



Notes on SIP visit to Cantell School on 27th September 2023

Report to Governors

The programme for my SIP visit consisted of the following:

1. Attendance at SLT briefing
2. A focus on attendance. Meetings with pastoral leaders, observing briefing and procedures meetings and visiting the new wellbeing hub.
3. Review of examination results.
4. Learning walks and walk during breaktime
5. Discussion of priorities for the year including expert teaching and learning.
6. Meeting with Chair of Governors and Head for feedback and PM meeting.

As seen on previous visits the school continues to be in a very strong position, fully staffed with all year groups up to PAN with further improvements in results and strong progress made in all of the areas of focus that were in progress last year. The unswerving commitment to building further on all of this and tackling even the most stubborn challenges continues to be very evident across the whole staff team.

Key points from the day:

Attendance is one of the greatest challenges facing all schools at present. In spite of statistics that exceed national averages and the strongest systems and procedures Cantell faces these in the same way as others. It is very evident that the long-term impact of the pandemic is far from over and that it has had a deep impact on whole families, including societal attitudes to attendance at work and school. There are no simple solutions to this but I do not know of any school that is doing more than Cantell to try to mitigate its impact. In the absence of external resourcing the governors are wisely committing significant resources into the pastoral support for Cantell students.

- The use of data in the morning SLT briefings and across the pastoral team has developed further providing powerful insights and forensic analysis of what lies behind the raw statistics. In spite of the expansion of the school roll this means that key staff know exactly what the patterns of attendance and behaviour for every single student are, and what action, support and interventions are in place or required. This data forms the basis of regular meetings between members of the pastoral team and their SLT line managers. Interventions are based on categorisation of students according to their attendance level and any specific factors affecting individuals. It is also providing a powerful basis for communication with parents both by letter and through face to face meetings, information evenings etc.
- The strong pastoral team is supported by a student support administrator removing what could be a significant burden for year leaders of sending out letters, dealing with

penalty notices and other administration around attendance , admissions, managed moves and exclusions.

- The pastoral team has also been strengthened further through the introduction of the wellbeing hub staffed with specialists. This will be playing a key role in attempting to reengage some of the hardest to reach students. A girls' tutor group has also been established to support some students who are anxious or vulnerable.
- The pastoral team work closely with external agencies such as the Mental Health in Schools Team and the Education Welfare Officer.
- Another development has been in the role of the form tutor. I visited some lesson A groups who were involved in the review of attendance that now takes place every Wednesday . The pro forma completed by students enables them to see the impact in terms of lessons missed of any absence, to recognise and value good attendance and for the tutor to have 'return to school' conversations with individuals who have been absent.

With the current size of year groups, getting to know every single child is obviously a greater challenge for year leaders. Staff are well aware of this and address it through the one to one interviews with form tutors and senior staff, the high profile of SLT and the current staffing levels. It would nevertheless be worth keeping an eye on capacity both of the pastoral team and SLT to see whether any further appointments might be needed in due course. We discussed the possibility of some action/collaborative learning work with other schools to inform this work and provide professional learning opportunities to staff.

Results and priorities

As with pastoral matters the data on students' progress and attainment enables forensic analysis. The analysis of the impact of absence on student outcomes is a powerful example. As reported to governors provisional results are once again very strong. The improvement exceeding predictions of grade 7 and above in English and Maths is evidence of the effectiveness of the work done to address this whole school focus over the last year. Once again the overall improvements reflect how the efforts made over a period of several years have continued to pay dividends showing that this improvement is becoming embedded and sustainable.

Though the policy of enabling students to access the most appropriate options to meet their needs has a small impact on some of the E-Bacc indicators it is clear that this approach is enabling students to get excellent outcomes and progress to their chosen destinations. Analysis of this provisional data is informing subject leaders' and SLT's plans for the year.

Based on these outcomes the three priorities shared with governors are entirely appropriate. As the school continues to work further to build on these improvements and the challenges more subtle and complex the task becomes more demanding. Examples of what is needed are:

- work on the identified cohort of students whose KS2 scores are middle ranging ,
- growing their aspirations,
- motivating students to increase their discretionary effort by taking on more active responsibility for their learning , asking questions in class and understanding the value of raising their ambition beyond what would achieve a middle ranging set of outcomes.

As with other improvements we have seen at Cantell it is recognised that this is more than a short term priority.

The emphasis on expert teaching via a holistic approach rather than limiting the focus to specific aspects of that is an appropriate development at this stage. The 'wheel' model shared with staff will support that process. Drop ins to lessons and the use of post-it notes continues to be a positive process and provides more powerful feedback for staff.

During a learning walk we visited some year 7 and 9 English lessons. Students were engaged and participating well in the lessons and the new year 7s were enthusiastic having obviously settled in well. In spite of the excellent teaching in English and the sterling efforts of the staff it is still proving challenging to match English outcomes with other subjects and to achieve accurate predictions. *We agreed it would be useful to explore what else might be done to overcome this in my next visit.*

In our discussions during the day we also considered topics such as

- *developing student leadership further,*
- *developing cultural awareness further in order to enable and motivate students to engage fully with the curriculum*
- *working with the 'invisible middle' of the larger year groups – those students who never do anything wrong but do not have a high profile in the school but deserve and need to be fully supported as valued members of the Cantell family.*

Date of next SIP visit: Wed 22nd November

Items we agreed to include in the programme:

- Time with English department
- Student voice with children of middle ability.
- Meet student leaders and discuss student leadership

Brian Lightman