

Sheldon School Development Priorities 2018-2021: An Update

In June 2018 we set out our stall for the next three years in our school development plan: a mix of ambition alongside ensuring that day-to-day business continues to run exactly as it should. Each year I aim to update parents in a brief document, highlighting the successes and also identifying the key focus areas for the year to come. The plan covers four areas: Teaching and Learning; Environment; Community; Outcomes.

Teaching and Learning

Since my arrival in 2012, Teaching and Learning has always been the starting point of any plan. It is our core business, quality teaching and learning driving everything else. In 2018/19, we had a specific focus on the quality and quantity of homework and trialled a system in Years 7 and 10 in order to bring up the completion rates and standard of finished product for even more students. For the majority, homework is well done, is handed in on time and completed to a high standard; this is our expectation for all students. For those who have found this more of a challenge, some extra training sessions after school have had a good effect on getting them into the right habits and brought about improvements. We want to build on this with all year groups in the coming year. Our staff training programme has been almost entirely devoted to aspects of teaching and learning, including opportunities for staff to visit other schools and have colleagues visit us to see what we do; conversations across schools and between professionals has been informative and beneficial in raising standards further. Underpinning a strong classroom environment is the need to have exemplary behaviour; over the course of 2018/19, isolated incidents of poor behaviour were picked off and expectations made very clear to students. Sheldon is a school in which our students want to learn and rightly demand the right atmosphere in which to do so. The implementation of the low-level disruption recording system in 2017/18 was developed to good effect in the last year and we will continue this going forwards. The implementation of a no mobile phone policy for Year 7 in 2018, which has now been rolled through to Years 7 and 8 has also had a calming effect and increased pupil engagement.

Environment

We are extremely fortunate in the site and facilities we have here at Sheldon, which have grown and been developed over a number of years. We have enjoyed the benefits of the new dance studio and lecture theatre from March 2018, the latter being extremely helpful for GCSE and A Level students, as well as those presenting projects or talks to small audiences. This summer also saw the completion of Phase I of the Library, which now has furniture and equipment more befitting the beautiful space we developed the summer before. There has been much-needed modernisation to the toilet facilities for visitors and staff next to the hall and ongoing investment around the site to ensure that social spaces and classrooms are conducive to really good learning. This is again something that we will continue to commit to. The significant investment in IT promised over the three-year period of the plan has begun under the stewardship of our network manager and a carefully planned renewal programme agreed. This year we are trialling the use of our parent portal and hope that by the end of 2019/20, we will have access for all parents to see live data and reporting on their children, as well as having even more efficient forms of communication. We now have new contractors for catering and cleaning, appointed after a rigorous process involving a number of stakeholders, pupils amongst them – and in both aspects, we have asked that environmental factors be a very high priority. Our cleaning company are committed to using the latest environmentally friendly products and our catering company have a directive to reduce the need for any non-recyclable materials; plastic drinks

bottles will be a thing of the past. Big strides were made in 2018/19 in all areas of the school environment and we look forward to improving further in the coming year.

Community

We appointed 14 new staff for September 2019, which for a staff numbering nearly 200 represents a turnover below average compared to most. In any given year a change of 8-10 teachers is ideal, so that we keep a good blend of well-established staff alongside others coming into the profession or bringing ideas from other schools. We have been delighted that, once again, we have appointed subject specialists to all of our vacancies and in the two senior positions appointed to the school, selected from two large fields of applicants. Maintaining strong links with local universities remains paramount in keeping a good flow of high-calibre new entrants into Sheldon – a long-established feature of the school. When staff have arrived, it is crucial that training and other opportunities are available and in 2018/19 a varied and extensive programme was provided for all staff (support staff and teachers) to participate in. In addition, we continued to look at the topic of wellbeing for both students and staff and are pleased to report the positive impact the additional pupil support worker and increased counselling hours had on the students in the school. Visitors frequently comment on the relationships exhibited between students and teachers and between the students themselves, all of which is built on our core values rooted in kindness and respect. We have been joined in our student community by several students from overseas, 2018/19 seeing a very successful yearlong stay by five students from Lausanne; these have been followed by nine from Switzerland and Germany for 2019/20. Overseeing all that we do and applying the necessary checks and balances are our governing body; this year sees significant change in some key posts, with three long-serving governors stepping down. It will therefore be important to monitor the effectiveness of the board of governors at the end of this academic year.

Outcomes

Results in both GCSE and A Level have improved on the previous two years, with A Level being the more striking of the two. Value-added figures see the school in the top 20% nationally (ALPS 3) and headline figures are again very commendable: 6% A*, 24% A*/A, half A*-B and three quarters A*-C. Three students also progressed to Oxford or Cambridge. At GCSE the Basics figure at 4+ (students achieving at least Grade 4 in both English and Maths) increased to 76%. Under the old measure of 5 A*-C including English and Maths, the equivalent figure is 74% for 2019, up 5% on 2018. 13% achieved the top grades 9/8, 81% of students achieved five or more Grade 4s and over half of the year group achieved at least one Grade 7 (old Grade A). Attendance figures for 2018/19 finished at 94.3%, below the school's target of 96%, and this is something we are keen to improve for 2019/20. It is worth highlighting that students hitting the school's average will have had ten days off in an academic year and that by meeting the 96% target, they will have improved their attendance by two and a half days. Pastoral teams will be more closely monitoring this and will hope for support from parents in helping effect an upward shift. Outcomes can also be measured in terms of extra-curricular participation and we hope that in 2019/20, there will be greater coverage from our student body for the 60+ offerings that happen each week. This will also see the happiness of students improve, although we routinely see bright, engaged and happy individuals in a positive and purposeful school.