



Chertsey High School

Disadvantaged Learners Strategic Review Summer 2021

Context

Chertsey High School is a relatively new school with year groups 7-10 currently in place. Around 26% of pupils are eligible for the Pupil Premium, close to the national average. At the time of writing, pupils at the school have yet to sit external examinations.

Review

The review was carried out by Marc Rowland and Penny Alford. It involved a series of short lesson observations and a range of detailed discussions with the Headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders (academic and pastoral), teaching staff and pupils.

As with all reviews, they are a glance at school life. Issues raised in this report are for the reflection of senior / disadvantage leaders who may decide upon any actions.

Key findings and recommendations

1. Initial discussions with leaders responsible for addressing disadvantage focussed on the ethos and expectations at the school. The culture of high expectations for all at the school is tangible. Staff at all levels speak and act with consistency, authority and commitment to addressing disadvantage. Pupils' understanding of themselves as learners mirrors this clarity of expectation.
2. From a 'blank slate', leaders have created an impressive, whole-school approach to addressing disadvantage rooted in expert teaching, engagement with wider school life, strong pastoral care and individual responsibility from pupils and staff. Where pupils may not have the support / opportunities to support their learning outside of school, they are supported in school.
3. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. This provides a firm foundation for learning. This is a good model for the roll out of a school-wide approach.
4. There was an extended discussion about the impact of disadvantage on pupils' learning. There is a culture of not blaming pupils and their families. Individuals all understand their roles in addressing disadvantage and focus on where they can have the most influence: in the classroom. Issues cited include (noting staff were asked to give generalised reflections):
 - Self-belief
 - Self esteem
 - Support for learning outside of school / lack of consistency in home life to support self-regulation / lack of resources / lack of experiences beyond school. Scaffolding, modelling, explicit vocabulary instruction and disciplinary reading can help to address these issues.
 - More easily distracted in lessons
 - Difficulties with social interaction / anxiety



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5. One staff member said 'some pupils don't see school life as an open door... a place for opportunity. It's our job to address that...'. The focus of discussions was consistently on helping pupils to be more independent in all aspects of school life, to feel a sense of belonging. This is a clearly articulated intent that all staff at the school can buy into.
6. Staff spoke with conviction about the importance of strong relationships and assuring pupils and families that 'we are on your side', working together. This partnership is really important – particularly for those that find engagement with school life more difficult.
7. The school has adopted a strong inclusion strategy that supports all pupils at risk of underachievement, beyond the Pupil Premium label or any other labels that might be attached to pupils: it is a pupil-led approach, rather than a provision-led approach.
8. School leaders have taken advantage of all the potential benefits of a new school and new building to make sure expectations are high. Despite a level of disadvantage that is near the national average, disadvantage is not visibly evident in the formal or informal aspects of school life.

Teachers

9. Teachers were asked about the impact of disadvantage on pupils' learning. In line with the school's approach, they spoke of the need for structure and routine. They recognised that some needed extra support, but the starting point was the needs of pupils, rather than labels. Disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately supported academically and pastorally, but the starting point is need.
10. A homework club is in place to support those that do not have the structures and support for learning available at home. This is a good example of how the school is taking ownership and responsibility for disadvantage.
11. Teachers also spoke about how they are using disciplinary reading to enable all pupils to gain the background knowledge required to access sequences of lessons across subject domains. This is excellent practice. It would be useful to carry out a qualitative analysis of the effectiveness of this approach and its impact on disadvantaged learners.

Lessons and pupil discussions

12. The high expectations discussed in meetings were evident in the lesson observations during the review. Teachers were experts at *including* pupils in learning through:
 - The use of modelling in mathematics
 - Expecting pupils to give full answers
 - Ensuring that all pupils participated in group activities



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13. Pupils spoke impressively about their school experiences. This was consistent for pupils across a range of prior attainment. They were able to talk articulately and confidently about the support inside and outside of lessons. They were particularly impressive at explaining the metacognitive strategies they adopt when they 'don't know the answer'.

Heads of Years

14. As with other staff, heads of years spoke with precision and commitment about addressing disadvantaged. They spoke about a range of issues, including:

- Careers education
- Building family relationships
- Personal development
- Additional opportunities e.g. Duke of Edinburgh
- Provision of resources

15. Encouragingly, staff saw their roles as part of a whole-school approach: 'we are trying to change peoples' lives. To do that, we need to provide opportunity'. However, they did reflect that too often their time is swallowed by a small number of significant issues. This impacts on their ability to carry out proactive work, particularly on social and emotional issues (some of which may have been exacerbated by Covid 19).

Final reflections

16. It would be helpful to consider carefully how pastoral support can be more proactive.

17. It would also be helpful to carry out an evaluation of the disciplinary reading strategy to measure the impact of pupils' participating in learning. This approach may have significant benefits for addressing disadvantage if manageable and scalable.

18. Chertsey High School is impressive in its consistent commitment to addressing disadvantage. The approach is clear and all staff who joined discussions understood their roles in the approach. Staff, and [disadvantaged] pupils expect to be surprised by what they can achieve. This is an excellent achievement.

Marc Rowland, June 2021