



## Notes on SIP visit to Cantell School on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024

### Report to Governors

The programme for my third SIP visit consisted of the following:

- Joined SLT briefing
- Meeting with head focused on next steps for the school.
- Learning walk and observation of school during breaktimes/lesson changes
- Meeting with SLT members to cover year 11 progress and exam preparation, attendance & behaviour, curriculum, careers, reading and rewards.
- Meeting with the head of student experience to discuss student leadership and wider opportunities.

Key points from the day:

This was my first visit since the inspection and the wonderful report which truly reflects the excellence I have been privileged to see on my visits and recognises the impressive improvement journey the school has been on under the outstanding leadership of Harry and his staff. I was pleased to be able to meet with the lead inspector and make a small contribution to that process. I'd like to record my congratulations to all of the staff and governors on this achievement.

What was really pleasing to see on this visit is that everyone is now focused on building on all of that. Many schools experience a dip or even some complacency after a successful inspection. At Cantell I saw business as usual in all aspects continuing to strive for the best for all young people.

- The SLT briefing followed the usual format looking closely at behaviour and attendance data and continuing to ensure that all possible action is taken to follow up any issues.
- As has been reported nationally numbers of parental complaints have increased and are providing a major challenge to all schools. Schools need to balance the need and wish to be demonstrably approachable, responsive and anxious to address any worries parents might have with an element of protection from early escalation of matters that can and should be resolved relatively easily and vexatious complaints. In this context I have shared some thoughts on your current complaints procedures and would recommend a review to ensure that they do this.
- During the learning walk we visited some of the masterclasses taking place as examinations are imminent. These seek to highlight and consolidate key aspects of the courses and provide some final practice. In RE students were working on tables to recall and share key points. In engineering the focus was on key terms required for the exam. *There students appeared much less confident in their knowledge recall and were unable to define many of the terms.*
- With the head we discussed the 4 ongoing priorities of the continuing to review and develop the curriculum, be a beacon for the community, further develop international links, further develop support for young people at risk of becoming NEET. *I have*

*facilitated a visit to the inspirational Haringey Learning Partnership an alternative provision school which is achieving spectacular successes with children who have been excluded from school. We also discussed ways of dealing with requests for visits to the school which are bound to be numerous in the light of the inspection including will hosting one for members of the Schools of Tomorrow network.*

- The school has extensive opportunities for rewards and recognition. It is recognised that now is the time to take an overview of all of these and look at how praise and recognition is fully embedded throughout the school. *Ideas we discussed included ensuring that every school assembly includes some form of recognition, use of screen around the school to highlight noteworthy achievements each week and looking how each department approaches praise and rewards so that a consistent culture is in place.* We also considered how there might be some aspects of current processes where there is overlap. As with other aspects of Cantell's work this is about building further on an aspect of highly successful practice which lies at the heart of Cantell's ethos.
- Following the departure of Dave Gill I met with Rhys who has taken on this role I was impressed at his mastery of this complex area of responsibility after a short period. We discussed the progress of year 11, the excellent support they have been given and the use of data. A great deal of time is being invested in Saturday lessons and other interventions reflecting the commitment and professionalism of so many staff. It was good to hear that processes to support year 10 in their exam year are being started earlier with raising achievement and progress meetings taking place this term so that plans for lesson A, interventions and the development of learning habits will be fully in place from the beginning of year 11. The meetings with subject leaders this term will enable any improvements to empower staff to further adapt approaches to make this work even more effective.
- Work on the curriculum continues to support faculties to develop their strategic approach to the curriculum. Student independence, quality assurance, revisiting knowledge and skills taught, embedding the teaching and learning ingredients and the use of departmental briefings are aspects of this. The role of middle leaders in the subject development weeks has continued to develop further with them taking full ownership of these with the SLT playing a supportive role. The INSET day will be an opportunity to share practice across all staff. In a conversation about the ways young people are learning independently using new technologies there is some evidence that shorter bursts of learning can often be more effective and preferred by students than the kinds of length of sessions that take place in school. *I have heard that language learning apps such as Duolingo can be very effective.* It is nevertheless important to emphasise that the ability to concentrate for longer periods and develop stamina to write longer pieces for example are at least equally important.
- It was good to hear that the work on reading continues to have impact and is developing further with the appointment of another member of staff to the successful phonics programme, the work on disciplinary literacy and reading for pleasure. I met the librarian who has developed the library into a superb, inviting learning environment.
- As the successful careers programme develops further the emphasis on transition out of the school at 16 is a good way of targeting potential NEETs and also ensuring that students join the right courses for their needs and complete them. It will also strengthen the school's commitment to its wider community and specifically its alumni.

- Having a specific role in the ELT in charge of student experiences sends out a strong message about the way Cantell genuinely values these opportunities as an integral part of the curriculum. The appointment of an intern from Southampton University through Schools of Tomorrow to support work on student leadership is a really positive development. In other schools we have seen that a designated member of staff to oversee this working with a member of the SLT is the most effective way of taking this forward and this is exactly the model Cantell has in place. We discussed Jonathan's plans and how these will bring together and integrate the work on diversity and the character curriculum, the house system with student leadership roles. The opportunity is there for students to move beyond existing roles in which they are involved to be 'activists' in helping the school community to discuss and consider how they have help to tackle global issues, aspects of gender and diversity etc. *Through Schools of Tomorrow there will be an opportunity in November for students to take part in a sustainability conference with other schools. With Steve Godwin having overall responsibility for the Schools of Tomorrow membership attending their annual residential and other activities including an opportunity for some students to visit a school in Barcelona next year.*

Date of next SIP visit tbc in the Autumn term.

Brian Lightman