



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR THE COURTYARD SCHOOL

Name of School:	The Courtyard School
Headteacher:	Deborah Shepherd
Hub:	London AP Special Hub
School phase:	Secondary special
MAT (if applicable):	Not applicable

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Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Effective
Date of this Review:	15/03/2022
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Leading
Date of last QA Review	28/06/2021
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	09/05/2017



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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 Effective

Quality of Provision and Outcomes Effective

AND

Quality of Provision and Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs

Area of Excellence None

Previously accredited valid Areas of Excellence Not applicable

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate Effective

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.

1. Context and character of the school

The Courtyard is a free school for students aged 13-19 with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All have an education, health and care plan. There are 48 students on roll and plans are in place for this to rise to 72 within the next three years. Most come to the school after their mainstream placements have broken down. Some have been out of school for a significant period: the average attendance for students in their previous schools is under 40%. This rises to over 80% when at Courtyard.

All students have speech language and communication needs, as well as some degree of autism, and a growing number have social, emotional and mental health needs. Through an agreement with St Mary Magdalene, the local secondary school, students can access subjects which Courtyard doesn't provide. One student, for example, currently accesses GCSE science there.

Over half the students are disadvantaged and for 25%, English is not their first language. Boys heavily outnumber girls: 13 students are female and 35 are male. There are 22 students in the 6th form. There is a strong focus on students' personal development. To capture this, the school has established a framework for assessing progress students make in the development of their social communication, emotional regulation and independence.

2.1 Leadership at all Levels - What went well

- Leaders have responded fully to the EBI from the last review: the school is developing the middle leadership team well.
- The school has a clear shared vision to equip the students with the skills and experiences needed to discover and live out their potential. The positive message of this vision is embedded throughout the school's provision. Governors share and shape this vision.
- Senior leaders are ambitious for improving all aspects of the provision. For example, staff are organised into small groups and receive regular developmental supervision from an educational psychologist.
- Leaders have set in place a fortnightly timetable of learning walks which has replaced the previous system of formal observations. Leaders have a clear understanding of what constitutes successful classroom practice. For example, a recent focus was on the quality and quantity of teacher talk and this led to focused training for the staff.
- As the school expands, the middle leadership team is growing too. Senior leaders provide good support to these middle leaders. For example, they have trained them in how to conduct learning walks and provide developmental support to staff.

Middle leaders feel well supported.

- There is a very positive climate for learning. Most students' previous placements in mainstream schools broke down and many have had extended periods out of school. Courtyard turns round the attitudes of its learners, skilfully building up students' confidence by providing a highly individualised curriculum with tailored emotional support. For example, one student is engaged in a project with Oxford University to pursue a specific interest.
- Provision for the development of students' wellbeing is very strong. Key workers deliver three sessions a week of pastoral support to each student where they work on the student's social and emotional needs. As a result of these positive and supportive relationships, student anxiety is reduced and students are ready to learn quickly at the start of lessons. Strong emphasis is placed on developing students' independence as well as their ability to understand and manage their emotions. As one student put it, 'I feel hopeful here'.
- The school makes good use of the extensive opportunities available locally to enrich the curriculum. For example, students access excellent opportunities at The Old Vic Theatre and The Arsenal Football Club round the corner. They also contribute to community projects such as improving the local church grounds. Students enjoy these opportunities.
- These links with the community enable the school to provide a good range of work experience opportunities. The older students access a six-week programme, including for example, placements in a pet shop, a gym and a local café. There are also talks in school from employers. The school has plans to expand opportunities for students to secure paid work.
- The school makes excellent provision to celebrate and promote diversity and equality. For example, there is a safe space support group for those students that identify within the LGBTQ+ community.

2.2 Leadership at all Levels - Even better if...

...leaders captured more succinctly the priorities for improvement in the self-evaluation and school development documents, adding the conclusions of the learning walks and other monitoring activities.

...senior leaders further developed the skills of the middle leaders to evaluate the curriculum in their areas and its impact on learning.

3.1 Quality of Provision and Outcomes - What went well

- Leaders have addressed the previous EBI by improving the communication systems within the school and the wider school community: specifically common messages for individual students are better shared between staff so students receive consistent messages.
- The subject knowledge of staff is strong across a wide range of subjects.

- Teachers mostly follow established routines which allow students to settle quickly. For example, all classes make learning objectives clear at the outset. Teachers systematically plan for the development of students' independence.
- Teachers employ appropriate strategies to support students' speech, language and communication needs, such as identifying key vocabulary, well supported by the school's speech and language therapist. As a result, they are increasingly confident to speak in classes.
- Teachers adopt a consistent approach to managing student behaviour based on the Positive Behaviour Support. The school has five trainers in this approach and as a result, there is a shared language with and about students. This approach is effective and as a result, the school is calm and purposeful.
- The school has developed a good way of measuring the progress students make in their social and emotional skills (Social Communication and Emotional Regulation and Independence). Students understand this framework and are able to talk about progress they are making in these important areas. Students express themselves clearly in the student council. For example, they are focused on what they need to do to leave the school successfully.
- The curriculum is well established. There are two pathways within the core subjects- functional skills or GCSEs. BTECs are available in science, hospitality, art, work skills and cooking. However, the school is very flexible and students may, for example, move between the pathways to meet individual needs. Careful thought has been given to ensuring practical aspects of learning are in place to help move learning into long term memory. As the school's plans for expansion bear fruit, opportunities to broaden the curriculum offer will become available: leaders are planning to review and refresh the curriculum in anticipation of this in the summer term.
- Staff are mindful of the importance of promoting students' independence. For example, those with autistic spectrum condition are helped to need less support in preparation for them transferring to college and thriving in the world beyond the school.
- The teaching of reading is well led. Age-appropriate strategies other than phonics are used and teachers provide an appropriate range of opportunities for students to develop their reading skills. There are plans in place to further develop students' love of independent learning.
- The pastoral team works very well alongside the teaching teams. Students know they can access 1-1 support time when needed and are encouraged to be aware of and anticipate what they need. As a result, learning proceeds smoothly and there is an excellent culture of calm learning throughout the school.

3.2 Quality of Provision and Outcomes - Even better if...

- ...teachers built on students' excellent attitudes to learning to increase pace and challenge.
- ...teachers ensured support staff were well deployed.

4.1 Quality of Provision and Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well

- For this section, the school has chosen to focus on the provision for the most able students and to explore the extent to which their needs are met.
- The school estimates that there are eight students in this cohort. They are typically more cognitively able or have a particular talent. They may be more able in a specific area of the curriculum only.
- Staff meet the needs of these students well. For example, in one lesson, the more able student took on the role of teacher, enabling him to consolidate his learning while boosting his self-esteem. In an art class, the teacher provided more challenging questioning to ensure the more able student was fully engaged.
- The school has established a range of relationships that provide opportunities for this cohort to be appropriately challenged. For example, one student studies combined science GCSE at the local mainstream school.
- The school rightly prides itself on its individualised approach to the curriculum. One student for example began on entry level qualifications but within a month was moved into GCSE groups to ensure appropriate challenge.
- The school's excellent pastoral support team also focuses on providing the support needed for the most able to thrive, many of whom arrive having experienced limited success in their previous settings. This includes enabling students to access an impressive range of out of school activities such as a LGBTQ+ conference in the Barbican, theatre visits and tailored work experience placements.

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

...as the impact of the pandemic recedes, the school further extended the good range of external activities available to the most able cohort.

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

The school is an active member of the Challenge Partner network and will draw on support as needed.



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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.