



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR ICKBURGH SCHOOL

Name of School:	Ickburgh School
Headteacher/Principal:	Joe Sieber
Hub:	London Special and AP Hub
School phase:	Community Special 3-19
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	The school decided to have verbal estimates only for this review
Date of this Review:	26/01/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	N/A
Date of last QA Review:	22/02/2023
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	28/06/2023

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers, agrees that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels	N/A
Quality of provision and outcomes AND	N/A
Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with additional needs	N/A
Area of excellence	Accredited
Previously accredited valid areas of excellence	Professional learning: Quality assurance and an approach to continuing professional development (CPD)

Overall peer evaluation estimate

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

Ickburgh school is a special school serving the local authority of Hackney. It has 184 students on roll from age 3 to 19. All students have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and most reside in Hackney. Two thirds of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with half of the students known to social services. The school's population reflects its location, with a diverse community with half of students coming from families where English is spoken an additional language. Half of the students have medical needs.

The school's curriculum is split into three pathways. The 'Sensory Learners' pathway fits a profile that meets profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). One half of students follow the 'Connecting Learners' pathway which is for students with severe learning difficulties and an autism diagnosis and the 'Active Learners' pathway is followed by nearly one third of students who have severe learning difficulties.

In addition, the school receives significant therapeutic support and further half termly visits by specialist teachers for those that have visual and hearing impairment.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders and staff are committed to living the school values of fulfilment, belonging and independence (FBI). This is central to their planning of learning experiences for students. Staff interactions and communication with students consistently apply these values that make it a happy community where students can be themselves and thrive.
- Leaders' identification of strategic priorities is informed by thorough self-evaluation processes distilled from different layers of quality assurance sources. This means that consideration is given to everyone's views which results in high satisfaction from staff voice.
- Quality assurance is a strength of the school and drives highly personalised continuous professional development (CPD) against a set of school specific standards that reflect the highest ambition for students. Coupled with supportive line management, this enables the granular detail of individual CPD plans to be explored through coaching that identifies areas of strength and further training needs. For example, staff that teach sensory students were given refresher training based upon therapist feedback. This ensured that high standards of therapy support in classrooms were maintained and strengthened.
- Phase and pathway leaders are an excellent example of distributed leadership in action. They are able to articulate with confidence their aims to their teams which gives clarity of purpose to teachers. This means that programmes of study are delivered with fidelity which matches intention.

- All the pathway curriculums give students experience of the rich opportunities London has to offer. There has been a rebuilding of staff confidence since the pandemic to manage the complexity of needs with educational visits. This is resulting in an ever-expanding variety of events in which to participate, such as the London Panathlon games, as well inclusive and mainstream events, such as the Hackney Music Festival.
- As a Gold UNICEF UK Rights Respecting School, students are able to use their knowledge of disabled people's rights. This has resulted in working with the local council to work towards establishing safe crossing points to the school which is situated on a busy main road. This also helps students in understanding the diverse world around them and their place in it as an equal alongside other members of society. During a student council meeting made up of a representative cross-section of age and need, students were given agency to help plan a celebration event; they did so with great enthusiasm.
- Personal development is at the heart of learning where independence is continually encouraged and planned for. All targets relate to ECHP outcomes which consequently increase students' confidence with socialising and developing communication skills.

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

- ... Leaders refined the identification and targeted support processes for EverCin6 families.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is under constant review to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners. It is tied to the school values of FBI as the main drivers when thinking about successful outcomes. This has led to an increased focus on adding more distinct routes to accreditation within the pathways. This widens the choice of further education and training available to students when they leave Ickburgh.
- EHCP outcomes necessarily form the spine of the curriculum across every class and pathway. This makes sure that the individual is at the heart of planning and learning. Teachers then ensure that weekly plans include group and individual tasks that capture progress towards those targets using live outcome maps. The tasks that teachers plan follow medium and long term aims set out in pathway schemes of learning which are then tailored to the individual.
- Teachers are becoming increasingly confident with incorporating more subject specific content into learning. In a post-16 functional skills mathematics lesson, the teacher expertly spotted some misconceptions while circulating and paused the class responsively to remodel how to measure using string and a ruler from a given point. This level of challenge made students think hard and achieve more success.

- The consistent use of well-embedded routines across all classes means that students transition very well between activities. This encourages independence. Not a single second is lost, with students able to collect their own resources and lead their own learning. Classroom environments facilitate this approach with pictorial and dual coded resources, along with visual checklists to help students decide their next steps within tasks more independently. In a Key Stage 5 class on the 'Connecting Learners' pathway, students were able to consolidate words they had learned as part of their functional literacy learning without help. This allowed targeted support from teaching assistants for students who needed more help with sounding out words and matching them to the pictorial resources.
- The deliberate approach to reading was further evidenced by a visit to a primary aged class on the 'Connecting Learners' pathway. The teachers' pedagogical phonics knowledge allowed them to help students read the tri-graph 'ire' correctly from a variety of different individual starting points.
- Assessment is a real strength of the school. Live outcome maps are assiduously kept up to date by teachers. They give a secure picture of learning that is easily quality assured through learning walks, student voice and video evidence scrutiny.
- The school has a thoughtful approach to transition as they receive students in all phases at all times during the year. In a Key Stage 2 mixed class, new learners to the school in September have been grouped together to ensure that they acclimatise quickly to the inclusive culture, such as using zones of regulation, sensory circuits and interactive welcome songs as part of a reassuring, repetitive routine. This means that they were able to start their day well using multi-sensory resources in a well-regulated, positive environment.
- Attendance has steadily improved since the pandemic year on year. It is regularly above the national average for SEND schools. The school recognises the challenge it has with a high proportion of students with medical needs and takes every care to ensure that they receive education at every opportunity.

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

- ... teaching teams agreed a shared structure to support the learning of small steps within subject teaching.
- ... training focussed on the consistency of delivery so that there was reduced variability in adult support.

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

- The school immerses itself in community engagement. It acts as a hub for agencies and as the lead advocate to meet and plan coherent support for

families in crisis. This extends to early identification of emerging behaviours to informal diagnosis and referral that can be followed up with external agencies and partners.

- The inclusion team uses behaviour management data and specific detail captured in reporting of incidents to unpick complex needs for the most dysregulated students to synthesise detailed behavioural support plans for them. The behaviour and wellbeing policy has been co-constructed with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) therapy team. This is enacted in classrooms by highly trained student-facing staff who say that they feel confident on what signs to look for as challenging behaviour presents itself. They refer to the training they receive, using a unified approach, team teach, for de-escalating behaviour successfully. This is supported by the low number of repeat offending and no suspensions or exclusions. It is equally reflected by the calm learning environments in classrooms and happy interactions students have with their peers and adults during social times. Multi-sensory resources are used well to help students calm and self-regulate after social times so that they settle quickly and are ready to learn.
- All staff fully understand that 'all behaviour is communication', even at its most challenging. When a high profile incident happens leaders are quick to ensure that staff wellbeing is prioritised alongside the learners. Staff are highly appreciative of the half termly wellbeing sessions co-delivered by the CAMHS team. Consequently, staff develop self-soothing strategies and recognise early signs of needing more help.
- Staff training and culture is focussed on a preventative approach towards dysregulation. They ensure that students have objects of reference and other strategies, such as using zones of regulation at an age-appropriate level to improve their self-regulation and resilience. This means that students feel safe and can manage change well. For example, one student was supported over a whole year from their transition from Key Stage 4 to the sixth form in small steps into classroom and library environments that ultimately meant they were able to cope with increased demand and transition successfully.
- The attendance of socially disadvantaged students is better than their non-socially disadvantaged peers.

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

- ... the school continued to explore and share transferable strategies and expertise to support families who need it at home.

5. Area of Excellence

Professional learning: Quality assurance and an approach to continuing professional development (CPD)

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 school is renewing its area of expertise as it was first accredited over three years ago. Leaders have evolved their approach, originally out of necessity to avoid a duplicative and stressful, transactional process that was not centred on wellbeing or personal growth.

Having identified the problems, leaders took an evidenced, research-based approach to constructing a new model of CPD support. They found the following:

‘Effective leadership of teacher professional learning involves using evidence about student learning to inform decisions about what professional learning is needed, whether it is working, who it is working for, and when it should end.’ (Elmore, 2004; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008).

They looked into further research into understanding the specific professional development needs of individual teachers. (Stoll et al. NCSL 2012). Cole (2010) suggests that there should be a strong link between staff development and performance management systems to support development within identified areas of weakness.

From this, the school identified three core principles for its CPD process:

- autonomy: the desire to be empowered and have control.
- mastery: the itch to keep improving at something that’s important to us.
- purpose: the sense that what we do produces something transcendent or serves something meaningful beyond ourselves.

Leaders recognised that this would move from a perception of top down quality assurance to real professional learning. The school embedded these principles in the self-evaluation document for staff that has encouraged professional honesty in a safe environment.

Next, the school looked at different monitoring systems and unified them so that the evidence gathered was not duplicated but was gathered in a way which triangulated

and then provided personalised next steps. The found that best practice was easier to celebrate and is subsequently shared across the school.

Once this evidence is gathered, a single termly meeting takes place starting with detailed self-evaluation. Next steps are decided together by triangulating quality assurance gathered class data against the self-evaluation. The impact of this is that it identifies individual and common themes where CPD needs to address areas for development or refresh expectations. It tells leaders how well teachers are capturing student progress and designing tasks to achieve progress.

The school has been able to present its approach to three schools in the local area since being accredited; each time, leaders have received positive feedback from other headteachers and leadership teams.

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

Teachers confirm that they find the process supportive, creating transparency and agency in the quality assurance process. There is tangible evidence of teachers progressing from partially meeting expectations to fully meeting expectations and on to areas of excellence, all found through rigorous scrutiny of pupil progress. The proportion of teachers meeting the highest standard has increased from 6% to 33% in the last three years.

Professional learning meetings enable leaders to monitor and refine universal, targeted, and specialist interventions for communication, ensuring that students can:

- understand and decode language through receptive skills more successfully.
- express needs, interests, and aspirations through expressive skills with greater confidence and clarity.

Professional learning also supports priorities, such as community learning, including physical skills and sensory health, communication, interaction and social skills and emotional regulation.

This work has resulted in over 85%+ success in meeting EHCP targets in the above referenced areas over a sustained period of three years across all pathways.

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

Joe Sieber, headteacher, jsieber@ickburgh.hackney.sch.uk

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 partnership of schools and trusts 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 partnership 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>)