



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR
THE COURTYARD SCHOOL

Name of School:	The Courtyard School
Head teacher:	Deborah Shepherd
Hub:	London Special and AP Hub
School type:	Free Special Academy

Estimate at this QA Review:	OUTSTANDING
Date of this Review:	06/03/2019
Estimate at last QA Review:	GOOD
Date of last QA Review:	21/02/2018
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	GOOD
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	09/05/2017



Quality Assurance Review

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

School Improvement Strategies	OUTSTANDING
Outcomes for Students	OUTSTANDING
Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment	OUTSTANDING
Overall Estimate	OUTSTANDING

Please note that a Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Review is not equivalent to an Ofsted inspection, and agreed estimates from the review are not equivalent to Ofsted judgements.

1. Context and character of the school

This special school admits students aged 14 -19. All students have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) relating to their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Students mainly have social emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) related to the autistic spectrum and often linked to speech, language and communication difficulties.

The school roll is 36 students. About half of current students are disadvantaged and about a third speak English as an additional language. Most students join Courtyard having experienced difficulties in mainstream secondary education. Many stay on into the sixth form which currently accounts for half the total on roll. A few members of the sixth form joined in Year 12.

The senior leadership team (SLT) is an established group. Middle leader roles have developed more recently.

The school has strong links with other special schools and some mainstream secondary schools, particularly St Mary Magdalene.

In its busy life, as well as hosting the review, the school celebrated World Book Day. It also provided a venue for a minister of education to visit and make a televised announcement about government policy relating to special education.

2.1 School Improvement Strategies - Progress from previous EBIs

The development plan is clearly laid out with deadlines and measurable success criteria.

2.2 School Improvement Strategies - What went well

- Strategic leadership is setting very clear directions for continuous improvement. Several years of success in readjusting the prospects of students whose needs could not be met in mainstream, have given leaders confidence in the Courtyard approach.
- Students receive high quality teaching which develops their independent skills. Leaders secure and maintain high quality by frequently observing teaching, feeding back and agreeing with the teacher on 'even better ifs'. Leaders discuss how to develop teaching to meet students' needs based on these individual observations. Selected features become the focus for after-school professional development sessions, sometimes led by external experts, sometimes by members of staff. Recently, trios of teachers have joined together in peer observation, reflection and developmental practice, following up these whole-school meetings.
- Another demonstration of how leadership reflects and brings about change is the greater emphasis on measuring social communication, emotional regulation and independence (SCERI) skills. It has been a core purpose at Courtyard since the school began to help students adjust their response to the external world. However, rather than developing students informally, there is now a defined and systematic approach which seeks to measure how well individuals are adjusting.

- To support social development, courses and qualifications group together to form the PAIL (preparation for adult independent life) curriculum. This provides a common pathway for students while flexibly allowing them to pursue other academic studies for which they have a talent.
- Middle leaders are involved in strategic development because they write action plans for their area of responsibility. Senior leaders check these plans frequently in meetings.
- There is a culture of sharing expertise. A teacher researching for a masters degree has led CPD. The school's speech and language therapist has become so integral to the school's development that she spends time in lessons observing students in action and suggesting ways of improving learning. Her introduction of Blank's analysis of questioning is helping staff to question students effectively. Leaders researched then introduced a dyslexia-friendly scheme which is improving students' confidence and comprehension in reading.
- The leader of sixth form won the Islington education award for 'special educator of the year'. Her development of work experience placements is exceptional. She prepares students for interviews, using external contacts. She helps employers understand how people with autism can contribute, sometimes at high level, within the work place. She now has a growing network of opportunities for students, as more employers become involved.

2.3 School Improvement Strategies - Even better if...

...alongside the summary of qualifications gained, leaders developed a profile of each pupil's gains in SCERI skills.

3.1 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - Progress from previous EBIs

Students respond well to being set challenging work because of the different kinds of support teachers provide.

3.2 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - What went well

- Teachers are conscious of students' SCERI targets. They encourage students, including those with high prior attainment, to have confidence and make independent progress in their learning. A student was confident to point out that the teacher's sentence illustrating alliteration also contained hyperbole.
- Lessons are well planned. Usually, a joint activity reinforces previous learning and focuses on the task ahead, before students work independently or in small groups. Scaffolded steps or examples remain displayed on whiteboards to guide students. These reference points contribute strongly to students' confidence and progress.
- Teachers take great care to match support to individuals' different needs and responses. In an English lesson, the teacher constantly checked and encouraged one student. She unobtrusively checked the progress of another, just intervening

briefly to praise and add a more demanding step. Role-modelling of respect and consideration for individuals by teachers has a strong influence on students' attitudes towards each other.

- When tackling a joint lesson-activity, the Courtyard's emphasis on social and communication skills helps students to engage constructively. For all students, developing this capability for engaging with others is a vital part of learning. In a sixth form discussion about life-changing moments, one student went into great depth about how a complicated medical operation had affected her. Her partner warmly appreciated both her nervousness and relief. The support resource of an 'emotions board' helped her partner in finding the right responses.
- Mixing students in class on a 'stage not age' basis often results in older students taking on a mentor role to younger ones, applying the knowledge they have gained over a longer period. Indeed, one former student is now working in class as a teaching assistant and eliciting excellent responses from more reluctant learners. One student, initially hovering near the doorway, became increasingly drawn to working alongside him.
- Students' books provide evidence of engagement and progress in a range of learning. The school policy of using a marking template that seeks students' responses helps students take responsibility for their own progress.
- The Courtyard puts great emphasis on making links with the world outside school. Going to mainstream school lessons is a challenge some can cope with. Others participate in a Shakespeare festival. Gaining work-experience placements for sixth formers is a very important part of their learning experience.
- Staff and students joined in dressing up to celebrate World Book Day. Besides being fun, this illustrated how Courtyard encourages students, who are often rather quiet, to feel at ease with drawing attention to themselves.

3.3 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - Even better if...

...because teaching is effective and previous learning is consolidated, teachers sometimes more rapidly engaged students in the main task.

4. Outcomes for Students

- Students arrive in school with skills and knowledge considerably below what is expected for their age. This is because students have experienced difficulties in their previous education. It takes them time to readjust to a positive attitude to education. Staying on into the sixth form, as the great majority do, provides additional time (in some cases continuing to Year 14) for this readjustment.
- Courtyard takes account of students' achievement at the end of primary education to gauge their potential capabilities. Secondary data is usually less reliable as learning has been interrupted and regressive. It is unlikely, for example, that high prior attainers at primary will be able to make up lost ground quickly because of their SEMH needs. Therefore, the school has a policy of flexible entry for a wide range of qualifications, as and when students are ready to take them.
- A successful outcome for many students is to gain functional skills qualifications

at level one or two in English and mathematics quite early in Year 10 or 11. Students gain confidence in the skills they have demonstrated.

- Another highly successful outcome reflects the interest and skills that many students have in computing. Last year ten of the eleven students entered gained a level 3 qualification.
- GCSEs in English and mathematics are usually taken in the sixth form. All students entered gain a grade. Last year about half gained grade four or above in mathematics and three-quarters did so in English.
- In terms of qualifications gained, there is no gap between disadvantaged students or those who have English as an additional language and their peers.
- Over the past few years, progress in English has been stronger than in mathematics. This year English skills have developed further through a newly introduced dyslexia-friendly reading scheme. Ideas and methods introduced by a new mathematics specialist are showing promise in terms of closing the gap.
- Some students attend courses as varied as biology and dance in mainstream secondary schools. Courtyard makes sure that every student has every opportunity to achieve in as wide a range of ways as possible.
- Over time, some students have entered for different AQA or BTec qualifications that offer success in a range of vocational or life skills courses. Courtyard has rationalised the selection into a Preparation for Adult Life (PAIL) course that all students access.
- The school has begun to assess students' progress on a scale adapted from the SCERTS model. These skills have always been key features of students' progress at Courtyard, but now the school has clearer evidence of their progress.
- The ultimate success outcome for students is that by the time they leave secondary education at Courtyard none are not in education employment or training despite their earlier difficulties.

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

The school does not require additional support at this time.

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.