***“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”***

**(2 Corinthians 4.18)**

**[Valuing what we measure, measuring what we value]**

There was for some time an educational obsession with carefully evaluating and measuring progress in a given lesson, a certain interaction between a teacher a group of students, usually over the course of 60 minutes. We used to think that the best way of knowing what was going on over time, was to visit each teacher for an hour a term, see what we could see in that short time, ideally arrive at a grade for the teacher (not the learning), and a list of strengths and weaknesses (or in less judgemental schools, what went well, and even better ifs!). Then we moved to a new system of visiting classes for less time, but making similar judgements, and then totted up these gradings across a school to arrive at a percentage of lessons (and by implications, teachers) graded as Good or better.

It was a ‘marmite experience’ – **who can forget the elation and rooftops feeling of being described as Outstanding, or equally who can let go of the crushing blow of being told you are Inadequate**. Equally if you are the observer, the challenge of finding the right box, and feeding that back effectively combining the right levels of challenge, support and patience.

As the Ofsted framework changed, we felt less comfortable grading individual lessons, so generally stopped doing that (although we perhaps still did it secretly on colour coded appraisal documents). We started talking about progress over time rather than in during individual lessons, and scrutinised books for evidence of this through beautifully presented learning conversations, dialogic feedback and endless yellow, pink of green highlighter-pen progress/feedback boxes. We became more interested in the journey than the episode.

Ultimately though, what we really care about is the final result. That’s what we’re measured on, whether we’re a student, individual teacher, school, academy trust, Diocese or Local Authority.

The end result matters most, and as ever, **what we can measure, we value most and therefore we value most that which we can measure.**

The reality of any learning experience however is that it is part of a journey, the end of which is not yet known, the future of which cannot be measured. While we can gain from temporary stop-off points on the journey, they are not always fully reflective of the bigger picture or the longer-term journey. They tend to over-prioritise a testing process which rewards recall, synthesis and problem solving under the silent time pressure of the exam hall, whereas very few examples of professional life seem to necessitate this. In this verse, Paul is speaking not simply in a careless regard for the present challenges or tests – after all, much of his letter up until this point has emphasised the detail of the very dangerous situations he and his team were finding themselves in. He writes with typical flourish earlier in the chapter:

*“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed” (4.8-9)*

This was a leader who knew the immediacy of judgement, and the consequences of failure, perhaps even more so than 21st century school leaders. However, in spite of the pressures and challenges he faced as a leader, he encourages the readers to reflect on the difference between the seen and the unseen. If you were to think of all the things that are ‘seen’ in your school (and that you perhaps find therefore easiest to measure) and then to compare that to the ‘unseen’, what would be the comparison? For example, if you teach a group of 8-year olds in Year 4 for a year – what eventually matters, that which is seen in the present, or that which is yet to come. Imagine if in 10 years’ time, that same group of 8-year olds all came back to you as their teacher and told you where they were now. Or in 15 years, when they’re 23, or 25 years when they’re 33…what would your hopes be for them? What would you want them to say?

**[Hope as a pedagogical posture]**

Ultimately verse 18 is as NT Wright puts it, *“one of the most astonishing statements of Christian hope ever written”* – but then isn’t all great teaching filled with hope? Isn’t anyone who gives their career to inspiring and empowering young people essentially looking to embody hope on a daily basis? **Hope is a ‘pedagogical posture’ - an orientation, mindset, lens, filter, trajectory, energy, direction, vision that great teachers instinctively live and breathe.** They do it in their curriculum design, their lesson planning, their handling of data and the culture they set in their classroom. Of course, they really truly care about ‘final outcomes’ of the course, the test or the performance. However, they also fix their minds on the longer term, ‘unseen’ outcomes that they want for their students, and they care passionately about 5- 10- and 20-years from now. Even though they may never see it.

Contemporary architects get to see their buildings made. It must feel amazing – to walk, talk, and work in a building that began as a sketch on a drawing board. Norman cathedral designers did not have the same privilege owing to the long-term construction challenges of 11th and 12th century building projects. They would sign off the plans with the client, having poured their everything into the perfect design. Hope sweats. However, they did so knowing they would never see the finished product. In many ways this is such a helpful metaphor for teaching, if we focus on the bigger picture, not merely the short-term measurement. **We may never get to see the outcome, but we still choose to build the cathedral each day.**

Whether you are teaching a class of Year 3s or Year 13s, leading a department, school, trust or authority, there is a constant leadership dialogue between ‘the seen’ and ‘the unseen’. The notion of the unseen is not fluffy or soft-touch when it is rooted in the present hope of our leadership and pedagogy. **To fix our eyes on the unseen does not mean we ignore the present challenges, but it enables us to view our present challenges through a different leadership lens.** As Richard Rohr succinctly puts it:

*“How we see is what we see”* (*Rohr 2017: 15)*

This is a leadership orientation which affects our decision making, but it is also an approach to pedagogy and the evaluation of pedagogical effectiveness – for it is often this longer term view that leads to more effective short term outcomes, even in the test. And as Paul says in Verse 16, “For this reason, we don’t lose heart.”

**[Questions for Discussion]**

1. What is your philosophy of teaching and learning, and how do you judge effectiveness in the classroom? What kinds of things do you measure?
2. What things are ‘unseen’ in education? How could focusing on these affect our sense of resilience?
3. What do you fix your eyes on? What impact do these focal points have on your decision making and actions?
4. What lens do you see your present challenges through? Do you share the same lens as your colleagues? How could you work together to make things clearer?