

Head-teacher's narrative report to governors for the Autumn first half-term 2015 (30.09.15)

1. Context for the school

As I write to governors the new term is here and both students and staff will have to make the significant adjustment that is returning to school and its rhythms and expectations after the long summer break.

Governors agreed this report would focus on pupil achievement and inevitably then quality of teaching and pertinent also the leadership and management of the school and its overall effectiveness. The focus would sharpen scrutinising end of KS4 outcomes as the most important and externally moderated measures of our effectiveness.

In such a small and specialist school the focus with governors will be the learning journey of individual students and how their story and their successes and disappointments and failures will also describe our successes and disappointments and failures as a school.

Senior staff mindful always of the dignity and privacy of the young people will explore and set out how good progress was and were target grades achieved and seek also to tell with compassion and respect the story of the young people and in doing so provide a window on how good the schooling was they received; the most important question.

1i. Current risks and opportunities

The business of re-establishing the rhythms and routines and expectations that promote and underpin the critical positive climate for learning will demand immediate hard work and commitment and vigilance and alertness from the team. That adjustment from "civilian life" is tough.

The children and young people too will have a big adjustment to make and typically there will be a short period of calm followed by robust and sustained testing of those rhythms, routines and expectations. The matter of new classes and new students and a new chemistry adds every autumn to the challenges.

Critical to this period of adjustment and testing will be the quality of our relationships with the children and each other and achieving that robust but warm and caring assertiveness and good parenting essential in our work. Some observations and judgments from Ofsted are far more powerful than they can first appear; they are hard won not least the "good relationships" between staff and students.

What the best staff make look easy is in fact very, very hard and it takes enormous investment and skill and authentic care to build trust and authority in our work. Another emerging "crisis" around nationally reported restraint and alleged "physical abuse" in a sister school in the independent sector in North Devon as the holidays began makes clear again the risks in our work. Holding children is of course risky and for me at least the reasoning in holding and the clear prevention of a greater harm the best protection but experience tells me where relationships and teaching are good holding happens less; vigilance, self-awareness and a commitment to transparent self criticism and a climate in which we can challenge each other; all these are essential.

The school has received three referrals for new students over the summer period and is edging towards the 59 we are seeking but financial modelling is still based on 54.

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

As the academic year closed all indicators were collated and reviewed and informed the school SEF that sets out key bullet points:

- Our behaviour indicators (scrutinised each half-term and accumulatively at academic year's end) remain sound and trends positive: over the academic year 2014-15 a large majority of students, 67% in KS3-4 and a large minority 45% in KS2 were not involved in any recorded serious incident nor were they held; similarly a majority of students 52% are never subject to exclusion and the trend positive and reasoning around FTE is sound; a very large majority of FTEs 82% are two days or less and a majority 61% 1 day or less.
- Attendance overall remains steady at 86% part of a steady year on year improvement from a low of 79% in 2011-12 and in our setting that is encouraging; in 2014-15 20/51 or 39% of students achieved attendance of 95% or better, 29/51 or 57% of students achieved attendance of 90% or better, 41/51 or 80% of students achieved attendance of 85% or better All students below 85% either accumulatively or by half-term continue to be tracked and a majority of those are improving.
- All emerging safeguarding issues are logged and monitored (there were 318 entries in 2014-15) and case studies evidence the positive impact of our working closely with social care; *"The child's emotional needs being recognised and kept very visible and skilfully not confused with or limited to a focus on (just) behaviour... The extraordinary willingness to be creative in achieving what the child needs and going the extra mile on many levels, at many times and in many different ways."* social work manager

As specifically requested by governors anonymised case studies, to ensure the humanity and worth and dignity of our students is made tangible and an agreed safeguarding checklist from Babcock will be shared when we meet and these will be shared every governing body meeting from now on.

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

The focus of Simon's report and our meeting will be the end of final key stage outcomes by student and subject and Simon will describe their learning journey and its context and the extent of good progress to those final exam results. He will also share with help from colleagues supporting him where they are now and a little about their nature and lives. Dave Jones will be supplementing this with a synopsis of their personalised packages and vocational learning in KS4.

I will provide a document (appendix 1) for governors that allows them to scrutinize outcomes, place them in context and track key students and groups to prompt and inform the critical friendship they must bring and be the starting point for scrutiny discussion at the FGBM 30.09.15 Their accumulative achievements this year and over time evidence our effectiveness will be shared and placed in the context of our performance over time and when set against similar schools locally and nationally.

Simon's focus will be on individual students and their journey and outcomes with us to make sure in our specialist and small setting each young person is acknowledged and celebrated and their achievements in context.

There is I assert strong evidence of good achievement.

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

It is equally and inevitably true also that what our students achieve is the most powerful and useful evidence of how good their education with us has been; how good teaching has been? My report (appendix 1) will also explore what students’ achievements this year and over time tell us about the quality of teaching (subject and teacher) and this in the context of observation judgments in-house, moderated and Ofsted over time. Simon will lead the discussion in unpicking and developing what we know about teaching and its quality in our school.

It has been notable for example for some time in IT that measurably good and outstanding teaching has logically led to consistently good progress and good GCSE outcomes.

There is wider evidence of good teaching manifested in good learning outcomes.

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

The notion of all teachers as leaders in a BESD setting is set out in our SEN policy,

“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” SEN Policy

Positive learning outcomes are the result of good teaching and that a result of a willingness to lead and take ownership and overcome obstacles to learning. Our work on what the young people get individually and collectively over time tells us about the quality of leadership in individual subject teachers.

The continued focus in school improvement and teacher performance management on the craft of the BESD classroom is improving that bottom up leadership we are seeking.

“Privilege and promote the key elements and be alive to any emerging innovations that characterise best BESD teaching practice; moderated and shaped by Ofsted descriptors of what “good” and “outstanding” practice look like and embed these collective goals in teachers’ and support staff performance management”

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

Through Simon’s unpicking of progress and achievement at the end of KS4 student by student and then cohort by cohort and over time the quality of teaching and learning is exposed subject by subject, teacher by teacher and accumulatively then the school’s effectiveness in this critical benchmark. There is in that story much that is good and that reinforced when put in context and described over time.

The extent of good progress and therefore good teaching for KS2 and KS3 will be unpicked and shared at our next meeting.

Michael