



Notes on SIP visit to Cantell School on 8th June 2022

Report to Governors

The programme for this SIP visit consisted of the following:

1. Attendance at SLT Briefing
2. Observation of reading buddies, English pre-exam briefing, house assembly and start of Lesson A
3. Discussion of next steps with attendance/behaviour and visit to CAP.
4. Year 11 update
5. Update about enrichment
6. Learning walk to year 11 Masterclasses
7. Discussion of SEND next steps with SENDCO
8. Curriculum update
9. Report back to SLT

Two overriding and positive features were very evident throughout today's visit.

1. There is a palpable sense of relief that further steps towards a return to many routines that were disrupted by COVID have been made. Face to face assemblies, more co-curricular activities and the transition week have been reintroduced giving new momentum to the house system and restoring valued opportunities to strengthen student's sense of belonging to the school community. SLT are very aware of the great opportunity of a full return to normality in September and using this to communicate core values, systems and procedures at the start of the new term as well as in the transition week. A decision to return to full rather than disaggregated INSETs will create the space for strong communication across the staff team.
2. The context of forthcoming policy initiatives such as the White Paper and the review of Initial Teacher education is extremely challenging. As always there is still much uncertainty and detail to follow with such proposals but it is nevertheless going to be most important for the school to consider its likely approach to these. The SLT is already considering these matters proactively and Harry's forthcoming meeting with the RSC is a timely opportunity to hear from that source. It may be timely to carry out a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis in order to develop an updated vision and 5 year strategy for the development of the school / trust. **I will of course be more than happy to try to help with such considerations.**

Back to the day to day matters I saw the usual positive and calm atmosphere in the school managed and led ably by the SLT in Harry's absence. I spoke to a number of staff who wanted to tell me how much they enjoy working at Cantell, feel valued and supported. This is reflected in the high levels of retention. The promotion of a strong faculty leader to an assistant headship in another school, though a loss to the team, is a credit to the leadership development provided at Cantell.

Other key points from the day:

- The reading buddies scheme is clearly valued by the school and university students and is a very good way of further making use of the proximity of the university and building on the school's relationship with it.
- The day of my visit coincided with a GCSE English exam affording the opportunity to see how the students are being supported. Students were clear about how useful the alternative timetable has been. It is not easy to dovetail this with the exam timetable but the very high levels of attendance by students show how they value this particularly in a

year when students have missed so many opportunities to be in school. Masterclasses a day before major exams give them last minute reminders and opportunities to clarify key points without creating additional stress. The opportunity to gather in the common room first thing and then receive encouraging messages from faculty leads in their tutor groups is enabling them to go into their exams confidently in the knowledge that their teachers have done everything they can to prepare them. Availability of key staff at the end of exams ensures that they are able to voice any concerns or feedback. So far students have been coming out of exams feeling confident. They are obviously pleased to have their school fully operational again and stay around to talk to their teachers and friends. Final predictions (though it is recognised that any data of this kind needs to be treated with caution) look very positive so the indicators for the summer results look promising. One of the masterclasses I visited was for further Maths- a really useful enrichment for the most able who are predicted to get top grades in Maths and continue studying it. This is a powerful example of how Cantell provides for all students within its comprehensive intake.

- Plans are underway to take forward the approach to assessment and support for students and the effective use of tutoring. The appointment of a Head of Interventions is a positive development hopefully providing opportunities to support students without withdrawing them from essential lessons. With so much work having been done on planning the curriculum, assessment can be fully embedded into teaching and learning with less reliance on summative tests and more emphasis on formative and diagnostic assessment as an integral part of teaching. Plans for an assessment fortnight in November will create the much needed time for faculty leaders to discuss students' progress and gaps in learning enabling them to adapt the curriculum. **It may be useful for one of my visits to coincide with this.**
- The planned curriculum portal currently under discussion has the potential to further facilitate sharing of ideas and be a very useful resources for faculty leaders and their teams. Having this in one place will strengthen the coherence of the whole range of educational opportunities across the school
- The appointment of a deputy SENDCO is a timely development as the school roll grows. Research has shown that LSAs have the potential to be an extremely valuable resource provided that they are deployed effectively. This is the focus of the SENDCO who is doing a great deal of really useful work to make explicit effective practice and raise awareness of staff of different ways of deploying them. Information about support plans and strategies are made available via a portal. This will dovetail with the work on interventions. Again it is good that the SENDCO sits on the EHCP panel for the City involving the school more widely. **This may be a useful focus for a learning walk on a future visit.**
- These developments reflect the clear development I have seen over recent a period of time in the leadership skills of faculty heads who are performing at a very high level. They and the SLT have found the subject development weeks very useful and are now well placed to build on these taking even fuller ownership of these in the next round as the focus moves to key stage 4. The plan for the school to fully manage the ECT process in the trust will enable provision to be tailored further to meet the specific needs of staff without being tied to an externally imposed timetable.
- The work on enrichment, the co-curriculum as an integral part of the education provided at Cantell is coming on at a pace. The house system has been re-invigorated and a wide range of plans are in place to further develop the sense of belonging including the way in which tutor groups are formed in the new year 7. The range of activities and events continues to grow and ranges widely with the 'empower' skills embedded and a growing involvement of former students. We discussed some suggestions about possible further ideas including the support of the army in some of the outdoor events, links with the Holocaust Educational Trust and water sports/outdoor activities in this country. The opportunity to take part in an Erasmus funded visit to Sicily was clearly useful. Other schools have experienced difficulties

recently with overseas trips especially with the loss of the opportunity to use collective passports.

- Attendance and behaviour statistics remain strong. Behaviour points discussed at the briefing reflect the emphasis on dealing consistently with even the most minor incidents. It is good to learn that Ian's expert input is being drawn on at City level on the COMPASS review. The CAP facility is providing essential support to children who would otherwise disrupt mainstream learning and giving them opportunities to gain some valuable qualifications and skills. Training is being provided for the LSA team and experienced staff create a positive learning environment. The emphasis on identifying specific individuals whose attendance could be targeted to improve is an example of the commitment to leave no stone unturned to give every child access to learning.

In summary this has been another extremely successful year for the school. In spite of the immense challenges the school has not, like some others, stood still and has continued to be as proactive as possible paving the way for a very positive start to the new school year. The staff team have been supported and valued and their skills and professional knowledge significantly developed. Students understand and value the strength of their teachers and the support they get at Cantell. The key question as alluded to earlier will be how to maintain and build on this in the next stage of its development and ensure that any potential structural or governance changes are beneficial.

- Date of next SIP visit tbc .

Brian Lightman