

John Spence Community High School Peer Review

23-24 October 2024

Background

John Spence Community High School is an average sized 11-16 secondary school with just over 800 pupils. The school was inspected in June 2023 and received an overall judgement of Requires Improvement with the breakdown of judgements as follows

- Quality of Education: Requires improvement
- Behaviour and attitudes: Good
- Personal Development: Good
- Leadership and management: Requires Improvement

Safeguarding was judged to be effective although this is not reported as a separate grade.

The school joined Pele Trust on 1 November and received a Trust review on 14 & 15 November. The suggestions and questions raised from that review are set out in Appendix 2 of this document.

Quality of Education

During the review, the team explored the quality of education through a focused examination of English, Geography and Maths. This involved discussions with the curriculum leaders, lesson visits, book reviews and discussions with pupils.

Curriculum leaders have carefully considered their subject curriculum and can articulate why they have included certain concepts and core knowledge. They have been thoughtful about the sequencing of the curriculum to ensure that pupils' knowledge and skills can progress logically and build on previous learning. Curriculum leaders are developing an increasingly accurate view of their subject areas through planned quality assurance activities, which are often supported by senior leaders. The outcomes of these activities are leading to direct actions in response. In all three subject areas, the curriculum intent is secure.

Curriculum leaders have clear expectations for how their subject is taught and this was largely reflected in lesson visits. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong with specialist teachers in all subjects. Teacher explanations and modelling is effective. Lesson materials are of high quality and used consistently across corresponding classes. In the majority of lessons, the activities were appropriate to the aims of the lessons and supported learning. In some cases, presentation slides were particularly 'busy', which could lead to a lack of clarity and cognitive overload therefore it would be wise to continually reflect on this when updating lesson resources.

In most lessons, teachers are increasingly deliberate in their approach to checking pupils' understanding. In the most effective examples, teachers provided individual thinking time before encouraging pupils to discuss the question/task with a desk partner; this stage often involved the use of mini-whiteboards. During this time, teachers circulated the classroom to listen and observe as a means of informing their questioning. When they followed up with questions and class discussion, the teachers directed questions to named individuals and drew answers from a number of pupils to ensure that key learning was understood by all. Opportunities were invariably taken to extend learning by offering further challenge through prompting and extending thinking by thoughtful questions. Where practice was less effective,

teachers provided minimal thinking and missed opportunities for paired discussion. When questioning, they took answers from only one or two pupils before moving on to the next stage of the lesson; this led to less secure learning across the class.

Senior leaders have been working on the approach to checking for understanding and it is clear that progress is being made. Teachers are more intentional in their approach and the use of directed questioning as opposed to a reliance on 'hands up' is secure. Most teachers provide thinking time before asking questions, however, in a number of lessons, the dominant voice is that of the teacher and opportunities for pupil discussion are missed. A stronger commitment to implementing a range of strategies designed to facilitate deeper thinking and rich discussion would see this aspect of teacher practice improve further.

Behaviour in the vast majority of lessons was good and supported by positive relationships between teachers and pupils. Teachers know pupils well and show they care. Pupils were attentive and listened patiently to teachers and they followed instructions promptly. The classroom environments were calm and orderly, and conducive to effective learning.

Discussions with pupils provided evidence that they could recall information on recent lessons and could talk confidently about what they had learned. With prompting, they could recall key learning from the start of the school year. They understood that teachers employ a range of approaches to support them in remembering key information such as retrieval activities and live marking. The pupils were familiar with the use of retrieval tasks but these differed depending on the teacher (within a subject) therefore it may be worth considering whether pupils would benefit from a more consistent approach to ensure that essential information is being revisited in each class.

Safeguarding

A recent peer review (3.10.2024) found the school had a strong safeguarding culture. This was reflected in discussions with teachers and pupils. Teachers have a clear understanding of their role and responsibility in ensuring that pupils are safeguarded. They can describe the contextual safeguarding challenges for the school and know how to deal with disclosures. Pupils feel safe throughout the school and have trusted adults they can speak to. They speak highly of the pastoral support available to them.

Behaviour and attendance

The school is calm and orderly; this is built on clear systems and positive relationships between staff and pupils. A strong and visible staff presence at lesson changeover and unstructured times also supports good behaviour on corridors. Older pupils recognise that behaviour has improved over time and they note that this has helped their learning.

Attendance remains a challenge with KS4 results in 2024 demonstrating the strong correlation between good attendance and outcomes. Senior leaders are taking appropriate action to address this aspect and are forensic in their data analysis. They are also increasingly prescriptive in setting follow-up actions arising from the review of data.

Pupils are clear about the consequences of poor behaviour and fully understand the potential sanctions that may be used. They understand the need for these sanctions and feel the

system is fair although they feel that some teachers are inconsistent in the way they give warnings. Interestingly, pupils were less clear in articulating classroom expectations, i.e. what you should do to avoid warnings. This might be something that school leaders wish to explore further.

The pastoral system is a strength of the school and this is noted by pupils. Year leaders take responsibility for their cohort and set an ambitious tone for them using assemblies to good effect especially in raising the profile of attendance and covering topics from the personal development curriculum. They are well supported by a team of mentors who add capacity in supporting some of the most vulnerable pupils. The Behaviour Centre is well managed and this helps those pupils removed from lessons to moderate their behaviour before returning to class in due course. Pupils feel that mental health issues are taken seriously by pastoral staff and appreciate the tiered support available to them.

Pupil information is shared with all staff via Google Sheets ensuring they have the most up-to-date and accurate information about pastoral issues, behaviour and attendance. The system is thoughtful and continually adapted to be fit for purpose. There are potential drawbacks to sharing sensitive information in this format therefore the school should consider procedures to ensure the confidentiality of the pupil data so that the risk of a GDPR breach is mitigated.

Personal Development

The PD peer review last academic year has provided the stimulus for significant senior leader activity including redesigning the curriculum structure, providing training and bespoke support to staff, and building a bank of common lesson resources. Senior leaders have also positively addressed the issue identified for those KS4 pupils studying separate sciences and they are now well catered for in receiving their full statutory entitlement. Pupils with special educational needs are particularly well supported with additional sessions provided to reinforce classroom lessons. The next task for senior leaders is to explore how best to assess personal development.

Pupils are positive about their Fit for Life lessons and appreciate the opportunities they have to discuss and debate the topics they cover. They demonstrate a keen knowledge and understanding of consent and healthy/unhealthy relationships; British values; protected characteristics; and online and offline safety. Pupils were able to answer questions about these areas and identify the most important aspects.

All pupils were adamant that derogatory comments were rare and that, if heard by teachers, would be addressed immediately. They also stated that in the absence of a nearby adult they would challenge racist or homophobic language or comments but were less likely to do so for sexist comments. This issue was particularly highlighted in discussions with Y11 girls and would be worth exploring further.

The school provides an impressive enrichment offer that pupils make good use of including a Pledges system that is well developed. Another notable element of this offer is the Sports Academy that runs from 8.00-10.00am each Thursday with a large number of KS3 pupils attending. Whilst the pupils enjoy this opportunity, the school should consider the impact of

missing a lesson each week and how pupils are supported to catch up with missed work especially if this is for one of the core subjects of English, Maths or Science. Some pupils also mentioned that lessons on Thursday morning could be negatively impacted by having very few pupils in the class leading teachers to plan a 'holding lesson'.

Areas for Improvement

Suggestions	Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. QE: further develop teacher practice in checking for understanding to become more systematic and <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promote richer discussion by providing more planned opportunities for pairs and small groups b. Draw from multiple sources when checking for understanding as opposed to relying on one pupil 2. BA: develop a report template that provides the basis for a termly report on key aspects within behaviour and attendance; the report should <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Set out key data in a simple format b. Provide a commentary on the data identifying patterns and trends c. Identify emerging questions and required actions in response to the analysis 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BA: what steps have you taken to ensure that highly confidential pupil (pastoral) data that is shared with all teaching staff is secure and unlikely to pose a GDPR risk? 2. BA: would behaviour be improved further by being more explicit about classroom expectations whilst ensuring this information is concise? 3. PD: has the school fully explored the implications of missed lessons for those KS3 pupils who attend the sporting academy each week; specifically <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Are core subject lessons affected? b. How do the pupils avoid falling behind in their affected subjects? c. Is the quality of Thursday (period 1) diminished by not having a full complement of pupils? Does it become an aimless lesson? 4. PD: why do some KS4 girls feel it is appropriate to raise concerns about racist/homophobic comments but feel less inclined to do so when faced with misogynistic comments from a small minority of boys?

Appendix 1: Areas for Improvement (from November 2023)

Suggestions	Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. QE: develop the use of Cold Call as a method of checking for understanding by always providing an opportunity for personal reflection/thinking time and/or pair discussion. 2. QE/PD: encourage more discussion and debate within lessons as a means to support learning and encourage increasing depth and justification within pupil answers (verbal and written) 3. SEND: consider how to refine the information on Pupil Profiles and manage the roll out for SEND support pupils <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Place the pupil and parent input at the front of the document b. Ensure that suggested in-class strategies distinguish between actions for the teacher and Student Support Assistant c. Divide the SEND support group into three discrete group; high needs = Pupil Profile, moderate needs = may require a Pupil Profile and low needs = no need for a Pupil Profile 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Behaviour: does the perception of some boys that those who routinely behave well miss out on recognition and rewards have any substance? 2. Behaviour: what are the expectations of staff in following up incidents of bullying (victim and perpetrator) or suspension? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How often and for how long? b. How and where are these recorded? 3. PD: do pupils studying separate sciences miss out on statutory elements of the PD curriculum? If so, how can this be mitigated? 4. QE: do some presentation slides contain too much information leading to cognitive overload?