

Name of School:	Castlebar School
Head teacher/Principal:	Paul Adair
Hub:	London Special and Alternative Provision
School type:	Community special
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Estimate at this QA Review:	OUTSTANDING
Date of this Review:	31/01/2018
Estimate at last QA Review	OUTSTANDING
Date of last QA Review	18/01/2017
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	OUTSTANDING
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	18/06/2014

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 Pupils	OUTSTANDING
Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment	OUTSTANDING
Area of Excellence	ACCREDITED Multi-disciplinary working
Previously accredited valid Areas of Excellence	Therapies 18/01/2017
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. Information about the school

- Castlebar School is a maintained special school admitting pupils from Reception to Year 6.
- All pupils have Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) covering a range of needs from moderate learning difficulties (MLD) to severe learning difficulties (SLD). A significant proportion of pupils have further complex issues or difficulties, such as autism or medical conditions.
- Just under half of the pupils are disadvantaged.
- About two-thirds of pupils have English as an additional language.
- Castlebar is a teaching school and plays a leading role in the local alliance of primary schools. The headteacher is a national leader in education (NLE) and several staff are specialist leaders in education (SLE).

2.1 School Improvement Strategies - Follow up from previous review

- Teachers guide teaching assistants very well in supporting learning in lessons.

2.2 School Improvement Strategies - What went well

- A significant feature of leadership is the school's bold determination to be a key player in developing leadership, teaching and learning. There is pride in not being marginalised as 'special.' The school earns respect as a participant in the broad educational debate. It is the same passion that fuels its vision for pupils to live fulfilled lives.
- The identification of school-wide actions clearly emerges from self-evaluation. Strengthening leadership, securing outstanding teaching, maintaining accurate tracking of achievement and extending the work of the teaching school are already strengths. The development plan outlines their next steps, so that the school can continue to be outstanding in all respects.
- Senior leaders work as a united team with shared understanding and passion for special education. The principal represents the school at a national and local level and continues to develop the contribution it makes to education. The deputy headteacher's leadership of the teaching school makes links with both special and mainstream education. The assistant headteachers keep a watchful eye on the welfare and progress of pupils and staff. Together, they constantly seek to refine and improve the quality of leadership and teaching.
- There is an effective leadership structure, empowered by well-organised systems of communication. Middle leaders say that they feel really involved in the priorities for improvement. They have opportunities for their subject to feature in the 'spotlight' in a week of subject-related activities. They meet with their smaller teams and distribute minutes to update all colleagues. This moves action plans forward efficiently, while keeping everyone aware of developments.
- Progression in leadership is a key policy in the school's approach to professional development, ensuring stable succession planning. A high proportion of staff hold

formal qualifications, such as national professional middle leader and subject leader. Those who have already gained qualifications mentor those who follow next. The teaching school provides a breadth of opportunities which contribute widely to the teaching community.

- Leaders have developed an innovative approach to teacher appraisal, taking full account of all the teacher standards. It includes responsibilities for leadership or sharing good practice and takes account of a wider range of factors than just observation. Teachers reflect on key aspects of their teaching, including pupil progress. Line managers quickly address any rare signs of underperformance that may emerge. The overall summary booklet serves two purposes, it clearly captures the strengths and development points for individuals and provides senior leaders with a directory of expertise that can guide others.
- The introduction of lesson study, supported by an external expert, has become a major feature in school and in the alliance. Teachers enjoy reflecting together and find that it influences their thinking about learning in many ways. As part of an expected commitment to professional research, participants eventually produce a 'poster' (as at academic conferences) or make a presentation to colleagues.
- Aware of how much time teachers spend on data collection, leaders have introduced a shorthand method of annotating 'live' proforma records. Leaders collect and analyse a great deal of assessment information about pupils. Where an individual shows any sign of making slower progress than usual, an array of interventions, including specialist therapies are available.
- To reduce the time teachers spend recording assessment, leaders have introduced abbreviations that capture learning as it happens

2.3 School Improvement Strategies - Even better if...

- ...teachers could link findings from lesson study to their appraisal observation. This would give more status and momentum to lesson study
- ...senior leaders continued to reduce to a minimum the assessment information needed to check progress and identify necessary interventions.

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

- Interventions are integrated into the curriculum, so much so, that this is presented as an area of excellence.
- Assessment and its application in the classroom is more than keeping pace with national developments. The school hosted a conference at which Diane Rochford, author of the recent national review of assessment in special education, was the keynote speaker.
- Teachers and support staff effectively develop pupils' independence.

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

- One reviewer described teaching at the school as offering, ‘an irresistible invitation to learn.’
- In class, teachers and assistants work as a united team. There is absolute consistency in their relationship with pupils which fosters independence through care, reassurance and praise.
- Teachers and support staff understand pupils’ needs well. They continuously adjust and adapt activities to secure maximum response and progress. Their deep knowledge of pupils means that moments of frustration or delay in learning rarely occur.
- The range of available specialist therapies is deployed well to support pupils’ development in learning. As the area of excellence implies, they are integral to pupils’ progress in the classroom. When pupils are experiencing out-of-class experiences, such as sensory rooms, swimming, or the rebound therapy room, the teaching continues to be very effective.
- The physical space in classrooms and the well-ordered resources contribute strongly to the high quality of learning.
- Class organisation provides the best combinations of needs for effective learning. Class groups are often sub-divided for therapies or intensive interaction between and adults and one or two pupils.
- Teachers plan the learning to fully take account of pupils’ differing needs. They share this in detail with teaching assistants so that they can support the learning well.
- The school is one of a few pilot schools working with the Department for Education to apply and develop an academic study about the ‘seven areas of engagement’. This puts staff at the forefront of innovation as reflective practitioners and refreshes their planning and strategies.
- Those pupils who are capable, present their work well in books. The achievement of others is captured in videos. Pupils’ art work is of a very high standard. One pupil’s inspiring response to the National Gallery’s ‘Take One Picture’ project was subsequently selected by the gallery for their next advertising campaign poster.
- Teachers annotate and mark pupils’ work diligently, recording progress and giving encouragement. Feedback is sometimes immediate through praise and may be highlighted in assembly.

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

...teachers were able to reduce the time spent on recording assessment.

4. Outcomes for Pupils

- The current state of transition in assessing special educational needs, combined with the extreme range of needs in the school makes comparisons year-on-year difficult. However, the detailed data that the school analyses does evidence very positive progress. Progress is evident in episodes of learning in lessons and one-to-one interactions. The well thought through innovations that build on established strengths, reinforce progress. In particular, the integration of therapies, such as

speech and language and occupational therapy into lessons has helped to accelerate progress in learning in many instances.

- Between the two groups of pupils, those with SLD and pupils with MLD, those with SLD make the most rapid progress. This is partly explained by the higher level of conceptual difficulty in the P-level criteria that MLD pupils must reach. Nevertheless, the standards reached by MLD pupils is creditable.
- The youngest pupils make exceptionally rapid progress when they transfer from part-time, less-specialised provision to full-time at the school.
- The school cannot compare outcomes data with any national statistics because of the highly individual nature of pupils' special needs. Similarly, only the broadest comparisons can be made with previous years, as cohorts differ so much.
- Two areas that the school specifically measures are literacy and numeracy. Four fifths of pupils over the last two years have achieved three or more steps of progress in both skills. The proportion achieving seven steps, which is seen as exceptional progress, rose slightly last year.
- School data show that the vast majority of pupils fully meet the detailed targets that feed into their EHCPs. This is similar to the previous year. For the minority who do not make good progress, additional interventions are applied and adjusted. Nobody gets left behind at this school.
- There is very little difference between distinctive groups of pupils. The minority group of girls makes equal progress with boys. Disadvantaged pupils match the progress of their peers. Having English as an additional language does not prevent pupils from learning as rapidly as others. More-able pupils reach the higher standards expected.
- Occasionally, on joining the school, a few pupils need help in personally and socially adjusting to learning and this delays their progress for a little while. However, there are no pupils who have not made the adjustment and progress matches what is expected of others.
- Liaison with future secondary placements demonstrates that pupils make a good start to the next phase of their education.

5. Area of Excellence

Multi-disciplinary learning – integrating therapies into classroom practice.

5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength?

For several years there has been excellent dialogue between therapy specialists and classroom teachers at review meetings. Classroom teachers find the advice very helpful in adjusting their teaching strategies to the needs of individual pupils. Increasingly, therapists conduct interventions in class. Good staff relationships and a shared commitment to the pupil means there is no sense of intrusion. In particular staff have become familiar with the methodology of the speech and learning therapist and the occupational therapist and have been able to include it in their teaching strategies. Interventions are now tracked as part of the progress data collected about pupils.

5.2 What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?

Teachers have developed a better understanding of how therapy contributes to pupils' learning. They now play a fuller part in referring pupils to therapy, for example music therapy. New teachers and recently qualified teachers receive support from therapists as part of their induction. The role of therapy has a more prominent profile in the annual review of ECHPs and parental awareness has been raised both in review meetings and in evenings hosted by therapists.

Several new approaches have been added to extend existing therapies, or interventions. There is a phonics-based reading system 'Lexia', which has had good impact on both struggling and more-able readers. An approach to numeracy, based on university research, is helping pupils move forward in their learning. Rebound therapy in the trampoline room builds self-confidence, self-esteem and social and participation skills. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder find a yoga programme helpful and reassuring because the sequence of exercises is comforting and familiar.

The speech and language therapist and the occupational therapist offer training for parents so that helpful techniques can continue at home. They offer training and drop-in sessions to staff and specifically develop the skills of newly and recently qualified teachers across the year.

The school has already accessed its extensive networks, for instance through the teaching school alliance, to make presentations or host visits that introduce other schools and interested parties to this successful initiative.

5.3 What evidence is there of the impact on pupils' outcomes?

Throughout the school therapies are impacting on the progress of individual pupils. This is now seen as a crucial lever to improve progress.

5.4 What is the name, job title and email address of the staff lead in this area?

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

The school is interested in making a visit to the Challenge Partners school of one of the visiting reviewers.

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.