Monitoring Visit – 7 December 2023

Review of 6th Form

In attendance:

Jane Swettenham (JS) – Chair

David Churchill (DC)

Andrew Williams (AW)

Julian Beard (JB)

People Met and Points Raised

Andy Cooke – Head of 6th Form

He provided a summary of the 6th Form performance contrasting 2022 and 2023, and in particular highlighted the drive towards improving attendance plus the drive for better A-Level results. He explained that the attendance figures for Year 12 are broadly similar for both years, whilst this year’s Year 13 attendance is now at 94.43%, up from 92.05%. The target is 95%. Attendance above 95% will be particularly challenging bearing in mind the cohort which includes a proportion of pupils who simply do not want to be at school.

He explained that two new subjects have been offered for September 2023, being Politics and Further Maths, with it being proposed that for September 2024 Photography and Philosophy A-Levels will be added plus there being an additional class for Maths and Psychology. The School were trying to offer subjects which would have wider appeal to both students who were wishing to remain at Shenfield to undertake A-Levels, plus attract pupils from other schools.

Issues

He identified staffing being one, as the 6th Form were particularly stretched and safeguarding was particularly problematic as students who were 16+ often had more serious issues they were facing that younger children. He identified the strengths of the 6th Form as their Academies and the students had a good relationship with 6th Form staff.

The International Baccalaureate was not really an option for the School as there was a lack of appropriately trained staff to deliver the course.

As for B-Tech the replacement option was T-Levels but the cost of setting up those courses was prohibitive.

The 6th Form did though have a chart showing where the previous year’s 6th Form students have gone to University and that was to be highlighted across the School. JS asked for a copy to be sent to her that Governors could see the same.

Clare Downey – Year 12 Pastoral Manager

She said that her role was particular challenging as she was covering Year 13 as well as Year 12. On a Monday there was no-one else to undertake her role. She said that she felt supported by Andy Cooke and Nigel Bolitho. In particular the latter was her go-to individual when there were serious safeguarding issues. She explained that there were children who had suicidal ideologies plus other students who self harmed. She had an open door policy but if a serious issue arose she would be with that student all day.

She explained that students who came from other schools into the 6th Form might have personal difficulties which were not known to her until the pupil’s file arrived from their previous school and that sometimes could take quite a while.

Attendance was an issue. She would often be chasing students who should be in study periods plus liaising with parents whose children were not even in school. An example was given where in the previous week she and another member of staff had without warning attended at a student’s home whose attendance record was less than 50%. They arrived at approximately 11.20am with the door being answered by the Father, who was still in his pyjamas. He then called out for the student, who then came down in her pyjamas. The Father did not want to engage in any discussion with the school representatives as to why his daughter was not in school.

She was of the view that if the school could have a policy whereby students did not attain a certain level of attendance the school could have the option to expel the child. She was not sure whether the school had that power. She had not undertaken level 3 safeguarding training, even though it had been offered to her previously, but she was open to considering it. She did say that one successful programme operated by the 6th Form was Peer Mentoring.

Tom Bishop – Head of Year 12 (A-Level Support)

He explained that he worked closely with Andy Cooke. His role was to consider how best to support students who were struggling with the engagement of both staff members and parents.

He had expressed his willingness to offer to other teachers/Heads of Department who had had results which were disappointing, the option to discuss the approaches that he had introduced into the Sociology Department. His department had had very good results.

He was candid in identifying that certain subjects produced decent A-Level results and in particular Business, Economics, English Language and Literature, Media and Film, Art, Psychology, Law and Sociology. The departments which were particularly struggling in achieving satisfactory A-Level results included Maths, Science and Humanities. He was of the view that there had to be a cultural change, especially in the teaching of those subjects where the results needed to improve. He would very much want to find a way to maintain those children who were likely to attain high A-Level results.

James Macdonald – Head of Year 13

He explained that he was Andy Cooke’s number two. He agreed with TB about the weaker and stronger A-Level subjects (as outlined above). He identified Maths as a department which struggled, with him highlighting one particular issue being that very few Maths teachers have a Maths degree.

The school monitored 6th Form performance by adopting a four stage process after identifying a student with pool performance. Initially that student would be referred to a Pastoral Manager with there being a review two weeks later. If there was no improvement by then the student would be seen by a Team Leader and if there was no success then, the student would be seen by either Head of Year 12 or 13. Finally, if there was still no improvement the matter would be considered by Andy Cooke as Head of 6th Form.

He was of the view that certain 6th Form Tutors were very good, and others less so, with a major problem being that the 6th Form were under staffed. He further added that he was of the view that there were two separate communities within the School, being 6th Form and Lower School.

6th Form Pupils

We met Malcolm – Head Boy, Izzie – Head Girl, Benson – All Year 13

Lexi, Brooke and Jess – Year 12

Izzie and Jess were the only students who had been at Shenfield throughout. They said they had not considered looking at other schools as they felt Shenfield would help them meet their aspirations. As for the other students, they had specifically chosen Shenfield, in Benson’s case as well as Lexi, because of the sporting academies.

Malcolm chose the school on the strengths outlined in the school’s website. AW/DC raised the issue of Social Media. All of the students agreed it was an important way of raising the school’s profile with some subjects being particularly good at highlighting their successes, eg sport. However Malcolm was not of the view that Social Media was the only basis upon which a student would chose Shenfield.

Issues/Weaknesses Identified

1. There seemed to be no strategy for 6th Form.
2. AC said that 5 students had been selected for Oxbridge interview, with the school putting in place a tutoring programme for those students. All had been closely associated with Mr J Sands. AC had no plan as to how the school could identify or support any other potential Oxbridge students and said that the current 5 were from a particularly impressive school year cohort.
3. Staffing. Tom was the only member of the Team who did not believe that staffing was a problem at all.
4. Academic weaknesses. All agreed that Maths, Science, Humanities and by and large traditional subjects were ones which under achieved in 6th Form. It became clear that the 6th Form had been undertaking enquiries of their own with the brightest 36 Year 11 students, the top 3 of whom had already indicated strongly that they would be leaving the school on completion of GCSEs to go to Grammar Schools. In effect the students are walking with their feet, as they do not believe Shenfield cannot meet their academic aspirations.
5. School Successes/Publicity. A wasted opportunity by the school is that successes (save sport) are not publicised near enough as well as other schools and this must therefore have a potentially detrimental effect on the 6th Form intake. There is also a failure to really properly explore the wider and better use of Social Media.

Conclusion

The issues/weaknesses referred to above were highlighted in the reporting back by JS, AW and JB to Claire Costello.

Questions for reflection

How the school can further develop and improve the 6th form marketing strategy

How the school can develop its alumni network for the benefit of students

How the school can attract/retain more HA students

Develop a response to the possible changes to BTEC

Actions By Whom

AC and the 6th form team to look at the above.