

Head-teacher's narrative report to governors for the summer first half-term 2015

1. Context for the school

The school remains a stable and productive community and a “good” school. All the available indicators both recent and accumulative for behaviour and learning support this and most notable and credible in this report is the favourable feedback from a visiting Ofsted inspector who has worked alongside senior staff in judging the quality of teaching in school. His full report will be shared and in his covering email he writes,

“I thoroughly enjoyed my visit yesterday. I saw some top quality teaching and some young people who were highly engaged in learning. You have some really good teachers and a very strong, supportive senior management team.”

Governors too will no doubt access fellow governor MD's report on his visit which I know was positive from his verbal feedback.

This most recent positive feedback can be added to those equally supportive insights and judgments provided by the school's attached educational psychologist shared in my last report and supplemented with a further report from her this half-term.

Shared too last time were a range of positive experiences described by visiting professionals including an experienced teacher studying for a masters degree in education and evidence is coalescing and accumulating then from a range and variety of credible sources to give governors an essential insight into the core business of the school; teaching and learning.

Worth noting too is the hugely affirming feedback from the diverse school community of professionals; people who work at Barley Lane feel happy and feel valued as do visiting professionals and a summary of feedback was shared with governors last time.

“I was welcomed into the school by all of my colleagues and knew on my first day that I had made the right decision to work here... I feel that Barley Lane prioritises the needs of the children first and that this is made possible by the staff being supported and valued. I am privileged to work with such hard working professionals and have found Barley Lane to be a wholly supportive and inclusive environment.”

The prevailing climate in school then is positive and this evidenced by recent feedback from a social worker supporting two of our students who fed back,

- *A very child focused approach.*
- *Excellent communication with staff whenever I have asked about a child.*
- *Very helpful.*
- *Staff that I have talked to clearly care about the children and is very evident*
- *I think it is fantastic with the level of parenting support given to the family.*
- *The first phone call I made to Barley Lane was checked out in the appropriate way by calling me back on my office which is good. I still walk into many schools that have never met me and do not ask to see my badge.”*

1. i Current risks and opportunities?

The perennial and ever present risk and opportunity that is the secure maintenance and promotion of safeguarding, good order and discipline, health and safety and wellbeing; all these critical to and **underpinning and protecting the positive climate for learning** and the drive to protect and promote the key positive Ofsted judgments:

- “Pupils learn well because teaching is good, with some outstanding teaching.”
- “Pupils respond well to the very good relationships they have with staff...staff are very effective in establishing a positive climate for learning with high expectations for learning and behaviour.”

As shared before but always worthy of revisiting and reinforcing; the school’s focus remains on the key element of school improvement to *“Modify, and develop the prescribed curriculum, take risks so learning is diverse, exciting engaging and stretching for students”* SIP 14/15.

This is, as described to you in my last report, developing into a strong theme for 15/16 that will focus hard on the robust and reasonable expectation of autonomous, reflective teachers as leaders rigorously self-evaluating engaging and challenging pupils with creative and innovative teaching, underpinned by the highest expectations and wholly embedded and reliable classroom craft.

This does fit neatly and securely with the emerging national agenda post the election and the greater rigour to be applied to so-called “coasting schools”, those who “require improvement”. This has powerful resonance for us even though we are currently judged “good” and our own indicators support we are sustaining this because not only must we aspire to be outstanding but be super vigilant about any decline in the quality of our work.

Apposite too is to make clear again the school’s recovery from failure, relative success and any hope for consolidation and further improvement all rooted in a bottom up model where good and outstanding teachers delivered and deliver a good school.

If the term coasting means anything in our setting it means the risk of “coasting teachers” including the head-teacher. The coasting teacher is out there. It is the teacher happy to be good but not seeking to be outstanding. It is the teacher who can be good or even outstanding when under scrutiny but fails to sustain that high quality with conviction and determination day in and day out. In our setting it is also the teacher that makes no sustained effective wider contribution to the life of the school community most powerfully good order and discipline.

It is both pertinent and critical too at a time when the leadership and wider make up of our governing body are both changing that the legacy VN and CV leave is that focus on teaching and learning.

It was for me the pivotal and most powerful moment in BP’s work with us as an Ofsted inspector focussing on governance that when he asked the question of the governing body, “What are we about?” VN as chair spoke for us all in her reply, “We are about teaching and learning”; this in the established context that in our setting the complexity of the children and their lives can be a distraction from their entitlement to high quality teaching and that in all their complexity it is powerfully clear good teachers and teaching can overcome the multiple and diverse barriers to learning.

Our school improvement work then and most pertinently teacher appraisal must focus on this and make sure too that the reported widespread good and outstanding teaching is celebrated and those consistently delivering it are affirmed and rewarded in their career development and wider influence and this another powerful and healing element of VN’s and CV’s legacy; on their watch good teachers have secured career development and become

Never look down on anybody unless you are helping him up. Jesse Jackson



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leaders in the school.

As head-teacher and a governor and after so many years of this work and the considerable measurable successes along the way I cannot stress enough, as we move into a new era of governance, the need for that unity of purpose across the community and an immovable powerful collective commitment to teaching and learning.

That does not mean we neglect the emotional support of and care of and guidance for our young people and at this watershed moment for the school it is also worth revisiting too those “very good relationships” and the safe and compassionate discipline and good order built on foundations of fairness, respect and unconditional regard for the children and young people.

Pupil numbers: we have hit the base line 54 for September and moved on to 55 meanwhile the consultation is happening to formally increase to 60 places giving us a potential for 66.

Funding follows pupils and numbers do rise and fall in our setting and admissions are a year round thing too as youngsters falter in mainstream across age range and key stages. **The impact of pupil numbers** on funding and consequently staffing stability and therefore school effectiveness is self-evident. The previous “planned places” model gave us stability and whilst numbers did rise and fall over time special schools represented good value. The current model creates unavoidable instability and whilst we will likely hit the maximum 59 places at some point in the Autumn term the funding gap will impact our recruitment decisions and encourage the use of fixed term contracts that in turn impacts on the quality of candidates and the morale and confidence of staff on those contracts.

Our status as a “good” school is critical to attracting students in an increasingly competitive landscape and must be maintained not only most powerfully because it is the least the children deserve and must have but it helps overcome the persistent residual prejudices about the school rooted in its past but also the increasing competition from new and independent schools and far greater parental awareness of other possibilities; the fact that these “possibilities” are often measurably and tangibly inferior is masked by the understandable if often unreliable perception that if something is “private” or “independent” and or costs more it must be better.

We continue to overcome such barriers most often through visits to the school and when parents and carers see and experience the school community their worries and or misconceptions are quickly wholly removed. Very recently one mother initially deeply resistant was almost tearful with happiness and couldn't wait for her child to start and happily the youngster equally enthusiastic.

Such successes though are hard won and all of us not least the children and young people are damaged by the clumsy labelling of our school and its language and this was recently changed from BESD (Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties) to SMEH (Social, Mental and Emotional Health) neither a great help to our children and young people's self-esteem and dignity.

Related to this is the growing prevalence of ASD (autism). Many of our youngsters, indeed many of us and the general population are on that continuum somewhere and no doubt shift up and down it. We have children with very distinct autistic traits and characteristics and they are thriving and we have increasingly knowledgeable staff and clear capacity to develop strong skills.

What contributes to our young people needing us is complex, diverse and multiple and elements of autism play their part but wholly unpicking what is nature and what is nurture not doable and that is why we focus instead on what our best practice must look like to get the best outcomes for all the children in all their diversity and complexity, talent and potential.

The problem remains that understandably the label ASD is far less potentially stigmatising than SMEH even if ASD is a part and quite frequently a significant part of the latter. Consequently we have parents with children we could

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and should work with put off not by the school but by the clumsy and unhelpful label applied to us and our students and assumptions around it.

2. The behaviour and safety of pupils at the school (current self-evaluation “good”)

The many and diverse emerging and ongoing safeguarding issues that naturally arise in our community are recorded and monitored daily and scrutinised and updated weekly; they track events, interventions and outcomes. This document can be accessed by governors on-site and should form a part of any governor visit alongside scrutinising recorded incidents.

Police share any interventions through a 121a report and these are monitored and shared.

Keeping children safe in school; a rolling behaviour and safety review document is updated each half-term and is again available to governors and covers all key indicators including: serious incidents, holding children, exclusion, attendance and behaviour reward system outcomes: all incidents have been scrutinized and signed off and reasoning and practice scrutinized to ensure both are sound and ethical.

Holding children remains occasionally necessary to keep them safe but as described above this high risk and potentially contentious element of our work is subject to close scrutiny with the reasoning for holding a child key and critical. Reasoning was sound in all but one case where professional guidance was given. There were no injuries and no complaints.

Our behaviour and safety indicators (scrutinised each half-term) remain reassuring and trends positive: a very large majority of students are not involved in any serious incident nor are they held or subject to any exclusion and where its used the trend positive and reasoning sound.

The small numbers of high risk students across key stages that continue to impact disproportionately are managed safely; work goes on both in school and with professional partners to both support and compassionately and safely challenge and support them.

A described above; all incidents with the exception of one ill judged low level intervention have been scrutinized and signed off and reasoning and practice judged safe, sound and ethical and in that one exception the teacher acknowledged their error and wholly transparent (in step with the school’s code of conduct, **“Be transparent: share errors and mistakes immediately and fully with the head-teacher do not allow the benign error to look malign through a failure to disclose it.”**) and embraced the necessary guidance given.

Attendance overall remains steady at 86% and in our setting that is encouraging; a significant minority achieved 100% attendance and a majority 90% or better in the first half of the summer term 2015.

All students below 85% either accumulatively or by half-term continue to be tracked and interventions carried out and a majority of those are improving.

Our behaviour reward or “points” systems evidence good or better behaviour in a large majority of students and only a very small minority dipped into poor behaviour by that measure.

We continue to work with professionals beyond school to seek input, insight and judgment about behaviour and safety. Our attached education psychologist continued her work experiencing and observing the community by being embedded in the school. Following up her work in the secondary unit she spent a day in the primary part of the school and her full report will be shared as an appendix to this report; pertinent extracts are reproduced below.

“High behaviour expectations and low level disruption immediately picked up and addressed... Teachers used a constant assertive but calm tone to maintain authority... All pupils were individually thanked at the end of the lesson using their name and explicit information about what they had done well.” 18.03.15

Former Devon head-teacher and Ofsted inspector BP continues to work with assistant head-teacher SR in moderating our judgments about the quality of our work and he comments about behaviour and safety,

“pupils settle quickly to learning, because a positive atmosphere has been established before they move into class... Much evidence during the day of positive, respectful relationships between staff and pupils. Staff share concerns openly (but professionally) and look to each other for support, which is readily available.... Corridors were calm, skilfully supervised by senior staff... Senior staff readily exchange important information about pupils with each other. This enables assistant headteachers to be aware of any difficulties, to anticipate potential problems and to allocate staff and resources as necessary... It was noted that where individual pupils were having difficult times, staff moved quickly, sensitively and professionally to ensure that disruptive behaviour did not occur. Senior staff clearly have the confidence of pupils and of the colleagues.” 11.05.15

As shared earlier in this report we seek feedback from all our diverse partners and in matters of safety social work colleagues powerful and pertinent in our self-evaluation,

“A very child focused approach... Excellent communication with staff whenever I have asked about a child... Staff that I have talked to clearly care about the children and is very evident... The first phone call I made to Barley Lane was checked out in the appropriate way by calling me back on my office which is good. I still walk into many schools that have never met me and do not ask to see my badge.” 22.05.15

Discretionary effort and commitment remain key with the half-term holiday bringing a range of safeguarding and pastoral working that included multiple home visits, attending meetings and working with social work colleagues and most poignantly supporting a CiC at the funeral of a key figure in his life.

3. Achievement of pupils at the school (current self-evaluation “good”)

The prevailing climate remains one of the “*high expectations*” recently noted by both a visiting Ofsted inspector and our attached educational psychologist “*Good practice was observed in all classes.*”

Information about and evidence of pupil achievement emerges over the academic year most powerfully at year’s end and GCSE exams are imminent and wider end of academic year learning outcomes will follow and this critical and core measure of our effectiveness will be reported in September.

Meanwhile human stories of achievement continue to emerge with two KS3 students tackling the national “*Maths Challenge*” securing scores that put them in the top tier nationally. A recent visit to Exeter College to familiarise year 11 students provided more evidence of former students thriving and a “*student of the month*” poster with a former BLS student was prominently displayed and feedback from college staff hugely positive (you will recall two of our students have gone on to achieve “*student of the year*” awards at college in auto-engineering and IT).

A number of our current students have now completed their mechanics vocational accreditation at college. Year 11 students have been attending and tackling their college interviews and in a large majority have secured places on their chosen courses. Some have been accompanied but notably some have insisted or out of necessity have succeeded at interview alone; admirable as the scale and tempo and numbers of people at these events a massive step up from our small setting.

As shared in my last report to governors Careers Southwest report all our leavers bar one are in work/training or engaging with CSW and participating in access courses or in one case negotiating to do so. This information has now been supplemented with tracking of our previous students over time and the trend encouraging but stalled as in 2011 all our previous students aged 16-18 only 15% were still “In Learning” rising to 50% in 2012, rising again to 54% in 2013 but stuck there in 2014 at 54%.

4. Quality of teaching in the school (current self-evaluation “good” with some “outstanding” teaching)

Recent activity in the school most powerfully the moderation of in-house judgment of the quality of teaching in the school by former head-teacher and Ofsted inspector BP and his report an essential piece of evidence for governors.

Such sharing of judgments about the quality of teaching was rubber stamped by BP during his recent work with the governing body: governors must be fluent in how good the core business of the school is? His covering email gives a flavour of the positive judgments,

“I thoroughly enjoyed my visit yesterday. I saw some top quality teaching and some young people who were highly engaged in learning. You have some really good teachers and a very strong, supportive senior management team.” 12.05.15

Such favourable judgments are reinforced by feedback from our attached educational psychologist and again her report a key piece of disinterested and objective evidence to keep governors reliably informed about the quality of our work and to enable us to credibly self-evaluate.

“Good practice was observed in all classes. Different strategies to promote positive relationships, improve teaching and learning, organise the classroom and manage pupils’ behaviour were employed.” 18.03.15

Teaching then remains good and sometimes outstanding.

5. Quality of leadership and management (current self-evaluation “requires improvement”)

As shared before and acknowledged in our SEF leadership requires improvement,

“Ofsted identified positive climate for learning has been protected and sustained however that leadership and stability too dependent on head-teacher limiting and damaging wider strategic leadership and operational leadership must be effectively delegated and distributed.” School SEF

It is very significant and evidence we are making the necessary progress to a more distributed and securely good leadership the wider judgment from BP and that in the context of his informal observation, *“You have some really good teachers and a very strong, supportive senior management team.”*

“Corridors were calm, skilfully supervised by senior staff... Senior staff readily exchange important information about pupils with each other. This enables assistant headteachers to be aware of any difficulties, to anticipate potential problems and to allocate staff and resources as necessary...It was noted that where individual pupils were having difficult times, staff moved quickly, sensitively and professionally to ensure that disruptive behaviour did not occur. Senior staff clearly have the confidence of pupils and of the colleagues.” 11.05.15

Operational leadership of the school is then embedding securely. Leadership in the quality assurance of learning and teaching already acknowledged by governors as secure and with new and emerging leadership in the primary unit proving autonomous and robust what remains is the notion of leadership already described in this report,

“the robust and reasonable expectation of autonomous, reflective teachers as leaders rigorously self-evaluating engaging and challenging pupils with creative and innovative teaching, underpinned by the highest expectations and wholly embedded and reliable classroom craft.”

And this consistent with our explicit statement of intent,

“A BESD school that aspires to be good then does not seek to excuse or explain any lack of learning progress by pointing to the nature and difficulty of its students, most obviously and commonly their behaviour, but relentlessly focuses energy instead on overcoming those diverse obstacles to learning: good teaching based on teachers who take ownership of behaviour and learning in their classes and are all “leaders” delivering engaging lessons with skilled relationship building and good discipline secured in clear expectations and routines.”

6. Overall effectiveness: the quality of education provided in the school (current self-evaluation “good”)

In judging we are currently still at least “good” we can do so based on the range of available measures and indicators not least the progress in an area of frailty leadership across the team and feedback best summed up by the first quotation in this report from Ofsted inspector Bob Pugh,

“I thoroughly enjoyed my visit yesterday. I saw some top quality teaching and some young people who were highly engaged in learning. You have some really good teachers and a very strong, supportive senior management team.”

Michael

31.05.15