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 - primary
MAT (if applicable):	Maritime Academy Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	N/A
Date of this Review:	19/06/2024
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	N/A
Date of last QA Review	29/03/2024
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	05/06/2019

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	School leaders chose not to have estimates.
Quality of provision and outcomes	N/A
AND	
Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs	
Area of excellence	N/A
Previously accredited valid areas of excellence	N/A
Overall peer evaluation estimate	N/A

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.

Please note that Challenge Partners is a school improvement charity and not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding procedures, handling or behaviour policies, however, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' Safeguarding Policy and report any concerns.

1. Context and character of the school

Danecourt school is a large specialist primary school spread across three sites in Medway, Kent. Each site has its own purpose whilst retaining the Danecourt identity. This is important because the school recognises that continuity and familiarity in a safe, caring environment is vital to pupils with complex needs. Whether pupils are at the Early Years (Year R) site at Featherby (Gillingham), the Key Stage 2 provision at Bligh (Rochester) or the main site at Danecourt (Gillingham), for pupils between Year 1 and 6, the values which drive the school are in evidence both visually and in staff interactions with others. The aim is for pupils at Danecourt to feel safe and happy no matter the setting and for them to know that each day they will be greeted by a familiar and smiling face.

The placement of Key Stage 2 pupils is determined by how well pupils are able to regulate themselves. Pupils who can do so more independently are able to access a more academically-focussed curriculum housed at Bligh which annexes a self-contained site with a primary school of the same name. Those that need more support with regulation or personal care stay at the main site, following the same curriculum with subtle and nuanced adaptations. This is done in careful consultation with parents so that the best interests of the child are always met.

Three quarters of the population are boys. All are pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and have educational, health and care plans (EHCPs) with autism as the main area of need. Almost half the population is disadvantaged. However, the school has noticed an increasing trend of social, emotional and health and speech and language needs related secondary diagnoses coming through since the pandemic.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The headteacher has built a dynamic and proactive leadership team, driven by strong ethical values with a diverse array of knowledge from the specialist provision and mainstream sectors. This is complemented and enhanced further with a therapeutic expert who has interwoven best practice in this area into the curriculum offer. Governors and trust leaders quality assure the school by evidencing agreed outcomes against the key priorities of the school development plan.

- The distributed leadership model empowers the development of experts and champions that enable high quality in-house continual professional development (CPD) to improve staff expertise. For instance, all staff have a thorough two-week induction period before fully accessing their role. Knowledge is cascaded through a universal offer of Makaton, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and sensory circuits via coaching and peer modelling, all of which are part of induction. The large layer (94) of teaching assistants benefit enormously from this and are able to support pupils proactively as a result. This also supports their own progression and the schools 'grow your own' policy. Higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) have their own specific programme supplemented by joint observations with leaders.
- Leaders have established a highly positive climate for learning. They do this by using shared language to communicate high expectations. They encourage pupils to 'shine like stars' around the five points of being: self-reliant, a team player, aspirational, resilient and successful. Adults reinforce this to celebrate success with pupils, for example 'I did it on my own!' to recognise self-reliance in an activity.
- The school engages well within the trust community and other specialist schools. Expertise is shared across the trust and used to support SEND pupils in mainstream provision. The school also works with other providers and institutions to further develop and hone its own classroom practice. For instance, they are working with the University of Kent to develop a story that focuses on self-strategies for pupils with language needs.
- Character development is at the core of the curriculum and runs through distinct curriculum areas called 'drivers'. In all these areas the pupils' individual needs are paramount and learning always relates back to EHCP driven milestones that are derived from targets. 'Shining like a star' is the embodiment of this.
- Pupils' transition is deliberately planned for every child as they prepare them carefully for change. This considers movement to another site if the needs of the pupil change, as well as moving between pathways or simply moving up a year. There is a graduated handover process between teachers, involving parents, that ensures continuity of provision. Equally, when transitioning to secondary provision or another provider, the greatest care and attention are given to make it a successful experience for the pupils which reflects how invested the staff are with them.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if…

- … the school strengthened the offer for families and emphasised shared language, star values, routines and expectations, allowing opportunities for feedback that informs assessment.
- … the school enhanced the CPD offer for teaching assistants further so that they become more expert at delivering and adapting the curriculum to meet pupils' specific needs.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is built on putting the needs of its pupils first and meeting them where they are. From their starting points, each pupil receives a personalised curriculum that is built around three, soon to be four, pathways. These pathways aim to develop the communication, personal, social, physical and cognitive skills, interwoven with stage appropriate Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and National Curriculum subject knowledge and skills.
- The 'engage' pathway is for those with the most complex needs; most pupils take the 'explore' pathway and those that are more able follow the 'enquire' pathway.
- The curriculum is split into distinct areas called 'drivers' which deliver a balanced and broad range of learning designed to help pupils learn functional subject knowledge. The driver curriculums complement substantive knowledge with a strong personal development element at its core so that pupils are ready for the next steps when they leave Danecourt.
- Leaders continue to prioritise early reading and ensure that pupils on different pathways have the right input as a result of universal and targeted training for staff. This means that there is consistency across the school in delivery and fidelity to the new phonics scheme which is firmly in place. More able pupils at Bligh are also focussing on a Year 2 fluency programme. For instance, a pupil was able to apply her phonics prior learning to blend a word successfully that she found tricky. Teachers engage with families by sending matched texts home.
- Teachers plan collaboratively in their 'driver' teams. This enables staff expertise in specific areas to permeate all curriculum planning. For instance, in every classroom on all three sites therapeutic and sensory circuit equipment is used consistently well to help pupils focus and regulate. Pupils use a variety of resources and strategies, such as smart sacks, smile therapy and sensory feel stations. As a result, pupils were immersed in their activities and able to engage with their learning.

- Adults encourage and plan for collaborative learning and teamwork in classrooms. This was particularly strong in a chemical reactions' experiment in a Key Stage 2 'enquire' class. Consequently, pupils shared and learned from each other's predictions.
- Daily routines, such as sensory circuits, help pupils start lessons well. This is taken further in EYFS where routines and structure based on highly effective practice are skilfully adapted to meet pupils' needs and interests. Over time, this helps pupils begin to predict 'what's next' and be ready for transitions between activities.
- Over the last year leaders have taken the decision to move away from a quantitative to a qualitative recording model. They have adopted a recording platform from a partner school based around a carefully planned assessment cycle to capture termly progress against EHCP targets, driver targets and learning skills centred on numeracy and literacy. Target trackers are personalised and link back to EHCP targets. Evidence is captured daily and feeds into baseline, mid and end of year assessment points.
- Assessment informs pupil progress meetings and provides the basis for extra support and/ or adaptations for pupils, with leaders' decisions focussed on pupils' learning and next steps. Leaders quality assure the evidence against 'drop ins', peer and more formal observations. Where there is a need, leaders will often model best practice.
- Detailed learning plans are available for all staff, enabling all adults to capture the small steps of progress against specific targets derived from EHCPs. This progress is shared weekly with families.
- Danecourt is a happy school where pupils are greeted warmly every morning by staff who also celebrate their successes as they depart at the end of the day. This is reflected in attendance figures that are consistently well above the national average for SEND pupils.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if…

… teaching teams extended the total communication approach outside the classroom, such as through signing and communication books and alerts.
… teachers empowered all adults to show initiative and adapt in the moment to ensure that all pupils are engaged in planned learning.
… teaching teams continued to facilitate play through well-resourced activities, linking sensory exploration with contextual play.

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

- The PSHE programme is a vital constituent of pupils' personalised learning at Danecourt. It is mainly delivered through the wellbeing 'driver' but is also in every 'driver' curriculum area of the school. For instance, listening and attention in the communication 'driver' or British values in the community 'driver' life are examples of how it permeates the curriculum offer. This was evident in all lessons where pupils were presented with an array of opportunities through thoughtful task design. For example, in a Key Stage 2 engage class, pupils were turn taking in an Attention Autism (AA) task; this well-rehearsed structure enabled pupils to wait patiently.
- Established routines and other structures, such as sensory circuits in all classes, enable pupils to be calm and regulated or seek appropriately resourced spaces in classrooms to self-regulate. Pupils in EYFS are taught explicitly how to begin to use Zones of Regulation to self-regulate, using the language of emotion, such as happy and/ or sad, to communicate their feelings and needs.
- In almost every activity, there is an opportunity to develop pupils' independence by design. For instance, in EYFS and Key Stage 1 classes pupils are encouraged to wash faces or brush teeth and these are supplemented with visual reminders.
- The school council uses a set agenda format planned a term in advance but released weekly to give every student a voice to explore things happening in the world around one big question. For instance, national refugee week becomes 'where do I live?' and 'What is my place in the world?' leading to more complex questions. This enables pupils to understand their place in the world in terms they can relate to.
- This is all underpinned by the reward system where pupils are encouraged to 'shine like stars'. Every small step is celebrated and recorded to help pupils take the next small step and become more independent. Adults capture this well which allows the subsequent informed planning to help develop pupils' communication, life and independent working skills, whilst building confidence and security.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for PHSE (agreed school focus)- Even better if…

- No EBI was identified.

5. Area of Excellence

The school did not propose an area of excellence for this review.

Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse report content to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector each year.

For further support following your QA Review, 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 (SLP) 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.(https://www.challengepartners.org/)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit)