Next Stop, Outstanding!

As we head towards the end of another busy term, there’s loads to shout about. As well as getting lots of encouraging signs from our own quality assurance work, we’ve had the ultimate in monitoring and evaluation, an Ofsted inspection; more on that later...

A range of training has taken place as the G2O and Next Steps programmes continue, there’s been lots of coaching, MAD sessions aplenty and the new Leadership Development programme has been launched.

On Wednesday 15th November we received a long awaited Ofsted inspection. Whilst an inspection is always a slightly nervy experience for everyone involved, we were confident that great progress has been made over the past 15 months, not only in terms of examination outcomes and the curriculum, but also in the classroom.

The Ofsted team were very positive about everything that they saw in the classroom and indeed much of what they were most impressed with was as a result of work we have done in some of our training over the past year or so: structuring lessons around the PDR cycle, the quality and regularity of student responses to feedback, the use of class support plans to ensure that all students make at least good progress and ensuring high levels of pupil engagement in all lessons.

It is to everyone’s credit that the main target in the report is to ultimately carry on doing what we’re all doing. Of course, there will be one or two things in the pipeline to help us continue our forward momentum and become an outstanding school in the not too distant future.

One of the reasons that we were able to feel so confident about the school’s readiness for an Ofsted inspection was as a result of the leadership team’s own quality assurance work so far this academic year. Whole-school lesson observations just two weeks prior to the inspection showed that good and outstanding practice was the norm across the school. Book scrutinies have also shown that the quality and consistency of assessment has rapidly improved over time. Read on for lots more information on this and other key CPD issues.
October saw our first round of lesson observations for this academic year take place. As usual, everyone received a 25 minute observation from a member of the leadership team and, most importantly, some feedback and guidance on how the lesson went afterwards. We were also able to acquire the services of Catherine Mortimer, Director of Teaching School at Arthur Terry in Sutton Coldfield.

First thing’s first, the observations showed that significant strides have been made in a number of key areas over the past 12 months. Almost all of the lessons observed showed students making at least good progress. There were also a sizeable number of lessons where students were making outstanding progress, which is also an improvement on last year. Whilst there is still work to do in some areas, it is great to see all of the training work that we have been doing over the past 12 months having an impact in the classroom.

IN THE NEWS...

It has been confirmed that there has been a failure to attract a fifth of trainee teachers that the government says are needed for secondary schools in England.

Recent figures from the Department of Education show only 80% of trainees were recruited on to schemes in 2017 and targets were hit in only 2 of 15 subjects.

You may have noticed an increase in the number of PGCE and SCITT trainees that we are taking on at the moment, however, this is vital if we are to continue to remain fully staffed. Two of our trainee teachers from last year took up a full-time teacher posts here this year!

There has been lots of training going on for teachers in English, science and history who are mentoring for the first time. Watch out for more opportunities in other departments on the horizon...

OBSERVATION FEEDBACK CONTINUED...

There were a number of key areas that stood out in the observations as being a real strength across the school, including:

- Use of the PDR cycle in lessons for planning activities and the whole lesson itself.
- Use of Class Support Plans for planning support and interventions, not just for SEN students, but also for disadvantaged students, and HAPs in some cases!
- The lesson observations also showed that our TAs are doing a tremendous job in making the CSPs count by implementing the strategies outlined.
- The quality of questioning was once again highlighted as being very good across the board with lots of examples of stretch and challenge being used to develop pupil understanding.
- Scaffolding examination responses and teaching exam technique in KS4 lessons was also a real strength.
- The quality of marking and assessment was also impressive and there was significant evidence of it really having an impact on pupil progress.

There are of course a few areas for us to do some more work on, especially if we want to increase the amount of outstanding practice across the school. Some of the key things that we’ll be working on over the coming weeks and months are:

- Building stretch and challenge into all lessons as a core part of the tasks set, rather than it being included as an optional add-on.
- Ensuring that students have sufficient ‘doing’ time in lessons to make even better progress—more time for them to experiment and investigate in order to be able to come to their own conclusions, for example.

Things are definitely on the right track, so well done to everyone. Let’s keep everything going though as we continue to move forwards.
MAD ABOUT TRAINING

This Autumn has seen the launch of departmental ‘MAD’ sessions. Moderation, Assessment and Development sessions take place fortnightly and allow departments and colleagues to work closely together in order to raise standards in the classroom.

A typical session will usually involve looking at student books, moderation of assessment as well as planning and CPD. Each session creates an opportunity for colleagues to share good practice as well as focus on pupil progress. This ensures the time spent together as a department is purposeful and has impact.

Sessions are planned and reviewed at the start of each term and allow SLT to monitor their content and value.

Excellent sessions have been seen in MFL, History, English and Maths and have really opened up a purposeful dialogue between teachers on how to improve standards. Sam Sullivan, Head of Faculty for English says: “MAD meetings are very useful. Our most beneficial sessions to date have been the marking and standardisation sessions. Staff really value the sessions, especially if they have the opportunity to take ownership of how some of the time is allocated. For example, my team has told me they would like some more time for joint planning, so I have allocated the next two MAD meetings for planning for Y8 and Y7 in January as these units are the most under-resourced ones coming up.”

The impact of MAD meetings has also been noted through SLT work scrutiny. In the recent Science Faculty work review the standard of marking and assessment was much improved and there seemed far more consistency between the quality of pupil work and assessment carried out by teachers. Dave Brown, Head of Science Faculty attributes this to the hard work taking place in MAD meetings to check each other’s approach and ensure everyone is following the policies in place. This has been particularly crucial due to the number of new staff who have joined the department in the last year, and has enabled them all to regularly check and ask questions about the work they are doing.

The geography department have also been using the MAD meetings to great effect. One of the biggest challenges for many subjects has been to accurately outline grade boundaries for the Y11 mock exams without having any prior data on the 9-1 system to use for guidance. During a recent RAG meeting the geography team used data from an online forum, alongside information from other local secondary schools and their knowledge of the previous A* - C system to create boundaries which were as accurate as possible. Actually having the MAD time was crucial in allowing this discussion to take place.

Having secured a ‘good’ judgement from Ofsted, MAD meetings are now going to be vital in moving forwards and increasing the amount of outstanding practice in our departments.

Some of the other more general features of MAD sessions include:

- Looking at the impact and rigour of assessment timelines— whether it be discussing the timing of key assessments or the quality of knowledge testing.

- Looking at the interventions being used with individual students—including those from key groups such as boys and Pupil premium—and evaluating their impact. This has allowed the most effective strategies to be implemented across departments.

- Taking the time to look over the books from specific year groups and really focus on a specific strand of marking and assessment, for example, the quality of student responses to feedback. The sessions allow staff to really drill down into an area such as this one and develop a greater level of common practice.

SECRETS OF SISRA

Want to be a data guru?

Want to get the most of SISRA?

Every half-term our very own SISRA expert will give you a tip to help you on your way

Tip #8

Whilst everyone is really confident when using SISRA to compare predictions against targets, we don’t always get best use out of it when tracking the performance of groups over time.

All you need to do is go into the data set for say Y11, DC2. Then select ‘dataset’ from the options at the top of the page, then click on the ‘track’ option.

If you do this for a subject area, you can track how the performance of different groups over time is changing. It is also useful for tracking the predictions of individual students within classes to see if any are suddenly starting to dip.

It’s especially interesting to compare predictions from Y10 with those in Y11.
LEARNING WALK, WITH A TWIST!

As you may recall, we had an Ofsted inspection in November, and whilst everyone rightly celebrated a fantastic report and hugely positive feedback, there were some things that came out of the visit that are worth passing on and giving some thought to as we can all learn from everything that goes on in school, especially an inspection.

One of the most interesting parts of the process when you work on a leadership team is undertaking joint observations and learning walks with the inspectors. Whilst the experience of having an inspector in your own lesson can be very nerve wracking, it’s also a similar experience for us as leaders coming along with them as we’re always rooting 100% for each member of staff to show the excellent practice we know that they are capable of.

In previous inspections there were often moments where it would be fingers crossed ahead of visits to certain classrooms, however, everyone’s hard work over the past 15 months or so meant that there was no hoping this time; everyone did the business and we were confident that would be the case.

One of the real challenges when you are doing joint learning walks with an inspector is to cram in absolutely everything that you want them to see in such a short space of time; in many cases we visited 5 or 6 lessons during an hour; how do you get in everything that you want to about PDR, question ladders, the Friary Framework, DIRT time, class support plans, differentiation and so much more? I took it as a complement when the inspector asked me to ‘slow down a bit’ in order to get down everything that I was saying.

Overall the learning walks were a very pleasant experience as everyone, everywhere was well on top of their game, just like any other day! It was also refreshing to work with inspectors who were realistic about what you can and can’t see during a 5-minute visit to a lesson. The focus was very much on talking to the students and looking in their books to get a view of what teaching and learning is typically like at the Friary.

It was also fantastic to see our teaching assistants harassing the inspectors as soon as they entered one of the classrooms that they were working in to highlight all of the great things that they have been doing with some of our most vulnerable students.

The Ofsted team were full of praise for what they saw going on in our classrooms. Our challenge now is to continue to be consistent, committed and innovative in order to maintain the high standards we have set for ourselves as we look to build on some very strong examination results and a very good inspection report.
**SAFEGUARDING FOCUS: SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

From Harvey Weinstein to Kevin Spacey, accusations of sexual harassment, assault and even rape are everywhere right now. But what do these words mean, and how can we explain the issue to students?

Why is this in the news so much right now?

Although there’s nothing particularly new about sexual harassment, in October harassment, assault and rape claims were made against the Hollywood film mogul Harvey Weinstein. The high-profile nature of both the accused and some of the accusers have created an atmosphere of historically unusual openness. On social media, women (and some men) have been using the #MeToo hashtag to tell their own stories.

What counts as harassment?

Harassment is a very broad term. When explaining it to students, it may be worth thinking in terms of three categories:

- **RAPE**
  - Unwanted Intercourse
  - Bodily penetration

- **ASSAULT**
  - Unwanted Contact
  - Rubbing against someone – Kissing – Touching body parts

- **HARASSMENT**
  - Unwanted Behaviour

While rape and even assault may often be ‘clear cut’ crimes, as they are certainly against the law, other forms of harassment are sometimes something of a grey area.

How can someone tell if behaviour is unwanted?

Sometimes it’s very clear: if one person tells another to stop, or repeatedly turns down the advances of that person, it is clear that the behaviour is unwanted.

In addition, if a person is very drunk, legally they are not in a position to give consent to sex – not even if they are already in a relationship with that person, or gave consent when they were sober.

But sometimes a situation can be less clear. Someone might not actually say ‘stop’. They might flirt at first and then decide they do not want to take things further.

Good advice would be: if you are ever unsure, ask. Certainly, before having sex with someone, they must have given their clear consent.

But remember: The age of consent (the legal age to have sex) in the UK is 16 years old. The law is there to protect children. While the law is not intended to prosecute under-16s who have mutually consenting sexual activity, this can be used if there is abuse or exploitation involved. Anyone under the age of 13 can never legally give consent.

‘So is flirting legal?’ Dealing with flippant questions

Students may ask if this makes flirting illegal – the answer is definitely not. Flirting is an important part of a relationship. However, if someone does it and it is not wanted by the other person, yet they persist, it can become harassment. Certainly, if someone touches or kisses another when they do not welcome it, that is assault.

‘What should I do if I’ve been harassed or assaulted?’

Ultimately, if an assault or rape has occurred, that is a potential crime and a matter for the police.

If someone feels they are being harassed, in the first instance it is worth that person telling them to stop. As educators we should try to empower all young people to be able to say ‘no’, in full knowledge of what is and isn’t legal.

However, as always with matters of safeguarding, if you have concerns that a student may have suffered (or have perpetrated) sexual harassment, then please follow the usual procedures: namely, a ‘white (safeguarding) form’ completed and handed without delay to Ian Rose, Steve Neale or Mark Drury.
As part of our on-going quality assurance work, there’s been lots of recent focus on looking at the quality of marking and assessment. Not only have the leadership team undertaken full book reviews for all of the Ebacc subjects, but there’s also been a range of departmental work taking place.

Middle leaders have been working with revamped documentation and there was also a slot on the quality assurance of marking and assessment at a middle leaders’ meeting. So far, so good as the documentation completed has shown some really perceptive identification of the most effective strategies and that there are clear plans for how to disseminate this across departments.

The SLT book checks have also flagged up some excellent practice. Getting students to complete high-quality responses to feedback is now becoming the norm across subject areas. There were some fantastic examples in geography where students were re-taught key concepts from the mock exam in which they underachieved, they then re-did several questions in order to prove that they were able to apply the knowledge.

There was also some fantastic work going on in science where students are being given around 40 questions at the start of a unit covering all of the key knowledge from that area. They are then expected to compete the sheet and fill in the blanks as necessary when working through the unit—this way, teachers can be secure in knowing that the students have all of the key facts that they need in their books when it comes to revision time.

As always, there are also some areas for improvement. One of the key targets for some departments is to ensure that students use all of the space in their exercise books. Some just had gaps between tasks, whereas others had gaps due to incomplete work. It’s really important that we maintain high expectations for all of our students, and this is a perfect example of something to tighten up on across subject areas.
SUBJECT AREA IN FOCUS: SOCIOLOGY

As a phase one A-Level subject, the last couple of years in the sociology department have certainly been challenging! However, having now waved off the first cohort of sociology students to cover the new specification into the big wide world, it’s been great to come back this year and reflect on what we’ve learnt.

Almost all students had convinced themselves over the summer break that they absolutely knew the exam question they had ‘smashed’ or the exam question they had ‘messed up on’ – but very often this was completely incorrect!

The first big job we focused on this year was ensuring that our current year 13 students reflected on their AS performance. Even though the AS exams no longer technically count towards the overall performance of the students, we felt that to make these worthwhile, we may as well treat them as a fantastic opportunity to have our student’s work marked objectively by trained examiners. Therefore, we have made real use of the E-AQA website this year to complete AS ‘interviews’ with all our students, which seems to have been effective. This involved a ten-minute dialogue with each student whilst on the E-AQA website to focus on the exact marks they obtained within each exam question, but also to focus on the skills they needed to develop. Both the teacher and the students completed a report whilst this was conducted, and this is something we often refer back to in lesson time. What we were most surprised at is how many students had a false perception of their AS performance. Almost all students had convinced themselves over the summer break that they absolutely knew the exam question they had ‘smashed’ or the exam question they had ‘messed up on’ – but very often this was completely incorrect!

Following on from this, students were then invited to attend intervention ‘master classes’ based upon the questions that they under performed on within the AS exam. We have found that this has been some of the most effective intervention. Firstly, it has really improved attendance to our intervention sessions as students seem to feel a little more appreciative and obliged to attend when they know the after-school sessions are tailored to their specific weak spot in the exam. Secondly, it has made us plan our intervention sessions in a much more focussed way. Rather than allowing students to drop in once a week for some ad hoc revision, we have done fewer sessions that have been planned in detail.

Alongside intervention, since the summer we have also started engaging increasingly with sociology networking groups which has been some of the best subject specific CPD we’ve ever had! Going on subject specific courses is becoming less and less of a realistic opportunity for staff within schools, however I have found that the AQA Sociology Facebook group has been a fantastic tool and support through the changes that have taken place within the curriculum. From sharing resources, to discussing mark schemes, this has allowed me to build some positive relationships with sociology teachers around the country. Most importantly for me, the groups are a fantastic way to moderate answers with other exam markers which is invaluable in a small department like sociology.

In other news, last month the year 13 sociologists took part in a crime conference in Birmingham. The conference is completely organised and delivered by ex-criminals and focuses on the effectiveness of the British legal and prison system. As always, our students really did The Friary School proud, and the stunned faces of the girls who found out that they had been sat next to a convicted murderer all day is probably my career highlight so far...
**COMPETITION**

There is a prize up for grabs in our monthly competition. Simply follow the instructions below to be in with a chance. Good luck!

How many responses to the staff questionnaire did the Ofsted team receive during their visit in November?

12

34

56

Return your completed response to J. Cain’s tray in the staff room to be in with a chance of winning.