



RASTRICK HIGH SCHOOL

POLARIS MAT MONITORING VISIT – 17/18/19 NOVEMBER 2021

Background

This was the first formal monitoring visit of the Trust senior leaders – Steve Evans (CEO) and Matt Crowther (Director of School Improvement). The review was led by Carlton Midgley (Trust School Improvement Partner).

The focus of the review was the Quality of Education and the curriculum areas covered were: English (incl. drama), Mathematics, MFL and Humanities, as these subjects are elements of core and Ebacc. Over the three days, a range of discussions were held with senior and middle leaders. Discussions were also held with some teachers who had been observed, and with a sample of students in years 7, 9, 10 and 11. A significant proportion of time was spent on a series of joint learning walks covering each year group from 7 to 11, amounting to 27 observations. In addition, the team scrutinised work from KS3 and KS4 students in each of the subjects.

Quality of Education


Curriculum Intent

Senior leaders have a clear vision for the curriculum, which is one of the three priorities in the School Improvement Plan 2021-22 – the associated objective is to deliver “an inclusive and ambitious engaging curriculum”. In order to achieve this, the aim is to “embed and sustain a profound understanding of curriculum intent across the school”, which should lead to “a greater understanding of the bigger picture for both staff and students”. In addition, the school aims to “embed and sustain a personal development curriculum which caters for all learners”.

The school’s curriculum intent statement is strong. It uses research driven best practice, the school’s context and the characteristics of its students to effectively communicate the purpose of the school’s curriculum. It is coherent, well planned and logically sequenced. In summary, it is designed to enable students to do more, remember more and achieve more.

Senior leaders have a deep understanding of the strategies that underpin the delivery of the school’s curriculum. They spoke with passion and conviction as they effectively articulated the school’s ambitious curriculum and their mission to deliver a curriculum that goes well beyond the National Curriculum. Clear evidence of this can be seen in the broad and balanced formal curriculum, which is complemented by the rich and diverse range of activities on offer in the school’s enrichment programme.

Another key strength of the school is the effectiveness of middle leadership – the four middle leaders interviewed with regard to the Quality of Education all had an excellent understanding of curriculum intent. Aaron Worswick (English) has led the development of an exceptional English curriculum that is based around four aspects: narrative, viewpoints & perspectives, Shakespeare & drama and poetry. Effective use of the waypoint system has ensured that the curriculum is planned and sequenced so that new knowledge and skills build on prior learning. It is clear what the next steps are and what students need to know and be able to do in order to get there. This includes students at all levels, as the waypoints have been skilfully adapted so they can be used in the lower



sets. The curriculum is designed to provide a platform to success, build the students' confidence and ensure that students know the department believes in them. This was borne out in the observations and in discussions with students. The vast majority of the English staff understand the curriculum intent and apply it well.

Leaders in Mathematics have a deep understanding of and can effectively articulate the intent of the mathematics curriculum. They communicated clearly why the curriculum was reshaped in 2019, giving a clear rationale for why the curriculum needed re-development. The leadership team understand the need to ensure the curriculum can consistently stretch the more able students. They also understand the need for the curriculum to have the flexibility to enable topics to 'breathe', so they can be explored deeply by HAPs; this has been planned into the medium-term planning across both the Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 curriculum. The team also demonstrated that they understood the need to support and scaffold learning / topics for SEND and / or lower attaining pupils. Their view was that most of the mathematics staff understood the waypoint system well and used it to good effect.

The curriculum intent was skilfully presented by Porya Kordbacheh, who leads the MFL curriculum area well. The curriculum in MFL is designed to ensure that students have every opportunity to explore and enjoy the target language. This curriculum enables students to use target language as frequently as possible across all the four skills listed in the National Curriculum. It is built around the understanding of the need to gradually build students' cognitive load. Language skills are built onto through a staged framework, starting with flooding students with target vocabulary and ending in retrieval and reflection. This gives students the opportunity to tackle any misconceptions and/or master skills and understanding. Led by the MFL Leader, the faculty conducted a needs analysis prior to the development of the curriculum to ensure that the content of curriculum addresses the context of the pupils and has high levels of challenge. This has resulted in students in Key Stage 3 being challenged to learn skills and knowledge, normally expected to be seen in Key Stage 4. Phonetic priming is a key part of curriculum resources and implementation. This support is aiding students' access to the target language and pronunciation skills. This was seen in Year 7 lessons, where students had the opportunity to access the language through lessons focused on pronunciation, before being engaged with the learning of grammar. Students revisit grammatical skills / tenses and structures in topics, throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, to ensure they can transition the skills they have learnt in one topic to another. This helps students preload skills and understanding and supports them to tackle the more complex work in the next term / year. This approach is effectively supported by teachers' skilful use of waypoints. This was seen throughout the books scrutinised and during lesson observations.

The Humanities curriculum is ambitious. Richard Cooper has led the redesign of the different curriculums in humanities – each focuses on the importance of sequence, foundations for GCSE, retrieval, subject specific 'Golden threads', cultural capital and clear progression. All these strands were visible in lesson observations and within the work scrutiny. The curriculum leader was clear about the importance of the above strands and about the balance, breadth and depth of the curriculum. He was able to articulate how the Key Stage 3 geography curriculum is more aspirational than the National Curriculum. There are additional units of study and the geographical skill sets, such as field work, are covered in greater depth. The rationale for this additional depth is to enrich experiences to meet the needs of disadvantaged students and provide opportunities to develop greater understanding. Although most staff have a reasonable understanding of the planned curriculum, further development and support is needed. The curriculum leader has provided a structure of activities and support for staff to further develop differentiated planning, so it caters more effectively for the needs of SEND students. However, a clearer narrative in this area would help.



Implementation (Quality of teaching)

Further improving the quality of teaching and learning is another of the three priorities in the School Improvement Plan 2021-22 – the associated objective is to develop “a culture of professional growth for all, that ensures that the students have an outstanding educational experience”. The key strategies are to “embed and sustain a focus on developing teaching craft across all subjects”, “embed subject specific training in all departments” and plan a “whole school training programme on teaching pedagogy”. Senior leaders are clear that the renewed drive to further improve teaching, supported by CPD and performance management, should enable teachers to provide appropriate challenge to all different groups of students.

The school’s commitment to achieving ‘most teaching is outstanding and never less than good’ is being tackled with skill. Senior leaders understand the need to continually invest in the craft of teaching. This investment is being delivered through a targeted CPD programme, that accurately reflects the need to continually focus on subject specialist learning and research driven whole school pedagogical approaches (‘5 to Drive’). The school has developed an effective waypoint system to enable pupils to better understand and connect their learning from Year 7 to Year 11.

Where teaching is not strong, the school’s systems for identification and support for teachers are fit for purpose. Senior leaders have an acute understanding of who these teachers are and the level of support they are receiving. There are clear well communicated timescales in place for these support programmes and they are effectively integrated into the school’s quality assurance system.

The curriculum leaders were clear that all their staff wanted to get better and that the departmental discussions and CPD sessions were vitally important. They knew their teachers well and joint observations demonstrated the accuracy of their judgements. Most of the teaching seen was ‘working at’ in all areas and, if this was consistent across all their classes and over time, they would be judged as outstanding. In these very good lessons, there were common features, such as:

- Good range of well-structured tasks
- Lesson built on prior learning and skills
- Clear explanations and expectations
- Secure subject knowledge and understanding
- High level of challenge for all
- Brisk pace and intensity of learning
- Regular assessment during the lesson
- Use of retrieval techniques
- Excellent behaviour, attitudes to learning and working relationships
- Students could articulate how their current learning fitted into their learning journey

The quality of the work and the marking in the books that were scrutinised was in line with that of the teaching seen. School / departmental policy had been followed and the grading would be

'working at' in all areas. In this very good practice, there were common features, such as:

- The work in the books matched the intended curriculum
- Books were marked regularly and effectively with clear next steps and feedback
- 'Even better if' comments were followed up with a task that students completed
- Evidence of appropriate challenge and a variety of learning activities
- Presentation was consistently good
- Students' work demonstrated good progress in developing detailed knowledge and skills

Main findings

- The Quality of Education of the curriculum areas reviewed is strong with regard to Curriculum Intent and Implementation (NB: Curriculum Impact was not within the scope of this review)
- Senior leadership of Curriculum Intent is outstanding
- Middle leadership of Curriculum Intent (in the curriculum areas reviewed) is excellent overall
- Implementation (Quality of teaching) was very good in most of the lessons seen

Suggestions for the March 2022 monitoring visit

- Curriculum Review of other subjects, including Science, with work scrutiny across a year group to enable comparisons to be made
- Follow up activities from the November 2021 monitoring visit:
 - Curriculum leader discussion on support for 'weakest' staff: support provided, CPD, evidence of improvement → observe and look at books
 - Discussion, observations, work scrutiny of provision in lower sets to check the effectiveness of the adaptations to waypoints