

9th April 2018



Mr Glen Burke
Principal
The Highcrest Academy
Hatters Lane
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Flagship Review Date: 20th March 2018

Summary

From the minute I walked into the school I was made to feel very welcome. Gaynor Weldon organized my visit, preparing the paperwork and arranged for meetings to talk to so many key members of staff. We were able to have some good discussions and to share ideas as we went through the day. Gaynor knows the school well and her input was invaluable during my visit.

The Academy continues to go from strength to strength. I was able to meet with several members of staff who were (as always) very enthusiastic and keen to tell me what they had been doing and what had been achieved since my last visit. Staff morale is high, and they feel empowered to try out new ideas and to take calculated risks in the interests of the students in their care. They feel valued and subsequently are very loyal and proud to work at The Highcrest Academy.

Life never stands still at the Academy as it continues to move forward at a fast pace. The new building works will provide even better facilities for students and will enable accommodation of the additional form of entry expected in September. The number of parents applying for a place at the Academy is very high and outstrips the places available. This is a key indicator of the reputation of the school in the local community.

The Academy is always looking to the future to see what is over the horizon and what opportunities or threats might be heading their way. This means they can be prepared and can make good decisions and develop plans for the future. However, this does not mean they neglect the here and now. Students always come first, and their needs are the priority. Positive relationships are at the heart of everything that happens in the Academy and at the heart of the inclusive policy and practice.

I am of the view that the Academy continues to meet all the criteria of an IQM Flagship school and should be reassessed in a years' time. The Action Plan for 2018/19 is currently being reviewed and refined following discussion and will be forwarded to head office in the next two weeks.

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The next review will look closely at how the school has interacted with its Inclusion Cluster and promoted continuing outreach. Evidence of Cluster working will underpin the capacity for the school to maintain its Flagship status.

Assessor: Kenny Frederick

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:



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Joe McCann MBA NPQH
Director of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd



IQM Flagship Review



My visit was structured around the last Flagship Action Plan and my report is guided by this plan.

Provision for more able students is still a high priority for the Academy. The Johnson and Johnson project has been and still is, a very exciting development and those who were involved achieved at least a grade higher in Science than predicted which is an indicator of its impact. However, the impact cannot be measured entirely by exam results but also by the intellectual and social challenges it provided for students. The confidence it developed in those lucky enough to participate in the ongoing programme has greatly increased. Careers Education and Guidance is very good and is helping to raise aspirations amongst students and many more are now applying for places at University. Apprenticeships are also popular amongst students of all abilities.

Year 11 students benefit from three SUPERDAYS during the year, in English, Maths and Science and are hosted by Bucks University. These days are designed to help consolidate and enhance learning in the lead up to public exams. Raising Achievement meetings have been introduced to look at how each student is performing and to take swift action when required. G4Schools (a data management tool) is proving to be very useful because the data is live, and interventions can be made without delay. Academic drop-in meetings after school have been introduced to allow parents to ask questions and raise concerns or to seek reassurance regarding their child's academic progress. Reports to parents have been redesigned to ensure they are accessible and meaningful for parents and children alike. Currently, the Academy is restructuring and expanding the way data is used throughout the school.

The curriculum is constantly under review and it is good to see Neil Stocking taking up his new role as curriculum leader. He is obviously enjoying his new role and is very excited about all things curriculum. His aim is to ensure that the curriculum is accessible and meets the needs of all students in the Academy. There is recognition that the cohort of student changes every year and therefore there may need to be changes to the curriculum. A number of new qualifications that are more appropriate for particular learners have been introduced over the last few years and have been very successful in raising the attainment of individuals and of the school. Students are targeted and mentored towards particular qualifications. All add to the Progress 8 scores.

Young Enterprise is just one of the projects designed to appeal to add value to the curriculum and the Academy currently has two teams involved, one in Year 10 and one in the Sixth Form. One of the Art teachers takes responsibility for running the programme with input from three business advisors from a local company. Students volunteer to participate following a presentation at assembly and many are encouraged to apply for a place by their tutors. There have been more volunteers than places and the Coordinator works with Heads of Year to identify, which students might benefit from involvement.

Alternative provision is available at a cost through Toolshed, which is social enterprise, funded by schools. Currently there are four Academy students attending this provision.

They still remain on the school role and their results are owned by the school. There is close communication and collaboration between teachers in the provision and in the



school. The Academy already offers alternative courses that are more appropriate and appealing to students who may be alienated by the academic curriculum and more are planned, to be delivered on site rather than in local colleges, for example, hairdressing and beauty and construction. ASDAN (COPE) courses are also offered for less able students.

Raising achievement of all students within a framework of inclusion is at the core of all that goes on in The Highcrest Academy. Student progress is carefully tracked and targeted and results in public examinations have been very positive this year despite the many unknowns and the predictions such as they are, mean that the Academy is expecting even better results this summer. Currently, EAL students are outperforming others and the pupil premium gap is narrowing and the school aim is to improve Progress 8 “if we can get to 0 it would be great”. The Academy is very aware of subject areas that are underperforming and the reasons behind that underperformance and they are taking steps to bring about improvement by using a range of strategies. The work that has gone on in the Sixth Form has been very successful and the impact of this work has been that Highcrest Academy was in the top 5% of the country in terms of added value. This very focused work particularly in terms of literacy and academic writing in the Sixth Form is innovative and should be shared widely.

The personal development and well-being of students continues to be a priority for the Academy. Staff know the children well and the school is built on good relationships between all stakeholders. The PHSE and Citizen programmes are carefully planned and thought out and teachers are supported in delivering it to students. I have suggested that it would be a good idea to get feedback from students about their experience in this area. The aim is to make PHSE as valued as all other curriculum areas in the school. Involving students in discussions about what works for them and what was missing would be a positive way to get them to take more ownership of the programme and to value it.

The Academy has done a lot of work around radicalization and this has been widely recognized as being innovative and different from the norm. Staff from the school have been asked to present their work to other schools and even to a school in France who had heard about the work the Academy was involved in. The Academy collaborates and works in partnership with the local police and youth service and other relevant partners. Radicalization is a safeguarding issue and staff have been trained to report any concerns they have under the safeguarding procedure. There is a can-do culture at the Highcrest Academy and teachers and support staff do not hesitate when it comes to having often difficult conversations and debates with students about a wide range of issues.

E-safety is part of the personal and well-being curriculum and there are many activities and strategies employed to keep students safe in this area. Although parents receive information (through the weekly newsletter) about keeping their children safe when using social media and the internet it would be an idea to run some advice workshops for them. The issues are constantly changing, and it is very difficult for parents to be confident that they are doing the right thing.



Teaching and learning is the core purpose of the Academy and a lot is being done to ensure that teachers receive appropriate challenge, support and training to help them improve their practice. The CPD programme is extensive and is designed to meet the needs of teachers and staff with a range of expertise and experience. There is something for everyone. The CPD offer is decided by the outcome of appraisals and from the Connect Programme (an innovative way of providing feedback from observations). In addition, teachers are asked for feedback following training and are asked what they would like to be offered that is not already there. We had a discussion about ways that teachers improve their practice particularly about the notion that observation is used as a tool for improvement. I have suggested that the CPD coordinator convenes focus groups of teachers to try to establish exactly what activities helps them to improve and what does not. Gathering their views following an open and frank discussion (with no senior leader present) amongst themselves might yield useful information that would makes them better teachers. Giving teachers time and space to reflect on the suitability of the professional learning opportunities would mean teachers would feel ownership of the programme. We also discussed the use of Learning Walks and I suggested that the Academy distinguishes when a Walk is a Monitoring Walk and when it is a Learning Walk with a clear learning focus. I also suggested that Learning Walks be included in the CPD programme and enable teachers from across the curriculum to participate.

Literacy across the curriculum is a big issue for the Academy and there is a great deal of activity going on to encourage students to read for pleasure. Many students entering the Academy in year 7 have reading ages that are well below their chronological reading age and there are many strategies in place to support them. The current actions being taken are positive and effective in themselves, but I would suggest that the issues are wider than reading and include oracy and writing at all levels. An audit of what is happening in different curriculum areas in terms of literacy needs to be carried out and a whole school strategy led by the senior leadership team needs to be planned. This strategy is an important one as it will have a major influence on attainment and achievement at all levels. All teachers need to understand what the issues are, and they need training and development, so they know what they need to do in their classroom to bring about improvement in this area. As part of this development it seems that teachers also need more training around meeting the needs of EAL students in their classroom. EAL students at different levels of fluency need different strategies and I have recommended training companies who might support this. The provision for EAL learners who are new to the country is very good and these students settle very quickly and are well supported.

Assessor: Kenny Frederick

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