

Dear Ms Thomson,

I am delighted to attach my formal feedback following to visits to your school. I have now visited many hundreds of schools and overseen my team's work directly with 2000 schools over 50 LAs and training of 10,000 schools and I find myself in the pleasurable unusual position to state that in many aspects, your school is a shining example of outstanding practices. Marlborough stands out in many aspects and I believe that other schools in both your local authority and nationally would benefit from learning not just from the systems you have put place but from you as an individual, your open and honest attitude toward school leadership, your advanced vision of education and your insistence on prioritising the most important aspect of children's lives – their emotional wellbeing. I am usually obliged to say how much I enjoyed the visit to a school but in this case, I can be most genuine in my emphatic appreciation for having learnt and basked in the wonderful practices and some truly inclusive staff you have developed.

In appreciation,

Daniel Sobel (CEO Inclusion Expert)

FORMAL FEEDBACK REPORT

A school review was carried out by Daniel Sobel over two visits. The first focussed on PP and SEN and was conducted with a range of staff and student interviews. The second visit focussed on the inclusion of the most challenging and vulnerable of students and families with the Pastoral Team. This report is a summary of key findings that stood out among many details and is written in no particular order.

Students feel part of a family

One of the goals of real inclusive practice is to enable a sense of “belonging” which is difficult to define but you know it when you see or feel it. Here at Marlborough, both the staff and students describe a sense of familial feeling and belonging, and it crops up in every conversation and seems to have infested itself into every facet of school life. The specific descriptors which you will both see in action and hear from staff and students at Marlborough include: kindness, dignity, respect, loyalty and friendship. The emphasis on these factors stretch beyond the usual strictures that drive most schools such as attendance figures and attainment. The school will always prioritise making decisions about the wellbeing of the child and rather than pushing on upping a specific grade, will deal with both parents, staff and children compassionately and seek to heal, support and express kindness above and beyond any curricular drive. If ‘child wellbeing’ and an environment that was a place of belonging to the most vulnerable and challenging children and families’ were the top OFSTED criteria, then this school would be obviously outstanding.

Student Voice

Many schools attempt different levels of student voice, but Marlborough is an outstanding example of how this can be used to great practical effect. For example, every week the SLT speak to students each week and ask a variety of questions about the school seeking their feedback about what is working and what isn’t. This then drives the SLT agenda and leads to changes and responses from all staff. The consequence is that students feel listened to and they have leadership of the school. Coupled with formal meetings that also include being an integral part of all interview processes for new staff (beyond the cursory way in which many schools use this idea), students and staff are particularly proud of the teacher’s (office) open-door policy which is, understandably a commitment to prioritise listening beyond anything else.

Range of Staff Roles Dedicated to Caring

Arguably, Marlborough has one of the highest proportions of pastoral-oriented roles to student ratio that I have come across in the mainstream. This enables the non-shouting school environment to be nurtured by highly skilled pastoral staff who help support staff in their understanding, reconciliation and understanding of student needs. Over time this has led to an unusually high quality of pastoral awareness of all staff. In a staff knowledge, skill and consistency evaluation exercise, the following factors scored between 8 and 10 out of 10:

- Supporting anxiety in the classroom
- Distorted thinking
- Impact of domestic abuse on learning
- Managing feelings effectively
- De-escalation strategies
- What behaviours mean and how to respond

These scores are representative of the majority of staff and are significantly higher than most schools in the mainstream school system. This level of understanding and practice by classroom teachers is unusual and speaks to the outstanding leadership and focus by the Head, Deputy and AHT in getting the pastoral skills from an excellent team into the classroom.

High Quantity of Support

The students emphasised how all staff are caring and nurturing, and this is the mark of a ‘Marlborough teacher’. However, this extends further than most schools: for example, the site team get involved in coaching and reading. These positive teacher-staff relationships even extend to the Governing body. For example, the Chair of Governors is very involved in supporting individual students and was described by one staff and student as ‘helping out just like a TA’. Some Governors have committed to regularly doing ‘morning reading’ while others get involved in the practical business of learning walks. There is special event the Governors put on to reward students and celebrate them for the ‘day-to-day’ of getting on well and this is done in front of parents and has become a very meaningful and emotional event for all. The parental engagement is unusually high so much so that OFSTED commented that the positive returns from 99% of parents is highly unusual.

Student Description of the Marlborough Teacher

Many of the students I met kept referring to two phrases interchangeably: ‘the Marlborough teacher’ and the ‘helpful teacher’. I wanted to know what they meant by these phrases and this is a summary of the key themes which were raised by the students by means of quotes:

- “Never embarrass a student, will always speak with them 1:1”
- “Respect of student – because they understand what behaviours mean and what students are really trying to say rather than just punishing them”
- “Teachers proactively go up to students and ask how they are doing and if they are ok. Teachers express care”
- “All teachers check the students actually understand and they do this by going around tables and checking-in with them throughout the lesson”
- “The Marlborough teacher is genuinely interested in the students and you can’t fake that”
- “All teachers speak to the students outside of the classroom so they get to know them”
- “All teachers help out students after school and at lunchtimes, their doors are open, and we can always approach them”
- “You can’t teach here if you are angry, you have to be calm and nice and react to any challenges with care”
- “Teachers pick up students who may usually go under the radar”
- “To teach at Marlborough you have to love being a teacher and be a happy person”

There is no higher accolade than what the student body says about their school. This list of descriptors of what it means to be a teacher here is highly unusual and in my limited opinion, the most important finding from this report.

Summary

If I were inclined to think it necessary or valuable to attribute marks like OFSTED do then I would conclude the following:

Belonging and sense of place	Outstanding
Student Centred	Outstanding
Pastoral Care and removal of barriers	Outstanding
Wellbeing of staff and student	Outstanding
Teacher Attitude	Outstanding
Leadership Focus on children	Outstanding