

Melland High School
Quality Assurance Review by Jim Muncey
13th February 2019

The focus of the visit was to celebrate, and further explore, Melland as an outward facing school.

The day was spent discussing and reflecting on the impact of the breadth of outreach support offered by the school. The richness of the presentations, and the enthusiasm of the staff when explaining and discussing their work, is difficult to capture in a report. The report does not attempt to describe the detail contained within each presentation. This is obviously well known to the school. Rather the report distils the main features of the work and examines the impact the work has on the whole school. Whilst the work is varied there are many features that are similar across the different programmes. These features are summarised below:

- Melland school is an outstanding school, as described by Ofsted inspections, the most recent being in January 2018. This evaluation has been reaffirmed by external quality assurance reviews. Despite being outstanding there is no complacency. The leaders and managers have great capacity for further change. The school is a genuine learning community where both staff and students learn together. They want to push the boundaries. They are confident to share successes and problems. Challenges are seen as an opportunity to improve further. The outreach programmes, and the work with external partners and agencies, is a demonstration of the confidence of the staff to support others. This confidence is not misplaced. It is a recognition that whilst the staff of Melland have much to offer others the work is also going to be of benefit to them and the whole school. This was observed during the day when staff were self critical and also explored with each other what could be done to improve work. There was also discussion about how experiences could be utilised to the benefit of students at Melland. It is an example where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The variety of the work supports debate, facilitates the exploration of new ways of working, and encourages leaders to examine their own work critically. It also helps in identifying what further training may be necessary as well as being a vehicle for sometimes identifying training that may be available outside the school.
- This desire for continuous improvement is reflected in the outward looking nature of the school. External contacts, work and research help to ensure that the curriculum, and teaching and learning, remain at the cutting edge. This reflects the desire of the staff to continually evaluate what they are doing and seek improvement. For example, there was much discussion about who was best to provide support to a local school, the nature of the support, the timing of the support and the evaluation of impact. A short discussion explored the nature of the challenge; the need to define roles such as mentor, coach and facilitator; the problem of having too many priorities; the challenges faced by a changing population; and, the difficulty of having a lack of clarity around the nature of aspects of the provision. Importantly the discussion led to solutions so that there was a greater understanding of how the staff at Melland could complement the work of each other, thereby maximising their support. In addition to exploring what needed to be done to facilitate change in this external provision there was also an analysis of the benefits of the work to Melland school. For example, how the work allowed staff to put into practice skills that had been learned in Melland and the relative merits of combining a SEND review with a review on teaching and learning. This discussion characterises the interaction that occurs during discussions at

Melland. It does not need to be guided necessarily by an agenda; it is an approach that is second nature to leaders and managers. It reflects the professional respect and trust that colleagues have in each other. They feel able to discuss not only where they are having success but also where they are finding the work problematic. They encourage constructive criticism. They want to improve and learn. They welcome constructive feedback. The enthusiasm of staff is infectious. They are excited and energised by the developments in which they are engaged. They want to share the work. Through debate they refine what they are doing, gathering new insights into the work. This feeds a continuous cycle of improvement.

- The opportunity to work with others outside the school requires staff to reflect on, and refine, what they are doing in Melland. They have to go beyond their own measures of impact to examine why the work is successful. They have to explore the relevance of context to see how work in Melland can be generalised to other settings. They also have to reflect on, and discuss with other colleagues in the school, how their experience in Melland can be made accessible to others. This requires them to consider carefully the reasons for their success, what quantitative and qualitative indicators they are using to evaluate impact and how the work can be generalised and adapted. It also helps them to become more confident and fluent in what they do as a consequence of having to teach and persuade other adults of the usefulness, relevance and effectiveness of different approaches. The SEND reviews, BFET combined reviews and outreach are particularly helpful at providing a range of opportunities which allow skills to be tried, tested and refined. For example, they provide opportunities for coaching and mentoring. They are also a vehicle for providing CPD to staff where working alongside others can be a more powerful vehicle than attending a course. The work can also be more bespoke and relevant to the particular needs of staff. For example, with one member of staff it was providing useful experience relevant to the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership by supporting them in becoming a highly effective middle leader with skills, confidence and knowledge to drive successful team performance and improve classroom practice. There are also opportunities to use different models with BFET combined reviews. For example, supported self reviews allow data to be collected, collated and presented to senior leaders to help them examine for themselves the implications for the whole school. Reviews can be tailored to areas agreed, whilst taking into account the point the school is at. It can also be useful to combine reviews, such as a review on special needs with a review of teaching and learning. This need not prevent the investigation of specific issues such as the role of the SENCO or issues related to compliance. The Trust Director of Education has facilitated useful meetings with reviewers to discuss what can be learned from reviews and how the skills of reviewers can be developed further, thereby helping to maximise the benefit of the approach for both those subject to the review and those undertaking the review.
- Working with others outside the school fosters self-improvement. Having to engage with and mentor, coach and teach others requires staff to be very clear about their own knowledge, skills and understanding. It also results in staff identifying practice, training and resources that can be helpful to Melland. It helps staff to distil what is effective practice across a range of settings and take the best for the use in school. Whilst Melland is outstanding staff do not believe they have a monopoly on effective practice. Good practice elsewhere provides another yardstick by which staff can evaluate what they are doing. Discussions showed how staff had learned from others and were importing the best of what they had encountered. Because of the whole school approach that characterises the work in Melland this can benefit practice across the school when shared with colleagues. Work with others also acts as a touchstone as others, in effect, act as external moderators by questioning approaches.

This requires staff to justify their own approaches and the evaluation of them. It is therefore a form of assisted self-review which holds up a mirror to their own practice. It makes the process of self-evaluation more robust. It is unlikely that erroneous conclusions could be held for long, and certainly not perpetuated.

- The work on outreach takes many forms. Work with primary schools is largely pupil led. Work with secondary school is more systems focussed. It involves training, coaching, examination of good practice and importantly an opportunity to exchange and explore approaches, developments and issues. The network meetings are well attended. Observation of one indicated that they are valued by the participants and provide an excellent opportunity for colleagues to work together on important developments. They are facilitated by the Assistant Principal who is well respected and is able to speak with authority as a consequence of her extensive experience and knowledge. She adopts a strategic role within the outreach programmes and also ensures that work is evaluated by, for example, using quality standards for outreach, examining the impact of work on Ofsted outcomes and producing case study reports.
- Many aspects of work have grown significantly in recent years. The work on safeguarding is an example where external demands coupled with a changing population have placed increasing demands on the staff. The work is very ably coordinated by one of the Vice Principals. All staff have received level 1 training. Training is repeated every two years. This is particularly important in a school like Melland which encourages and fosters the development of a vital relationship between students and all staff. This means that students may disclose information to any adult in the school irrespective of their formal role or position. The Vice Principal encourages feedback from staff whilst acting as an essential filter. The burden can be significant. It is also a challenge to maintain a clear separation of roles. This is well understood by the Vice Principal who appreciates that it would not be helpful to try and act as a social worker, housing officer or indeed parent. Eight members of staff are also trained as designated safeguarding leads so there is back up cover if required. Keeping abreast of developments is an onerous task. This not only requires participation in training but also importantly maintaining a network of contacts outside the school. These links that have been fostered allow a lot of information to be exchanged. Sometimes it can be frustrating when incidents have to be formally logged and reported to outside agencies even when it does not appear to result in any action being taken. Quite correctly it is recognised that however frustrating this can be it cannot deter from the need to report information through the correct channels. External contacts are one means of evaluating the work. Another very important source of evaluation is the designated governor who is excellent at asking questions and examining the work being undertaken to ensure that it is robust and constantly being reviewed with an eye to improvement.
- The five day Digital Advantage programme is impressive and is a particular example of the benefits of the school working with outside agencies. This ground breaking digital skills initiative for 16-18 year olds brings together trainers and experts from industry with schools to deliver real world digital skills and experiences in the classroom. The work observed being undertaken was to address the challenge of how to decrease the amount of time that young people spend on screen to make them healthier whilst not detracting from their opportunity to have fun. It was clear that both students, teachers and external facilitator were all profiting from the experience. Students reported the positive impact the work had on their confidence as well as helping them to develop creative skills and the skills necessary to work together to solve problems. The facilitator reported how the work had introduced new perspectives and views of the work as well as teaching him how to interact with young

people who can be challenging. As stated in the information about the project the work clearly has the potential to transform the lives of all those who participate in it and give the whole city a real Digital Advantage.

- Two projects discussed are being researched by individuals. One is examining how students with PMLD learn. It is ground breaking and will potentially have implications well beyond the school. The work is the focus for a PhD. This is beneficial to the school as it provides a high level of external support and challenge. The work also clearly helps to motivate the work of the teacher responsible for the project. This is also important to the work of the school because it helps to inform, enthuse and engage the staff working with this group of very challenging students. It provides a basis for team work. It is also recognised by the staff of the school that it is important that the focus of the study will also benefit the students by developing an innovatory approach to teaching and learning. It is a good example of how the leadership of the school is sufficiently confident in the capacity and work of the school to facilitate the taking of controlled risks and invest in the future.
- The other project discussed is the responsibility of the science co-ordinator. It is also an innovatory approach to the development of the curriculum and teaching and learning. The work is examining how the curriculum can be evolved to meet the needs of students with different abilities. The work has commenced with analysing the demands of the entry level curriculum and assessment arrangements. It does not define practice in the classroom but informs it, providing students with the skills to tackle assessments and examinations. It has similar advantages for the school as those described for the project on the teaching and learning of students with PMLD.
- Despite the significant benefits that accrue from the outward looking work of the school, by definition work outside the school requires staff to sometimes be offsite. Where appropriate, cover has to be arranged to ensure that this does not impact adversely on the education of students at Melland. Using particular teachers for this ensures that they have the relationship with students as well as an understanding of their needs so that their education is not interrupted.

There is extensive evidence to show that by being outward looking and engaging with research and enquiry schools will improve. As stated by the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education, "Schools that adopt a culture of enquiry, underpinned by an understanding of academic or professional research, are most likely to improve teaching and learning and improve outcomes for young people." (CUREE, 2011). Melland High School is an excellent example of the benefits that accrue from being outward looking and engaging in a variety of projects. The range of work is impressive. The enthusiasm of staff for the work is unquestionable. Certainly, the school is having a positive impact on other schools, including those in BFET as well as the Local Authority. Importantly, the work is also having a positive impact on Melland and its staff. It is ensuring, despite the outstanding work already taking place, there is no complacency within the school. Staff are constantly pushing at the boundaries of development and innovation. The leadership and management have created an environment that fosters research and enquiry. The school is well equipped to respond to the challenges posed by the ever increasing diversity of the population that it serves. Importantly the innovatory work ensures that no stone is left unturned in the quest to constantly improve and deliver the highest quality education to all students.