

Mark Wilson review 23-24 September 2013

Introduction

Mark Wilson visited Millthorpe on 23/24 September to assist us in refining our SEF and helping us secure a good grading at the next Ofsted inspection. He interviewed the Headteacher and observed eight 25 minute lesson snapshots on the first day. On the second day, he held interviews with senior staff about pupil premium, behaviour, attendance, teaching & learning and leadership. He also interviewed governors and a selection of middle leaders about leadership. Finally, he interviewed a group of students and scrutinised their work.

What we say

We are currently grading all four elements of the SEF as Good (grade 2). The four elements are Achievement, Teaching, Behaviour Attendance & Safety and Leadership. Of the four, we feel that Behaviour Attendance and Safety is currently the strongest.

What Mark Wilson says

Achievement

Our 2013 results certainly support a grade 2 for Achievement, but there are four things currently indicating a grade 3 which must be put right. First, the pupil premium results are not so strong and we will have to say what action we are taking to put this right in the future. Secondly, achievement over time as evidenced by classroom observations, pupil voice and work scrutiny needs to support a good judgement as well. Thirdly, we normally have to have a three year trend and we don't. We must use in-year tracking of Year 11 (and eventually Year 10) to support our judgement here too. Finally, we must show that achievement in KS3 is good. This is more difficult and will be a combination of rigorous use of tracking data and what is seen in lessons and work scrutinies (progress over time). Be aware that in terms of data, Ofsted are obsessed with levels of progress and HoDs of English and Maths must speak **more** about progress than about attainment.

Teaching

There were relatively few lessons observed, but a few common themes emerged. Behaviour for learning was generally good. Quality of teaching overall did not match the typical grades those teachers had consistently achieved last year, and the discrepancy was linked to a strengthening of some parts of the Ofsted framework this month. There are Mark's "Secret Seven" (as in Enid Blyton, not as in Official Secrets!) which teachers need to consistently show in lessons. If we got these right, our teaching would be securely good. The most significant of these was the match of level of challenge to the level of **individual** need. This is basically good differentiation linked to high enough challenge. A further significant issue was feedback. While there were excellent examples, books were typically not well enough marked. This was confirmed by the pupil voice which indicated some pupil dissatisfaction with quality of marking, particularly last year. All of this was backed up by the work scrutiny making a solid picture of feedback requiring improvement. However, all of this is relatively easy to fix.

Pupil premium

Some really good work, but we must show more of what we do in KS3 and not focus as much on Year 11. The amount of work with Year 11 should be declining in our future plans. Currently what Mark saw in classrooms does not suggest there is sufficient differentiation (match of level of challenge to need) to ensure really good progress by PP pupils.

Attendance Behaviour & Safety

Mark detected a distinct improvement from his last visit. Until the behaviour for learning in lessons improves further we cannot claim an outstanding for this. We must beware of boredom creeping into lessons through mismatch of challenge to need and triggering poorer behaviour. Inspectors will check behaviour at free time and in large spaces for example the dining hall, and search for "aggressive language" or its absence. During the two days, Mark felt this was good. The rate of exclusions was not a concern.

Leadership

There is much good work being done. The department improvement plans need tweaking so they are more rigorously monitored. Heads of Department are beginning to improve teaching but this tends to be with individuals and not systematically for all teachers. Also the monitoring of departmental effectiveness by HoDs can be strengthened further. Mark suggested a self-validation exercise he has found helpful in other schools which we will discuss with HoDs. A more general issue, but not so challenging to us is the progress of the more able. HoDs need to aim for really good progress for the more able students.

Governance

Governors performed well in their 20 minute interview. They would benefit from being able to state the key improvement priorities from memory and also thinking through how they know SLT judgements about teaching quality and achievement are reliable – how can they get some external validation? They also need to be totally clear about how they have challenged the headteacher and SLT in the past, and how robust they feel Performance Management procedures are, and how well teaching is providing value for money. Pupil premium spending is more of an issue here and will be probed deeply, so we need the Pupil Premium governor present. Governors will also have to give a view about how far they agree with SEF gradings and why.

Actions we should take as a result of the review

Achievement

1. Redouble our actions on pupil premium pupils to narrow the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

Teaching

1. Mark's "Secret Seven" must be understood and applied by all teachers in all lessons. SLT must make sure HoDs have the support needed to make this happen. HoDs must assist teachers and monitor that they are doing them.
2. In KS3 we must be able to show within lessons that good progress is being made.
3. All teachers must provide good challenge to individuals taking into account their starting point.
4. All marking must immediately meet basic standards and progress towards consistently giving useful feedback which is used by pupils to improve.

Behaviour, Attendance & Safety

1. Pupil voice currently says that for most pupils between 1 & 5 lessons a week are held up because of some minor disruption – we should analyse what type of disruption and take action to reduce it further.
2. While behaviour in lessons was good, engagement needs to be higher to move from grade 2 to grade 1 and this will mean all lessons must be interesting – boredom not allowed!
3. We need to be more active in monitoring conduct – behaviour outside of lessons – to ensure the good picture from 23rd/24th September continues into the future.
5. We must continue with the good work being done on attendance and safety. Attendance can rise further.

Leadership

1. The focus of middle leaders should be primarily on improving teaching – there have been good starts but there is too much reliance on senior leaders at the moment. Middle leaders have had good training to do this but would benefit from further support and modelling.
2. Governors are performing well, but should prepare very well for their Ofsted interview to put across their contribution to the school's improvement more concisely.

Trevor Burton 25th September 2013