

English and Literacy Focus Review – 27th and 28th April 2015

This intensive review was undertaken by Patricia Metham and Tracey Maloney, both of whom are trained Ofsted inspectors commissioned by the Local Authority to undertake these reviews in schools in East Sussex. In addition, Patricia Metham is most recently well-known as an experienced HMI and Ofsted's leading inspector of English and Literacy.

The findings of their review are detailed in the report below following verbal feedback to the Chair of Governors and senior staff on 28th April 2015. This report has also been submitted to the Local Authority.

The scope of the visit and evidence gathered

During the visit:

- 11 lessons or parts of lessons were observed, 9 jointly with a member of the senior leadership team
- Examples of students' written work were scrutinised
- Information about students' attainment and progress over time was reviewed, together with the school's response to challenges and opportunities highlighted by analysis of achievement data
- The school's development plan, the action plan for English and literacy, the school's teaching, assessment and performance management policies and its curriculum plan were evaluated
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and the senior leader line-managing English and literacy, the subject leader, the literacy co-ordinator, the transition student support manager for Year 7, and groups of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students.

The context of the school

The school was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2012, when its overall effectiveness and capacity for further improvement were judged to be good. Inspectors noted that the provision and outcomes in English and literacy were particularly strong, with attainment and progress significantly better than average. They also noted that the English department made a determined and successful effort to encourage students to improve their reading outside school and to read at home by recommending suitable books. They remarked that students appreciated this and many made good use of the school library outside lessons.

Key findings

- The school has a commitment to providing excellent continuing professional development (CPD), which it describes as 'growing teaching and learning'. The yearly research strands for teacher-research include 'the literate school'. There are robust performance management systems.
- Transition procedures are coherent, beginning with a June/July induction. Many parents described their child's first few weeks at Chailey as 'very positive' and 'very happy'. The intervention programme is rigorous and coherent.
- Attainment on entry reflects a huge range of ability. All groups show significant improvement as they progress through the school.
- Library provision is of a very high standard; it is well used by a wide range of students, boys as well as girls. Student librarians assist at lunchtimes. The librarian is up to date with all developments in reading and has a presence in classrooms.
- Students' work shows a variety of useful, appropriate resources to assist understanding and an appreciation of each of the different text types.
- Speaking and listening are highly valued, as feedback from Key Stage 3 students made very clear. Discussion is seen as a vital rehearsal for writing.

Overall judgement of the effectiveness of English and literacy leadership and provision

The overall effectiveness English and literacy provision is outstanding

Leadership and management at all levels, including curriculum planning and implementation

- **School leadership:** there is a clear and ambitious vision promoted by the head teacher and senior leaders, set out succinctly in the school development plan. It is translated into a very systematic approach to monitoring, target-setting and well-focused professional development.
- Chailey's classroom-based research programme shows ambition and encourages collaboration and reflection amongst staff.
- A well-established framework ensures coherence and consistency across departments. There is clarity in the whole-school approach to assessment and to the development of literacy.
- Transition into Year 7 is a strength, led by a non-teaching middle leader. This also marks the beginning of a strategic intervention programme, shaped by careful assessment of each student's attainment and capacity on entry to Key Stage 3.
- **Subject leadership:** Subject leadership is effective. The Head of Faculty combines enthusiastic subject knowledge with a readiness to respond to changing circumstances, such as the new GCSE structure.
- **Middle leadership:** roles and responsibilities are well defined and effectively carried out; for example, literacy co-ordination, and delegated responsibility for Key Stage 4.
- Performance management is focused and rigorous, ensuring that the school's vision for developing learning communities is being realised. Creating teachers as researchers is an effective policy and is beginning to show positive impact, particularly on the thinking skills taught in Key Stage 4 lessons.
- Lesson observations are linked to performance management and show a combined approach of both monitoring and coaching.
- The Head of Faculty is aware of the demands of the new curriculum and has involved the whole department in planning for the future.
- There is an enterprising approach to assessment in Year 7, to be 'one jump ahead' when National Curriculum levels are no longer applicable. This is proving successful because the criteria defining each threshold or level of attainment for every unit have been carefully constructed and consistently applied and a system worked out that can record progress. The same letters are used to indicate students' attainment over time but the threshold criteria are redefined at each stage.
- Data capture points are used in English to monitor progress and put forward an effective range of interventions, including the Key Stage 4 'closing the gap' lessons. The impact is evident in students' better than expected rates of progress.

Teaching

- Teachers are confident and enthusiastic with good subject knowledge. They are skilled in questioning students, using both open and well-directed approaches. There is a constructive rapport between staff and students. Teachers have effective, unconflictual classroom management styles and are highly skilled in working with a broad range of students.

Behaviour and attitudes to learning

- The students are willing learners, exhibiting a positive rapport with teachers and other staff. Mutual support is apparent, especially in group work and discussion. Students are ready to apply in one context, skills developed in another; particularly evident in approaches to literacy across subjects.
- Students are successfully encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, as seen in 'Show my Homework' and the Chailey Learning Zone.

Achievement

- **Attainment:** while there is a broad range of prior attainment on entry, GCSE results are well above average in Language and Literature for all groups. In 2014, the average point score per student for GCSE English was 49.0, against a national average of 38.2.
- **Progress:** this is significantly better than average, for all groups. The school's ambitious target for progress from entry to Year 7 to assessment at the end of Year 11 has been met consistently over time. Published Key Stage 4 results at the end of the 2013-14 year show 89% of students making at least expected progress, against a national average of 70%, and 48% making better than expected progress, against a national average of 32%. The pattern is similar for 'disadvantaged' students, with 82% making at least expected progress and 36% making better than expected progress. The gap between students known to be eligible for free school meals or to be in local authority care and their Chailey contemporaries is successfully being closed by the school's well-established approach to assessment and intervention.