



## Notes on SIP visit to Cantell School on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021

### **Report to Governors**

This was my first 'in person' visit to the school since November 2020 though I have been in contact on various occasions and gave an introduction to the first session of the excellent leadership programme led by Mark Bagust.

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

1. Meetings with Head and SLT members
2. Learning walk and discussion of lesson A programme
3. Learning walk and discussion of ECT (Early Career Teacher) programme
4. Discussions of results/attendance/behaviour/ curriculum/ pastoral matters
5. Student voice session with years 7/8
6. Meeting with Paul Bridges to discuss Streamer
7. Meeting with Luke Newman to discuss enrichment programmes.

### **Key points from the day:**

- There is no question that the last 18 months has been as pressured and challenging for Cantell as for every other school. However it was very evident that Cantell has been able to cope with this far more readily than many other schools as a result of the excellent leadership and team work which is such a well-established feature of the school community. Having seen numerous schools in real difficulty during this period the significance of this is not to be underestimated. Specifically I would highlight the following points:
  - The SLT demonstrated agility and skill in their planning and adaptation to meet the rapidly changing and often last minute external demands.
  - Plans for the increased number of students alongside the implementation of 'bubbles' maintained a calm and safe working environment. Since the removal of the requirement for bubbles the school has retained those aspects of the new arrangements that have worked particularly well and continues to build on those opportunities that have arisen from the experience of the pandemic – the so called 'COVID keepers'. These include the retention of year locations for tutor groups. Movement between lessons and the general atmosphere around the school were, as I have always seen, orderly and calm.
  - The school's involvement in the saliva testing has been a great benefit as well as enhancing the school's links with the University and the wider Southampton Community.
  - Communications with parents and the wider community have been excellent and have been enhanced by the use of videoconferencing software. It is very evident that parents value the strength of the school's relationship with the community with evident impact on the current level of oversubscription.
  - The TAGs process was well managed and rigorous and the outcomes for students reflect a realistic, evidence based reflection of their attainment. This was a weaker year group with a low level of prior attainment and progress was therefore strong. Importantly

destinations were tracked closely and followed up in every case where there was any uncertainty about this. The school continues to track attendance and behaviour daily resulting in very strong figures for both. Exclusion rates remain low with continued efforts to avoid these wherever possible.

- As has been well publicised, the gap for PP pupils has widened and remains in sharp focus for the school. As with National trends it is the non EAL/PP pupils who are in need of the greatest amount of support. Much that has been said in the media etc. about 'lost learning' and 'catch up' has not been informed by first hand feedback from students. The Aim High programme at Cantell has put listening to students first and is a considered and appropriate way to manage the transition back into school and the associated learning routines for students. The initial focus on rebuilding confidence and relationships has clearly paid off and enabled staff to unpick and gaps in learning and forensically analyse the needs of every single student recognising who needed more support and addressing anxieties. The programme enables support interventions to be targeted at the needs of each individual student rather than a 'one size fit's all' solution. Staff briefings, training and support continue to be a feature of the open and collaborative climate that prevails.
- The school's use of technology has progressed significantly. There is excellent access across all classrooms and for remote teaching – again something many schools have struggled with- and the use of streaming to classrooms has been retained to enable form groups to see presentations, briefings etc. from their classroom with the tutor facilitating discussion . This is enabling the school to embed external speakers etc. in the curriculum. The use of Google Classrooms and incorporation of videos recorded by staff has enhanced the subject curriculum and made learning resources readily accessible to all students and visible to their parents. The 'Streamer' programme is an exciting long term development with a great deal of potential to take the support of children whose first language is not English and those with learning disabilities including hearing impairment.
- The Lesson A programme has built on the above and been developed further into a carefully sequenced curriculum which strengthens the role of houses and the development of employability skills through the 'empower' programme – both areas for further development that had been identified in the past.
- The group of year 7 and 8 students I met were enthusiastic about their school and delighted to be out of lockdown which one described as 'torture'! The year 7's spoke positively about the transition even though the usual face to face programme had not been able to proceed. They commented how welcoming everyone was and particularly how helpful older students were. The year 8 students were enjoying being able to use what specialist facilities now that they can circulate to all areas and as one described – 'take full advantage of everything our amazing school' has. They are enjoying the large amount of practical Science, the extra curricular activities including the forthcoming production of Grease in which several were involved. They were notably able to articulate the purpose and role of attack words and the Aim high programme and give examples of how these helped them in their learning.
- The introduction of the Early Career Framework is a welcome Government initiative which will be beneficial for the 9 teachers. The scheme places a significant workload on mentors and the school is enabling them all to gain coaching/mentoring qualifications as a part of the extensive CPD programme. I visited the lessons of several of these teachers

and was impressed by their confidence in the classroom. They clearly value and welcome the scheme. The work done so far on classroom management routines is already paying off.

- Luke is taking forward the extensive enrichment programme to build on the strong base that already exists and develop it further so that it is fully embedded with the 'empower' programme. Providing free transport home for students taking part in activities will make them far more accessible for disadvantaged students. New software will improve analysis of range and number of participants and access for parents to relevant information and data . We discussed virtual work experience as an area for development and I have shared details of a provider for this.

#### **Action points/follow up:**

- There is so much excellent work taking place in the school that the main recommendation can only be to maintain this direction of travel and impetus and congratulate the staff on their achievements.
- With all of the progress in the use of technology and the plans for further development I would recommend that this is brought together in an overall strategic plan. Staff are right excited by the opportunities and it will be important to prioritise developments, decide what not to do and manage expectations including costs. With the level of investment that has already taken place evaluation of this will be important. The teaching profession had to adapt rapidly with limited external support or policy to the use of remote access. Support to develop skills and understanding of the pedagogy of remote teaching will be important.
- Having managed TAGs effectively it will be important to review the role of assessment in the classroom and the balanced between formative and diagnostic assessment that is embedded into teaching , the use and timing of more formal assessment tasks/tests including end of year exams /mocks.
- I would recommend that we might focus on the following in further visits:
  - the ongoing role of curriculum leaders and how they are taking the leadership of their subject areas forward.
  - The preparedness of year 11 for their GCSE.
  - The motivation and engagement of year 10 (not because of anything I have seen at Cantell but because this is emerging as an issue in many schools.
  - The impact of the trust on the quality of education provided.

#### **Date of next SIP visit .**

HK to ask Michelle to arrange dates. Headteacher Performance Management to take place on next visit or remotely.

Brian Lightman