



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



School Name: Danecourt School

School Address: Hotel Road, Watling Street
Gillingham
Kent
ME8 6AA

Head/Principal Ms Cathryn Falconer

IQM Lead Mr Matt Smith

Assessment Date 24th September 2025

Assessor Mrs Karen Robinson-Jones

Sources of Evidence:

- IQM Self Evaluation Report
- Ofsted Reports
- Master Curriculum Document
- School Development Plan
- School Website
- Challenge Partners QAR Review February 2025
- Learning Walks
- Learning Environment
- Newsletters
- Singing Assembly

Meetings Held with:

- Headteacher and Deputy Headteachers
- Pastoral and Behaviour Team
- IQM Lead and Deputy Head
- School Social Worker
- Pupils and Teachers including members of School Council



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- Assistant Headteachers
- Therapy Lead and Assistant Head
- Parents, carers and guardians
- Community Ambassador
- Nurture Lead
- Parent Partnership Lead



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Overall Evaluation

Danecourt is a large and oversubscribed mixed Academy Special School in Medway, educating 291 pupils aged 4 to 11 across three distinct sites:

- **Danecourt@Gillingham**, the main site, supports pupils in Years 1–6 who require additional help with regulation and personal care.
- **Danecourt@Featherby Primary** provides specialist provision for children.
- **Danecourt@Bligh Primary** caters for Key Stage 2 pupils who are able to access a curriculum with a greater emphasis on discrete subject teaching.

Although each site is tailored to the specific needs of its pupils, they are united by the shared Danecourt values, ensuring consistency of ethos and approach across the school community.

The school is unique within the Maritime Academy Trust, being the only Special School in a partnership otherwise made up of mainstream primaries. Since joining the Trust in 2020, it has contributed significantly to, and benefited from, the wider collaborative practice. The pupil community reflects a wide range of Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including autistic spectrum conditions, speech, language and communication needs, and severe learning difficulties. Every pupil has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The school also serves a community of considerable social disadvantage, with around half of pupils eligible for additional support and three-quarters of the population being boys.

The inclusive nature and positive ethos of Danecourt have been consistently recognised by Ofsted. In the most recent ungraded inspection in November 2024, inspectors noted that while the overall grade from the previous inspection remained unchanged, the school's work *"may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection."* They highlighted the dedication of staff, the engagement of pupils, and the strong contribution of the community, with particular praise for the way learning is carefully tailored to individual needs and the significant impact of teaching assistants on pupils' progress. In the previous full inspection in June 2019, Danecourt was judged to be Good overall, with Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare judged as Outstanding. Inspectors recognised that pupils were proud of their work, eager to collaborate, and demonstrated strong social skills such as turn-taking and supporting each other. The curriculum was described as *"lively and engaging,"* offering rich opportunities to develop new skills, while teaching assistants and specialist staff made *"an incisive and highly effective contribution to learning."* Behaviour across the school was judged exemplary, and the ethos of ensuring every pupil is *"valued, respected, safe and successful"* was central to creating the warm and inclusive environment in which pupils flourished. Together, these inspection findings highlight the school's sustained commitment to inclusion, personal development, and high-quality teaching and learning.

Danecourt delivers a bespoke curriculum designed to engage and challenge pupils through creativity, imagination, and practical, hands-on learning. Curriculum delivery



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follows a pathway model, with classes allocated to one of four tracks: Engage, Explore, Discover, or Enquire. Each pathway is carefully designed around specific need types, learner profiles, and learning styles, ensuring pupils are supported to make the best possible progress. Therapeutic input forms a core component of the curriculum, which follows a total communication approach to ensure accessibility for all learners. Key frameworks, including the Oakley Learning Journey, SCERTS, and Evidence for Learning, support personalised learning and progress monitoring.

The school has continued to evolve its provision in response to changing needs. The proportion of pupils receiving Pupil Premium (PP) has risen from 44% in September 2023 to 51% in September 2024, and the school now serves 12 pupils from Kent compared to 8 the previous year. Twelve families now have multiple children enrolled. Additional capacity has been created through the recruitment of a healthcare assistant to support pupils with medical needs, and the role of Parent Partnership and Safeguarding Lead has been divided to strengthen both functions. Alongside these changes, leaders have introduced an effective reading strategy to support a wide range of learners and a highly effective mathematics curriculum that links concepts to real-life contexts. Staff continue to tailor learning to individual needs with the support of therapeutic input and evidence-based frameworks.

The Headteacher and Senior Leaders place children and their families firmly at the centre of all decisions. Staff are trusted and empowered through a distributed leadership model, ensuring that learning is carefully crafted to meet every pupil's needs. Evidence gathered for the IQM Assessment demonstrates that leaders know their school well and are able to provide clear evidence of their effectiveness. Regular monitoring and evaluation of provision ensures that the school is continuously improving.

Positivity radiates throughout Danecourt. During the assessment visit it was clear that staff, pupils and stakeholders alike have a positive outlook, working very much 'together' to find solutions to any challenges. This sense of togetherness is a binding thread across all approaches. Classrooms are purposeful, consistent, and carefully structured to be "*consistent, persistent and familiar*," with behaviour data showing clear improvements in regulation and readiness for learning. Pupils are recognised as individuals, and the whole child is supported. The integrated, holistic approach means that therapy staff work in classrooms alongside teachers to provide support "*in the moment*," while parents are engaged as genuine partners in learning. Staff shared that "*walking hand in hand enables all pupils to make progress*," reflecting the inclusive, collaborative ethos that underpins the school.

Leaders are also responsive to the increasingly complex needs of their pupils. The introduction of the TEACCH approach in the Discover track is one such example of how provision is adapted to ensure that every child receives the right support. The inclusive values of Danecourt are deeply embedded and shape all aspects of school life. Visitors are welcomed warmly into a positive, family-like atmosphere where staff and parents describe the school as "*like a family*" and where "*everyone looks out for each other*." Pupils are happy, engaged, and successful, supported by staff who are wholly committed to enabling them to thrive.



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I am of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark's Inclusive School Award. There are only minor areas requiring development and the school is aware of these. I recommend that the school be awarded the Inclusive School Award and be reassessed in 3 years' time.

I also recommend that the school should consider applying for Centre of Excellence status subject to the inclusion within its plans of the appropriate areas for development and the completion of the Centre of Excellence documentation. If the school chooses to pursue this status and it were to be awarded the school would be subject to annual review from this point forwards.

Assessor: Mrs Karen Robinson-Jones

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. McCann", is written over a horizontal dotted line.

Joe McCann MBA NPQH
CEO Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd



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Element 1 - The Inclusion Values of the School

The Headteacher emphasised during the assessment day the importance of *“understanding our children as individuals, removing barriers for them and their families.”* This reflects Danecourt’s deep commitment to personalised, inclusive provision, ensuring that every pupil’s needs are recognised and met, and that the school’s values underpin every aspect of learning, care, and support.

During the visit, it was clear that Danecourt is an ambitious school that genuinely embraces the individuality of every pupil. Staff recognise that learning can take many forms and adapt approaches to meet the specific needs of each child. The curriculum is designed around the learner, enabling children to reach their full potential. The environment is engaging and enjoyable, fostering safety, happiness, and readiness to learn.

Strong collaboration among staff creates a cohesive community that extends to families. Positive relationships between staff, pupils, and families were evident throughout the assessment, supporting pupil wellbeing, engagement, and achievement. Inclusion is not simply a guiding principle but a lived reality, embedded across policies, practices, and everyday interactions.

Walking through the school, it was apparent that staff demonstrate consistent dedication to achieving the best outcomes for pupils. Each EHCP is central to the child’s learning experience, with tailored support provided for both pupils and families. Multi-agency collaboration was seen to be strong, ensuring pupils receive coordinated support across education, health, and social care. Every moment of the day is treated as a learning opportunity, from the time a child steps off their transport until they leave at the end of the day. Breakfast club is a valued part of this ethos, open to all pupils, where children are supported to develop independence through practical skills such as washing, tidying up, and taking responsibility for themselves.

Learning at Danecourt is holistic, with every aspect of the day contributing to skill development. Visual supports are consistent across the school, colour-coded to aid semantic learning and provide a predictable environment. The fully integrated, collaborative, and research-based Danecourt approach recognises that pupils learn best in a special school setting where therapists, school staff, and families work in genuine partnership. Therapy is embedded within the curriculum rather than treated as an add-on.

The therapy team is led by a Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) and Behaviour Specialist, who also oversees therapy deployment and curriculum track development. The wider team includes a full-time Speech and Language Therapist, occupational therapy provision, and two Technical Instructors; one supporting communication and one supporting occupational therapy and leading hydrotherapy. Policies such as the Integrated Therapy Policy, Inclusive Communication Policy, and Visuals and Learning Support Guidance exemplify this collaborative approach and provide clear practice guidance. For example, the Visuals and Learning Support Guidance sets expectations for the consistent use of symbols across classrooms and



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activities, supported by teacher self-assessment checklists to ensure consistency and predictability.

Inclusion is central to Danecourt's ethos and runs through all policies, processes, and daily practices. The school's STARS values;

- Successful
- Team Player
- Aspirational
- Resilient
- Self-reliant

These provide a common language for high aspirations and inclusive practice. Pupil needs are systematically assessed to inform personalised action planning. The Track model enables pupils to follow one of four curriculum pathways aligned to learning profiles, communication needs, and peer group considerations:

- Engage
- Explore
- Discover
- Enquire

Each pathway ensures that pupils access a curriculum tailored to their profile, with individual targets linked directly to EHCP outcomes. Behaviour data is regularly reviewed to inform interventions and staff development.

Leadership at Danecourt actively promotes collaborative and holistic approaches. Staff and pupils are both engaged in shaping school life through contributions to policy development, questionnaires, person-centred reviews, and the school council. Curriculum delivery is highly individualised, with responsibilities distributed across class teams. Ongoing professional development, including coaching and mentoring, is aligned to the evolving needs of the pupil cohort.

Collaboration is further reinforced by integrated therapy teams, dedicated planning time, development days, and termly class meetings. The Culture Deck sets out expectations for inclusive practice and mutual respect, ensuring consistency across the school. Pupils understand the inclusive ethos through the STARS values, reinforced by weekly celebration assemblies and participation in the Smart School Council. Achievement and progress are celebrated widely, and pupil successes are consistently recognised.



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The school maintains a welcoming and inclusive environment where all pupils can access the curriculum through a total communication approach. Transition arrangements are carefully designed, including home visits, outreach to previous settings, transition packs, parent meetings, and bespoke secondary transition plans. These processes ensure smooth and supportive transitions both into and beyond the school.

Partnerships with external agencies are strong, enabling pupils to access enriching off-site opportunities while maintaining regular communication with families. Wellbeing sits at the heart of the school ethos, supported by a dedicated wellbeing curriculum and a range of targeted interventions. Staff wellbeing is also prioritised, with forums, a wellbeing team, Trust support programmes, mental health first aiders, and structured opportunities for feedback and reflection all in place to ensure staff are supported as they deliver for the children

Next Steps:

- To engage in the Centre of Excellence Programme, joining a Cluster group
- To continue to use behaviour and progress data to evaluate inclusion strategies and refine interventions.



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Element 2 - Leadership and Management and Accountability

Danecourt School operates a distributed leadership model, empowering leaders at all levels to take strategic oversight and drive vision within their areas of responsibility. Leadership is supported by clear line management, well-defined accountability structures, and a culture that encourages innovation and measured risk-taking. This approach ensures strong, inclusive practices across the school and fosters a collaborative environment where leaders and staff work together to achieve excellence.

The school's leadership is underpinned by a structured and strategic approach. Responsibilities are clearly allocated across different school tracks, enabling shared accountability and cohesive decision-making. Leaders engage in regular impact meetings to track progress on strategic priorities, provide feedback, and refine teaching strategies. Feedback loops are embedded throughout the school, ensuring that key developments and priorities are consistently communicated and actioned. The Strategic Development Plan (SDP), focused on three core priorities and supported by dedicated working parties under each Ofsted heading, streamlines improvement efforts and ensures measurable progress.

Professional growth is a central focus of leadership practice. Coaching and mentoring are integrated into leadership development, supported by Mindflick's high-performance psychology platform. Leaders reflect on their behavioural styles, mindset, and team interactions, enhancing self-awareness, adaptability, and overall leadership effectiveness. Staff professional development is equally robust, with structured Professional Development Conversations (PDCs). These strategies encourage continuous reflection, refinement of teaching practice, and the adoption of evidence-based approaches, including IRIS Connect AI coaching pathways, which all teaching staff engage with at least once per half-term.

The school benefits from strong external validation and support. Annual Challenge Partner reviews and termly visits from a School Improvement Partner provide constructive feedback and strategic guidance, ensuring alignment with best practices and forward-thinking development. This external engagement complements the school's rigorous self-evaluation systems, enabling leaders to continuously assess and improve the quality of education, learner engagement, and achievement.

Danecourt places a high priority on inclusive practice and safeguarding. Leaders model the school's STARS Vision and Values, fostering an environment where all pupils and staff are valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. Safeguarding measures are robust, including annual audits, a dedicated social worker, and external consultancy, with Ofsted confirming that safeguarding is effective. Leadership actively monitors inclusion from policy to practice, using the STARS values to evaluate and improve practice. Pupil premium and other targeted funding are used creatively, supporting disadvantaged pupils and whole-school initiatives such as the Little Wandle Phonics Programme. Monitoring sheets track interventions and resources, reviewed termly to ensure progress and value for money.

Staff wellbeing is carefully considered and systematically addressed. A dedicated wellbeing strategy incorporates proactive initiatives, termly forums, and multiple



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feedback channels, including staff surveys, suggestion boxes, and peer-led listening services. Staff are supported through the Maritime Academy Trust Wellbeing Offer, providing access to counselling, digital tools, and additional mental health resources. The school's open-door policy and culture of reflection ensure that staff feel heard, valued, and supported in their professional and personal wellbeing.

New staff, including middle and senior leaders, benefit from a comprehensive induction programme. This combines structured training, induction checklists, and ongoing mentoring to ensure consistency and support. Leaders access the Mindflick platform upon joining, strengthening self-reflection and leadership development. Staff deployment is carefully managed through weekly Senior Leadership Team (SLT) reviews and collaborative daily cover arrangements, ensuring the highest quality learning experiences for pupils.

Governance at Danecourt reinforces the school's inclusive ethos. The Local Academy Committee (LAC) is composed of members with relevant expertise in safeguarding, wellbeing, pupil premium, and school development. Governors undertake regular training, monitoring visits, and engagement with school priorities to provide informed challenge and support. Staff are well-informed of governor roles, responsibilities, and their oversight of inclusion, creating a transparent and collaborative governance environment.

Next Steps:

- To continue to use the IRIS Connect AI Coaching Pathways to support targeted professional development on specific teaching strategies
- Further Develop the Assistant Head team who include some who are new to role to further strengthen and add capacity across all leadership areas



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Element 3 - Curriculum – Structure, Pupil Engagement and Adaption

Danecourt School delivers a broad, inclusive, and holistic curriculum that ensures every pupil experiences a rich and relevant learning journey. The curriculum goes beyond the National Curriculum, blending creativity, imagination, and hands-on engagement to inspire curiosity, confidence, and a lifelong love of learning. The IQM lead highlighted the importance of an engaging curriculum, noting that *“a sense of fun is ok, in fact it’s essential,”* a philosophy clearly evident during the assessment day.

The curriculum is highly responsive to each child’s unique strengths, interests, and prior knowledge, integrating personalised development plans, therapeutic approaches, and bespoke interventions to meet individual needs. By fostering a safe and nurturing environment, pupils are encouraged to take risks, explore new experiences, and develop essential life skills that prepare them for the future.

Learning is structured through a carefully designed pathway model comprising four tracks; Engage, Discover, Explore, and Enquire. These are aligned with pupils’ EHCP targets. Progress is monitored through the Oakley Learning Journey framework, which uses a flexible ‘basket of indicators’ to capture individual measures of success. Across all tracks, the curriculum focuses on three core areas: Life Skills, Connecting and Responding, and Subject-Specific Learning. Short-term, personalised targets are set for each pupil, and progress is regularly shared with families through the Evidence for Learning platform.

Curriculum design is informed by ongoing impact meetings between Deputy Headteachers, Assistant Headteachers, and Track Leads, ensuring continuous evaluation and refinement. Reviews conducted through Challenge Partners, internal Trust processes, and annual curriculum planning allow leaders to maintain relevance, high standards, and continuous improvement. A multidisciplinary approach is embedded throughout, incorporating therapies such as speech and language, occupational therapy, and sensory integration to support holistic pupil development. The curriculum also reflects local, national, and international contexts, particularly through Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) and Life Skills, fostering social awareness, independence, and a sense of belonging in the wider community.

Personal development and preparation for life beyond school are prioritised. The STARS curriculum, integrated with PSHE delivery through Jigsaw, promotes personal growth, resilience, collaboration, and self-reliance. The STARS reward system reinforces teamwork and shared responsibility, celebrating pupils’ progress and achievements. Functional skills and life readiness are embedded across all learning tracks, ensuring that pupils develop independence and confidence to succeed in the modern world.

Learning extends beyond the classroom. Weekly Enrichment Groups, offsite visits, annual residential trips, and termly Enrichment Days provide hands-on learning experiences that enhance social, physical, and practical skills. Memorable experiences and enrichment activities, including music, sport, and movement delivered by external providers, allow pupils to apply their learning in meaningful contexts. Participation is carefully monitored to promote inclusivity and ensure balanced access for all learners.



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The curriculum actively supports development in reading, writing, and mathematics through a cross-curricular approach. Reading is reinforced via the Little Wandle phonics scheme, supplemented by a whole-word reading approach where required, with essential vocabulary identified for each learning track. Skills and knowledge are delivered flexibly through thematic and track-specific learning, guided by the Oakley Learning Journey and the Pyramid of Learning, which provide a progressive framework from sensory integration to academic skills. This ensures a coherent, cumulative learning journey that is both engaging and personalised.

Staff are fully equipped to implement and articulate the curriculum approach. Twilight training sessions, termly planning updates, and regular learning walks encourage dialogue about the purpose and sequencing of learning. Curriculum drivers and thematic frameworks are clearly communicated, enabling all staff to discuss the rationale for teaching and learning coherently. The 'Five to Thrive' document which highlights each track's development priorities ensures all stakeholders and staff understand expectations.

Danecourt places a strong emphasis on risk-taking and challenge within the curriculum. The STARS values, particularly the focus on being aspirational, encourage pupils to attempt new tasks independently, build confidence, and develop resilience. Achievements are celebrated through assemblies, STAR rewards, and positive communication with families, reinforcing motivation, engagement, and a sense of pride in learning.

Next Steps:

- All Tracks will have revised curriculum coverage maps that clearly outline the differentiated content, pedagogical approaches and expected learning outcomes for their individual Tracks.
- Clearly defined, measurable progression frameworks will be embedded within key curriculum areas, demonstrating a cohesive and cumulative learning journey for all pupils.



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Element 4 - Teaching and Learning – Learning Environment, Planning Resources, Pedagogy

At Danecourt School, teaching and learning are of consistently high quality, with the majority of lessons rated as Good and several areas demonstrating outstanding practice. Classrooms and wider learning environments are carefully planned to provide communication opportunities, visual supports, and structured routines that promote independence, engagement, and active participation across all pupils. As highlighted in the 2025 Challenge Partner Report, learning spaces are thoughtfully adapted to meet individual needs, teaching teams foster independence through routines, and pupils make strong progress as demonstrated by their achievement of EHCP and curriculum targets. Ofsted (2024) similarly recognised the school's success in leveraging staff expertise, including contributions from the therapy team, to enhance teaching quality across all phases.

The school has cultivated a strong culture of continuous improvement and reflective practice. Teachers engage in a coaching model that encourages professional ownership and growth. Supportive learning walks, reflective dialogue, and peer observations; enhanced by IRIS Connect and AI coaching pathways. This creates a safe environment for constructive feedback and skill development. Professional Development Conversations (PDCs) are conducted termly, promoting targeted improvements in pedagogy and the application of best practice across the school. A varied CPD offer ensures teachers remain up to date with research, initiatives, and specialist approaches, contributing directly to high standards of teaching and pupil outcomes.

There is a strong ethos of nurturing and developing staff at Danecourt, which has resulted in many team members choosing to remain with the school or return after exploring other roles. For example, one Assistant Head began her journey as a volunteer, progressing to Teaching Assistant, Early Years Lead, teacher, and ultimately Assistant Head. She reflected positively on the support she received throughout her career, highlighting the value of her *"lived it, breathed it, experience"* in shaping her understanding and leadership within the school.

Teaching at Danecourt is highly individualised. Planning is guided by track-specific non-negotiables, medium- and short-term plans, and Person-Centred Learning Plans (PCLPs) that reference EHCP goals, prior learning, and the Oakley Learning Journey. Lessons are designed to challenge pupils across all ability levels, incorporate their interests, and sustain engagement through structured routines. A total communication approach, underpinned by the SCERTS model, ensures all pupils can actively participate, express their ideas, and contribute meaningfully to their learning. The mantra of you *"take your communication everywhere"* was clearly evident in the way pupils are supported in all learning environments.

The learning environment supports a wide range of teaching and learning approaches. Classrooms are adapted to meet diverse sensory, cognitive, and communication needs, employing strategies such as TEACCH zoning, Attention Everyone, and small-group tables. Specialist facilities, including MSI and SI rooms, a sunken trampoline, and the immersive classroom, provide further opportunities to enrich learning experiences. Resources are regularly audited and managed by Curriculum Driver Leads to ensure



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alignment with objectives and effectiveness in supporting both individuals and groups. Digital technology is purposefully integrated, including AAC devices, Clicker 8, VR headsets, and interactive software, enhancing accessibility, independence, fun and engagement.

Staff deployment is strategic and responsive, with support staff assigned according to the specific needs of each class. Leadership ensures effective deployment through regular monitoring, planning meetings, and line management structures. Class teams collaborate termly and hold daily briefings to align expectations and optimise learning outcomes.

Teachers employ a range of pedagogical approaches, scaffolding learning through effective questioning, TEACCH rotations, and carefully structured support to develop understanding, confidence, and independence. Reflection is embedded through IRIS Connect, coaching, and collaborative sharing of best practice. Constructive dialogue, controlled flexibility in classroom management, and engagement with professional development contribute to a strong, cohesive teaching culture.

Danecourt's impact extends beyond its own classrooms. Through its outreach service, the school supports mainstream provisions across the Multi Academy Trust, sharing effective specialist pedagogy and strategies to enhance inclusive practice and improve outcomes for a wider population of learners. This demonstrates the school's commitment to leadership in inclusive education.

Next Steps:

- All teachers who are new to SEND (defined as less than 2 years in a SEND role) will successfully complete an enhanced and comprehensive induction and ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) package delivered via the Learn Upon platform.
- To further develop the strategy of embracing technology for learning and how this can support teachers to deliver engaging sessions.



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Element 5 – Assessment

At Danecourt School, assessment is a carefully tailored and integral part of teaching and learning, designed to track and support every pupil's progress in a meaningful and inclusive way. The school adopts a broad 'basket of indicators' approach, combining formative and summative assessments alongside personalized methods to capture the full spectrum of each child's development. This framework ensures that progress is monitored not only against curriculum priorities and EHCP goals but also in relation to individualized learning objectives, allowing for targeted interventions and well-informed planning.

The school's approach to assessment is embedded in a continuous cycle of review and reflection. Pupil progress meetings are held three times per year, providing an opportunity for teachers and leaders to identify learning gaps, analyse attainment data, and plan focused strategies to address specific needs. Evidence for Learning serves as a central tool, allowing staff to track progress, moderate assessments, and ensure consistency across all year groups and curriculum tracks. Short-term targets are collaboratively set with parents, monitored closely, and reviewed three times a year at parents' evenings, ensuring that families remain central partners in their child's learning journey.

Formative assessment is highly individualized, with learning intentions and success criteria clearly communicated to pupils using language, symbols, or assistive technology appropriate to their needs. This approach fosters a growth mindset, allowing pupils to take ownership of their learning and understand the next steps required to progress. Adults provide immediate and constructive feedback, scaffolding learning to address misconceptions while promoting independence and resilience. Staff are skilled at linking new learning to prior knowledge, ensuring that each session builds upon existing understanding and contributes to cumulative skill development.

Teachers engage deeply with pupils to develop a nuanced understanding of their individual needs. Personalised Curriculum Learning Plans (PCLPs) and high staff-to-pupil ratios support strong, trusting relationships, enabling tailored guidance for every child. Observations, discussions, and contributions from parents are incorporated to ensure learning is relevant, motivating, and responsive. Pupils are encouraged to participate in their own assessment, contributing to a shared understanding of personal targets, celebrating successes, and reflecting on progress. Recognition of achievements is reinforced through the STARS values system, weekly Celebration Assemblies, and whole-class reward structures, further fostering motivation and engagement.

Assessment is also used to promote collaboration among learners. Peer learning and talk partners are incorporated where appropriate, and nurture sessions support the development of social skills, friendships, and cooperative learning. Across all tracks, pupils are encouraged to support one another, developing communication, teamwork, and empathy in addition to academic progress.

The school maintains rigor and consistency through moderation both internally and with external partner schools. Assessment data is analysed strategically, informing teaching, resource allocation, and interventions to ensure that every pupil receives the



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support needed to succeed. At Danecourt, assessment is not only a measure of progress but also a tool for enhancing teaching, shaping the curriculum, and celebrating each pupil's journey.

Next Steps:

- To continue to develop the use of summative data and analysis in a robust and systematic manner through strategic meetings so that this can inform interventions and a whole school awareness of pupils or cohorts that need further support.
- To fully embed co-construction with parents in setting and reviewing personalised targets three times a year.



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Element 6 - Behaviour, Attitudes to Learning and Personal Development

At Danecourt School, pupils' personal, social, and emotional development is a central priority, with a tailored approach to nurture independence, resilience, and self-esteem across all elements of the school day. OFSTED (Nov 2024) highlighted the school's emphasis on personal development, noting the strong impact of the tailored opportunities on pupils' confidence and emotional growth. Pupils' behaviour is generally excellent, and evidenced in the assessment day, supported by skilled staff who are adept at de-escalating anxiety and managing complex needs effectively. High levels of trust and strong relationships allow staff to anticipate and prevent incidents, creating a calm and supportive learning environment.

Behaviour support at Danecourt is embedded within a Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) framework, underpinned by trauma-informed practice. Positive behaviours are actively celebrated, and pupils are equipped with strategies for emotional regulation, forming a strong foundation for effective learning. De-escalation techniques are central to this approach, supported by in-house training for staff in trauma-informed behaviour management. Behaviour incidents are carefully recorded and analysed weekly and termly, with Functional Behaviour Analysis (FBA) informing bespoke behaviour plans tailored to each pupil. The Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports (PBIS) team monitors trends across the school, ensuring that staff development and strategic planning are aligned to pupil needs.

As a result of this proactive and holistic approach, instances of physical intervention have reduced significantly over the past two years. During the assessment, staff highlighted the importance of meeting pupils "*where they are*," enabling support that is closely aligned to individual needs. For example, a child who had previously struggled transitioning into Key Stage 2 (KS2) both at home and at school was supported through a consistent behaviour support plan. By identifying that challenges were rooted in a fear of failure, staff implemented a class change alongside tailored strategies, resulting in the child now feeling happy and confident to attend school.

Danecourt fosters a culture of high-quality teaching and engagement, recognising that effective pedagogy is central to positive behaviour for learning. The SCERTS framework is embedded across the school to support teachers in managing dysregulation, enhancing engagement, and providing inclusive learning experiences. Pupils are encouraged to embody the school's STARS values; Self-Reliant, Teamwork, Aspiration, Resilience, and Success, which underpin the development of character, social responsibility, and essential life skills.

Personal development is further promoted through active pupil voice initiatives, including School Council representatives and the Smart School Council, enabling learners to contribute to decision-making and develop a sense of agency. During the assessment day, pupils spoke confidently about how they are heard and valued within the school. They described teachers as supportive and highlighted the availability of calm rooms and clear class rules that help them regulate their behaviour. Pupils also discussed having responsibilities, such as supporting with breakfast club, which fosters independence, confidence, and a sense of contribution to the school community.



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The school environment and routines reinforce positive behaviour and personal growth. Non-negotiable standards for classroom layout, visual supports, and regulation strategies create a calm and organised environment. Predictable routines, visual schedules, and structured supports ensure that pupils understand behavioural expectations and feel secure. Staff consistently model respectful interactions, promoting inclusion, tolerance, and co-operation. Attendance and punctuality are actively encouraged through visible senior leadership, positive reinforcement, and strong communication with parents and the wider community, helping pupils to develop responsibility and routine.

Mindfulness, wellbeing, and growth mindset approaches are embedded across the school to cultivate positive attitudes among both staff and learners. The Wellbeing team provides dedicated support to staff, while mindfulness strategies in classrooms offer pupils the opportunity to regulate before transitions and engage fully in learning. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through a combination of curriculum initiatives, catering collaborations, and targeted programs such as SOS feeding, ensuring pupils develop positive physical and nutritional habits.

Inclusion, respect, and awareness of individual differences are central to daily practice. Learners demonstrate understanding and empathy in line with the school ethos, with any issues of bullying addressed promptly and effectively. Safeguarding information is clearly communicated, ensuring pupils know key personnel they can approach for support. Every pupil benefits from a personalised educational offer, with tailored learning and transactional supports allowing full participation in school life. High aspirations are embedded through the STARS framework, helping pupils build self-belief and strive for ambitious goals.

Next Steps:

- All pupils will have completed a STARS booklet to demonstrate how they have learnt about the school values throughout the year
- The 'Perfect Fit for Danecourt' document will have been produced for staff to use to support the practical implantation of the STARS values and therefore maximising the positive impact on pupils.



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Element 7 - Parents, Carers and Guardians

Danecourt School places a high priority on building strong and collaborative relationships with parents, carers, and guardians. This commitment is woven through the school's strategic priorities and is evident at every stage of the pupil journey. Parents consistently express trust, appreciation, and confidence in the school, as reflected in feedback submitted for the Medway Parents and Carers SEND Awards. They highlight the personalised care and support their children receive, recognising Danecourt as a truly inclusive and nurturing environment. During the assessment day, parents described how the school puts children first, with one parent characterising the culture as one of *"I can help"* and sharing how her child's confidence has grown since starting at the school.

Engagement opportunities are diverse and carefully designed. Stay and Learn sessions, held three times a year, invite parents into classrooms to experience learning alongside their children. Parents' evenings and annual review meetings provide structured forums to review progress, celebrate achievements, and set new targets, while the Evidence for Learning (EFL) Parent Share platform allows families to view classroom progress, contribute observations from home, and actively engage with their child's learning journey. End-of-year reports present progress in accessible, family-friendly formats.

Clear communication is a cornerstone of the school's approach. The Parent Communication Strategy, introduced in 2024/25, ensures personalised and responsive engagement through a range of channels including Class Dojo, email, telephone calls, newsletters, the MCAS app, and EFL. Translation and interpreter services are available to ensure all families can participate fully. Leadership visibility at the school gates and at key events further strengthens trust and accessibility.

Parents are regarded as active partners. Regular feedback is sought through surveys, informal conversations, and external forums, with findings used to inform practice. Staff are trained to communicate in clear, accessible ways, using visuals and other strategies to meet the needs of all families. The school's open and transparent culture is reinforced through clear procedures, a visible leadership team, and *"You said, We did"* follow-up on parent feedback.

Workshops and training sessions are an integral part of the school's offer. Delivered by therapy staff, senior leaders, and external agencies, these cover areas such as reading, personal development, autism awareness, behaviour management, and goal-setting. Parents also have access to the Triple P Positive Parenting Program and individualised support from the Parent Partnership lead or school social worker. These opportunities empower families to understand their children's needs and contribute effectively to their learning.

The Friends and Associates of Danecourt School (FADS) enhance the sense of community by organising events such as discos, seasonal celebrations, Easter egg hunts, and fundraising activities for projects including the Immersive Classroom. These initiatives strengthen connections between families and provide enrichment opportunities for pupils.

Family support mechanisms are both proactive and responsive. Families are signposted to external agencies and networks, and initiatives such as home visits for all new pupils



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ensure strong relationships are established from the outset. A listening campaign is underway to gather parent perspectives, supported by regular opportunities for feedback through fortnightly questions on Class Dojo. Innovative approaches, such as hosting coffee mornings at local venues, have been introduced to reach a broader group of parents. The newly appointed social worker, Parent Partnership lead, and Community Ambassador are already strengthening support, ensuring families feel included, empowered, and confident in their partnership with the school.

Next Steps:

- To continue to develop the roles of the School Social Worker, Parent Partnership Lead and Community Ambassador
- To implement the fortnightly 'Class Dojo' questions to elicit parental voice and views on how to improve the school



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Element 8 - Links with Local, Wider and Global Community

Danecourt School actively cultivates links with the local, wider, and global community to enrich pupils' learning experiences and to strengthen its role as a community-focused institution. Collaborative partnerships with other special schools and local SEND feeder secondary schools ensure smooth transitions, enabling joint visits, shared experiences, and coordinated parental engagement. These partnerships promote effective collaboration and prepare pupils for the next stage in their education.

The community is a core driver of the curriculum. Pupils participate in regular local trips and enrichment activities, which deepen their understanding of the world around them while fostering independence and confidence. Weekly enrichment opportunities, such as sessions with Boogie Tots, football coaching, and swimming, alongside visits to shops, libraries, and tennis clubs, provide meaningful opportunities to apply learning in real-life contexts. These experiences help pupils develop practical skills and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community.

Visitors from local and national organisations, including the Dog's Trust, the Pearly Kings and Queens, and the Family Trust, further enhance the curriculum, bringing different perspectives into school life. Pupils also take part in fundraising and community events, promoting social responsibility and reinforcing the reciprocal relationship between the school and its wider community.

Beyond the local context, Danecourt maintains strong professional links across the Trust and with other special schools in Kent. These relationships enable joint training, curriculum moderation, and leadership of the Maritime Outreach Support Service (MOSS), which provides observations, tailored training, and SEND strategic support for mainstream colleagues. The school's professional reputation extends nationally and internationally, with contributions to TES publications, podcasts, and the Challenge Partners network, sharing expertise and influencing wider SEND practice.

Teaching staff make effective use of local and global resources to enrich learning opportunities. Outdoor education plays a central role, with pupils regularly accessing nearby woodland and participating in the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) programme. Offsite experiences such as skiing, trampolining, and cultural workshops broaden horizons, while community services, including the Police and Fire Service, contribute to safety and curriculum-based learning. Professional development is also strengthened through these partnerships, with local agencies and networks contributing expertise to enhance staff knowledge and practice.

The recently appointed Community Ambassador is building further connections within the local community. Work is underway with a local autism charity to explore support for families with younger children (0–5), and links with the NHS and housing associations are helping families to access wider opportunities. Parents have highlighted challenges in accessing clubs and community spaces for children with SEND, and early plans are being developed to support local organisations in better understanding and meeting these needs.



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Next Steps:

- To continue to develop the role of the Community Ambassador
- To further develop links within the community to support families access to more resources