

Challenge Partners Review of King Solomon Academy (November 2019)

This year, KSA has joined a programme called Challenge Partners which aims to partner schools together from across the country to learn from each other's practice and support school improvement. We welcomed a team of five Senior Leaders, two from primary and two from secondary, lead by a Lead Inspector.

We are pleased and proud to report that King Solomon Academy is considered to be a "Leading" school which is the highest possible evaluation.

You can read some of the highlights of the report below:

"The strong ethos for learning and the collective and collaborative culture that supports pupils and staff are evident right across the academy. There is a clear determination to make sure that each individual achieves highly and benefits fully from the many opportunities offered. King Solomon is a very strong community, where expectations are high, learning is for all and engagement is the norm. Pupils and staff feel strongly supported and are rightly extremely proud to be members of the King Solomon family."

"Pupils are very happy with the education they receive. Many say that academy staff go beyond their expectations and provide extra help and support before, during and after lessons. They often speak about 'climbing the mountain to university'."

"The Principal and the Associate Principal are complemented and ably supported by a highly skilled and effective leadership team. Leadership is distributed widely and opportunities to develop leaders are seized upon. Teachers and other staff are positive about the opportunities afforded them by senior staff and say that leaders are mindful of their wellbeing."

"School leaders have made important improvements to the school in recent years. The merger with a local primary school has significantly strengthened the primary provision. The dynamic leadership of the primary phase is palpable. The new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) leader has already identified what has been holding children back previously, action plans have been produced and the impact is evident in children's achievements. Better teaching means that pupils are now better prepared for the secondary phase of the academy."

"Leaders have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They are highly reflective and use the individual and collective strengths of the team well to address priorities swiftly but thoughtfully."

"Leaders have fostered strong links within the community. This helps pupils to grow into respectful citizens. Regular visitors to the school share their careers and experiences of life in modern Britain. All pupils take part in a four-day work experience placement. This supports pupils' understanding of life in society beyond the immediate locality"

"The curriculum supports pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development exceedingly well. Pupils take great pride in themselves and their school. Opportunities to exercise

responsibility and to develop their leadership skills are very good. Pupils work co-operatively in groups and show great respect for each other's feelings and for different faiths."

"The careers programme tightly adheres to the principles laid out in the Gatsby Benchmarks. The academy particularly helps pupils develop the skills and knowledge needed for the changing job market, providing pupils with a variety of opportunities to engage with employers, further education and higher education providers through their time at the academy."

"King Solomon Academy is an exciting place to learn. Staff provide a wealth of interesting experiences. The curriculum is designed to ensure that from the moment children set foot in the nursery, their needs are analysed. Their starting point 'on the mountain' is established and a path through the whole academy is mapped out in order to prepare them for university and beyond. The academy is very successful in fulfilling this ambition with many students being offered places at top universities."

"In lessons, teachers' strong subject knowledge and its presentation ensure that pupils know more and remember more. Pupils expect to engage with the lesson from the moment the teacher greets them at the classroom door. Routines are very well established so starts and transitions are swift and orderly. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour too. Consequently, pupils settle down to work without fuss and stick to their tasks, so that lessons are conducted in a purposeful manner."

"Relationships throughout the entire learning community are very productive. These motivate pupils and staff to become excited about their learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and attend regularly"

"Staff development is a strength. Structures for developing staff are highly advanced through focused professional development programmes. The Great Teacher Rubric (GTR) is designed to be a holistic tool to support teachers and leaders to understand where they are in their practice. A personalised approach enables staff to keep up to date."

"Pupils achieve very well at King Solomon Academy. Children now make a strong start to their education in the EYFS. Weak achievement is now assigned to the past. Children are now making far more rapid progress as a result of a carefully planned curriculum that helps them to learn well. The quality of teaching is much improved. Involving parents more effectively with children's home learning is helping teachers to plan better for children's needs. Children are now being much better prepared for Year 1."

"Young children make a prompt start when learning to read. Staff have very good skills to teach phonics well. The proportion of pupils achieving the national phonics screening check is very high. Teachers build pupils' knowledge in small steps. Where pupils fall behind, adults support them to catch up quickly. The books pupils read are matched to their reading knowledge. This develops pupils' confidence and motivation in reading."

"At Key Stage 2, evidence in pupils' work books and in lessons show that the strategies that the academy has used in recent years to improve pupils' progress are having a considerable impact."

“Pupils’ progress at Key Stage 4 is remarkable. Across a range of subjects, pupils make exceedingly good progress. Both girls and boys make exceptional progress compared to their peers nationally. Disadvantaged pupils attain and achieve much better than other pupils nationally.”

“Leaders have developed an appropriate offer of subjects for students in the sixth form to meet the needs of students. Consequently, students study the subjects they enjoy and want to learn more about. Nearly all go on to higher education, other training or employment. Students value the support they receive from their teachers highly. They are confident and respectful and strong ambassadors for the academy.”

“Leaders have a strong overview of pupils with SEND. Teachers are quick to identify when pupils struggle. They act quickly to plan small steps in learning that help pupils with SEND achieve well.”

“The academy operates a ‘no excuses’ culture for disadvantaged pupils. The academy also recognises pupils who have been identified as being at an educational disadvantage but may not be eligible for government funding. These pupils are supported out of the academy’s main budget. Pupils have equal access to sport, music, trips and residential. The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils is considerable better than other pupils nationally. The proportion of pupils following and being successful at Ebacc subjects is well above national benchmarks. The academy places a strong emphasis on attendance for all pupils but especially disadvantaged pupils. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is above national averages for all pupils nationally.”

We discussed and agreed the following actions steps from the review:

- Even better if leaders at all levels celebrated more effectively what the academy does well and developed an executive summary narrative that highlights these many strengths (in process from November onwards)
- Even better if all teachers developed a better understanding of the responsibility they have for promoting careers within their subjects (Careers Week, HT3 Wk 5)
- Even better if teachers planned learning experiences to meet the academic needs of all pupils and used close intentional monitoring to adjust the learning journey when needed and pupils carried more of the cognitive load by doing more of the thinking to ensure knowledge and skills are retained. (Professional development priority in the academy development plan)
- Even better if succession planning for leaders of additional needs was strengthened (Deputy SENCo appointed in primary in Nov 2019; advertising for a new Head of Primary Inclusion in Jan 2020).