



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR

CASTLE MEAD ACADEMY

Name of School:	Castle Mead Academy
Headteacher/Principal:	Tom Hague
Hub:	East Midlands South
School phase:	Secondary Free School
MAT (if applicable):	The Mead Educational Trust (TMET)

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	20/06/2022
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Leading
Date of last QA Review	10/06/2021
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	The school has not been inspected by Ofsted
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	N/A

Quality Assurance Review

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

Leadership at all levels Leading

Quality of provision and outcomes Leading

AND

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

Area of excellence Accredited

Previously accredited valid areas of excellence N/A

Overall peer evaluation estimate Leading

The Quality Assurance Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.

1. Context and character of the school

Castle Mead Academy (CMA) opened as a new school in the autumn term of 2019. It is situated in the centre of Leicester, with a city-wide catchment. The school currently has scholars in Years 7 to 9 and it will grow to an 11-16 school over time. In its short term of existence, it has become extremely popular and is thus heavily oversubscribed with more than double the applications for the places that are available. The school moved into brand new accommodation at the start of the autumn term 2021.

Whilst being a member of The Mead Educational Trust (TMET), leaders at Castle Mead enjoy the freedom to drive the school in their own direction and with their own distinctive values that are most applicable to their scholars.

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The vision for the school is 'At Castle Mead Academy we are growing a community of excellence by giving our scholars both roots and wings so as they can create a better future. We do this by being kind, working hard and building our character'.

The values of the school are: Everyone is capable of excellence, we develop the whole self, we make no excuses and we see feedback as a gift.

The proportion of disadvantaged scholars is above the national average. The school celebrates its diversity, with a much greater than average proportion of scholars coming from minority ethnic groups. White British is the predominant group, although there is a relatively equal division of other ethnicities. The proportion of scholars who have English as an additional language (EAL) is above the national average and there are 45 different languages spoken in the school. The proportion of scholars with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is broadly in line with the national average.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The principal and other leaders are very ambitious for each scholar and are committed to improving the life chances of all. Leaders are very successful in implementing the school's mission of 'Growing a Community of Excellence'. Staff and scholars live and breathe the school's values and drivers. As a result, scholars maintain the highest standards in terms of attitude to learning, behaviour and respect. The principal is ably supported by a very capable and effective team of senior leaders. Staff speak passionately of the warm and supportive working relationships created by the senior team, with staff morale being high.
- The work of the school is based on informed deep and relevant research. For example, The Castle Mead Academy framework for teaching is an exceptional body of work and ensures that scholars receive consistently high-quality learning experiences. Expert lesson delivery is underpinned by this framework.
- Professional learning (PL) for teaching staff is a strength of the school and is built into the school day. Fortnightly one-hour PL sessions are research informed. All teachers partake in instructional coaching, with fortnightly lesson visits. Coaching highlights professional development priorities for teachers and builds teachers' independent ability to reflect on their own practice.
- The curriculum leaders' forum facilitates discussion and challenge between middle leaders. It provides opportunity for leaders to share expertise, challenge curricular decision-making and pave the way for interdisciplinary working.
- School leaders know their school very well. Self-evaluation at all levels is thorough, detailed and drives improvement. Rigorous quality assurance

procedures are based on a culture of critique. This enables leaders to be flexible and adaptive to the needs of both staff and scholars.

- At the heart of the school's work is the promotion of scholars' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. All subjects contribute to the SMSC development of scholars. For example, in history, some units of work are based on the history and culture of Leicester. Scholars visit the King Richard 111 visitor centre. Scholars have access to a wide range of opportunities to grow their skills and desired character traits so that they develop their whole self. At the core of their journey is 'Castle Character Time'. This is similar to an after-school club but takes place through the extended school day, on Mondays and Thursdays, to ensure that all scholars access a broad range of experiences.
- The school is outward-looking and collaborates very effectively with other schools within the Mead community. Leaders facilitate TMET's annual 'Growing Great Leaders Series' with leaders from around the world taking part.
- The curriculum is extensively enriched by music, art, sport, cultural learning experiences and visits. The Stempiecetrust hosts STEM days for scholars; scholars participate in a pottery workshop in Stock-on-Trent; and rowing scholarships allow scholars to benefit from working with coaches from the Leicester Rowing Club.
- Academy councillors work in partnership with senior leaders and the community so that scholars get the best education possible. They know and understand the specific needs of the community well.

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

...leaders at all levels were concise when articulating the work of the school.

...leaders further developed the professional growth offer for *all* staff.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The school community works hard to ensure that CMA provides the best possible school experience for every scholar. Curriculum leaders have built their own curricula. Ongoing review and refinement are systematic and in line with the school's maxim that the 'curriculum is forever'. The curriculum is sequenced well with a commitment to high academic achievement through challenge, nurture and support.
- Leaders have paid attention to the order in which knowledge should be introduced and revisited. Procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge for each subject are mapped and scholars' learning builds on what they have learned before. Scholars are equipped with powerful knowledge. This knowledge is specialised knowledge that scholars would not otherwise encounter in their day-to-day lives.

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- Leaders actively promote the Ebacc suite of subjects. Additional curriculum time is provided for these subjects. Modern languages are studied by the vast majority of scholars to GCSE. This year, access to facilities has enabled a greater emphasis on the creative subjects, such as design and the arts. The music scholarship scheme has inspired scholars and there are now numerous choirs and orchestras.
- The 'Poetry in Voice' initiative provides the opportunity for all scholars to read and learn the diverse 'Castle Canon' poems off by heart. This helps to build scholars' social, cultural and linguistic capital.
- Teaching and learning is rooted in educational research. Teaching is characterised by rigour, depth, drive and clarity of instruction. Teachers employ a 'Do Now' approach at the start of lessons. This is successful in building the foundation for higher order thinking. In a mathematics class, a Flashback4 activity enabled scholars to retrieve previous knowledge and solve problems related to trapeziums.
- Teachers provide invigorating instruction to scholars, interspersed with appropriate activities to enable them to practise and consolidate their understanding, before moving swiftly on to acquire new knowledge.
- Teachers have consistently high expectations of all scholars. They shape the learning activities according to scholars' needs, including those who are disadvantaged and those with SEND. In-class levels of support are adjusted as deemed necessary. As a result, scholars make exceptional progress from their individual starting points.
- Disciplinary literacy is developed exceedingly well and scholars have a deep knowledge of specialist subject vocabulary. The 'speak like a scholar' oracy strategy is used consistently well across the curriculum.
- Teachers 'plan to the detail' and craft questions to maximise scholars' learning. High quality modelling quickly moves scholars from concrete to abstract concepts. Misconceptions are proactively addressed.
- Routines are explicitly taught, leading to positive behaviour and a welcoming and warm learning environment.
- A key feature of the school's work is to inspire in scholars the need to contribute positively to life in modern Britain. Scholars understand that acts of kindness help them form connections with others and increases popularity. Being kind to others, the community and to themselves is encouraged. Scholars speak of a greater sense of belonging and improved self-esteem as a result of the school's focus on being kind.
- Scholars have many opportunities to actively develop their leadership skills. In addition to the planned opportunities for scholars to demonstrate and develop leadership skills in lessons, there are numerous others outside of the formal

curriculum. These include scholars taking on the role of scholar councillors, sports team leaders and Castle Character Time activity leaders.

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

...all teachers planned regular opportunities to check for understanding.

...probing questioning was used to deepen scholars' thinking.

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

- The ethos and high expectations for SEND scholars are shared widely and are evident throughout the school. The ethos within the school is to break down barriers to access learning. School leaders, the SEND and behaviour team, have created an exceptional culture in CMA.
- The SENDCO has supported her team through quality professional learning that has enabled them to grow in confidence and develop key strands within their roles. They attend all professional learning days and have fortnightly 1-1 meetings with the key workers to ensure that they are aware of the support needed for scholars.
- Scholars' needs and the high expectations are well embedded across the school. Parental responses highlight the success of the school in creating a strong partnership. Parents and carers are encouraged to be actively involved in the scholar passports and sharing of information.
- Skilled key workers are in place to deliver targeted interventions. Interventions are fluid and support a range of needs. Key workers are well trained in delivering the interventions and these are monitored across the school. The use of role play to support one another in how to handle situations that may arise in class is modelled and discussed between staff; this supports a consistent approach across the school.
- The SENDCO attends curriculum leader meetings to discuss scholars' needs, to explain how learning can be tailored and to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about scholars' passports.
- Disadvantaged scholars benefit from the same high expectations, the warm positive climate for learning and the rich curriculum as other scholars. They also benefit from the extended day through the Castle Character Time. This time is a unique enrichment opportunity for all scholars. These opportunities specifically benefit disadvantaged and SEND scholars who get priority in their choices. This increases their social and cultural capital. Addressing social disadvantage is a priority of the Ebacc curriculum. Leaders set out to eliminate the knowledge gap between vulnerable scholars and their peers.

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

No areas for further improvement of any substance were identified.

5. Area of Excellence

Professional Growth

Accredited

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

Leaders continually strive to improve the quality of teaching and learning at Castle Mead Academy. The Professional Growth model embodies the notion that, at CMA, 'feedback is a gift'. Leaders make very effective use of educational research to inform and develop practice as teachers. Professional Growth is of the utmost importance, and just as scholars have access to the best that has been written, thought and said, so too do CMA teachers as part of the Professional Growth offer.

The Professional Growth model ensures that scholar learning is supported by expert, quality first teaching with an emphasis on direct instruction, centred around the 'Invigorating Instruction' framework for excellent teaching. As a result, teachers are highly effective as shown by the progress and learning of scholars across subjects. Every two weeks, teachers have a research-informed professional learning session, two short 'Expert Practice' sessions to hone a granular aspect of practice, a short, developmental lesson visit, and a coaching conversation.

The professional learning (PL) sessions run fortnightly, on Friday afternoons. Scholars leave school at 14.10 every Friday, and on alternate weeks teaching staff and the inclusion team come together for PL. The fact that PL is built into the school day in this way highlights the value placed upon it. Sessions are research-informed, centred around the CMA 'Invigorating Instruction' framework for excellent teaching, and responsive to quality assurance findings. Each term, the PL programme is informed by common threads and themes emerging from a culture of critique activities.

In a feedback survey, 100 per cent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that Friday PL was having a positive impact on scholars' learning and progress. All

respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that coaching was having a positive impact on practice and all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Professional Growth opportunities at CMA help to ensure that they are constantly improving.

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

As a result of teachers continually developing their pedagogical and subject knowledge, they enact the curriculum in accordance with the 'Invigorating Instruction' framework in such a way that ensures that scholars know more, remember more and can do more over time. Internal assessment data shows that, across all year groups, in almost all subjects, scholars are making good or exceptional progress. In termly learning conferences, where senior and curriculum leaders meet with scholars to gather feedback on their learning experiences within a particular subject, scholars are asked questions around the '20%' (core, high-leverage knowledge) from within that subject. These questions span over time and topics to gauge scholars' retention of knowledge over time. Scholars demonstrate a consistently high success rate when tasked with answering these quiz questions, demonstrating that they know more, remember more and can do more over time.

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

Name: Chloe French and Adna Harris

Title: Vice principal and assistant principal

Email: cfrench@castle-tmet.uk / aharris@castle-tmet.uk

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

Following discussion with the principal, school leaders would like to reflect further about what support they might like.

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.



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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.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website.