QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR DANECOURT

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

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Not applicable
Date of this Review:	21/03/2022
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Not applicable
Date of last QA Review	21/06/2021
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	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 is a special school catering for pupils aged 5 to 11. The school joined the Maritime Academy Trust in September 2020. It remains the only special school in the Trust. Recently, there has been much leadership change.

Currently, there are 234 pupils on roll. This represents significant growth over recent years. Two satellite provisions have been established – at Bligh and Featherby. This year two early careers teachers, along with two newly qualified teachers, work in the school.

The school's designation is for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and/or autistic spectrum disorders. However, there is an increasing number of pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

The majority of pupils are White British. There are more boys than girls at the school. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average.

The headteacher has been in post since January 2019. The two deputy headteachers took up their posts in September 2021.

Pupils follow one of three tracks through the Danecourt curriculum. These are: Engage (pre-formal learning); Explore (semi-formal learning); and Enquire (formal learning).

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders continually demonstrate their commitment to pupils at Danecourt. This positivity has continued despite the turbulence caused by the pandemic. Systems and processes are in place. Leaders recognise that in many cases they have not had the space or time to embed provision; for example, leaders' learning from a review of higher-level teaching assistants has yet to feed into teaching development.
- Senior leaders recognise the importance of distributing roles and responsibilities amongst staff. Consequently, they have sought to empower leaders, both in subjects (such as English and mathematics) and other aspects of provision (such as personalised learning). A range of leaders is now contributing well to school improvement work.
- Leaders have clarified the purpose of their improvement planning documentation. They articulate well how each leader contributes to the wording of priorities, through each informing the process with monitoring detail. Each leader then considers how their responsibilities can contribute towards ambition, articulating

this via more specific action planning work.

- Senior and middle leaders articulate their vision for Danecourt clearly. In respect of leadership, they recognise how an empowered staff will be well equipped to deliver on this ambition. Consequently, over the last two years, a coaching model has been developed. Leaders, trained in coaching, consult with staff to come to an agreement on how teaching practice can be further developed. This has led to strong pedagogy identified and celebrated, with such successes shared with colleagues.
- Middle leaders benefit from the support of senior leaders. Trusting relationships are evident. An example relates to the leadership of mathematics, with the subject leader drawing on knowledge gleaned from being part of networks, such as a local mathematics hub. All leaders demonstrate their commitment to their own learning by engaging in a range of professional development work, including national professional qualifications.
- Trust colleagues are keen to learn from Danecourt, as all other Trust schools serve primary mainstream pupils. Consequently, leaders understand that governors to be appointed at Danecourt need to acquire and apply knowledge about how best to assure themselves that the curriculum offer is effective. Trust colleagues possess pertinent knowledge about special school provision and so are well placed to support.
- Leaders' knowledge about each curriculum track is developing well. Leaders are clarifying what it means for a pupil to make strong progress through each track. This will involve a balance of communication, behavioural and academic attention.
- Leaders carry out a range of monitoring to inform their evaluation work. Recently, learning walks focused on staff's use of assessment. This provided leaders with evidence about how well the different methods were working and, subsequently, the extent to which they were fit for purpose.
- Pupils have always enjoyed the Danecourt provision. This is evidenced by the high attendance rates, both before and after the pandemic. Parents recognise the value that leaders place on forming and sustaining positive parental partnerships. The parent partnership leader facilitates activities to foster this engagement, for example, setting up curriculum workshops. Following the last Challenge Partners' review, leaders have strengthened communication between the school and homes. Parents voiced their appreciation of termly track newsletters, which support parents in enriching home learning.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if…

…(now that leadership capacity and staffing stability is being secured), senior leaders strategically thought through how leadership roles connect, resulting in subsequent improvement work thriving.
…leaders clarified the purposes of monitoring and evaluation work and subsequently developed a self-evaluation form that was fit for purpose.
…governance was strengthened through the appointment of governors who are committed to the school and willing to learn.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Pupils enjoy a happy and vibrant start to the school day. Following, for many, long journeys into school, pupils know how they will be greeted and what they can expect when entering their classrooms. This is because staff adhere to routines which suit the learning needs of each class.
- Routines are embedded. All classroom staff use their secure knowledge about each pupil to ensure that learning each day balances the need to keep each pupil safe and secure with the risk in exposing pupils to experiences which will benefit them today and in their future lives. Pupils trust staff, which in turn promotes strong relationships.
- Pupils in every class are encouraged to be independent. Consequently, they make their own decisions - such as opting to take time out of learning and, once regulated to join back in. Staff recognise when pupils behave in such ways and so reward, rather than sanction, them. This further enhances the trusting relationships that exist.
- Classroom staff are well supported by a range of professionals, including the in-house speech and language therapist. They carefully consider options available, for example, in addressing a pupil's sensory needs before implementing agreed strategies. Information is captured in each pupil's person-centred learning plan, which is used to inform teaching practice. Consequently, as an example, staff and pupils use specific visuals to support regulation.
- Staff understand the importance of vocabulary. As a result, they use specific words in their day-to-day work and expect, where appropriate, pupils to also use the vocabulary to convey their thoughts. In one lesson, the teacher took the time to check that pupils understood 'whisper' before facilitating a game of 'Chinese whispers'.
- Pupils know how to conduct themselves well. They use various strategies, including zones of regulation, to self-regulate. They also show positive attitudes to learning, often demonstrating a love of learning. One pupil was passionate about offering her opinion, recognising that she needed to keep her emotions in hand. Another pupil experienced a 'boom' moment by showing sustained attention when

exploring shaving foam. In all such examples, communication strategies were employed effectively.

- Leaders understand the importance of teaching assistants (TAs) in the Danecourt provision. In some classrooms, it is difficult to identify the teacher, as TAs provide effective support for individual pupils. This is because they know what they need to do to support a particular pupil. Such fluency in classrooms means that there is little overt direction provided by the teacher.
- Recently, a nationally recognised well-being award was achieved. This acknowledges the cohesive culture in which all staff can develop – both personally and professionally. Classroom practice across all sites benefits from carefully selected professional development. Generic development work is also effective, with all staff understanding why a positive reinforcement behavioural approach benefits pupils.
- Staff remain calm when pupils struggle to regulate their conduct. Staff know which strategies to employ for each pupil, such as applying pressure to limbs which relaxes the pupil. Consequently, pupils are able to quickly re-engage with their learning.
- Parents recognise the ways in which the Danecourt curriculum is enriched. Pupils experience a range of planned activities which support their learning. Activities include horse-riding, hydrotherapy and cycling. As a result, pupils' mental and physical well-being benefits.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if…

…all teachers and TAs continuously reflected on their teaching to ensure that pupils maximise progress.
…every adult used agreed strategies, including communication, with each child as and when required.

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

- Leaders have a clear understanding of what is meant by excellent teaching. Classroom staff are developing a similar understanding through their work with leaders. Such detail is helpful when colleagues talk about teaching effectiveness. Leaders are developing curriculum handbooks, which will enable information to be captured.
- Teachers benefit from attending pupil progress meetings, where a range of professionals (including speech and language) contribute their expertise to the dialogue. In turn, each pupil benefits as teaching is modified according to how well the pupil is progressing through the curriculum. This, along with other leadership processes, inform performance management objectives for individual

staff.

- Classroom staff benefit from a well-thought-out induction programme. Leaders reflected on the previous induction process and recognised that staff would benefit from more time to understand provision at Danecourt and their role within it. Hence, this has been actioned. Staff talk positively about their initial start at the school. This is important given the relatively high number of new staff appointed, owing to the growth in pupil numbers.
- Given the school context, leaders recognise the importance of encouraging staff to look outwards in order to learn from relevant research and reading. Staff value leaders' encouragement to do this, knowing they can access information via the National College, for example.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if…

…teachers used their knowledge about assessment systems and frameworks to inform subsequent teaching.

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

Leaders at Danecourt will seek to use the Challenge Partners' network more fully.

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.