



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR DANECOURT SCHOOL

Name of School:	Danecourt School
Headteacher:	Cathryn Falconer
Hub:	London Special and AP
School phase:	Special Primary
MAT:	Maritime Academy Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	The school elected not to have estimates
Date of this Review:	12/02/2025
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	N/A
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	12/11/2024

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 Not applicable

Quality of provision and outcomes Not applicable

AND

**Quality of provision and
outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and
pupils with additional needs**

Area of excellence Danecourt School Integrated Therapies
Approach, Accredited

**Previously accredited valid areas of
excellence** Not applicable

Overall peer evaluation estimate Not applicable

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a school's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the school chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the school

Danecourt is a large and oversubscribed mixed Academy Special School in Medway for 257 pupils from the age of 4-11. The main site, Danecourt@Gillingham, supports pupils between Year 1 and 6 who need more support with regulation or personal care. Danecourt@Featherby supports Year R pupils and Danecourt@Bligh supports Key Stage 2 pupils who are able to access a curriculum that has a greater focus on discrete subject teaching. The three sites are underpinned by the Danecourt values. Danecourt is the only Special School in the Maritime Academy Trust of mainstream primary schools, which they joined in 2020.

Pupils have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities including, autistic spectrum conditions (ASC), speech, language and communication needs and severe learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Half of the school population is socially disadvantaged. Three quarters of the population are boys.

The school offers a highly bespoke and personalised curriculum, addressing pupils' needs and their barriers to learning. Danecourt creates meaningful learning experiences, enabling pupils to participate outside of the school, in their homes and wider communities, preparing them well for transition to life after Danecourt. The Danecourt school vision is to turn their pupils into STARS - Self Reliant, Team Player, Aspirational, Resilient and Successful.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders' clear vision for all at Danecourt is clear to see. Leaders are striving to build relationships with pupils, families and the wider community and fully embed Social Communication Emotional Regulation Transactional Support, to support pupils' learning.
- The broad and balanced Danecourt curriculum is delivered thematically. There are now four Tracks, Engage, Explore, Discover and Enquire with different weightings of connecting and responding, life skills and subject specific skills. Delivery has been further refined, recognising the increased number of pupils and complexity in the Engage Track. Targets are derived from the curriculum, based on eight drivers for learning, using the Oakley Learning Journey, complemented by individual EHCP short term targets. Leaders ensure that target setting and assessment is rigorous, moderating targets and evidence gathered on the online assessment platform.

- Danecourt's exemplary approach fully integrates therapy and education. Leaders ensure that a neurodevelopmental perspective ensures that pupils' fundamental needs, for example sensory integration, and communication are fully addressed, to enable them to function at higher developmental levels, to develop executive function and higher level skills. The Therapy team of Speech and Language Therapist (SALT), Occupational Therapist (OT) and Technical Instructors, is embedded in all aspects of school life working directly alongside teaching staff, working closely with Track Leads, ensuring an excellent universal offer to all. This has resulted in the provision of well-matched equipment and resources, with high quality modelling, to ensure that they are used consistently and well.
- Senior leaders develop leadership capacity at all levels, especially important as the school expands, with an outward facing role, supporting provision beyond the school. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is comprehensive, delivered in house, using external training and networks. The Danecourt Culture Deck inspires staff to know how STARS applies to them and how they make a difference. New staff have a two week induction, benefiting from an accessible online platform, with some self-directed CPD. Some CPD is Track specific. Teaching assistants (TAs) take opportunities to work on different sites with a CPD focus.
- The approach to behaviour is person-centred and empathetic, underpinned by an excellent understanding of arousal, sensory and communication needs. Each child has an annual home visit, building trust and connection with pupils and families. The Danecourt Physical Handling approach, accredited by the Institute of Conflict Management, emphasising de-escalation, has two levels with a small physical curriculum where appropriate. Talking mats are used to debrief pupils after incidents. Incidents and restrictive physical interventions continue to reduce.
- Leaders strengthen family engagement, communicating the STARS approach, using the lively website, newsletters and social media. Class Dojo and the online assessment platform help parents to understand and share in their children's success. Some pupils generalise skills learned in school, taking them up at home, for example horse riding and tennis.
- Pupils in a School Council meeting were effectively supported with visuals, ideas cards and time to process so their voice was heard, contributing to Red Nose Day planning.

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

- ... leaders ensured that the progressive nature of the curriculum, to be embedded within and across the Tracks, is evidenced in planning and practice.
- ... leaders further encouraged risk taking in pupils' learning, where appropriate, to maximise pupils' potential.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Staff are aspirational for pupils. They use their knowledge of and empathy for pupils with knowledge of arousal and sensory states, alongside communication skills to enable them to access higher levels of learning. Teaching teams, including therapists and technical assistants, work together seamlessly to meet pupil needs. As a result, engagement and behaviour for learning are exemplary features of the school.
- Environments in classrooms and around school are consistently well planned, offering communication opportunities. Visual supports are adapted and matched to the needs of pupils. For example, photos are used, as opposed to symbols, for some pupils on the Engage track. Pupils fully utilise visual timetables. For example, a pupil looked further down her timetable and selected garden time. While she made her choice, she was reminded that this would happen later in the day.
- Pupils take advantage of personalised strategies to be ready for learning. Sensory equipment, including sensory circuits, is consistently available and used. At Featherby, children in Reception used communication boards with personalised strategies to use if they needed to be calmed or alerted.
- Teaching teams promote independence in both formal and informal learning using well thought out routines. Transitions and independence are well supported. Pupils get off the bus with the same genre of music played each day, for example 'Mozart Monday.' On 'Pop Friday,' pupils walked, twirled and ran enthusiastically into school with high levels of independence. In Reception at Featherby, children were supported with a song to help putting on their coat and coming in after outside play. In a lesson in Discover track, pupils spontaneously cleaned up after a fine motor activity.

- At Breakfast Club, at Gillingham, staff skilfully supported pupils' fine motor skills as they spread butter on toast, their communication skills and independence.
- Where pupils get 'stuck' staff are calm and creative, often stepping back, to give pupils time to process information, and using a 'change of face' to de-escalate situations. At Featherby, children who initially refused to return to the classroom were offered time, roses and bubbles. One child returned to the classroom supported by a TA from another satellite, on a planned exchange, who stepped in as a change of face.
- At Bligh, pupils in Key Stage 2 use consistent environments, with personalisation promoting independence and character. A pupil earned a Dojo point for giving some of their drink to another pupil.
- Staff ensure that pupils use their communication systems functionally. In an Explore Track lesson in Key Stage 2, staff modelled two and three symbol phrases on communication grids at snack time. As a result, pupils used two and three word phrases to request their snacks. Later they independently requested snacks with their communication grids.
- Equipment is personalised to make it appealing and enticing, for example a Seahorses board game timetable.
- Pupils develop resilience. In a lively lesson in the Explore track, including a parachute game, a pupil stayed calm supported by a 1,2,3 visual support.
- Learning takes place in the appropriate context. In a Key Stage 2 lesson in the Explore track, pupils practised tooth brushing in the bathroom area.
- At Danecourt pupils make strong progress as demonstrated by their behaviour, personal development and achievement of moderated EHCP and curriculum targets. Pupils vote with their feet: attendance is only just below the national average for mainstream primary schools.
- At Danecourt, success is celebrated. In a lively celebration assembly pupils and classes who 'reached for the stars' recognised their success, proudly proclaiming – 'We did it!'

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...

... No EBI was identified.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well

- The pastoral team, including the Nurture lead, alongside an assistant headteacher (AHT), ensure that leaders at all levels play their part in enabling pupils and their families to get the support they need to thrive.
- Half of pupils' families are officially designated as disadvantaged, alongside a significant minority of families who are 'just about managing'. Leaders support families to access practical support and signpost them to appropriate help, including a Foodbank and a hygiene bank. Breakfast club is open to all but is targeted at vulnerable pupils. Danecourt is recruiting a qualified social worker who will complement and further extend the current support available to families and leaders.
- Pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs are supported directly with interventions such as Draw and Talk and Zones of Regulation, ensuring that the pupil, their family and teaching team are at the heart of the process.
- Leaders at all levels and the pastoral team build relationships with families to improve skills and behaviour at home. For example, the family of a pupil who became angry at home, generally not at school, was supported by the pupil learning to label emotions and triggers, using breathing techniques, using a five-point scale and asking for regulation time in his room. Small groups of pupils have learned to make shopping lists, buy the items from a local supermarket and make a meal with the items. Some pupils can now go food shopping successfully with their family.
- Leaders have responded to parental requests to set up girls' and boys' clubs for pupils in Years 2 to 6 to address issues such as puberty. The therapy team have designed visuals to go home.
- Recently 23 pupils took part in a weekend residential visit for the first time. Pupils had no access to electronic devices. Pupils who find sleeping at home challenging, slept well. For many pupils this was their first time away from home.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if...

... No EBI was identified.

5. Area of Excellence

Danecourt School Integrated Therapies Approach

Accredited

5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength? What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?

The fully integrated, collaborative and research-based Danecourt approach recognises that pupils learn best in a special school environment, through effective partnership and cooperation between therapists, school staff and families throughout the school. Therapy is not an 'add on.' As a result of holistic, 'joined up' thinking and planning, provision for pupils continues to improve in school and at home.

The Danecourt therapy team, comprising a full-time SALT, 0.6 full-time equivalents OT and two Technical Instructors, one supporting communication and the other supporting OT and leading the Hydrotherapy service. The Team is led by a Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist and Behaviour Specialist, employed as an AHT with responsibility for deployment of the therapy team and curriculum track responsibilities as an AHT.

The Integrated Therapy Policy, Visuals and Learning Support Guidance and Inclusive Communication Policy exemplify collaboration and give clear practice guidance at Danecourt. The Visuals and Learning Support Guidance sets clear expectations for the consistent use of symbols across the school. Visuals representing spaces, lessons, and activities are standardised; pupils benefit from a consistent, predictable learning environment. Teachers use a self-assessment checklist to ensure that their classroom symbols meet the established criteria, reinforcing consistency across the school.

The approach to EHCP reviews is integrated and collaborative. Where National Health Service therapists are involved, their targets are aligned with the EHCP objectives.

All evidence and data are collected in the same system on the online assessment platform, accessible to teachers and parents.

Inset days and induction processes are comprehensive, sharing key knowledge and developing skills and tools to better support pupils' learning journey.

The integrated approach has been shared with Ifield Special School and Oakley Special School as part of Triad collaboration between the three schools. Policy and guidance, other training materials and symbol resources have been shared.

The Danecourt team is supporting the Maritime Trust mainstream schools to develop their approach and expertise in regulation strategies, classroom environments and offer expertise in TEACCH strategies. In 2025, the Maritime Academy Trust held its first Special Educational Needs advice clinic, where Special Educational Needs Coordinators from mainstream Maritime schools visited Danecourt for practical advice and support.

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

Pupil progress meetings recognise the sustained impact of the integrated team approach. Feedback from families, teachers, and external professionals complement numerous case studies to show that pupils have made significant progress at school, often echoed at home. Short, targeted studies show the impact of the integrated school approach, for example making significant improvements at mealtimes.

Data from the behaviour monitoring software continues to show that the intensity, frequency and duration of behavioural incidents reduces. Fewer pupils require behaviour support plans, due to the excellent integrated universal, targeted and specialist offer to each pupil.

Pupils' well-being is well supported. They have improved understanding of what will happen in their day and comment upon and request what they want and need. Debrief communication grids following behavioural incidents in school are supporting practitioners to be more reflective. This is building empathy and understanding in individuals and class teams, as well as supporting pupils to build their understanding of their emotions and potential alternative choices to make both at school and at home.

The understanding and the learning plans for each pupil are shared effectively with the pupil's new school, in supported transition visits, alongside passing on communication, sensory aids and systems.

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

Name: Lou Elliott

Job title: Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist and AHT

Email address: l.elliott@danecourt-maritime.org

Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse content reports from across the hub networks including using AI tools to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector (sharing these with the partnership) each year. The QA Review reports remain confidential to Challenge Partners and the host school. This ensures that schools embrace the review as a development process, acting as a catalyst for their ongoing improvement. This is the primary purpose of the QA review. However, our aim is that the thematic analysis will demonstrate the additional value of a sector wide overview, illustrated with real-life examples.

For further support following your QA Review, 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. The School Support Directory can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>).

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>).