



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR CASTLE MEAD ACADEMY

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

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	09/11/2022
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Leading
Date of last QA Review:	20/06/2021
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	This school has not yet been inspected by Ofsted
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	N/a



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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 scholars and scholars with additional needs Leading

Area of Excellence Not submitted

Previously accredited valid Areas of Excellence Professional growth June 2022

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 11-16 mixed school in 2019. It currently has scholars up to Year 10. The school buildings are purpose built and were opened in 2021. The school's location, in the centre of Leicester, is in an area of very high deprivation. Similarly, the student deprivation base is high overall, with an above average proportion of disadvantaged scholars. The school's popularity means that it is oversubscribed. 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, with a relatively equal division of other ethnicities.

The proportion of scholars with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the proportion with an education, health and care plan are close to average. The proportion of scholars for whom English is an additional language is above the national average, with Polish, Arabic and Romanian the most prevalent.

The school is part of TMET and sits within the Leicester City local authority.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The Principal ensures fidelity to the school's vision to 'grow a community of excellence by giving our scholars both roots and wings so as they can be grounded in traditional values yet poised to reach their future ambitions.' For example, students like being referred to as scholars because it reinforces excellence to them. 'The important thing is we are called scholars not students, because we learn and gain knowledge. Here, we are not just students.'
- The vision continues with, 'We do this by being kind, working hard and building our character.' Scholars are taught to model their character to those new to Year 7. As one explained, 'the school puts responsibility on our actions. We have to constantly think about what we are doing because other scholars are looking at us. For example, Year 10s have Year 7s behind us at line up, so they can see the standard that we set.'
- There is an evident thread from the vision to the strong systems, processes and procedures. These are implemented, monitored and reviewed meticulously. There are many unique aspects to CMA life for which staff and scholars are very clear about the why and the how. As a result, everyone works together to achieve

excellence within a tight system that embraces individuality. For example, scholars proudly follow a strict uniform code but can express their individuality with coloured hair.

- The system is highly effective at maintaining high standards as the school grows. Since September, leaders have successfully integrated a new large Year 7 cohort, transitioned their first Year 10 scholars into a new Key Stage and inducted several new staff. The many strengths identified at the previous Challenge Partners review remain.
- Leaders embrace a culture of challenge and honesty with the view that 'feedback is a gift that allows you to keep getting better'. Consequently, within just a few months, teachers have made rapid improvements in checking for understanding and deeper questioning.
- Senior leaders draw on research and expertise to develop strategies for new developments. They work with staff to skilfully synthesise strategies suited to CMA's scholars, such as the exceptional reading strategy and the comprehensive assessment strategy.
- The Principal manages resources to maximise support for the strategies. For example, the reading strategy is supported by library reading lessons and a phonics specialist. The assessment strategy is supported by time to standardise and moderate. Leaders monitor for accuracy across departments.
- Scholars benefit from a broad curriculum including citizenship, computing and careers education. The vast majority of scholars continue with a language into Key Stage 4. Consequently, the number of scholars studying an English baccalaureate programme is well above the national average.
- The Vice Principal ensures that impactful conversations about refining the curriculum are built into the monitoring system. Senior leaders illustrate with examples how they have challenged curriculum leaders to further improve their curriculums. Consequently, scholars benefit from an ambitious curriculum which is exceptional in its cohesion.
- Academy Councillors have a very clear understanding of school life, policies and the school's strengths, such as how leaders re-modelled the role of academic mentors to increase the impact of recovery catch-up spending.

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

...leaders strengthened real world application within subjects and evaluated the impact on how well scholars are prepared for their future life.

...Academy Councillors challenged leaders on areas for improvement as well as they engaged with the school's strengths.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes – What went well

- Curriculum leaders build their curriculums on the key knowledge that scholars must learn fluently in order to progress in the subject. This is referred to as 'the 20%'. A scholar exemplified the value of content choices and subject enrichment that leaders add to their curriculum as 'it helps me to appreciate the environment, standards and diverse options.'
- Teachers give scholars a clear and consistent understanding of the curriculum rationale. Scholars are able to clearly identify what they are learning and why, as part of the lesson's 'big question.' For example, in mathematics scholars confidently rounded decimals using their place number knowledge to answer the big question of 'how does our number system work?'
- Teachers use knowledge of their curriculum narrative to build on prior learning within the subject. As a result, scholars habitually make links and connections throughout their lessons. For example, one scholar studying Frankenstein made the link that 'The Creature is similar to Caliban in The Tempest because they are shown as both monster and victim.' Similarly, teachers use their subject knowledge to deepen scholar understanding with precise follow-up questioning, such as 'What part will cross-contaminate?' or 'Why did Russia put missiles in Cuba after the Berlin Crisis?'
- Teachers of performance subjects ensure that scholars know the underpinning knowledge before they produce their work. Consequently, scholars use impressive vocabulary with confidence when describing their tasks. For example, 'aeration' when describing how they improve their cooking, 'rendering' when describing how they visualise their product and 'tone' when describing how they create depth in their drawings.
- Teachers use a consistent approach to checking scholars' understanding. Scholars regularly use mini-whiteboards and fingers to support this approach. Teachers immediately improved their active observation of scholar responses and how to follow this up after an 'expert practice' briefing. For example, when scholars did not answer a question about stage directions as expected, the teacher retaught the key points and emphasised why they are so important.
- Frequent retrieval and assessment are a strong feature of learning. Consequently, Year 10 scholars feel well prepared for their GCSE exams. They say they are 'getting more personalised feedback this year because teachers know our strengths and find our weaknesses more.'

- Teachers use scaffolding techniques to improve verbal answers, such as the sentence starter 'Sherlock Holmes conforms to...' They also reinforce the school's 'Speak Like a Scholar' strategy to improve scholars' oracy, for example requiring full sentences or louder volume. Similarly, teachers routinely develop the 'reading to learn' strategy strand with reference to high-quality texts. They deliberately read the key aspects of the text but share out other parts for scholars to read. As a result, scholars are confident to give and improve answers and to read aloud.
- All teachers, including those recently joining the school, provide scholars with a highly consistent learning experience, exemplifying the power of a common vocabulary and well-employed routines. As a result, scholars' learning time is maximised in an exceptionally calm and purposeful environment. Scholars show positive attitudes to learning in all lessons.
- Daily tutor-time reinforces the same routines as subject lessons and teach a range of content in a safe space. Scholars develop their confidence by learning how to debate and discuss answers to important life issues, such as, 'Should rules around drugs and alcohol exist?'
- Scholars see the quality and diversity in their education and view it as a privilege. They value that they will be confident scholars when they leave their school, particularly in terms of how they speak. They recognise their identity and self-worth and have high expectations of their future life.

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

...when teachers checked understanding they had a clear plan of how they would scaffold follow-on activities for any scholars with wrong answers.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged scholars and scholars with additional needs – What went well

- The consistent lesson routines avoid the most vulnerable scholars becoming overloaded. The calm learning environment maximises their concentration so that the amount of work in books matches the rest of the class.
- Many teaching strengths, such as modelling, and a focus on language particularly support disadvantaged scholars and scholars with additional needs. Scholar passports detail further techniques, such as word banks, sentence starters, supporting images and templates which help scholars to learn with their peers. For example, one scholar used a slide showing key

words and a photo of a storm to explain that 'the storm made me feel scared, but also a bit suspicious about what might happen next.'

- Curriculum leaders, subject teachers and key workers liaise regularly. This makes sure that scholar passports remain dynamic, with accurate detail about the best teaching pedagogy to meet their needs.
- Leaders prioritise new scholars who are unable to read well enough. The SENDCo has compiled a range of interventions, including a national trial, into an effective direct instruction programme. Scholars follow this intensive learning to read programme until they catch-up with their peers.
- Leaders support their vision of 'giving both roots and wings' by providing excellent provision for care outside of lessons. Scholars can access this provision in the spaces they refer to as the Keep, the Library and Scholar Support. Scholars use these spaces for counselling, interventions, learning support and guidance. One student exemplified how this makes them feel, 'they are here to help us or be a place where we can talk to staff.'
- Castle Character Time (CCT) is embedded into the timetable so that all scholars benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as crochet, martial arts and Mandarin. Disadvantaged scholars and those with additional needs get first choice with these activities, which offer inclusive provision that particularly benefits them. Scholars' enthusiasm about CCT demonstrates how much they value being part of CMA. As one student said, the school 'exposes me to lots of opportunities. Lots of other people don't have what we have here. We don't just focus on the academic, we focus on so much more.'

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

...all teachers planned to the detail for each task so that they considered how well each scholar with SEND could access the learning.

...leaders strengthened links within the local community so that scholars had the opportunity to contribute as an active citizen during Castle Character Time.

5. Area of Excellence

Not submitted.

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

To facilitate contact with new schools with a similar context who have been open slightly longer, such as Riverside School, Barnet.

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.

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.