

Torshire Community School – note of visit for core subject review

From John Smith, School Improvement Partner,
To Jane Green (Headteacher)

Thank you for inviting myself and the LA consultants for English, mathematics and science to carry out a review of your core subject departments. I write to confirm the findings that I gave in my verbal report to you directly after the review. As requested, I have forwarded a copy to your chair of governors as I understand you have agreed to meet to discuss the findings in the near future.

Leadership

At Torshire, there is clearly a high level of commitment among senior leaders to reach floor targets but it is a relatively new senior team and a considerable amount of work remains to be done to ensure that subject leaders, in particular, are fully engaged. The distance to be travelled is also considerable, with the school stuck at or around 30% over the last three years.

Mathematics

In mathematics, the school must improve the engagement and attainment of Year 10 and 11 girls. The school's analysis show that 15 girls in a cohort of 100 are on track to reach A*–C in science and English but not in mathematics.

English

In English there has been considerable recent turnover of staff. The team now has a new subject leader, in post from the start of September, but with limited teaching experience (3 years). Pupils make sound progress and the team is regarded as a strength of the school. Action is needed now, however, to improve and secure key aspects of leadership of the department. In particular, it is critical that teachers are confident that judgements about pupil progress are secure – standardised, based on GCSE criteria, and used to inform dialogue with pupils and future planning. At present, the team believes that both Year 10 and Year 11 results will be better than they have ever been. I am not so sure and I know you share the same concerns.

Science

Science underperforms and is characterised by significant variations between classes. The top sets, which are taught by the most experienced teachers, make sound progress. Two middle groups in Years 10 and 11 are taught by non-specialists, including one long-term supply teacher covering maternity leave. Pupils in these groups make much slower progress, with problems of attendance and behaviour. The school particularly needs to improve the outcomes for boys on free school meals who lag behind significantly. The head of department, now in her second year at the school has good ideas but needs more support if she is to develop the confidence to challenge established practice and see change through.

Recommendations

There are three key areas that need to be addressed.

- 1 Several senior leaders are relatively inexperienced and need to focus more sharply on how they support, monitor and hold to account middle leaders. There's considerable in-school variation across the school – if every subject did as well as the best the school would easily exceed floor targets.
- 2 Some pupils vote with their feet, particularly where teaching is uninspiring. Behaviour in some lessons prevents some children from learning.
- 3 There are guidelines on teacher planning but little evidence of systematic monitoring. Evaluation of teaching and learning is a weakness.

Role descriptions

Chair of governors

You are aware that the headteacher has been in post for two years. Your initial impressions are positive, but concerned that as yet there is little evidence of significant impact on standards. You feel that the head is developing an 'excuse culture' which prevents school improvement. You don't feel she has the confidence to tackle the real issues and want to give her your support. You have agreed to meet following the review and will chair it. You are determined that specific actions will be agreed by the time the meeting ends.

The following are important to your thinking:

- The school must lead its own improvement.
 - The headteacher and you must agree what strategic actions the governing body will take in order to make progress.
 - There must be an agreed priority list of actions which need to be taken.
 - You must make concrete progress towards action for the head and senior team by the end of the meeting.
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Headteacher

You have been in post for two years. Your leadership team are enthusiastic but include several members with limited experience. You feel that the chair of governors is not fully aware of the difficulties of leading change in this challenging school environment. He wants improvements immediately but these things take time.

The following are important to your thinking:

- You are committed to improvement and positive about working with the SIP.
 - You have some good development projects in place but these have yet to bear fruit.
 - Most staff are committed and hard-working – you are concerned that you might be seen to be unreasonable if you ask them to do more.
 - LA consultants are already working in the school and have a clear plan of action.
 - You are concerned that staff shortages, particularly in core subjects, will prevent significant improvement.
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Observer

Your role is to feed back on:

- the effectiveness of the meeting in identifying and prioritising the actions needed for improvement
 - the impact of behaviours and attitudes within the meeting related to the level of challenge in the conversation.
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The name of the school and people referred to in this handout are fictional and for illustrative purposes only. Any resemblance to actual place names or names of individuals is purely coincidental.