

Southampton School Improvement Officer Annual Visit Report 2021 – 2022

School	St George Catholic VA College	
Headteacher	James Habberley head@stgcc.co.uk	
Chair of Governors	Anna McCormack amccormack@stgcc.co.uk	
School Improvement Officer	Alan Taylor-Bennett	Date of visit: 14 Jan 2022
Other attendees	nil	
Last Ofsted inspection judgement / date	In November 2021 s8 visit: ‘...could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a section 5 inspection now. The school’s next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.’	
Information about the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 992 students are currently on roll <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ this is 50 more than at this point last year • 16.4% of students have SEND <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 2.3% (of NOR) of students have an EHCP (included in above figure) • 44.6% of students have EAL • 18.5% of students are eligible for PP • 15.6% of students are currently FSM6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ this is 2.1% (of NOR) more than academic year 2020/21 • 3.5% students currently have a social worker • 12.4% of students were persistently absent in 2020/21 • 2.1% students had 1 or more exclusion(s) in 2020/21 • 2.9% of students arrived in-year in 2020/21 • 3% of students (29) were in-year leavers in 2020/21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 0.4% (of NOR) were EHE (included in above figure) • 5 students had reduced timetables in 2020/21 	

Follow up review recommended?	Not required. The school may request a follow-up visit in the summer term if it would be found useful.
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Area to develop	Timescale and intended impact
See below	Planned and initiated over this academic year

How evidence was obtained

Meetings were held with:

- the headteacher
- the deputy headteacher and other senior staff
- a representative group of subject leaders
- leaders with responsibility for safeguarding and RSE
- the school business manager

- a representative group of students
- governors.

The following documentation was reviewed:

- the school development plan
- the self-evaluation summary
- the PP strategy statement and catch-up premium details
- the report from the recent Ofsted s8 inspection
- CPD tracking information
- analyses of attendance and exclusions
- the teaching and learning handbook.

Several lesson visits were undertaken across a range of subjects and year groups, and an assembly was observed.

Summary of key findings

This annual visit was re-organised in response to the school having very recently had a s8 inspection by Ofsted in which the lead HMI declared the intention for the next inspection to be undertaken against s5 of the Education Act 2005 (amended) with a view to judging the school to be outstanding. We agreed that time spent discussing the implications of some of the points he raised was more useful to leaders than carrying out all of the usual AV activities.

Accordingly, some of the detail in the traditional AV was not covered explicitly and this report takes the form of a record of some very school-specific conversations and, more particularly, some ideas around next steps for leaders to consider.

At the outset we decided to try to do two things.

1. To explore the ways in which outstanding schools may think and behave differently to very good schools.
2. To unpick the meaning of the key element of the feedback by the lead inspector: 'The QofEd is 'cuspy' – some very exceptional QofEd was seen but there were indications of a lack of consistency in some areas around curriculum implementation and its assessment.' He went on to explain, 'There are questions around how leaders gauge the impact of all of the good practice evident. This is very important because it's a reflection of your intent. Consider formalising the checking processes; this will help to improve the consistency of your work.' He then went on to promise that, 'The area for focus will be something like 'The extent to which the impact of the curriculum is monitored formally – how leaders check that what they intend is having the impact they desired. This is associated with the generation of a high level of consistency across the school'.' Frustratingly, however, this area of focus was not mentioned in the final report.

The key finding of this visit is that we felt that, by the end of the day, we had explicated this message and arrived at a set of specific innovations that could be considered for adoption, all based on '...gaug(ing) the impact of all of the good practice evident...' and doing so '...as an expression of...intent', at least some of which could assist leaders to energise, focus and deepen their grasp on the curriculum, and any of which could encourage leaders at all levels to adopt a more exploratory/empirical/wide-ranging approach to improving outcomes even further for students here.

They are organised under appropriate headings below.

The quality of education

- Subject leaders (and others – see below) must hold students' acquisition of essential knowledge and skills (K&S) absolutely at the centre of their thinking.
 - K&S are the key driver, and the clearest expression, of a subject's statement of *intent* (what used to be called a subject's 'scheme of work')
 - using K&S as the basis for discussions around how students learn a particular topic best will help leaders identify the most appropriate *implementation* mechanisms to deliver it (pedagogy, assessment etc)
 - gauging impact must be focused on the extent to which essential K&S are being acquired by students, initially in their short-term memory and then moved into long-term memory.

- The essential purpose of CPD is then understood to be enabling all teachers to contribute to an outstanding quality of education for students by maximising their effectiveness at doing the above. This begs questions around the current and future balance between CPD dealing with generic pedagogical skills and CPD driving those skills in a subject-specific context. The balance will, of course, be different for teachers at different stages of their careers, but is there an appropriate shift underway towards deep and highly effective subject-specific pedagogy for more experienced classroom practitioners?
- Leaders use the word 'coaching' to describe a process more akin to co-planning. This isn't a problem. Time spent in very high-quality subject-specific conversations about how students most securely and reliably acquire particular aspects of the subject statement of intent and using the insights gained to decide the best way of teaching them, in more frequent department meetings, suddenly seems to be a core activity. Small departments will need special provision to enable this, possibly involving adaptations to the existing inter-school subject liaison groups.
- We discussed the concept of having a very small number of whole-school curriculum priorities that strongly influence every subject/aspect statement of intent. Leaders are very confident that this can be driven by their mission statement 'At St George, we ASPIRE to become all that God has created us to be'. However, this statement needs connecting to the curriculum more explicitly and clearly. In separate discussions with SLT, middle leaders and with governors the same idea emerged: the bridge between these fine words and classroom practice is the current emphasis on enrichment and enhancement. Leaders should refine this idea and consider writing a statement of whole-school curriculum intent that captures it in a real, practical and exiting manner, a statement that is far from the traditional generic statements out there and defines *precisely* what St George's stands for.
- Of course, doing this may well give you the capacity to say '...and therefore we have a two-year KS3'!

Behaviour and attitudes

- Lessons visited were calm and there was a good sense of purpose and alignment between teachers and students. There were a few occasions when some of the questions posed were not driven with sufficient insistence and the real point of that part of the whole-class conversation wasn't achieved. This may well be teachers exercising sensitivity around the impact of Covid on students' confidence. If so, leaders may well want to reflect on how, in time, they encourage the students themselves to be more critical of the extent to which they have arrived at a deep understanding of an idea under discussion, and be more willing to play an active and critical part in their own learning.
- The group of students spoken with conveyed a thoughtful and considered view of their school. They showed significant appreciation for all that the staff here offer them and how they are supported to develop, learn and grow. They identified little teaching practice that could be improved (only identifying some frustration for not being always able to 'interrupt and ask an important question' sometimes) and identified much classroom practice that they enjoyed and benefited from, including the clarity of explanations, the frequency and quality of marking and opportunities for practical work in relevant subjects. They felt that there was very little bullying in the school, and it is almost never driven by malice but more by 'taking a joke too far'. They were realistic about this being an inevitable aspect of some human interactions and said that it was always tackled well by staff. Low-level disruption was said to be unusual and, when it happened, managed well. They enjoyed the conversation and expressed a desire to engage in more discussions such as this with senior staff.

Personal development

- The first bullet in QofEd above could be regarded as relevant to many aspects (non-subject specific domains) of the work of the school. For example, on the day of the visit there was a high-quality Year 8 assembly outlining whole-school approaches to sexual harassment. Leaders understand that their provision around this topic must be evaluated at some point. To what extent will they consider gauging the degree to which students have acquired particular knowledge and skills as a result of all of this input? (Which, in turn, begs the question of whether they ought to have been defined explicitly at the outset.) There are clear examples in other schools of Ofsted criticising the work of SEN departments for driving high quality provision but failing to check the extent to which this is improving acquiring the acquisition of subject-specific K&S of students with SEN. All of this seems to chime with our discussion about the

relationship between *monitoring impact* and in doing so being clear about the *relationship with your intent* (see above) beyond a subject-specific context.

- PSHE is an interesting point for consideration. Many schools seem to regard it as somehow different to other subjects. If we were to look at the subject statement of intent for PSHE would we see clear statements of expected knowledge and skills? If not, why not? And do we assess PSHE by (appropriately) gauging the extent to which students are acquiring securely these key K&S? If not, why not?
- All of the above suggests that a key mechanism to gauge the impact of (at least some, probably many) aspects of the curriculum is engaging students in subject/aspect-specific conversations. This, of course, should be a primary focus of lesson visits, and involve a scrutiny of their books to support the process (see first bullet under QofEd above), but it could be extended to subject/aspect leaders meeting regularly with small groups of students. We agreed that, rather than being at the level of 'What do you enjoy most/least, and 'What do you find easy/difficult' etc, these meetings should involve straightforward discussions about particular aspects of a particular science, geography, PE etc statement of intent and be led by experts in those fields.
- A possible extension of this idea is to explore the extent to which teachers may wish to share the purpose and methodology of certain pedagogical activities with students. Would (some?) students learn better if they understood what teachers were actually trying to do by using eg hinge questions, exit questions, Do Nows etc? This is a very interesting question; not of us were absolutely sure what the answer is. How could this be determined? (Outstanding schools want to find out answers to questions such as this.)
- As I write this, I find it interesting that I have placed it in the PD section of this report.
- The recent Ofsted visit included a conversation with the Careers team and they were impressed with the offer and its focus on a student centred approach and the pursuing of face to face activity to build resilience in the young people.
- The new look website is easy to navigate and provides all the relevant CEIAG information.
- The careers leader gets no additional time for this role and sees his input as ensuring action at a strategic level. He is hugely grateful to his careers coordinator for her dedication and capacity to innovate.
- The team have concerns around the challenge of providing face-to-face experiences and the effect this has on mental health and wellbeing for those moving on from Year 11. They are conscious that the level of pastoral support they provide is not always sustainable post-16.

Leadership and management

- Governors may feel that they have a role in carrying out some feature of the activity described in the third bullet of PD above. They would, of course, want to operate from some very clear ground-rules.
- Leaders want to keep their SEF in its current format. Indeed, governors said that they valued it as an informative document. If this is to be the case, we agreed that there are two improvements required. Both are centred on ensuring that it is strongly/powerfully evaluative.
 - Do not detail provision, detail impact. Providing a list of provision is an unfortunate characteristic of parts of the PD section in particular, which is interesting given our conversations that led to the points in the PD section above. We looked at a few examples of this. A rather brutal, but very effective, mechanism to avoid this error is to ask oneself (and/or each other) 'So what?' after writing entries.
 - Use many more modifiers (adverbs and adjectives) and modifier phrases to convey the extent to which you are pleased with an outcome.
- If the SEF is sufficiently powerful it will point the way to a relatively small number of key areas for improvement. These can be captured in a short, sharp, simple manner in a (relatively) brief school development plan.
- Governors demonstrated an impressive awareness of some detail of the school's work and very relevant insights into the efficiency and effectiveness of curriculum delivery. This gives them confidence to offer support to senior leaders by showing appropriate and constructive challenge; several examples were outlined.