

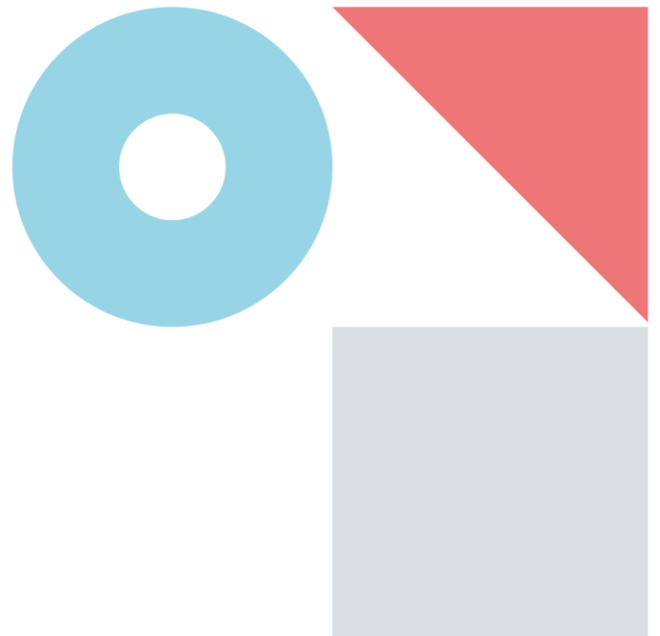
*Whole-school developmental  
review of*

*Name of Academy*

Headteacher:

Reviewer:

Date: October 2024



## Context:

This review was commissioned by the trust as part of their ongoing quality assurance processes. The school was expecting a graded inspection following academisation and therefore wanted an external perspective on the quality of education. To facilitate this, the reviewer conducted four 'deep dives' in English, maths, languages and history. Conversations were held with each curriculum leader to discuss their curriculum intent, a sample of classrooms was visited, during which time pupils were spoken with and books were scrutinised. The trust's director of school improvement was able to join the review in parts of day 1 and colleagues from the senior leadership team undertook some joint activities where possible. Verbal feedback was provided at the end of each day.

## Key findings from the review:

- Leaders have accurately judged the quality of education to be requiring improvement overall but recognise that there is variation within this, and that there are significant weaknesses in maths where leadership has not been strong enough to drive the necessary improvement.

## Maths:

- Unvalidated data shows that GCSE outcomes in maths were poor with a progress indicator of around -0.6 with 35% of pupils attaining grades 5-9 and 60% attaining 4-9 (data provided by the maths leader). This is below the national average and has been for some time. For low prior attainers, the progress indicator was -1.1. The subject leader did not appear to recognise the significance of this, saying that it was not out of line with the performance of some other subjects in the school.
- There is no overall curriculum map which outlines the journey through Years 7 to 11, and this made it difficult for the curriculum leader to articulate how key strands were revisited, secured, embedded and deepened as pupils progress through school. Nor was there clarity about what pupils should know and be able to do at key end points or how assessment was used to inform tracking, curriculum adaptation or intervention.
- In terms of curriculum planning, much is left to the interpretation of individual teachers. It is said to be based loosely on [CURRICULUM PROVIDER], but teachers are free to adjust time allocations or bring in additional resources. While any commercial curriculum will need to be adjusted to meet the precise needs of each individual school, there still needs to be a common and consistent approach to planning so that pupils, regardless of who is teaching them, are able to access a high-quality curriculum and be taught to the same high standard. There is not enough clarity about schemes of learning to ensure that this happens, and though the intention is that teachers should plan collaboratively and share a bank of resources, lessons would suggest that this is not happening in practice. There was a lack of clarity about how the curriculum is adapted to suit learners from different starting points (which would explain the very poor progress of low prior attainers) and there was no clearly identified approach to the teaching of mastery or expectation about the use of concrete, pictorial and abstract resources. Teachers do not use knowledge of the key stage 2 curriculum or the outcome of SATs as a starting point, and therefore they are not quick enough to identify whether the curriculum provides the right level of challenge for pupils or to intervene when pupils begin to drift off track.
- There was considerable variation in classroom practice because of the lack of guidance in planning, and none of the teaching observed was good enough to close some of the significant gaps in pupils' knowledge. One teacher was enthusiastic about maths and tried both to engage pupils and to follow the school's processes such as the 'do now', but did not check well enough that all pupils had understood what was being taught. Typically, teachers were not picking up on misconceptions (asking pupils how they feel about their work is not assessment for learning). One teacher introduced a topic and did some modelling on the board, but then moved pupils onto worksheets without checking that they had understood and were ready. There was no evidence of adaptation or scaffolding and pupils tended to work through the

same sheets. This meant that many struggled and much of the work was incomplete. There was evidence of assessment sheets in books, but it was not uncommon to see pupils repeatedly getting 3, 4 or 8 out of 20 with no evidence that anything had been done with that information to secure their learning. In effect, the assessment was meaningless and continued to show that some pupils simply did not understand what to do. A discussion with a very small sample of Year 10 pupils showed that they did not understand maths and some were very anxious as a result. Interestingly, in one Year 8 class only seven pupils were present, and the class should have been much bigger. No one was able to account for this at the time, but is it a possible indicator that pupils are choosing not to attend?

**English:**

- The English curriculum leader has only been in that role for a year but has been at the school for a long time and is supported by a well-established team of staff. She recognised that 2024 outcomes (progress indicator of -0.4) were not good enough and was able to give a clear evaluation of why that was and what she intended to do about it. The department has, for example, introduced a 'big write' into Years 10 and 11 (though the pitfalls of this and the need to closely monitor the impact were discussed.)
- The curriculum leader articulated the curriculum and the rationale for it clearly and convincingly. The key stage 3 curriculum has been overhauled and she can justify text choice, and how key concepts and threads will be revisited and embedded as pupils progress through the curriculum. Medium term planning makes these connections clear. The key stage 3 curriculum is undoubtedly ambitious and challenging so will need to be monitored in terms of how well teachers adapt it to meet the needs of pupils from different starting points. Each unit has an end point task, and it was explained how the intended curriculum builds up to that should enable pupils to be successful. Assessments are in place but need to be clearer in terms of expected knowledge and outcomes and what will be done as a result of the assessment. Discussion took place about the need to use these to track progression through the curriculum. The curriculum leader could talk generally in terms of monitoring and CPD, but needed to be more precise about what monitoring was telling her and how this fed back into a development plan and into CPD at both department and individual level.
- Lesson visits showed a strong element of consistency and compliance to the expected features of an English lesson. These included an emphasis on vocabulary development and teacher modelling, and it was evident from visiting several Year 11 classes that the curriculum coverage is consistent. This is a good foundation from which to build. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that the quality of curriculum implementation in the classroom is consistently good. For example, 'do now' was in evidence, but not all teachers monitored closely enough whether pupils were getting on with them, so some gave feedback before some pupils had even started. There was evidence of the big write question in Year 11 books, but two of them on Jekyll and Hyde were very similar, so were they really consolidating and developing pupils' knowledge? Activities and questions set did not always enable pupils to fulfil the learning objectives. Teachers often talked too much which limited opportunities for pupils to explore their thinking independently and to write much. In some books, it was not clear to see how the curriculum sequencing was building up to the finished piece of work, so though the subject leader knows what she wants to see, some staff need more professional development to deliver it. As with maths, there were some assessment weaknesses. For example, one pupil had 9 out of 30 for an assessment and 11 out of 30, but it was difficult to see how they were supposed to know what to do to improve or where they had had the opportunity to do so.

**Languages:**

- Low pupil numbers have led to a decline in the size of the department with voluntary redundancies, so it now consists of the curriculum leader and an ECT2. Both are French specialists, meaning that the school now offers just the one language. Attainment in 2024 was below average with 55% of 20 pupils attaining grades 9-4, though the subject leader could explain why that was the case. Numbers are increasing with 31 pupils in the current Year 11 and 40 in Year 10. It will therefore be important to ensure that the curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of pupils with wider starting points.
- The curriculum planning is clear and detailed. The curriculum leader spoke passionately about wanting to inspire young people with a love of languages and could explain how the key stage 3 curriculum was underpinned by the three pillars of phonics, vocabulary and grammar. There is evidence in the curriculum of opportunities for disciplinary reading and transcription. Assessment is in place but is in the early stages of development, particularly in terms of its use. There needs to be more clarity about how the curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of all learners.
- It must be noted that only one lesson was visited but the implementation did not match up to the quality of the curriculum intent. There was evidence of use of target language and some live marking by the teacher in the lesson, but in the main pupils appeared to self-assess which meant that some basic spelling and grammar errors went uncorrected and were therefore perpetuated. There was evidence of translation of simple sentences, but it did not build up to much extended writing and it was unclear how high prior attainers were being challenged. Pupils were typically doing the same relatively closed activities, so it was difficult to see how pupils of different starting points were progressing or what scaffolding was made available.

**History:**

- The department consists of a subject leader who has been in role for two years, an additional specialist history teacher and a non-specialist member of staff. Data provided by the subject leader for 2024 showed that attainment was just below national but only 44% of pupils were on or above target. Low prior attainers did least well.
- Extensive work has gone into the key stage 3 curriculum. The subject leader can explain the rationale and the sequencing, and it has the potential to be an exciting and challenging curriculum. Discussion took place about the amount in the curriculum – is there a risk of breadth over depth meaning that pupils will only have a superficial overview? Some of the time allocations need to be reviewed – for example, the Black Death does not need as many lessons as the Tudors. There is a need for more explicit clarification of how both disciplinary and substantive concepts will be developed as pupils progress through school.
- As with other subjects, classroom visits showed variation in delivery with implementation not matching up to the promise of the curriculum intent. Some of the tasks observed, such as the question to Year 8 of ‘Did Mary Queen of Scots lead a dramatic life?’ were not precise enough to nail down the knowledge that pupils were expected to demonstrate and there was no clarity about what success should look like. There were lots of worksheets in pupils’ books containing lots of complex ideas (such as the Act of Uniformity) but because pupils were not really asked to manipulate them in a meaningful way they could not remember what they were when asked. Year 10 had a similar pattern of worksheets which limited the amount that pupils were able to write and did not allow them to explore complex concepts in enough detail. There was insufficient attention paid to precision and detail. For example, one pupil had written the definition of socialism as ‘working class people thinking that everyone should be equal’. This is not accurate and does not give pupils the depth of understanding to access the highest levels at GCSE. In an A Level lesson, pupils were doing yet another work sheet which, in effect, they were completing by copying from a textbook.

**Summary:**

It was very clear in three out of four subjects that curriculum leaders have worked extremely hard on developing their schemes of work and that all could explain the rationale and principles that underpinned them. The curriculum conversations were very promising. However, these were not followed through with strong implementation in the classroom, and this meant that pupils were not being given the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and therefore knowledge was not always sticking. Teachers did not routinely check for depth of understanding and pupils were too often engaged in low- level closed tasks or in copying. Little evidence was seen of teaching that was adapted to meet the needs of learners.

## Points to consider:

- Maths needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
  - Leadership of the department is not having the required impact on improvement. Senior leaders should be robust in their provision of support, challenge and CPD for the subject leader in moving this forward.
  - The curriculum planning needs to be much clearer so that all staff know what plans they are following. At the moment, teachers have too much flexibility to interpret the curriculum as they see fit, and they do not have the skills to do this well.
  - Assessment in the widest sense needs to be reviewed so that it is fit for purpose. Teachers do not currently have a clear enough view of what pupils can and cannot do and gaps in curriculum knowledge are not being identified and addressed quickly enough.
  - The principles of the best way to teach maths and secure pupils' depth of understanding need to be agreed by the department so that they understand the key building blocks and common misconceptions in the acquisition of mathematical concepts. Teaching needs to be adapted so that lower prior attainers are supported to access the curriculum objectives while other pupils are challenged. Consider providing concrete and pictorial methods of securing conceptual understanding.
  - Provide CPD for all staff to ensure that they have the subject knowledge to teach the curriculum well, including being able to select the most appropriate resources to deliver what they are teaching.
  - Ensure that pupils are given a range of opportunities to apply and explore their mathematical understanding through reasoning and problem solving.
  
- In all subjects
  - Curriculum leaders need to be more robust in their monitoring so that they have an accurate and unflinching view of the strengths and areas for development in their department, including of individual teachers. They then need to use this knowledge to provide subject specific CPD at both departmental and individual level.
  - All leaders need to have a development plan which is clear in the identification of the issues to be addressed, the precise actions that will be taken to address them, the intended impact and the milestones against which this will be evaluated, and the range of monitoring activities that will need to take place.
  - Adaptive teaching appears to be an area of development in all four subjects – consider whether this needs to be part of a whole school priority.

- Ensure that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and do not accept substandard work and presentation.
- All subject leaders need to be better able to identify what pupils should know and be able to do at key end points and be able to show how substantive and disciplinary concepts will be revisited and deepened as pupils progress through school.
- Assessment practice needs to be developed so that curriculum leaders have accurate information about pupils' progress and are able to intervene where necessary in a timely manner.