QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR DANECOURT SCHOOL

Name of School:	Danecourt School
Headteacher/Principal:	Cathryn Falconer
Hub:	London Special School and AP Hub
School phase:	Special 4 to 11 Years
MAT (if applicable):	Maritime Academy Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Not applicable
Date of this Review:	29/03/2023
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Not Applicable
Date of last QA Review:	21/03/2022
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	05/06/2019

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Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers agree that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels	Not applicable
Quality of provision and outcomes	Not applicable
AND	
Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs	
Area of excellence	Not applicable
Previously accredited valid areas of excellence	Not Applicable
Overall peer evaluation estimate	Not applicable

The Quality Assurance Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.

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1. Context and character of the school

Danecourt school is a large specialist primary school, with three sites in Medway, Kent. The early years foundation stage (EYFS), has 24 pupils at Featherby. Bligh has 36 Key Stage 2 pupils. The Danecourt site has provision for the remaining 182 pupils, from Year 1 to Year 6.

Approaching the main school, the small frontage fools the casual observer as to the size of the school. From an original 1960s build, the school has been extended again and again, with further expansion planned. Behind the small school reception lies a site containing 18 class bases, a range of specialist sensory and therapy rooms, dining and sports halls, a 'fizzy' suite for therapists, a nurture provision, sensory gardens, forest areas, an extensive school field, multiple playgrounds, and a myriad of outdoor learning areas. These are all connected by a warren of corridors showcasing pupils' work.

Each pupil's progress is dependent on the deep relationships that they have with the adults across the school. Pupils coming to the school know it's a safe and caring environment. The dignity with which staff support each pupil is remarkable. Pupils call out to staff across the day, to say hello and share their excitement at their learning. Visitors might even get a cheery 'Hello Mate!', if they're lucky.

Reflecting special school national averages, there are many more boys than girls at Danecourt. Almost half of the pupils receive pupil premium. All of the pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). The most common primary diagnosis on pupils' EHCPs is autism.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Since coming into post, the headteacher has revised and extended the leadership team. Some of the members of the extended leadership team are fairly new to post, but this is counterbalanced by their previous experience across a range of specialist settings and multi-agency roles. This diversified team is well placed to ensure that the school responds to the changing complexity of the pupil cohort, in an agile and proactive way.
- Leaders at Danecourt have expanded the therapy team in recent years. Currently, there are two speech and language therapists, one occupational therapist and two therapy assistants. Leaders' vision is that each pupil's therapeutic input should happen in the daily lessons, wherever possible. Through this planned intent, leaders are reassured that pupils don't miss out on their learning, and an integrated therapeutic curriculum is achieved.

- Leaders have recognised that the pedagogy used in the more complex pathways, 'engage' and 'explore', can be challenging for other professionals to understand. To help this understanding, classroom doors often have a checklist for visitors to explain what the learning may well look like. In this way, anyone visiting or working within a class can recognise and share in each pupil's incremental successes.
- Leaders have gone down a research route to ensure that each classroom environment matches and supports pupils' needs. For example, in the explore pathway the environment may be uncluttered, deliberately diminishing arousal, with small work groups ebbing and flowing as needed. In the engage pathway, classrooms may have attached a calming sensory room and a crash room to help pupils regulate their senses, and get the most from each school day. These will be matched with zoned learning areas, including Teacch booths and EYFS style continuous provision. In this way the pupils are guaranteed the opportunity to succeed in a way that recognises their complex needs.
- Leaders know they need to work with parents and carers to help them understand the hard work their children are undertaking in school. This is especially the case since the pandemic, when parents and carers stopped coming onto the school site. To remedy this, stay and learn sessions enable parents and carers to have an opportunity to come into the classroom and take an active role alongside their children. This means that parents can become accustomed to the learning environment, be exposed to the communication systems being used, and have a common language to celebrate their children's success.
- Leaders are tenacious in ensuring that each pupil's targets match the levels they are working at. Unfortunately, the opportunities to adapt and amend EHCPs isn't as timely as it could be. Consequently, leaders address these targets at annual reviews and keep evidential logs. These logs then show the tenacity leaders have in ensuring each pupil's learning remains consistently aspirational.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if…

…the school's website and self-evaluation form had greater detail explaining the exceptional cohort and specialist provision at Danecourt.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well…

- With 24 teachers and a staff of more than 150, Danecourt is a school where staff development is key to pupils' success. Each class team member has specific training to ensure they have the right skills to support their pupils best. This could be in relation to the pupil's communication needs and/or specific aspects of the pupil's diagnosis. For example, helping pupils with Downs syndrome to access

their learning without stress, and specific medical training such as gastro peg feeding. As one colleague explained, ‘There are development options all the time. If we ask for it, extra support or training is available. There’s always opportunities to develop yourself at Danecourt’.

- The curriculum offer is consistently evolving. There are three curriculum pathways, ‘engage’, ‘explore’ and ‘enquire’. As the pupils’ needs become more complex year-on-year, the amount of pupils in each pathway has changed. Most pupils are now in the most complex ‘engage’ pathway, while the fewest pupils are in the ‘enquire’ pathway. The number of pupils in this more cognitively able pathway is reducing each year.
- In each class, pupils have a progress tracker. The tracker has two aspects. One aspect links to the outcomes statement in each pupil’s EHCP, section F. These are then backchained into manageable steps for the pupils to work on every day. The second aspect is more subject based and links to individual targets pupils are working on, for example in PE or mathematics. When each pupil achieves an aspect of their progress tracker, teachers tick off their success, and share in the celebration with the pupil of their great work.
- Person centred learning plans explain more about the individual child, including their diagnosis and the best ways to support them with their learning. These high quality documents are the real measures that record the progress pupils make, celebrated beyond the school, with weekly online updates for parents and carers.
- Danecourt has fidelity to a recognised phonics programme, but fewer pupils are becoming fluent readers year-on-year. This reflects the increasing complexity of pupils joining the school. Consequently, the love of reading is incredibly important for this community, including the joy of a shared story. The school has invested in reading corners for the classes where pupils can access these, and high quality interactive texts that can be enjoyed at school, or at home.
- For the range of pupils’ needs at the school, medium term plans now recognise key vocabulary for each aspect of the subjects taught. For some, these include text. For others, whole word reading as in the See and Learn programme and for others, key Makaton signs are used. In this way a core vocabulary spine is being developed for each pupil, in each pathway, matching individual needs.
- The school council is phenomenal, and showcases the power of the integrated therapeutic offer. These meetings are facilitated by a higher level teaching assistant and a therapy assistant. For the meeting they prepare a Teacch schedule. Pupils have individual packs to share answers to binary questions along with their photos to show where they are sitting, with other pupils joining from other sites via Google meet. Pupils share what they love about Danecourt and explain, ‘I love it here because everyone is kind’.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if…

…colleagues strengthened the articulation explaining the intricacies of the carefully chosen pedagogy in use at Danecourt.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well…

- Across Danecourt, pupils benefit from a total communication approach. This means that teachers understand the need to not just be reliant on speech, but also deciding the best scaffolding to support communication. This could include objects of reference, photographs, single symbols, single symbols with single words, backed up by Makaton signing to match the spoken language used.
- When pupils join the school, their stress often reduces, and they make strong progress. Teachers skilfully use pre-reading and pre-writing checklists to help decide when to move pupils onto the next level. In this way pupils benefit quickly from the boost joining the school can bring. As one parent explained, 'It's a massive relief. It's life changing for us. It's just amazing to see the independence the children are developing. The school doesn't only nurture the children but us, the parents as well'.
- For all pupils transitions are challenging. Often, pupils have had a poor time in their previous schools and have not flourished. Once at Danecourt, staff recognise the need to ensure that there are smooth transitions either from EYFS into Key Stage 1 or from Key Stage 2 to their specialist high school placements. To help facilitate this, leaders link with new provisions sharing the best ways to help pupils access their new schools. They also recognise the need to support families within these processes. This year, the school is undertaking a pilot to visit all the pupils in their homes to help prepare for this.
- For pupils in receipt of pupil premium, leaders undertake a series of checks and measures to ensure that the progress of these pupils matches, or exceeds, the rest of the cohort. Included within this is the school's drive to increase the attendance for pupils at school, with a separately commissioned company supporting the process. This has led to the school often achieving higher attendance than their mainstream counterparts.

4.2 Quality of Provision and Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if…

…leaders had even more opportunities to share with their local academy trust information pertinent to the cohort, to help them understand the school better.

5. Area of Excellence

Not applicable on this visit.

6. What additional support would the school like from the Challenge Partners network, either locally or nationally?

For Challenge Partner's to facilitate more special schools working groups, for example, one looking at the challenges faced by the sector with a more complex cohort, year-on-year.

This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.

Schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website.