

Note of Visit	
<b>Name of School/Academy:</b> Fort Royal <b>Focus:</b> School Improvement <b>Advisor:</b> Deirdre Fitzpatrick	<b>Email:</b> didgefitzpatrick@hotmail.com <b>Mobile Phone Number:</b> 07748661858 <b>Date of Review:</b> 28/03/19
<b>Context where appropriate:</b>  Half day visit. First visit to school following the retirement of previous SIP	
Key Observations and Suggested Actions	
<b>Key Observation 1:</b>  <p><b>On a tour of the school, the Advisor was very impressed by the clear routines in place that enabled many students to work independently and with enthusiasm. The environment has been managed and maintained well to meet the needs of the students.</b></p> <p>It was quite evident that Fort Royal is a school that effectively manages a very wide range of student need. A number of students, that given the right environment, resources and support to manage own anxieties and needs, can effectively work independently for short periods of time. However, it is evidently clear that the school has had to work very hard to enable this to happen. Routines that enable students to appropriately select resources, problem solve and ask the right questions of one another when needing help, have had to be established over time. It was clear that students enjoyed these routines and were confident learners.</p> <p>However, it was also clear that many students needed more one to one support or specialist environments outside of the classroom. The Advisor was shown how the space within the school was creatively used to meet the needs of students with high anxieties or with complex medical needs. The Advisor also observed the skilful interchange of adults as they moved from supporting particular groups of students into the delivery of lessons.</p> <p>Fort Royal is a very well maintained school where classrooms, despite often being small, are used to the best of their potential and resourced appropriately. It is clear that both staff and students take pride in their environment and school.</p>	
<b>Key Observation 2:</b>  <p><b>Common to many schools currently and for a full range of issues, the school is under considerable financial pressure and is actively seeking ways to maintain standards given the budgetary pressures.</b></p> <p>The Headteacher showed the Advisor a table which detailed how the school was very poorly funded compared to other Special Schools. Furthermore, common to other Local Authorities, the LA was having problems managing escalating high need block costs and as a result was very reluctant to increase funding to schools even when there was a clear need to do so. The Advisor suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- That whilst currently the school was able to manage students safely, senior leaders would need to ensure that staffing levels and resources remained sufficient to keep students safe. The number one priority of the school is clearly the safety of the students. The Advisor suggested that going forward, full cost recovery needs to be calculated to meet students' needs and ensure safety particularly where students are highly anxious or there</li> </ul>	

are complex medical needs. If sufficient income is not forthcoming from the LA, the Advisor suggested that the school may not be able to take the student because they couldn't keep the student safe. Often the only alternative for the LA is out of borough placements and this is generally far more expensive so LAs will often pay to keep the child safely at the school

- However, whilst the school may not be able to manage more complex pupils without additional funding, the school should continue to explicitly show a desire to work in partnership with the Local Authority; becoming the 'go to school' for the LA when they have questions about SEN. Questions like 'How can we help you?' may encourage them to view the school as a useful partner and enable the school to more effectively get the funding they need and resources they need to provide for increasing numbers. (The Advisor understands that building such partnerships may take a long time but are always worth doing).
- A review of those on Upper Pay Scale (UPS) may be appropriate especially prior to Performance Management. Those on UPS need to undertake a whole school responsibility, preferably involving training of all staff, as well as teach consistently 'good' or 'better' lessons. Ensuring effective UPS responsibilities will enable the school to be more efficient, reducing workload and potentially costs.

**Actions:**

- See above

**Key Observation 3:**

**The school recognises the need to reduce workload for staff in order to improve wellbeing.**

Senior leadership are taking seriously their responsibility to improve the well-being of staff and reduce workload. This school priority is being given weight by the new proposed Ofsted Framework which will take into consideration the extent to which the school tries to reduce teacher workload. The school recognises the need to reduce duplication particularly with regard to reporting to parents. The Advisor had a long discussion with the Headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. Understandably the Head was keen to report in as 'meaningful' a way as possible recognising that Ofsted may have little tolerance for reporting over 3 times a year or where reporting was duplicated. The Advisor suggested that leadership consider using teacher meeting time to support some of the report writing. (A further discussion was had about the consequences of paying TAs to work after school time and whether that limited teachers ability to get on with things such as report writing).

**Actions:**

- Ensure there is an appropriate mechanism for capturing staff feedback regarding workload
- Consider looking at the impact of TAs working after school time (both on restricting work done by teachers and financially)
- Consider using some after school meeting time to allow staff to catch up on some report writing

**Key Observation 4:**

**Senior Leaders recognise the need to reassess the use of the Assessment Centre.**

The Advisor visited the Assessment Centre. Currently the school assesses students for the LA before placement. There was a feeling that, at times, the LA wrongly believed that the school assessment system favoured placement at the school rather than at a mainstream school. This may be a natural suspicion to have especially when the LA would be keen to place more students in a mainstream provision. Furthermore, the school felt that once parents brought their child for assessment and saw the school, they were keen for their child to remain in the school. Given that the school is full and over number, parents expectations of gaining a school place would often pose problems.

The Advisor discussed whether the school should consider conducting assessments in the mainstream school rather than the assessment centre. This would do a number of things:

- It would give the school the opportunity to show the LA that they are keen to work in partnership with them (as suggested above) and enable the school to become more of a strategic partner to the LA
- It would enable the school to support the mainstream schools to further develop expertise and resources and so strengthening the SEN community
- It would free up space in Fort Royal to allow more pupils to attend

This plan would need to be fully costed and the Advisor suggested that a business case is put together and discussed as soon as possible with Governors and the LA.

**Actions:**

- Consider the appropriateness of changing the use of the assessment centre

**Potential focus for next visit:**

- **Curriculum planning aligned to the new Ofsted Framework**
- **Safeguarding audit**
- **Review of business plan for assessment centre**

**Date of Next Visit: 18/06/2019**