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HOPEFUL
Review of the Year
September
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Annual Review 2019-20

Writing my annual review of the previous school year has been a real tester. It was a test to avoid stating the obvious about the level of disruption to the school and a test when we found it difficult to provide some certainty when the guidance we received was unclear, delayed and/or just contradictory. It was testing to avoid blaming central government!

In all of this our aim, right from the start of the year, was to provide as much certainty as possible and, more importantly, continue to work on improving our school.

In this sense, we had to re-invent ourselves. We let parents and carers know in July 2020 that from September we would have bubbles, classes being taught in the same room, a new one-way system, staggered breaks and lunches, extra hygiene including outside handwashing stations, face coverings, amendment to uniform, the rule of six, no changing for PE, lanyards and swipe cards. We even had COVID secure rooms built to deal with positive cases along with temperature checks. The restrictions had a major impact on the cornerstone of our Catholic school community. We could not have Mass. We could not have face to face assemblies but instead they were recorded and played in form time.

We could not have achieved any of this and maintained the safe operation of the school without the unfailing and incredible support of all the staff. It was staff who were on the front line when it meant travelling between sites to teach in unfamiliar rooms. It was staff who covered for absent colleagues so that we didn't have to have one day of supply in. It was staff who treated sick students and phoned close contacts in evenings and at weekends. And it was the staff who maintained the cleanliness of the three sites. I am and will remain immensely grateful and proud of them.

In the face of this, we were still able to successfully recruit staff and currently have no vacancies being fully staffed with specialists in all areas.

As the Autumn term progressed we had our first cases in Y11 and Y13 from contacts from outside of school. In this first term, although the guidance later changed, we had to, very reluctantly, close some bubbles. High quality Emergency Remote Learning immediately began; we had learned and improved so much since the first lockdown.

Our weekly School Critical Incident Team meetings continued to take place, having started in March 2020, so that Governors were fully aware of the situation and our positive and effective response.

At the same time, by the end of term, the Governors and the Leadership Team had been working on our improvement plan priorities; our curriculum was completely reviewed ready for September 2021 and our longer term priorities were refocussed.

We looked forward to the new year and then at the beginning of January the Education Secretary announced that exams would be scrapped for Summer 2021 and that schools were to close.

The focus of our thinking was, primarily, to provide as much certainty as possible for our Y11 and Y13 students as quickly as possible. The catastrophe of the previous year had left last years exam cohort de-motivated and confused.

Over that weekend we formulated a Five Stage Plan which was resoundingly supported by our curriculum leaders and then we explained it to parents/carers and students in two exceptionally well attended virtual meetings.

In the coming months we did not deviate from the plan and were able to share in their joy as both Y11 and Y13 returned some extraordinary results; results which stand up to the standard as in other years, remained unchanged by the exam moderators and were the product of teachers, students and their families working very closely together.

We were able to offer early enrolment for 80 Y11 students to give added security and certainty in their future plans. To date we have enrolled 160 students into Y12; 60% of the cohort, who have had a fantastic start to this academic year after completing their Bridging work. Later in the year we applied the same certainty to Y10 and Y12 and before May half term included Y7, 8 and 9 too.

The level of support that students received during lockdown was incredible. Tutors and Year Leaders checking in, Safe and Well checks for our most vulnerable, SEND students attended supported by teaching assistants, provision for key worker children increased too. We were able to report to SCIT incredibly high levels of student engagement in Emergency Remote learning. Obstacles to accessing this were removed. We had a laptop lend-lease programme and provided support for internet access.

We were mindful of the impact of having our young people sat in front of a screen for, at least, five hours a day so instigated some well-being days (Consolidation and Catch up) and also instructed them all to have half term off! Catch up sessions, however, were held for selected Y11s to help them 'kickstart' their studies. These students were also allotted a mentor to guide them.

Government guidance came in over February half term telling us that on their return students would be tested in school twice using a new Lateral Flow Test. We sent out 'Return to the Gold Standard of Teaching' outlining the plan for return. A significant amount of work was undertaken in planning for this and we gained an astounding 99% parental consent in support of this. The national and Doncaster figure was nearer 80%. Testing ran like clockwork which meant once again we started the year with all the usual precautions.

We were able to report to SCIT that our attendance rates continued to be better than both Doncaster and National. It would remain like this for the rest of the year.

Amidst all this on March 17th we got the OFSTED call saying that next day two HMI (Her Majesty's Inspector) would be conducting a virtual inspection to look at our provision for remote education. The weekly data we had collected on Attitude to Remote Learning, our high levels of attendance of the most vulnerable, the way we had worked at keeping parents informed were key in gaining such a positive OFSTED report.

OFSTED REPORT March 18th

Main findings

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances.

While providing a remote education, leaders have also continued planning for the future.

During the spring term, leaders worked closely with pupils and families to ensure that pupils could access the curriculum remotely. They simplified the ways in which pupils accessed and handed in work. One parent commented that the 'teaching throughout lockdown has been exceptional'. At the same time, leaders were able to continue with plans, developed after the last inspection, to improve the curriculum for Years 7, 8 and 9. Leaders plan to introduce the new curriculum in September 2021.

Leaders made sure that pupils were able to access their usual range of subjects remotely in the spring term. Changes were also made to the order in which subject topics were taught, with clay work being moved to the spring term. Now that all pupils have returned to school, leaders are considering how to cover any missed content.

Pupils in Year 11 and Year 13 have continued to receive guidance to help them move into further education or training when they leave school. Pupils feel well supported by school leaders and teachers in helping them to make choices about what they will do next. As a result, the impact of COVID-19 3 restrictions has been minimised as pupils prepare for the next stage of their lives.

For pupils who are not in school, teachers continue to offer remote education. However, this is now more difficult for teachers to manage while they are teaching pupils in school. Leaders do not have a clear plan for how they will manage this.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and vulnerable pupils have been well supported by the school over the course of the pandemic. Teachers have maintained regular contact with pupils with SEND. They have adapted the curriculum to prevent pupils from being overwhelmed.

Many pupils with an EHC plan have been attending school and this has helped to make the full return to school go smoothly, particularly for anxious pupils. One Year 7 pupil commented that he had 'got his routine back' after returning to school.

Leaders are using the rest of this term to help pupils to settle back into school life. They intend to use informal checks to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge before moving to more formal checks, particularly for those pupils in Years 11 and 13. Leaders also intend to conduct checks on pupils' reading after Easter before putting in place any support needed.

Governors know the school priorities. Minutes show that they receive updates about the ongoing work of leaders. The creation of a 'school critical incident team' in the last year has meant that there is oversight of the work the school is doing to address the challenges brought on by the pandemic. Governors are beginning to develop a more formal training programme to support work to challenge and support school leaders.

The work of leaders during the pandemic has led increasing numbers of parents to feel positive about the work of the school. Staff also feel very well supported by leaders. One commented, 'Staff wellbeing is taken seriously at McAuley

The Summer Term brought the challenge of putting in place a watertight system of checks and balances to make sure that Teacher Assessed Grades would be able to stand up to the most rigorous scrutiny. We knew from staff that student engagement in Y11 and Y13 was very high. We knew just how much assessment had taken place and we knew how closely staff were working with their students. Virtual parents evening gave staff the chance to re-assure families.

We were told to expect support and extra materials from the exam boards. This never happened. It was clearly down to the professionalism of teachers to ensure that the opportunities were given for students to demonstrate what they were capable of. We worked with other schools to help moderate judgements.

Before they were submitted to the exam boards our analysis indicated a significant increase on previous years results. The guidance was clear – schools should take account of previous trends in results. We thought that this was plainly unfair; students would be fairly awarded the grades that they had worked for. We stuck to our guns and the students got everything they so richly deserved.

Before the year drew to a close I received another phone call at the end of June to say that we would be having a face to face OFSTED monitoring visit. They arrived the next day and I was only half-joking when I pointed out how awful their timing was – staff had just finished double marking, moderating, agreeing and inputting over 3000 exam grades. They were marking Y10 and 12 assessments as well as beginning writing end of year reports.

It was another extremely positive experience in sharp contrast to the way the previous full inspection had been carried out in February 2019. We were and are confident that we continue to make big strides forward.

The report will be published this week but I include the MAIN FINDING was that.

"Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school."

OTHER COMMENTS 'You and other leaders are taking the actions necessary to improve the school. You have made improvements to most of the issues identified at the last inspection. The quality of education has been strengthened since the previous inspection.'

"Parents, carers and staff agree that the school is much improved. "

"Since the last inspection, the toilet facilities have been modernised."

"Staff feel supported and say that you take account of their workload and well-being. The comments made by many parents in the online inspection questionnaire note the caring ethos and the efforts of staff who 'have gone above and beyond', particularly given the challenges presented by the pandemic over the last year."

"Your leadership team is united and has a clear sense of direction. This is supported by leaders' clear moral purpose that is threaded through the school."

"You and other leaders place pupils firmly at the centre of your work. Pupils feel that you have their best interests at heart and that staff listen to the concerns they raise."

"Throughout the pandemic, you ensured that pupils covered the planned curriculum. Pupils in Years 11 and 13 were able to complete their courses before they left. You made sure that pupils are ready for their next phase of education. The majority of Year 11 pupils will be returning in September to join the sixth form. You are providing them with 'bridging work' over the summer to help them to prepare for their sixth-form courses."

"Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. They now behave respectfully in lessons and move between classes calmly. They are polite to staff and visitors. Lessons are now more purposeful.

You have introduced a system to keep a close check on pupils' attitudes to learning. Leaders review this information and make sure that appropriate help is quickly put in place where pupils are not behaving well in class."

"Attendance has improved since the previous inspection. Leaders and staff monitor attendance closely. Attendance has been strong since you opened to all pupils in March 2021. Pastoral leaders work with families and outside agencies to encourage stronger attendance."

"Staff quickly recognise where pupils may be struggling in lessons. They know this might be for many reasons and work rapidly to identify how best to help each pupil."

"Although governors are knowledgeable about the school, they do not hold leaders to account consistently well. They have made arrangements for training in the autumn term to develop their role in supporting and challenging leaders."

We were left with only one action point!

"There are still curriculum improvements that are required to ensure that pupils know more over time. You are taking steps to address these. You check the progress of these priorities each term."

In the background to everything in this last year was the on-going work to create two Catholic Multi-Academy trusts for all Catholic schools in the Diocese of Hallam. We will be in The St Francis of Assisi Multi-Academy Trust along with members of our Family of Catholic Primary schools; the other 'MAT' being St Clare. These names were chosen for a particular reason; male and female Saints and role models who turned their backs on wealth and status to focus their attention on care for creation and the needs of the poor and most vulnerable in society. A message and spirit that our school aspires to share.

With the departure of a number of staff at the end of term (the staff turnover rate is very, very low) I was able to completely restructure my Leadership Team and our lines of accountability for September 2021.

Many important areas of school life that had been paused last year have been included in our planning for 2021-22.

The McAuley diploma, Student Leadership and student voice (although the conversation about sexual harassment began in the summer term following a national focus) our Mansions, retreats and the Catholic Life, our 40th anniversary celebrations, plans for Open Evenings, Concerts and performances. External verification of our work through Arts mark, Careers mark, Inclusion Quality Mark will continue as will our aim to get the next level of the International School Award which we were pleased to receive in January.

If it felt like life has been on pause for 18 months or so along with a general air of, at times, being confused. This feeling was not helped with Euro 2020 and Tokyo 2020 taking place in 2021!

Like the North Macedonian supporter at the Euros (on the front cover) who seemed oblivious to his broken drum and kept on beating it and singing his **hopeful** heart out for his team.

We are **hopeful** that this will be a 'normal' year.

We will continue to beat out our own steady rhythm in time with our unique vision and keep our child-centred focus.

We will continue to provide your children with the best all-round Catholic education that they can possibly get.

We are absolutely confident in our ability to do this and with the continued and growing support of our parents and carers we will.

God Bless us all and our Catholic school community.

John Rooney
Headteacher

September 2021