

Review of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Elmwood School

7th March 2017

In addition to the 7 lessons which were formally observed, a learning walk was conducted across the school, encompassing all aspects of the school day including breakfast, transition, group discussion, reward time and social reading.

Strengths

The quality of teaching and learning is at least consistently good and very often outstanding.

An overwhelmingly purposeful learning atmosphere pervades. In every lesson, time is used very effectively. Planning takes account of the needs of the learners and unfailingly builds upon this, with new knowledge and skills being imparted at every opportunity. Differentiation is integral, not a bolt on, in every classroom. Teachers have an almost intuitive knowledge of how far they can push each pupil to achieve the most in the time.

Expectations of pupils are very high with high level tasks being attempted, often with considerable success. Even those pupils who were less successful with their final outcomes, such as in an art lesson where they were reproducing Van Gogh's sunflowers, demonstrated very positive attitudes to learning.

Relationships are extremely positive in all lessons, meaning pupils are eager to please.

A significant strength is teachers going the extra mile to make learning relevant to pupils. This really motivates pupils who might otherwise not see the point. This includes substantial links to possible careers, which also help to raise pupils' aspirations.

Teachers consistently scaffold learning well with pupils being given the confidence they need to work diligently through tasks. In the majority of cases, enough time is given to pupils for them to work independently following this scaffolded section of the lesson.

Teachers are quick to identify pupils who are at risk of falling behind because they carefully monitor their classes whilst they are working, but do so unobtrusively. Learning is allowed to progress without the need to stop pupils who are working well.

Because teachers have such an incisive knowledge of their pupils' needs, they are able to pre-empt any potential difficulties pupils will have with the work. Subject knowledge is secure, allowing teachers to unpick the difficulties pupils might face well before they run into difficulties.

Potential behaviour difficulties in particular are pre-empted and planned around. Indeed, it was often difficult to witness the high level behaviour management techniques being employed because they were so well embedded. The reflective culture is not limited to the 'group discussions' that take place throughout the day but permeate everything teachers and pupils do together.

The collaborative ethos sometimes results in pupils being willing to help each other. For example, whilst pupils during a food technology lesson worked at their own stations, they took turns during a group discussion and washed up for each other.

Pupils are being very effectively guided to reflect on their emerging needs and are consequently articulate about their learning, identifying their strengths and what they need to be working on. The quality of verbal feedback is especially high with pupils relishing opportunities to discuss their work with their teachers.

The school's work on building resilience is paying off with pupils feeling "ok" about getting things wrong the first time.

Reading is promoted by effective teacher modelling, especially during social reading time. The reading texts have been carefully chosen to promote pupil engagement but they are also challenging (e.g. Dylan Thomas).

Stereotypes are routinely challenged, both reactively and proactively. In the case of the latter, strategic curriculum decisions, including set texts in English and topics embracing multiculturalism (including foods from other cultures), have instilled in pupils respect and tolerance for people outside their immediate experiences. In the case of the former, the one stereotypical comment heard throughout the whole day (a cultural stereotype, not intended to be offensive) was quickly challenged by the teacher.

Additional adults are well directed, being deployed where they will have the most impact on pupil progress. In many classrooms it is often difficult to distinguish who is the teacher and who is the teaching assistant: knowing the best approach that works with each pupil is a shared responsibility.

Areas for Development and Recommendations

An acknowledged priority of the leadership team is to develop pupils' independence. Their work thus far is definitely paying off with regards to behaviour and sometimes with regards to learning. Several teachers are now experimenting with giving pupils more time to work on tasks which have been heavily scaffolded beforehand. Carefully taking away some of this scaffolding might promote further progress and develop this sought for independence. Use of model answers or style samples of 'the sort of thing you need to be aiming for', particularly for extended writing tasks, but also for practical outcomes, would support teachers being able to 'step back' a little.

Although pupils have a well-developed capacity for learning from mistakes, some pupils are reluctant to revisit work they have already 'drafted', following teacher feedback. Perhaps replacing the idea of 'drafting' with 'crafting' (or an equivalent) would reduce this resistance to getting work to the highest possible standard it can be. This approach appears to already be working in practical subjects where pupils are willing to refine their outcomes so could be extended to subjects where pupils have to write for extended periods.

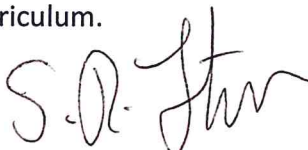
Teachers are experts at judging when it is best to move on so engagement remains high, though this rapid pace sometimes comes at the expense of deeper questioning. Perhaps pausing to ask more 'why?' questions ('why are we doing this?' / 'why is it important to...?') would help to get the most out of the excellent resources being used.

In line with school policy, homework is set but its completion is understandably variable. Where parental support is strong, homework is commensurable. Promoting the value of homework for all learners might be a priority for the future.

Social reading time helps to establish the value of reading and this could be reinforced by focused reading of longer extracts in lessons across the curriculum.



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