

Name of School:	St. Mary Magdalene Academy – The Courtyard
Head teacher/Principal:	Deborah Shepherd
Hub:	London Special and AP Hub
School type:	Free School Academy
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Estimate at this QA Review:	Good
Date of this Review:	21/02/2018
Estimate at last QA Review	This is the school's first Challenge Partners review.
Date of last QA Review	N/A
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	GOOD
Outcomes for Pupils	GOOD
Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment	GOOD
Area of Excellence	Not submitted
Previously accredited valid Areas of Excellence	N/A
Overall Estimate	GOOD

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. Information about the school

- This free school has places for 36 pupils, all of whom have education, health and care plans (EHCP) for autistic spectrum disorders and speech, language and communication issues. 17 are in the sixth form.
- Most pupils join the school at the start of Year 9 or, in some cases, in the sixth form.
- About half of the pupils are disadvantaged, which is well above the national average.
- About a third of pupils have English as an additional language (EAL).
- Some pupils access some GCSE or A level courses in a nearby secondary school.

2.1 School Improvement Strategies - Follow up from previous review

- This is the school's first Challenge Partners review.

2.2 School Improvement Strategies - What went well

- Senior leaders have developed a stable and talented team of teachers and higher-level teaching assistants. The school is reaping the benefits of the intensified monitoring of teaching that has shaped this team. A termly teaching and learning report keeps attention focussed on aspects of teaching that need refreshing or developing.
- The school takes full advantage of being such a small school in highlighting and updating information about each pupil's needs. Documentation keeps staff fully informed and ready to meet those needs.
- Leaders closely monitor the deployment and impact of local authority therapists who work with pupils on a one-to-one basis or observe them in lessons. Therapists and pupils' keyworkers agree strategic responses to pupils' needs.
- The academic progress of pupils, including the impact of interventions outside lessons, is reviewed at fortnightly meetings between senior leaders and key staff. As a result, pupils not making enough progress receive additional support and staff plan ways to challenge others to reach their aspirational targets.
- Collating and analysing data on progress has been greatly strengthened by an additional appointment to the senior team. The school will soon be able to present data over a substantial period of time as evidence of consistently high standards.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and identifies a few areas where further work is needed to securely meet standards of excellence.
- The development plan has been extended in response to the growth of the school. The expansion of the senior team is allowing more time for strategic thinking. The demand for attending case-conferences remains high, but now others can take on some internal matters, so there is less pressure on the headteacher. With the clear guidance of the Ofsted report, senior leaders are

ready to revise the plan to feature fewer, more focussed priorities. The headteacher is very clear that the current priorities are to develop literacy, to challenge the more-able to reach their full potential and to establish a wider range of measures of progression across a broad 'framework'.

- The development of the school council and the lively debates that take place in sessions with tutors, gives pupils a real say in how the school develops. They clearly have a sense of involvement and ownership that makes them proud to attend the Courtyard.
- A major strength of the school is the broad curriculum, related to a wide range of qualifications at different levels of challenge. This enables pupils to follow a flexible programme that suits their individual needs at a pace they can cope with, while still providing substantial, worthwhile challenge.
- The Courtyard is a small school that does not 'think small'. The local authority recognises its success, and tentative discussions about expanding its provision have begun. This is a testament to the successful management of this relatively new and fairly unique school.

2.3 School Improvement Strategies - Even better if...

...the development plan expressed fewer, more succinct priorities. These should have the clear steps the school needs to take to achieve them, measurable success criteria and evaluation of the impact.

3.1 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - Follow up from previous review

- This is the school's first Challenge Partners review.

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

- Leaders have recruited and retained a stable team of staff. Over the last year monitoring and feedback has improved teaching to a consistently good level of quality that promises to be sustained.
- Relationships are particularly crucial to learning in this school because of the nature of pupils' special needs. Teachers constantly adjust working groups and pairs to make pupils feel at ease, to encourage greater adaptability and to develop tolerance and respect between peers.
- Pupils are fully aware of the school's expectations about how they will conduct themselves. Adults consistently reinforce these expectations, always demonstrating respectful awareness of others.
- When interviewed, pupils said how settled they felt at the Courtyard and how much they enjoyed the calm atmosphere.
- During the review pupils were entirely settled in their classes – a testament to the school's effectiveness in developing pupils' capacity to work with others. On the

few occasions when negative behaviour does occur, leaders are very clear that it should be regarded as a way of communicating that seeks a positive response.

- Based on pupils' needs, teachers explain what they will be doing in each lesson and often link work to previous successful learning. This reassures those who may feel disturbed by what is unfamiliar.
- To promote independence and confidence, teachers plan for hands-on use of resources. A good example was the gym lesson when pupils could choose different exercises and equipment, having been briefed about their impact on the body.
- Assessment is a strength. Teachers know pupils' targets and progress towards them because a clear record is kept and updated on the front cover of each pupil's book. Work books also contain very clear guidelines for pupils to follow in presenting their work and tell them what to expect in terms of marking and feedback. Marking is regular and detailed.
- Teachers question pupils gently but effectively, probing for the understanding of key points. Some pupils' responses are shy and quite muted, but teachers are adept at noticing. In one lesson the teacher heard a pupils' perceptive comment. She drew attention to it later, in a way that celebrated his achievement without directly drawing attention to him.
- Pupils' capacity to relate to others develops when they get involved in peer assessment. Talking about their work provides a mutual interest that helps to break down barriers.
- Whilst being very supportive, teachers are aware of the need to challenge pupils to reach their highest potential. The school encourages pupils to participate in a wide range of opportunities. A pupil who regularly takes part in a local Shakespeare festival read a speech from 'Romeo and Juliet' brilliantly!

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

...teachers even more frequently encouraged pupils, who clearly feel confident and secure at the Courtyard, to take the 'risk' of learning in more independent ways. This applies particularly to ensuring that the more-able pupils are challenged.

4. Outcomes for Pupils

- The reason pupils are admitted to this school is that they have not made progress in mainstream schools. The vast majority have regressed in secondary school following transition from primary.
- The school assesses them on entry and sets targets according to the end of Key Stage 2 data. This approach aims to ensure that pupils make up for lost time. Leaders additionally set aspirational targets for each pupil to push rates of progress on even further.
- Progress targets for 2018 are considerably above those achieved in 2017. The school is ambitious, but realistic, because teaching is more established and good practice more consistent.

- Generally, pupils do better in mathematics than in English, which relates to their special needs in terms of speech language and communication.
- In English and mathematics, current data show that progress towards expected targets is already close to, or above what was achieved through the entire year in 2017. Progress towards aspirational targets in both subjects is slower, but some pupils are on track to achieve them and interventions are in place to close learning gaps for others.
- Some girls are not currently achieving as well as boys. Leaders explain that this is due to some relatively recent admissions to the school who are girls. They are taking time to settle.
- Pupils who have EAL do a little better than their peers, so that is not a significant barrier to their achievement. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils does not differ significantly from their peers. A detailed plan for spending additional money to support them is in place. This is helping them keep pace with their peers.
- The 'stage not age' approach at Courtyard means that pupils do not necessarily take examinations in all their subjects at one time, for example, at the end of Year 11. Pupils take a range of qualifications, personalised for their capabilities, when they are ready.
- A few pupils who can cope with the demands of college courses without the support they receive at the Courtyard leave at the end of Year 11. The majority, about three quarters of Year 11, stay on.
- Destinations post sixth form are promising. The school has evidence that all pupils who leave are in education, employment or training. Some go on to take further qualifications at college or through schemes and projects designed to meet their needs. Others take up apprenticeships with help and guidance from the Courtyard.

5. Area of Excellence

Not submitted for this review.

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

One of the visiting reviewers, the headteacher of an outstanding special school, has offered to share her approach to development planning.

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.