



VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP QUALITY
ASSURANCE REVIEW

THE COURTYARD SCHOOL

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

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this virtual Leadership Quality Assurance Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	28/06/2021
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Outstanding
Date of last QA Review	06/03/2019
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	09/05/2017

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	Leading
School improvement strategies	Leading
Approach to recovery and remote learning	Not applicable
Area of excellence	Not applicable
Overall peer evaluation estimate	Leading

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

The peer evaluation estimate included on this report has been collectively agreed between the lead reviewer, review team and host school. The estimate is based on the evidence seen as part of the virtual Leadership Quality Assurance Review.

Whilst every effort has been made to triangulate the evidence presented during the review, it is important to note that the nature of working remotely means that the estimate given only encompasses that which is able to be explored virtually.

1. Context and character of the school

The Courtyard School is a free school for pupils aged 13 to 19 with special educational needs. The pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum condition and/or speech, language and communication needs. All have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). There are 48 pupils on roll with 21 in the sixth form. It has recently expanded from 36 on roll. The majority come from previous placements in mainstream schools, and some have been out of education for a significant period of time when they start.

The school works with a neighbouring mainstream secondary school, St Mary Magdalene Academy, for a few students to access particular curriculum subjects such as computer studies. The curriculum enables all students to gain qualifications in a minimum of five subjects, move on to further education, training and employment and live as independent a life as possible. The personal development curriculum is central to the school's ability to support pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. The school has devised an assessment system for this – SCERI (social communication, emotional regulation, independence).

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Senior leaders and governors have a strong shared vision for the school, which is to enable the young people to leave and be successful in future education training or employment; all pupils move on to one of these. A pupil who has been at the school for some time is looking forward to starting college in September.
- Leaders of the English, mathematics and sixth form teams have recently had leadership training. They have put this into practice highly effectively. These middle leaders understand their skills, how to adapt them for different purposes and their role working between senior leaders and the rest of the staff team. They are highly reflective, always seeking to improve outcomes for the students, whether that is choosing the most appropriate English GCSE or working with colleges on admission procedures that are most effective for autistic students.
- Leaders ensure that teachers have supportive professional relationships with mainstream colleagues through the local authority subject teachers' network and with the neighbouring academy. This has enabled staff to moderate GCSE work for the teacher assessments this year and keep up with current practice. Students are entered for qualifications when they are ready.
- Senior leaders provide structured group supervision for staff with the educational psychologist. This solution focussed work has increased the confidence of staff to communicate to leaders. Staff have identified areas for development in their personal and professional practice. As a result staff feel well supported and committed to the school.
- Leaders regularly poll staff to gain their views to improve the school. A recent

innovation was the introduction of Class Dojo to provide a behaviour 'currency' with points that pupils 'earn' and a means of collecting and showing work and communicating this to pupils.

- Senior leaders are continually adapting the curriculum to support the changing needs of the learners. They have formed teams for the preparation for adult independent life (PAIL) curriculum and a specialised independence curriculum based on a communication programme. Leaders ensured that the speech and language therapist and teacher responsible for this programme received the necessary training together. This enables them both to adapt the programme for each individual pupil.
- The headteacher works with a mentor, an experienced headteacher, who has provided advice and support for strategic decision making. This has supported the headteacher to continue building staff and leadership capacity. She is working with governors to research and find further ways to expand the provision, which is in high demand in the locality and beyond.
- Governors have considerable experience and expertise to support and challenge leaders highly effectively. They share the vision and work closely with the headteacher to evaluate the provision.

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

...senior leaders continued to develop the structure of how they work with middle leaders to maximise the drive for improvement.

3.1 School improvement strategies and the extent to which these address the needs of different groups of learners, especially disadvantaged pupils and those with additional needs - What went well

- Leaders have addressed the EBI from the previous review. The continued development of the SCERI assessments and the regular systematic reporting of students' achievements encapsulate their progress and enable leaders to evaluate the provision well.
- The PAIL curriculum encompasses the themes of identity, relationships, communication and 'our world'. The team responsible works with subject teaching staff to ensure these themes are embedded in all lessons, making learning meaningful for pupils. These ideas are further developed for pupils on themed days when pupils have many opportunities to demonstrate their critical thinking skills and knowledge of other cultures.
- The staff team delivering the independence curriculum provides support for pupils to develop life skills, through a communication programme. The teaching and

therapy staff work cohesively so that pupils develop the necessary skills through a practical and well-structured programme. There are individual examples of pupils' massive gains in confidence in using public transport and preparing their own food at home.

- Leaders' have made sure that that all members of the community can communicate highly effectively and know exactly what is happening during the day. All members of the school community fully understand 'zones of regulation' and use it as a common language and self-reflective tool at the beginning of each lesson, for example.
- The Class Dojo interactive IT platform is primarily used as a positive behaviour tool for awarding 'points' to pupils. Staff have agreed the parameters for these, and pupils highly value the award system which leads to rewards such as trips and celebration of pupils' total 'scores' in the Friday community assembly.
- Staff have devised a simple 'snippets' system for recording incidents or concerns about pupils. Actions and follow up are recorded so that leaders can continually evaluate and check on procedures and ensure pupils receive the support they need from other professionals. The pastoral leader analyses this data regularly to find solutions. She delivers training for all staff and works closely with the pastoral team so that they implement strategies that are bespoke and highly effective for individual pupils.
- The pastoral leader fully involves pupils in recording factors that trigger their anxieties and emotional reactions on a personalised 'zones of regulation' document and 'pupil passport'. These useful summaries are used within school, particularly when there are new staff or pupils. They are also used as the basis of discussions with work experience placements, colleges that pupils move onto and employers.

3.2 School improvement strategies and the extent to which these address the needs of different groups of learners, especially disadvantaged pupils and those with additional needs - Even better if...

...leaders continued to review communication systems within the school and the wider school community to ensure they are fit for purpose and fully effective.

4.1 Approach to recovery and remote learning - What went well

- During the first lockdown, school staff responded and adapted quickly, providing a virtual platform for pupils to access learning at home. Leaders provided training for staff to produce engaging lessons. Teachers delivered these in a range of formats. Leaders conducted polls of students so that they could learn what suited

- them best. Pupils responded that they did not always need to see staff's faces.
- Leaders produced a detailed handbook for parents about how to access the learning and to support their children at home. Staff provided support and training for parents as needed.
 - Staff offered considerable pastoral support for parents and pupils, varying the amount according to families' needs. All families received calls each week and more if they needed it. The pastoral team made a 'return to school' pack to support pupils returning in September 2020 and March 2021. Bespoke support was provided to any individual pupil who was particularly anxious.
 - Staff ensured that all pupils had access to electronic devices and delivered them to their homes and ensured that the equipment was working well.
 - Senior leaders checked and recorded pupils' engagement in all online learning. They knew exactly what pupils did, and this was used to encourage further participation.
 - The headteacher made sure that pupils returned to school through effective communication and clear and confident decision-making so there was no confusion or frequent changes.

4.2 Approach to recovery and remote learning - Even better if...

...leaders provided transport to enable pupils to attend so that there would be no regression if there are further lockdowns.

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

The Hub is developing mechanisms for headteachers to work with each other, and the school wants to be part of this.

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 also 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.



VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP QUALITY
ASSURANCE REVIEW

THE COURTYARD SCHOOL

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.