



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR NETHERHALL MEAD ACADEMY

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

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Not applicable
Date of this Review:	02/03/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Not applicable
Date of last QA Review:	31/03/2025
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
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/or pupils with additional needs N/A

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' 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

Netherhall Mead Academy is a special school based in Leicester, catering for pupils aged 4-19, and is co-located with the Orchard Mead secondary school. All pupils that attend the school have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and at the time of the review there were 138 students and 120 staff supporting the complex needs of those that attend the school. The school site and buildings are impressive with dedicated space, and a range of excellent facilities, which are ideal for its pupils.

The proportion of pupils classified as being within the disadvantaged group equates to just under half of the school. Additionally, just under two thirds of all pupils had English as an additional language at the time of the review. Netherhall Mead also had the fourth highest rate of deprivation amongst the fifteen schools within its Trust.

The leadership team is composed of a Principal, Vice Principal and two Assistant Principals. They are an established team supported by an equally stable wider leadership team. Netherhall Mead is part of the Mead Education Trust and is currently the only special school to join the Trust, along with eight primary and six secondary schools.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The leadership team has dedicated time and energy to ensure that the school continues to drive forward its key objectives. This has included embedding the schools vision and values within the wider community and defining their role as the only specialist education provider within the trust.
- Netherhall has excellent capacity for continued improvement with its wider leadership team. These staff members collaborate with senior leaders to oversee and direct different pathways, leading both operational and strategic responsibilities. Joint observations and frequent visits allow for a flow of information, discussion, and advice where appropriate. Wider leaders clearly articulated their journey with their pathway development, their approach to quality assurance and ideas for the future. This has created a distributed approach to leadership that uses coaching and professional growth meetings to support staff development.
- The climate for learning is excellent. The site manager ensures that the building still looks brand new! A range of dedicated spaces support classroom provision to add breadth to the curriculum experience. This includes a rebound room, regulation spaces, a soft play area and a therapy pool.

Outside space is just as impressive with most classrooms having attached space for pupils to safely use. Plans are underway to develop a forest area that will support various activities. This has led to pupils being able to use space supported by staff for learning activities and co-regulation when with flexibility and personalisation.

- Community involvement is a constant feature of the schools approach to growth, ownership, and sense engagement. A parent governor was able to highlight, with video evidence, the impact of the Santa's Grotto. This was a complete sensory experience filling a sports hall that culminated with meeting Santa! Parents were able to bring their child's siblings and staff could invite their own children and family. The same parent governor discussed the important of working with 'PLU!' When asked for clarification this equated to working with and valuing 'people like us.'
- Staff wellbeing is a long standing and central pillar to the senior leadership teams approach to supporting staff. During the first day of the review (Monday) staff supported a team member after school, with a fund raiser for the London Marathon. Feedback collected from suggestion boxes placed in key locations have always been reviewed and acted upon. Staff attend the 'well-being' games during directed time which helped promote a sense of fun and competition. During the morning staff briefing, 'Wispa' bars were handed out to honour employees who exemplified the school's core values. Staff genuinely feel that they belong, appreciating their school and its leadership, and reflect its core values both at school and in the wider community.

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

...the approach to summarising the schools challenging context evolved and included curriculum provision.

...the excellent approach to using evidence for learning and staff wellbeing was shared with other schools locally and nationally.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Netherhall has created its own curriculum, which is highly personalised and designed to flex with the complex needs of its students. A picture of a curled ribbon brilliantly demonstrates the highly interwoven pathways that dovetail to suit individual pupils. The pathway headings of Aqua, Jade, Amber and Ruby have created generic groupings, but staff ensure that pupils could be on any pathway if this is what their needs dictate.
- The school's vision that it should create a place where pupils can shine, is aided by its core values of being brave, kind, honest, safe, and growing together. This was observed in lessons such as outdoor learning, cooking, primary start to the day and in sixth form classes where pupils were supported

to be safe, kind and work together. The combination of activities undertaken during the review confirmed that Netherhall pupils really did equate to a bright beam of light, particularly when compared to their previous educational placements.

- Assessment for learning is highly advanced at this school. Not settling for a standardised approach the lead for this area has collaborated with a national company to generate a 'three click approach' that enables an overview of pupil engagement and progress when reviewing key areas. This means that staff can spend more time actioning their next steps and promoting even more progress. Parents have also been able to engage with the process of sharing their child's development at home with the school, creating an even wider picture of what is going on from week to week.
- Communication is a key development for all pathways. This varies in the way it is used and based on the needs of the pupils being taught. For example, in a primary class one pupil was able to quickly order days of the week, whilst his peers needed greater time for their sensory processing needs. In a sixth form lesson, staff ensured pupils understood their choices to promote elevated levels of engagement. Consistency of practice such as 'now and then next' boards also support pupils understanding of the day and their learning activities.
- Outstanding resources that help students to learn, stay safe, and flourish at the school were observed in use throughout the review. One lesson, for instance, began with pupils participating in a song and dance routine to spark engagement, and then transitioned into small group activities focused on counting. Within the groups, a range of resources such as counters and blocks helped pupils to form a more concrete understanding of the task.
- Relationships are at the heart of this school. Teachers benefit from the assistance of skilled and dedicated teaching assistants. It was observed that at the start of the day, the well-being team, alongside other staff meet and greet students and use this as a 'check in' before they go to their classroom bases. Some students have carefully planned 'soft starts,' such as using the rebound area. This enables a level of personalisation that ensured pupils have the best chance of being regulated and ready to learn, but at their own pace.
- Attendance was recorded at 89% at the time of the review which was above average for special schools when compared nationally.

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

...continued development of post-16 provision widened the opportunity for alternative future pathways within the local community.

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

- Netherhall Mead Academy has a clear strategy to support pupils with disadvantage. However, alongside many other special schools they recognise the fact that all pupils start at the school with some form of disadvantage and personalise their approach to support whatever needs are presented due to contextual factors that may vary.
- Carefully crafted interventions to support pupils include the use of music and play therapy. Specialist 1-1 music lessons using a variety of instruments have ensured growth of confidence, improved communication skills, working towards qualifications and performance skills. In fact during the review a pupil played the Glockenspiel beautifully in the presence of the review team. It was later noted that the pupil had only seen the music twice and yet could play it with mastery, being supported by the specialist member of staff! A truly 'wow' moment!
- In order that no pupil at Netherhall Mead is negatively affected due to financial disadvantage, identification of pupils and possible experiences are made to overcome such a barrier. This has led to opera house visits, participation in creative and sporting experiences, supported work experiences and travel training.
- Historically all pupils have usually left Netherhall and then attended local college placements. However, during the last academic year, five pupils did not follow this pathway and therefore the school has now adopted its approach to ensure varying level of support is tailored for future cohorts. The introduction of a life skills learning area will add value for some pupils as they transfer to situations such as supported living.
- Behaviour for learning and supported regulation is a core aspect of the schools work to ensure progression and engagement from starting points. All staff are dedicated to maintaining an environment in the school that prioritises safety, engagement, and positive experiences for everyone. This starts with entry into school from bus journey's but also includes space and time within classrooms, seamless transitions, and frequent analysis of need. This has resulted in a calm, purposeful, and creative atmosphere where the schools values come alive on a lesson-by-lesson basis.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or 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 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>)