



Notes on SIP visit to Cantell School on 22nd November 2023

Report to Governors

The programme for my SIP visit consisted of the following:

1. SLT briefing
2. Year 8 assembly
3. Meeting with English curriculum leaders
4. Meetings focused on careers provision, NEETs strategy and CPSD curriculum/Empower
5. Discussion of a potential link visit to a school in Netherlands and engagement in collaborative learning work via Schools of Tomorrow.
6. Two student voice activities including
7. Meeting with student leaders and discussion with member of staff responsible
8. Learning walk
9. Feedback to SLT

Key points from the day:

English

The team is working tirelessly to build on successes to date, learn from what is still not having enough impact and improve outcomes further. The team had been released for a subject development day to work on all of this. A great deal of analysis of results has been undertaken in order to investigate which factors have helped those student who have attained high grades, find out what lessons can be learned and applied to more students.

Topics under discussion have included:

- Motivating more students to make use of the comprehensive revision website and monitoring its use.
- Student voice activities
- Subject development work focusing on independence.
- Extensive work on reading so that students read independently as well as in class and those who are less likely to read at home are supported compensating for disadvantage.. There has been strong investment in providing enough books for students to take home.
- Strengthening systems to ensure that teachers can easily monitor returns of books.
- Double lessons for year 11 to deepen learning.
- CPD for the team

Areas for further development we discussed included:

- *Further work across the trust on transition, approaches used and standards achieved in key stage 2.*

- *Looking at the balance between teachers modelling responses for students (some very good practice in department) and techniques to develop more intrinsic motivation.*
- *Action research into active listening.*
- *Techniques to empower students to work more independently asking questions and owning classroom routines.*
- *The culture of instant gratification in the world of Instagram etc is a real challenge not limited to Cantell. Short tasks and regular short assessments/feedback can help. But this could be a useful topic for wider consideration across the school.*

Careers

The careers provision in the school is now exceptionally strong with a vast range of opportunities for students as recently reported to governors. Preparation for transition to colleges is outstanding. The support for students at risk of NEET is extensive. In spite of the well-known post pandemic challenges it is to the school's credit that numbers are below the LA average, though as ever there is no complacency. Communication across staff and relevant agencies about students at risk is underpinned by strong data collated by the school. DFE data is inaccurate and unreliable. The school is doing everything it can with those students whose attendance is good but more external intervention is needed for those who the school rarely or never sees.

Though all students have the opportunity for work experience placements, some have been frustrated by the shortage of placements even when they had applied early leading to allocation of less valuable ones. *For some with specific aspirations such as medicine or careers with employers not based locally where placements are limited by health and safety requirement virtual placements could be considered.* [Springpod](#) and [Speakers for Schools](#) are sources of high quality placements.

*An area for development identified by staff is the support students receive **after** moving to college. It is a frustration when feedback is not received and there is evidence of students who drop out or struggle in the college environment. This is a challenge shared by other schools and suggestion would be attempting via the city-wide operations or headteacher groups to convene a round table meeting with colleges to look at how this can be addressed and strengthened. Though these discussion might potentially be sensitive they could have a powerful impact on effective collaboration between the schools and colleges. Another idea we discussed was for Cantell to consider investing in some additional staff hours to visit vulnerable students in their colleges.*

Empower

The careers provision is fully embedded within the comprehensive Empower programme which has been well implemented throughout both key stages and is informed by feedback from students who have suggested topics for inclusion.

Students keep a detailed record of their progress in a booklet which they keep as the move through the years. *We discussed how this might usefully evolve into a digital format. In a number of schools in the UK and internationally there is a growing interest in the idea of digital pupil profiles which the pupils would own. The [Rethinking Assessment movement](#) has been piloting some models.*

Student voice on careers

The students I met spoke highly of the information, support and guidance provision and had all received offers from colleges. They particularly appreciated the help with applications, personal statements and the interviews. Nevertheless, a perhaps unexpected shared general view was that there is too much provision. The group I saw were well motivated, high achievers. They had paid close attention to the information provided about routes and next steps and had followed advice getting applications in early. They therefore commented that they did not need the level of repetition of things they had heard and felt that the programme could be differentiated more. They felt that the enrichment days were too long. The practical sessions where they worked on applications, personal statements etc. and mock interviews were really useful but they felt that having to spend 3 hours in afternoon sessions was too much. Some workshops such as the one on memorisation were very valuable but there were others where there as little or no interaction. *In the meeting with MUZ we discussed the briefing of speakers who are not teachers some of who might benefit from closer assistance on planning. A suggestion from the students was to shorten these days to half days.*

Learning Walk:

We visited lessons focused on middle ability students in Art , English, Science and a brief drop in to the end of a Spanish lesson. In Art students were expressing and justifying opinions about an artist they had been studying orally and in extremely well-presented writing. The teacher linked this explicitly to the empower skills. Students were clearly well motivated and engaged. The year 7 English class was learning about anecdotes and beginning a task to produce one. They were finding this concept quite difficult and the teacher gave helpful examples. Some of these students are still relatively immature and the teacher emphasised active listening channelling their responses well. In a Science lesson on particles the students were skilfully asked to justify their answers enabling the teacher to identify and explain any misconceptions. The class was highly engaged.

Netherlands link and Schools of Tomorrow

A visit in February is to a school in Nijmegen which has strong student leadership provision. This is part of the School of Tomorrow programme to which the school has subscribed. (I am a director of this social enterprise and will continue to help the school to make best use of these opportunities outside my SIP role.)

An aspect we discussed was harnessing the potential for collaborative learning projects linked to the schools extensive CPSD/action research programmes.

The school is also involved in the innovative Globe from Home programme.

I recommended a conference on March 14th and visit to Haringey Learning Partnership on the theme of inclusion.

Student voice

I met with a group of students of middle ability. These are the kind of students who can easily be 'invisible' in a school (do everything asked of them, don't get into trouble etc.) The rationale behind meeting this group was to see whether more can be done help such students who can sometimes be overlooked to raise their achievement

Their experience of the school is a very positive one. They spoke about and appreciated characteristics of Cantell that compare very favourably with other schools such as the sense of belonging in a strong community, the quality of relationships with and approachability of teachers and the comfortable uniform (though boys and girls in the group felt quite strongly that some girls got away with stretching the rules about length of skirts). They appreciated what they described as the freedoms given to them saying that 'you are treated like a person'. An example was being allowed to have phones and they did not feel that this was abused or disruptive to lessons.

Their suggestions and constructive criticisms of aspects of their lessons reflected the fact that this is a group of children who are highly motivated to do well.

- *They said that Google Classrooms is not used by all departments and they would like it to be.*
- *In cover lessons they are often given work but not helped to complete it. They find the Oak Academy lessons repetitive and miss the teacher input.*
- *Learning journeys are used helpfully in Science because the teachers goes through and explain them. In other subjects they are often simply given out and stuck in books rather than being integrated into teaching.*
- *In some mixed ability lessons they feel that the attention teachers have to give to pupils who are struggling means that they are often left to get on with their work sometimes receive less attention /support.*
- *Because of the low profile this group has they have little contact with senior staff though one was on the school council. They are aware that SLT tends to have more contact with children who have particular issues.*
- *They felt that some teachers need to be a little more understanding when a student is late as not always their fault.*
- *They are frustrated by the one-way system when lessons are nearby and require a longer route.*

Student leaders

There are ample opportunities for students to engage in voice and leadership activities and it is very evident that their contributions are valued, listened to and acted upon by SLT. They were in the process of preparing to present to the SLT. The group is involved in a wide range of activities including participation in teaching and learning briefings for staff as well as fundraising, organisation of the prom and work with the councils. The progression as students move through the years enables them to play a developing role. The benefits of this approach were very evident with the student leadership team who receive feedback and suggestions from the school councils but also investigate the objectivity of any comments. A good example was the feedback on the one-way system where the older students understand the need and rationale behind this so would not press for change. The work being undertaken with the team about the 'ladder of participation' (image pasted below) is an excellent way of developing a model of student leadership through the school.

SLT

In the feedback session with SLT we felt it could be timely to look at the extent to which these valuable wider aspects of the curriculum. Empower, careers, Development of Student leadership, enrichment activities etc. can be further coordinated so that they do not run the

risk of being developed separately by individual staff. This could be a topic to consider further on a future visit.

This was another highly enjoyable visit during which I met numerous delightful students and learn of many further developments to aspects I have seen on past visits. My thanks go to all of the staff who gave of their time.

Date of next SIP visit: Wed 27th March tbc.

Brian Lightman

