

Overview of school improvement activities

The An Daras Trust recognises that school improvement initiatives are not just a tool for accountability but also a key driver for initiating, supporting, and embedding effective practice within each school. The school improvement programme is designed to maximise impact on pupils' achievement and add value to the curriculum provision. The strategy model is structured around establishing sustainable school improvement 'building blocks' of capacity, consistency and clarity in school operations, delivered through interlinked improvement strategies informed by the Trust.

Central to effective school improvement work is a focus on the education that pupils are actually receiving day-by-day. This is best achieved through visits to lessons, work scrutiny and discussions with pupils. This enables Academy Improvement Officers (AIOs) to explore first-hand how education flows from intention to implementation to impact within the school. As a result, AIOs are able to secure the necessary evidence to identify the precise strengths and weaknesses and the key priorities for school improvement going forward.

Visits to lessons are designed to be developmental and supportive and are undertaken within the guidelines and expectations set out by the Trust. They are carried out with professionalism, integrity, and courtesy. Key findings are evaluated objectively and reported accurately and fairly. AIOs will usually undertake lesson visits with school leaders. AIOs will seek to evaluate where a lesson sits within a sequence, and teachers' understanding of this. AIOs will not make graded judgements on individual lessons. Visits to lessons enable AIOs to see first-hand how teachers are imparting new knowledge and skills and enabling pupils to embed these in their long-term memories and apply them in more complex tasks. In addition, lesson visits also provide evidence around key areas such as teachers' subject knowledge; the use of assessment; how pupil misconceptions are addressed; the level of challenge; how pupils are building on their prior knowledge and skills; and pupils behaviour and attitudes.

Evidence gathered from lesson visits will always be triangulated through work scrutiny. AIOs will be using this approach to check that pupils' books show that what the school sets out to teach has indeed been covered. School leaders are always encouraged to participate in this activity. Work scrutiny can provide valuable evidence to show whether pupils know more, remember more, and can do more, giving a detailed insight into the quality of pupils' work across the curriculum. AIOs will always review several workbooks per subject and year group to ensure that the findings from any sampling are realistic and meaningful. Workbooks from significant groups, such as pupils with SEND and the most disadvantaged, will always be included in the sample.

Discussions with pupils offers a valuable insight into how well teaching is embedding key knowledge and skills in pupil's long-term memories. AIOs will start this discussion with an initial focus on the learning that has taken place in the lessons visited, before moving on to ascertain what pupils remember from previous content that has been taught. Discussions with pupils will often be used to explore other aspects of the school's work such as safeguarding, behaviour and extra-curricular opportunities.

The specific focus of school improvement visits are informed by the Trust's rigorous analysis of each school's performance, based on a range of internal and external risk assessment checks. Central to this work is a detailed evaluation of school assessment information, including pupils' progress and attainment at key benchmarks (e.g. EYFS profile; Year 1 phonics check; end of KS1 & 2 assessments). MAT wide improvement priorities are explored systematically as part of each school improvement visit (e.g. improving pupils' achievement in reading and maths; securing curriculum coherence; and ensuring that there is a strong curriculum offer for pupils with SEND and the most disadvantaged).