



Lightman Consulting

Education Consultancy Services

Report to Governors from SIP visit to Cantell School on 1st December 2021

Since the last visit I have acted as external adviser with the headteacher and Chair of Governors in the head's performance management.

The programme for my second SIP visit of this academic year consisted of the following:

- Attendance at SLT morning briefing
- Meeting with headteacher
- Meetings with SLT members to discuss curriculum, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding, year 11 preparation, enrichment and work across the trust.
- Learning walks to lesson A and a range of subjects
- A student voice section with a cross section of year 10 students.

Statistics reviewed included attendance and behaviour and uptake of enrichment activities.

Introduction

- As this term has progressed the SLT has given careful consideration to what would move the school forward in the aftermath of the challenges of the pandemic. They have recognised that now is the time to review and refresh many aspects of a school's work. Life is not the same as before the pandemic and it would be a missed opportunity to ignore this. Consequently, despite the school's success in much of what it has been doing, nobody views that as a reason to stand still. At a time when many schools have found that their capacity for strategic thinking has been constrained, a process of constantly reviewing and refreshing has created an energy which was really inspiring to witness and has begun to lead to further developments which will undoubtedly benefit the whole school community. I think this approach is a key to the school's exceptional ethos and culture.

I will highlight some of these developments in this report:

- The SLT continues to lead the school energetically and proactively spend a great deal of time in classrooms and around the school. All members of the team know the children very well even though numbers have increased substantially. Every morning a briefing looks forensically at the diary and the previous day's data including attendance statistics for each year group and the reasons behind every single absence. They discuss the behaviour points that have been awarded and ensure that prompt action is taken in every case. The impact of this is evident in the data. Attendance levels are significantly higher than national averages and the number of behaviour points is very low. The reasons for many of these points are nearly all ones which would not reach the attention of the SLT in many schools such as talking in class but this reflects the very high expectations within the school ethos. I am sure that the fact that such matters are dealt with in this way is a reason why more challenging behaviour is a rarity in the school and accounts for the small number external fixed term exclusions.
- The SLT has recognised that the level of creativity that characterised much teaching and learning before the pandemic was inevitably affected when a much more limited range of approaches was required. Teachers needed to be supported and given back the confidence to move forward and take risks again. For those whose initial training during that period had severely limited the range of experience there were particular needs to address. With characteristic consultation

with staff, briefings, sessions focused on specific strategies such as questioning, coaching and mentoring have been put in place. Work is taking place with curriculum leaders to take forward work on the learning journey that takes place in their subject and what needs to be adjusted to address learning deficits arising from the disruption. The focus is on small, manageable steps. A recent development has been the creation of a link governor system and a number of visits to departments have taken place. All of this is about a supportive culture and is certainly not a top down approach. During the day I witnessed a number of casual conversations in which staff enthusiastically spoke about the work they and their colleagues were doing in the classroom and it is obvious that this climate continues to be appreciated by staff.

- The pressure and workload on everyone during the pandemic has been responded to by adapting several systems. Data collections have been simplified, a week in which no meetings took place was designated and gestures to recognise staff have been put in place.
- A significant change has been made to homework policy and follow up where it had not been completed taking the burden of this away from teachers and replacing detentions with supportive homework sessions during which students can catch up with missed tasks. Faculty leaders are available to help where students are having difficulty with the tasks. At the same time the nature of homework is being reviewed with a view towards moving in the direction of flipped learning so that it becomes 'pre-work'.
- For the students the pandemic has given rise to a big increase in mental health issues and the extent of disadvantage. Pupil premium numbers have risen from 288 to 403. The school is therefore investigating ways of further increasing pastoral provision and if resources allow bringing in some professional mental health support. Issues relating to the self-confidence of girls have been identified and are a focus for a designated member of staff. The strong pastoral team is supported by a range of volunteers. The SLT has been reviewing those aspects of school life which were restricted during the pandemic with a big emphasis on enrichment. In addition to the clubs a wide range of trips are being organised with the aim of providing opportunities for all children. Numbers are monitored. Numbers attending clubs has shown a high level of uptake in years 7 and 8 reducing somewhat in year 9 particularly for girls and reducing further in year 10. Though the year 10 uptake is likely to be due to the greater focus on GCSE with additional support etc. uptake in year 9 is being considered further and students consulted in order to ensure that what is offered meets their needs. It is hoped that some residential trips will be able to take place soon. We discussed possible ways of supporting PP children with the costs. The way rewards systems operate has been reviewed so that the criteria are standardised. Awards weeks have been organised to recognise the large number of children who do everything that is asked of them and not just the few who do something exceptional.
- Mock exams have been organised in ways designed to help students to manage the transition back to taking formal exams. Rather than having mocks in all subjects they have been spread over two periods before and after Christmas. This was informed by student feedback which suggested that some spent less time revising some subjects because of the large amount of content for Science. Marking of English has been done externally by Pearson providing robust data, reducing staff workload and providing valuable feedback and CPD for staff. Diagnosis Therapy and Testing is embedded in curriculum planning with the use of lesson A to focus on specific topics of make use of tools like the memory workout in Science. Targeted individuals or groups of students receive bespoke support. The SLT meet with every single teacher of year 11 for a data led discussion about every student. A key question is 'if there were no barriers what more could you do?'. This leads to a discussion of potential actions some of which may be simple but impactful steps.
- The year 10 student voice session reflected the fact that they enjoy being part of a very special community and are thriving despite the very obvious challenges. They were able to cite a long list of aspects of the school they like and find helpful and are very appreciative of the supportive and positive relationship with staff who always want to help them. They also know that they are

listened to and that student voice is genuinely acted upon. They highlighted two areas they would like to develop

- a slower pace through the Science curriculum to enable them to gain a better understanding of the large amount of content some of which they find very challenging.
- From some girls: more one to one support for people who lack the confidence to wait behind after lessons and ask for help. This reflected the issue the SLT are aware of.

Other points:

- The school has successfully managed the increase in pupil numbers with staggered breaks and very attractive new common room and service point facilities for year 11. Applications for admissions remain high with 553 applications 431 of which are first choice and second choice, with over 250 as first choice.
- The trust is continuing to play an important part in strengthening common threads around the curriculum, implementing collaborative CPD and helping schools to work on areas for development as well as shared priorities such as ECT teachers and middle leader development. As with other aspect the pandemic has impacted on the amount that could be achieved and the curriculum groups that had been on hold have now been restarted. **Further development:** As with the work at Cantell it would be timely to review what the next stages of strategic direction for the trust might be in order to build further on the significant achievements to date.

Suggestions for next visit:

- To review the outcomes of mocks and predicted data and actions taken to follow up.
- Meetings with some year 11 teachers to look at post mock action.
- Student voice with a group of girls about confidence/motivation etc.
- Follow up on the rewards systems and the impact on student motivation/progress.
- Meeting with some ECT/NQT teachers on CPD
- Follow up on developments with homework.

Date of next SIP visit : Wed. 23rd March 2022

Brian Lightman