

Southampton School Improvement Officer Annual Visit Report 2021 – 2022

School	Cantell School	
Headteacher	Harry Kutty head@cantell.co.uk	
Chair of Governors	Glynis Alexander glynis.alexander@cantell.co.uk	
School Improvement Officer	Alan Taylor-Bennett	Date of visit: 8 December 2021
Other attendees	Mark Bagust (Trust SIO) took an active part in this AV and contributed significantly to the report	
Last Ofsted inspection judgement / date	Continues to be good (s8 short inspection September 2017)	
Information about the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1210 students are currently on roll <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ this is 26 more than at this point last year ○ the boy/girl imbalance remains significant • 18.6% of students have SEND <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1.8% (of NOR) of students have an EHCP (included in above figure) • 49% of students have EAL • 35.5% of students are eligible for PP • 33.2% of students are currently FSM6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ this is 4% (of NOR) less than academic year 2020/21 • 36 students currently have a social worker and a further 38 have ever had a social worker • 142 (12%) of students are currently monitored through the school's safeguarding team • 14% of students were persistently absent in 2020/21 • 2.9% students had 1 or more exclusion(s) in 2020/21 • 5.7% of students arrived in-year in 2020/21 • 3.4% of students were in-year leavers in 2020/21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 0.6% (of NOR) were EHE (included in above figure) • 25 students had reduced timetables in 2020/21 and 6 do so this year 	

Follow up review recommended?	No follow-up visit is needed or was requested
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Area to develop	Timescale and intended impact
The enunciation of curriculum intent	Over the next few months. Leaders to review the whole-school statement of intent with a view to ensuring that it sends a few strong, simple messages about current curriculum emphases at Cantell. Subject leaders to review their expression of their subject statement of intent with a view to demonstrating the 'flow through' of these whole school emphases as well as their own, and emphasising the key elements of knowledge and skills to strengthen the connection between intent, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes and CPD.

PSHE	As soon as possible. Leaders to review the delivery model at KS4 and undertake a curriculum intent review to ensure stronger progression and better sequencing of essential content across all five years. Consideration could be given to some significant involvement by students in this process.
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How evidence was obtained

Meetings were held with:

- the headteacher and other senior staff
- subject leaders of science & English
- student in Years 7, 8 and 11
- the business manager
- a group of ECTs.

The following documentation was reviewed:

- the school development plan
- the self-evaluation summary
- the minutes of the most recent FGB meeting
- an analysis of 2021 outcomes
- the single central record
- analyses of attendance and exclusions
- the report from the most recent SIP visit.

Several lesson visits were undertaken across a range of subjects and year groups.

Summary of key findings

- The school continues to be led with zeal and commitment to meeting the needs of its students and the local community. The headteacher and his senior staff strive for improvements with a palpable sense of drive and energy. This is producing impressive outcomes for students' welfare, happiness, and the security of their learning.
- The accent on having a clear vision for the next few years that puts students first means that the pandemic has not thrown the school off course. It has some appropriately different priorities that continue to serve the needs of students and their families appropriately.
- Leaders see significant value in being a part of the Aspire Trust can point to tangible benefits around students' transition from Year 6 to Year 7.
- The school continues to be popular and maintains a pleasing number of 1st preference applications from the parents of Year 6 students. The headteacher is a well-known and highly regarded member of the local and broader Southampton community, and the school has received positive media attention more widely than this.

The quality of education

- The quality of education in English and science was scrutinised closely.
- English
 - Leaders have thought hard about curriculum intent and now have a much greater clarity about the outcomes they are trying to achieve. This is expressed in a clear vision statement and curriculum overviews that set out the key knowledge and skills that students are taught in each year group. Leaders recognise that English is a 'spiral' rather than hierarchical curriculum, where the same core skills, eg inference and retrieval of quotes, are regularly reinforced through increasingly demanding texts. Careful thought has been given to the choice of texts that students read, starting with a transition text in Year 7, several texts that focus on 19th century Britain, Shakespeare plays and a range of modern literature.
 - In lessons, staff build on students' prior learning and encourage them to revisit and make connections. The use of Learning Journeys is encouraging students to reflect on their learning and

how they can improve their work. For example, students in Year 7 were able to identify different parts of a narrative structure in texts and how they could apply this structure to their own writing.

- Science
 - Outcomes in science by the end of KS4 are pleasing. The team is stable and many teachers are well established here. The newer members of staff are receiving good support to enable them to develop their classroom skills.
 - The gradual return to practical work is being well managed with around half of lessons currently involving either students having opportunity to use equipment, or a teacher demonstration.
 - Good use is made of external stimulus and guidance around curriculum intent and implementation eg from the ASE and IoP.
 - The subject statement of intent involves several documents. Long-term planning is assisted by the subject calendar, medium- and short-term planning by the schemes of learning (or 'route maps') which involve a more lesson-by-lesson statement of essential and desirable learning. The subject leader agreed that an approach that culminates in everyone having a clear grasp of the specific knowledge and skills that every student would be expected to acquire over a period of time (eg a half term) more explicitly and simply may assist with developing implementation strategies.
 - We agreed that students often need to be able to 'zoom out' of the detail and to see how their current learning is located within the big picture of science, and how various topics are linked and key concepts are manifest in various contexts.
 - In lessons we saw teachers using attack words. Students were responsive when teachers checked understanding and the quality of learning certainly benefited from this, eg when a teacher checked that students understood why dyed water was used in the experiment on celery. We agreed that some lessons would have benefited from much more careful checking of students' grasp of the essential points (eg what 'peak flow' and 'L/min' signified).
- In these and other lessons visited the great majority of students were seen working quietly and studiously. Many teachers offer a strong lead and structure to learning and demonstrate good subject knowledge.
- A learning walk through Year 11 geography lessons showed the launch of a new topic and students were engaged actively in their learning, drawing upon knowledge from key stage 3 and applying it in a new context. One lesson offered students particularly rich and sophisticated insights into geographical models of economic development.
- In Art, students built on their prior learning. The sequence of learning enabled students to actively work on prints where they were applying their knowledge of colour theory.
- Sometimes staff need to provide greater clarity of instructions and ensure that the most essential teaching points are clarified and re-enforced. An excellent example of where this did happen was in Year 7 Drama lessons, which explicitly broke down the key components of comedia character. This enabled all students to fully access the task and for the teacher to provide direct and constructive feedback on specific aspects of students' performances.
- Leaders are aware and are working on strategies to support students who do not take enough of an active role in their learning. Some students have reduced confidence and capacity to engage given their experiences since March 2020. The understandable use of face coverings also does not help the effective flow of communication. A consequence is that, while students listen quietly and respectfully, few speak up to ask for further clarification or to contribute some thinking. Also, in a few lessons visited, some students did not fully understand some aspect of the work but did not act to address this. A very small minority seemed quietly disengaged.
- Leaders have not found the national tutoring programme as effective as the school's staff supporting specific students with their additional learning needs.
- Cooperative work across the trust has had clear impact on students' the quality of pupils' learning as they move from Year 6 into Year 7. The 'Nail it' initiative identifies the essential knowledge and skills that pupils need to 'nail' to make a flying start at Cantell. This is communicated clearly to primaries and Cantell staff have produced excellent support materials, including on-line learning tools, to support its delivery. Leaders speak of their global strategy involving primary staff learning about the 'what' from them, and their learning about the 'how' from their primary colleagues.

- End-of-KS4 outcomes data continues to be analysed closely and carefully to look for indications of the successes of current priorities and to identify potential underperformance. The valuable insights that this offers into achievement enables leaders to target groups and individual students for extra support and challenge with considerable precision.
- Students achieved an overall A8 of 45.3 in 2021. 61% achieved Basics at G4+, this being broadly similar to outcomes in this measure over recent years, and 36% at G5+, again, broadly in line with the average over the last few years. The proportion achieving Basics at G7+ has risen steadily and pleasingly: in 2021 it was double the 5.3% of students achieving at these higher levels in 2018. 23.4% were entered for the Ebacc and 18% achieved it; only one in three students were entered for languages although over half of these students achieved at least a strong pass. The proportion entered for humanities was 62% but, again, over half achieved at least a strong pass.
- Leaders are aware that the gap between the (smaller proportion of) attainment of disadvantaged students and others widened in 2021 outcomes to be, on average, over a grade in every subject. This was largely due to the attainment of disadvantaged students having dropped by about a third/half a grade.
- The attainment of students who do not have English as an additional language has improved. This is associated with leaders having prioritised their achievement over recent years. The gap closing with those with EAL is artificially greatly reduced because of the drop in average attainment of those with EAL.
- Boys' average attainment is broadly steady over recent years but girls' attainment dipped in 2021. Leaders attribute this to factors already highlighted above (ie the higher than usual proportion not having EAL and being disadvantaged).
- Students with SEND achieved broadly in line with this group in previous cohorts ie on average about two grades below others in every subject.

Behaviour and attitudes

- Leaders' relentless focus on behaviour and attendance has had a positive impact. Recorded behaviour incidents are very low and below pre-pandemic levels. Attendance so far this academic year is, impressively, similar to pre-pandemic levels at 94.1% and has shown improvement for disadvantaged pupils, despite the increase in their number (+115).
- There has been a robust response to the Ofsted survey on sexual assault and harassment. Staff training has been provided and students' awareness raised through assemblies and tutor time. Incidents of sexual abuse and harassment are now explicitly recorded, along with other examples of peer-on-peer bullying such as any use of derogatory homophobic and racial language. Numbers recorded are low and all incidents are followed up.
- The school uses its own alternative provision for the relatively small number of students who struggle to engage with mainstream education. 23 students currently attend this provision, with only 1 student educated in an off-site AP (Compass Centre).
- Students spoken with are clearly proud of their school. When asked about its 'stand out' positive feature, many cited the quality of their learning in lessons and how effective their teachers are at supporting this, while being 'nice' at the same time. Many appreciated the way in which staff balanced friendliness and professionalism.
- Students describe poor behaviour in lessons as rare and usually being limited to off-task chatter. Younger students feel that the narrow corridors can occasionally become busy and some behaviour can be a little boisterous, but they say that it's almost never malicious.
- Students say that they feel very safe here and that bullying is very rare and low-level when it happens. Staff are regarded as caring, and the great majority of students would be comfortable reporting any unpleasant incidents that they had experienced or witnessed, in the knowledge that staff would respond well. They like the system of house points but would value having more ways to earn them.

Personal development

- The small group of Year 11 students interviewed had mixed views about the PSHE curriculum. They have really valued recent sessions on consent, drug awareness and gambling because they feel that the

sessions were relevant and provided them with information they need. However, they feel that this is not always the case: they feel that the enrichment days can seem disjointed, with lots of different sessions, and that, despite the best efforts of staff, many students do not take the sessions seriously. Progression in some aspects of content could not be tracked convincingly across all five years.

- None of the students spoken to had heard of the term 'protected characteristics'. However, when prompted, they could describe different types of discrimination that could be experienced by some groups on the basis of, for example, religion, ethnicity, sexuality and age. Older students had a very good understanding of consent and were clear that 'no means no'.
- The school offers an impressive range of extra-curricular clubs (currently 61 are running!) and student participation is high, particularly in Years 7 and 8 where about two-thirds of students regularly take part in an activity. Leaders have prioritised maintaining some enrichment provision during the lockdowns and getting the full programme up and running again as soon as restrictions were eased. The introduction of a new online registration system has made it easier for leaders to monitor student participation and identify any groups who are underrepresented. For, example leaders are reviewing the extra-curricular offer to try and encourage more girls in Year 9 to take part.
- The number of trips and visits is inevitably down on pre-pandemic levels. Nevertheless, 25 trips have taken place so far this term for all year groups and across a range of subjects.
- The Empower programme provides a comprehensive range of opportunities for students to develop their wider employability skills, like leadership and teamwork.
- The school is particularly proud of the increasing numbers of students who are successfully completing the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award (42 last year) and that the first cohort of students have completed the Silver Award.
- Careers at Cantell is embedded across the subjects and there are extra activities throughout the years to further inspire and inform. All activity is coordinated by the Careers leader **and SLT link** with support from both employability and enrichment leads. The school accessed 2 independent careers advisers prior to the 2021-22 academic year enabling 2.5 days of interviewing a week and this has now risen to 3 independent careers advisers enabling 3.5 days of interviewing a week. This has led to an excellent data set for the transitioning year 11s.
- The team has full support from the senior leaders, governing body and teaching team. The careers leader is able to implement a range of careers activities which benefit the students and ensure aspiration and expectation is high across the school's student body.
- The proportion of students NEET from the 2021 cohort is, perhaps understandably, higher than usual at 4%. Some are engaging with the Itchen College programme but a few have personal circumstances that prevent this. A further 3% of the cohort are unaccounted for; staff are continuing to work closely with external agencies to ensure the welfare of these students.
- The Baker clause is prominent on the careers page with access arrangements clear. Careers program and support links are provided on the dedicated page covering all bases. Staff could consider streamlining the webpage to reduce scrolling; careers enterprise recommends evaluation is included on the website to ensure it is providing the appropriate level of detail.

Leadership and management

- Staffing remains usefully stable at all levels, including governors. Leaders are targeting re-establishing the confidence and creativity of their staff post-lockdowns and while they continue to tackle the various challenges of Covid. This has served to maintain very good staff morale.
- The self-evaluation summary for governors highlights key areas for attention this year: restoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in a few subjects to pre-pandemic levels; students' reading skills; attendance; students with challenges arising from their SEMH and being from disadvantaged backgrounds; ensuring the security of all students in education, training or employment post-16.
- The current curriculum statement on the website (why not call it the whole-school statement of intent?) emphasises the importance of knowledge and recall and some skills, but doesn't yet explicitly address these key points. The website is being reviewed and refreshed for 2022.
- Each subject statement of intent on the website has an explicit link to knowledge and skills but these are very high level rather than serving to drive teaching and learning in classrooms week by week.

- Not all subjects are always clear about the difference between knowledge and skills. Subject leaders could be encouraged to reflect on the advantages of ensuring that all of their very good curriculum planning culminates in clear statements of the very specific knowledge and skills that they want students to acquire over appropriate periods of time during the year (eg over a topic, or half termly) and consider publishing these on the website.
- Leaders have established a very strong culture of continual self-evaluation and development planning. Top-level emphases are clear (see above) and are reinforced frequently and effectively. There are specific action plans in place for particular initiatives. Very unusually, there is no whole-school SDP/SIP. We decided that the clarity of leaders' vision, the highly coherent manner in which everyone works as a team, leaders' liking the capacity for responsiveness and flexibility within a tight overall structure, and the excellent lines of communication in the school had largely obviated the need for these documents. Interestingly, middle leaders remarked that they didn't feel the need for such documentation because 'it's all in the bloodstream of the school'.
- Subject leaders play a significant and vital role in school improvement. They regard themselves as pivotal to maintaining high standards of learning and behaviour and are obviously proud to be trusted to act quite autonomously but with excellent lines of communication, both formal and informal, with senior staff.
- Communication systems in the school are very highly developed and very effective.
 - Senior leaders meet very frequently and give considerable time to sharing, staff welfare issues, drop-in priorities and behavioural (both positive and negative) events. They are therefore extremely well-informed about the day-to-day working of their school.
 - Weekly faculty briefings are used to support staff subject knowledge and the implementation of whole school and subject T&L priorities. In one session the following was observed.
 - The mathematics team spending time working through multi-stage operations from the mathematics hub, thinking about the steps that students would need to go through.
 - Feedback on learning walks carried out by members of the team science team around the 3 key T&L priorities (attack words, learning journeys, checking for understanding).
 - Discussion in humanities around learning journeys and review of how they are being developed in each subject. The subject leader has clearly taken on board feedback from previous observations and has reflected deeply on the implications and action points for subjects.
- Very strong leadership is provided for staff's continual professional development. There is a clear distinction between subject-specific and generic pedagogical knowledge and skill development, and responsibilities are assigned clearly. The effectiveness of CPD is judged very appropriately in terms of its impact on learning. ECTs feel very well supported by their mentors and staff in their subject teams. The school is working with its partners in the Aspire Community Trust to deliver the Ambition Institute core programme. ECT's appreciate how the programme breaks training modules down into small, manageable weekly focus areas. They value the instructional coaching provided by mentors which focuses on specific targets and the opportunity to discuss ideas and strategies as a group in sessions led by the Induction Tutor.
- Safeguarding is a real strength. In response to increased referrals as a result of the pandemic (approximately 50 MASH referrals since September) capacity has been expanded to support the DSL through reviews of responsibilities of pastoral staff. Leaders have ensured that staff have received training in how to recognise and report concerns, including sexual abuse and harassment. The single central record is fully compliant. It has been recently checked by the headteacher and safeguarding governor.
- The minutes of governing body meetings scrutinised demonstrated a good level of probing and questioning from governors on a range of topics including post-16 NEET figures, responses to the national emphasis on tackling sexual harassment and violence and links with RSHE, the use of Catch Up funding, and other issues around students' personal development and behaviour including attendance and exclusions. There is a clear sense of challenge and support in these minutes. Governors have also instituted links with subject areas so that they can gain first-hand insights into the experiences of students and staff in the school currently. The emphasis is appropriately on collegiality and contributing to the existing supportive culture rather than being specifically evaluative of that subject's performance.