excellence at the same time as enjoyment.

Care (including respect, support and togetherness).

Children are able to talk about what care means to them, whether it be respect for each other in the classroom or playtime. Younger children talked about taking turns to talk in group work or listening to others. Older children were able to talk about helping younger children in the playground, or listening to others read (Yr 5). Relationships are respectful and are a strength.

This theme is linked to the taught curriculum. Children were able to discuss aspects (for example) of their understanding of LGBTQ+ characteristics, of bullying and staying safe. One Y1 child was able to give a full and expansive commentary on scamming and hacking. Children talked positively about behaviour in and around school. They talked about making choices. They spoke about the support a small number get. They were very understanding that some children find making choices hard and were supportive the extra help they received from adults.

Discussions with parents support this. Parents were very complimentary about support children receive (for example for those pupils with SEND, support during and after COVID). They talked about the warm family atmosphere within the school. Behaviour was felt to be good. Governors echoed this. They were aware that COVID had impacted on attitudes to learning and social behaviours, but felt individualised support was in place.

The school places itself in the heart of the community, with close links to the church and other places of worship. Children talked about school trips and “being on their very best behaviour in public”. They talked about charity fund-raising, the choir singing to local OAPs or trips to the local hospice.

A member of staff talked about her role in the pastoral support system the school has. She outlined her support on a 1:1 basis for some twelve children with emotional needs. The support offered involved pre-questionnaires with both children and parents, and then an impact questionnaire at the conclusion of the support.

This curriculum offer is dynamic. It is adapted and changed to reflect world events (eg the on-going crisis in Ukraine).

With reference to the adults at school, staff and Governors spoke about how school leaders place an equal emphasis on their care. Examples of this included support for home issues, support and encouragement to develop their skills or talents. Even the change in a work title supports this. In most schools, teaching assistants are known as just that; an assistant. Certainly in some schools, this does not recognise their expertise, their invaluable support for children and staff, as well as their efforts which go beyond the ‘average’. At Longton, colleagues are known as Assistant Teachers, a subtle but important difference.

Growth (including try anything, being open to challenge, taking a full part in the running of the school)

Growth was described by a KS1 child as “extending your learning, playing your part in school.” Some stated that you learn to “approach things in a positive way, avoid the negative” or trying something new.

The school prospectus states that “A major strength of our school is our commitment to maximise chances, experiences and opportunities”. All stakeholders made mention of this. A member of staff talked her leadership of wider opportunities within the curriculum. For example, Wednesday afternoons in Y3 and 4 could be spent learning Braille or sign language. She described how drama is systematically taught from the earliest age, so children are used to performing to audiences of different sizes or pretending to be someone else (with their views, perhaps from a different time). Governors echoed their support of this.

She spoke with energy and passion about enterprise schemes, with research, manufacturing, advertisements and sale (eg fruit kebabs). Rather than just making Mother’s Cards, children explored their origin, the first examples and how they have developed over time. This places learning in context, and most certainly is more than just a colouring-in activity.

The colleagues expanded on the wide range of careers advice and opportunities the children have to listen to the world of employment.

Parents spoke warmly about the extra-curriculum provision and specialist teaching (eg drama, music, IT). This was echoed by staff and children. Children spoke about trips and opportunities they had experienced, and ones they knew were coming. Learning was seen by all to start locally and expand outwards.

Children talked about the many opportunities to take part in the school; the Head’s Team, Snack and Chat, the Eco squad or being a buddy to a younger child. Some opportunities included meeting other children in the South Ribble Pupil Parliament, or representing the school in a STEM activity. Children talked about discussion sessions in class where they listened to two opposing views on a subject and then had to vote one way or the other. This allows children to have the opportunity to debate an issue, listen to differing views and then come to a rationale decision.

Snack and Chat was frequently mentioned. Children enjoy this, and felt it a privilege to be chosen to meet the headteacher or other colleagues and answer questions about a foundation subject or an aspect of school (eg playtimes). They felt proud that the school took their views and opinions seriously enough to arrange these regular meetings. This is supported in discussions with subject leaders (core and foundation). Colleagues valued the opportunity to talk through their subjects with children to see the impact of their subject action plans.

Membership of the Head’s Team is worthy of a special note. Children have to apply in writing and be interviewed by Governors. There is a dress code for this role, and children are required to report on their findings. This is another example of developing a graduated responsibility in the school for children, starting in the earliest years, developing throughout the age groups and moving towards top end of school.

Growth also includes that of school staff. Many, many staff spoke about the unique support and encouragement they had been given by senior leaders, and especially the headteacher. One assistant teacher spoke about her 13 year journey, from dinner lady, to pre-school leader and running lego groups. Through support and encouragement, she took the relevant qualifications to undertake her current role. The school has supported two apprentice teachers, colleagues who have developed in their careers. Another described the life-changing effect the headteacher’s confidence in her ability and the support she had received. Continuous professional development was emphasised by all at all times.

Shine (including challenge, achievement and celebrating success)

Pupils talked with pride about the many opportunities they have to celebrate their achievements. A group of children discussed the vast array of cups and trophies in the hall and what they each meant. Unlike many school halls with trophies, the children knew what they were and the ones they felt they wanted the most. They covered all aspects of the Care, Growth and Shine, not merely participation in the local competitions against other schools or swimming. Two girls eyed up the Resilience Cup, and how their achievements might mean they might be awarded this cup. These cups and trophies were not there, merely gathering dust. The cups meant something.

Children were proud to show their achievement books. These map out their achievements across the full spectrum of Care, Grow and Shine; when they did the activity, what they did and is signed off by the relevant adult. Much alike the scouting/guiding awards, the school has a system of character awards of badges. This academic and social/pastoral award follows the children through school and the different age groups, giving a wealth of discovery and talent through the Longton journey. It also celebrates the achievements at home in any of the many activities and sports which children involved in. A Y5 girl spoke with pride about her funding raising through selling her hair, and her accomplishments in judo.

As is often the case, the children summarise how they value this recognition themselves:-

“They recognise our talents outside the school (eg swimming, dancing).”

“This motivates you more. It also motivates other children.”

“Recognising our achievements inspires other children to do better.”

Summary.

Jerome Bruner put forward a theory of cognitive growth with regard to a Spiralling Curriculum in the 1960’s. It highlighted the importance of children meeting a range of concepts, skills and ideas over their time in a school, then re-engaging with that knowledge at a greater depth each time. It keeps the knowledge and attitudes to learning fresh in children’s mind. The curriculum offer at Longton does exactly this. The three aims of care, shine and grow are returned to frequently and at a deeper level, and are carefully planned and well-thought through, building on previous learning.

I would suggest that the curriculum offer available to children at Longton is probably unique. It is certainly ambitious, far-reaching and successful.

The curriculum offer has developed and expanded over the years. It is exceptionally well-led with a clear rationale. It is ambitious and prepares children for their stage of learning and ultimately for adult life and employment. It is planned for at every level. There is consistency in the planning. It is monitored and evaluated. It is an integral part of the ethos of the school. Children, parents, Governors and staff all understand it, talk about it and *believe* in it. They are able to talk about the impact it has had on their lives, their children’s lives. Some were able to talk about how it had supported the transition into secondary school.

It is my view that children and staff do indeed care, they certainly grow and they most certainly shine. Personal development is outstanding.