



Notes on SIP visit to Cantell School on 29th March 2022

Report to Governors

The programme for my SIP visit consisted of the following:

1. Meetings with Headteacher and Chair
2. Learning walks and observation of social time
3. Meetings with SLT and faculty leaders and learning walks focused on subject development weeks
4. Meeting on pastoral issues
5. Interim headteacher PM review
6. Feedback to SLT

General comment

Like all schools Cantell continues to face immense challenges arising from the pandemic. There are no quick fixes to issues of this magnitude. What continues to be striking and impressive is the way the SLT and staff have not allowed this to distract from the vision they share for the students and to drive forward the developments which sit at the heart of the schools vision and ambition for its students whilst dealing with immediate challenges as effectively as they can. Key factors enabling this to happen include the presence of all SLT around the school listening to, supporting and valuing staff and students, the wide ranging CPD provision, the very strong leadership of middle leaders and the forensic use of data to identify and deal quickly and proactively on it. With the school's restless commitment to do the very best for its students and its transparent and honestly self-critical ethos I felt it important as an external pair of eyes to emphasise that what I see at Cantell is in many ways quite exceptional. **The SLT and staff who would never be complacent should have every confidence in the direction of travel and the impact of the work they are doing.**

Pastoral issues:

Mental health: This is undoubtedly the greatest impact of the pandemic. Cantell is no exception is having to deal with a host of issues around anxiety, resilience, self-belief and more. The proactive work with the health authority to seek to employ a specialist mental health worker working alongside the pastoral team is a powerful way of enhancing further the work the school is doing.

SLT members attached to each year group work alongside year leaders and their teams. Year 7 for example is a complex year group which has been strongly affected by the interruption to their education needing particular support. It is good news that the transition week will take place this year.

Data: The data collected on a wide range of KPIs every day enables SLT and other staff to be extremely responsive on matters such as attendance and behaviour, homework completion, mental health issues etc. An example of how this has been used has been to sharpen the

focus on planned action to improve the attendance of SEND students. The attendance of girls which had been a focus has improved.

Staff survey:

The response to the staff survey provides strong evidence of the high morale of staff which I always see on my visits. The comments from the staff speak for themselves about the impact of the positive culture and also highlight the pressure some continue to feel through this period. **I know that the SLT are looking carefully at the comments to explore in characteristic consultation with colleagues in order to see what more can be done to help.**

Subject development weeks: The first of these exercises completed with Science and PE and underway with English are providing to be a really useful alternative to the kind a review which is 'done to' departments. By working in a collaborative way feedback from teachers and faculty leaders indicates that they have found this process has given them ownership of it and it has helped them to focus on the development of their subject areas. Similarly SLT members have found it helpful to understand in more depth the specific issues facing subject areas and to provide a strong steer on the planning of CPD and other developments. The process is also highlighting links between subjects for further development. The outcomes of the reviews have given a clear breakdown of strengths, areas for development and CPD needs informed by a wide range of conversations, lesson visits and student voice feedback. The staff survey in Science for example has led to a refocusing of the way 'learning journeys' are more effectively matched to the needs of that subject and some powerful thinking about assessment.

The faculty leaders I spoke to would like to see a process like this taking place each year and were keen to own that process in future. A strength this year is that every subject area will benefit from this process. This is a huge investment of time for the SLT but one which is clearly proving very helpful. **Though it would be unrealistic to repeat it in full each year there is clearly potential to design a next phase perhaps led by subject leaders with support of SLT once the current round has been completed and evaluated..**

Lesson visits

I visited a number of classes during lesson A, Science, Maths, RE and Drama lessons and a range of English lessons as part of their subject development week. In every single class I visited students were fully engaged and attentive. The standard of behaviour I saw in classrooms and during social time/lesson changes was outstanding without exception. A number of the lessons I visited were taught by teachers at early stages of their careers some of who had experienced extremely curtailed initial training due to the pandemic. They have been supported with coaching, mentoring and support with lesson planning. The result was evident in the classroom with confidence, presence and planning of a high standard. I saw some excellent questioning and scaffolding and examples of where students saw links to what they had learnt in previous lessons.

As always I would like to thank everyone for making me so welcome on my visit.

Date of next SIP visit : 8th June including governing body meeting.

Brian Lightman