



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR NETHERHALL MEAD ACADEMY

Name of School:	Netherhall Mead Academy
Headteacher/Principal:	Sarah Naylor
Hub:	Ash Field
School phase:	Primary and Secondary Special
MAT (if applicable):	The Mead Educational Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Not Applicable (N/A)
Date of this Review:	31/03/2025
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Leading
Date of last QA Review:	11/03/2024
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good across all areas
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	21/06/2022

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 N/A

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

Area of excellence N/A

Previously accredited valid areas of excellence Building a bespoke assessment system that demonstrates meaningful progress for pupils with SEND 11/03/2024.

Overall peer evaluation estimate N/A

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' ng 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

As you climb the gently undulating hills coming to the eastern edge of Leicester, the imposing campus site that holds Netherhall Mead Academy rises at the city's edge. Every weekday, pupils tumble into the school with an enthusiasm and excitement that instantly lights a fire for a 'joie de vivre' that is truly catching.

Netherhall Mead is a highly specialised provision for pupils with a range of complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils have education, health, and care plans (EHCPs). The 136 pupils at the school are supported by a huge staff team of 120. All have bespoke training that enables them to support the pupils' SEND best, for example, at understanding and working with dysphasia across the school day, or as travel trainers working with pupils in the community.

The proportion of pupils receiving pupil premium funding is more than double the corresponding national figure. Just as importantly, more than one third of pupils are known to social care, which is more than ten times the national average. Girls make up just under a third of the cohort, and the number of pupils who have English spoken as a second language at home is more than four times the national average. Almost one in ten of the pupils have gastro feeds, and a high proportion have physiotherapy, occupational therapy and medical care plans in place.

Pupils and their families love their school, as one family member explained, 'Netherhall is a school that recognises the importance of what the pupils can do, not what they can't.'

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders continue to have a powerful strategic role in the development of the school. The building, although 11 years old, is truly exceptional. Classrooms have been designed to hold the massive range of equipment many of the pupils utilise across the school day. There are changing areas with dual 'H frames' to enable access to every part of the classroom, linking to changing areas with the same systems. The wide, airy corridors are uncluttered and provide great spaces for pupils to practise their mobility, whether they are independent in their wheelchairs, in wheelchairs with assisted drivers, or when undertaking physio in walkers. Pupils get an amazing physical development offer, accessing the incredible soft play room, built-for-purpose rebound therapy hall, a 'Zen Den', a daily mile track, and a hydrotherapy pool.

With such an amazing environment, pupils and their families know that at Netherhall Mead they can have a completely integrated therapeutic curriculum.

- Leaders have a deep knowledge of the outcomes pupils achieve once they have left Netherhall, and are navigating life as adults with complex learning difficulties. For example, leaders can share that the number of pupils coming from Leicester special schools into independent employment is 0.4% as part of their 'be honest' value, and that the key focus for the school is to ensure that pupils have the core knowledge and skills, to lead a purposeful and meaningful life, within their home communities. This focus extends to helping the pupils' families articulate their needs to multi-agency colleagues, and ensure that ex-Netherhall pupils get the support and care they need long-term. To achieve this, the school tracks alumni for up to 14 years, and with this knowledge, aspirational end-points can be carefully targeted.
- Leaders at Netherhall understand that the core values that the school holds dear - to 'be kind', 'be safe', 'be honest', 'be brave' and 'grow together' - need to be a lived experience, both in the school and beyond, in pupils' communities. Leaders share how carefully they involved stakeholders in the values production, and have crafted a series of statements that show the behaviours and actions that 'are not good enough for Netherhall', such as 'ignoring how others feel', across a graduated scale to 'the perfect fit for Netherhall' and 'goes out of their way to help others create a strong sense of community'. As an evolving project, leaders know that by having lived values, the teaching team, pupils and their families aspire to the best holistic outcomes for their wider community.

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

...leaders ensured that the website and school's self-evaluation form fully reflected the complexity of the cohort, and the integrated therapeutic curricula offer at the school.

...for further refinement to the independent living aspect of preparation for adulthood curricula offer, the school developed new spaces devoted to enabling pupils to practise key skills for life.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Staff articulate that there is a change in the needs of the current cohort of pupils. Pupils starting in the academy have more complex needs which impact the curricula content, and the need for high-quality continuing professional learning for all staff working with the pupils. Staff describe having the flexibility

within their classes to try new things, and share those which are successful. There is an expectation of a bespoke approach for all pupils. Staff and leaders have lived the 'be brave' value in making decisions about changing the curriculum to meet the individual needs of pupils. Pupil progress meetings within class groups, and also with members of the leadership team, are valuable opportunities to discuss barriers to learning for certain pupils, and explore ways to overcome these. Staff at Netherhall know their skills and knowledge are valued. For example, often staff have the opportunity to deliver training in areas such as *Team Teach*, manual handling, *Rebound Therapy* and first aid. With staff that feel super skilled to meet the needs of the changing cohort, there is a consistent drive to 'grow together'.

- Teachers at Netherhall ensure that their lessons match the proximal learning needs of the pupils. For example, when undertaking an intensive interaction activity, teachers raise their energy levels so they can join pupils in their enthusiasm for the chosen activity. Staff work wherever pupils have chosen to engage in an activity, layering positive reinforcement, and providing time for cognitive processing. With such a personalised approach, staff engineer great relationships where pupils know their interests are taken seriously.
- Teachers ensure learning outcomes for individual learning activities are clearly displayed and communicated to the staff team. Small step learning priorities are on display in every classroom, adapted and amended when needed, unlike the common cyclical models in other specialist schools. This then links directly into *Evidence for Learning*, allowing a portal to pupils' families where they get a high-quality fortnightly update, alongside the opportunity to share the achievements pupils make in their wider lives. With the curriculum as a blended offer, linking therapeutic input, alongside carefully planned EHCP section E targets, and adapted academic content, pupils get a curricula offer that is tailored to match the skills and knowledge needed for a successful adulthood.
- As the cohort changes, so the curricula offer needs to flex to meet pupils needs, and will continue to, as opposed to a fixed model like 'the national curriculum'. For example, a new pathway, 'Jade', has been developed following a change in the identified needs of pupils. Within this cohort, pupils have complex sensory profiles, meaning these have to be met before learning can start to take place. The 'right time demand' means that fleeting engagement becomes the vehicle for learning for these pupils. By having a curriculum offer that matches presentation, pupil-led education ensures they have the opportunities engineered to allow engagement in learning.
- Staff at Netherhall work together to understand and implement effective communication approaches, responding to spontaneous communication from pupils, allowing the pupil's 'voice' to be heard. For example, a pupil used his communication board during an *Attention Autism* session to request the teacher to blow the bubbles 'slowly'. In a *Body Rhymes* session, a pupil was given a choice of two sensory stimuli to explore. The teacher was able to

respond to the pupil's body language, to follow through with her request. This pupil-led approach to communication has enabled a high level of engagement, and an understanding among pupils that their communication at every level is noticed and acted on.

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

...none identified.

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

- Staff have a really clear picture of what they are trying to achieve for pupils, and what a great outcome looks like, no matter what pupils' complex SEND. Articulating this, staff encountering a 28-year-old ex-pupil on the High Street would appreciate knowing they have a healthy life, meaningful communication systems, community access, enjoyment of adulthood, purposeful adulthood, and opportunities for meaningful decision-making, all in line with the school's value of 'being safe'. With a unified view of what they want to achieve, pupils and their families get the preparation they need to live successful adult lives.
- Pupils have their 'voice' developed, have opportunities to ensure that they can hold others to account, and share their thoughts on what matters to them. For example, recently the school's library has been moved to a smaller room that does not mean another class has to be disturbed to access it. While the new library is being set up, outward-facing bookshelves will become a feature of corridors, allowing pupils the opportunity to 'drop everything and read' if a book gets their attention. While for many this is fine, for a few pupils they already miss their library, and at a pupil voice meeting they are 'honest' in letting teachers and leaders know this, ensuring the revamp of the library offer matches the speed that pupils would like to see its reinstatement. Pupils are taught how to share their thoughts, dreams and wishes, and expect those working with them to listen carefully to their opinions.
- Netherhall Academy takes family support with a seriousness that matches the complex challenges its pupils and families face. For example, within the cohort there are pupils who have lived in multi-occupation housing, temporary housing, very low-quality rented housing and emergency housing. Families at the school get signposting to early help, including food banks, and the school clothing bank, alongside the consistent offer to help guide families through the changing multi-agency services that they may well have to access, for

example, filling out GP assessments, housing assessments and benefit forms. With a motivated team wanting the absolute best for such a disadvantaged cohort, families at Netherhall know the academy is always 'in their corner'.

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

...none identified.

Following the QA Review

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

For further support following your QA Review, schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools. The School Support Directory can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

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