



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR STROOD ACADEMY

Name of School:	Strood Academy
Headteacher/Principal:	Jon Richardson
Hub:	Leigh
School phase:	Secondary
MAT (if applicable):	Leigh Academies Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	27/11/2024
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Effective
Date of last QA Review	29/06/2022
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	01/12/2021

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** Not applicable

Overall peer evaluation estimate Leading

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

Strood Academy was formed in September 2009 following the closure of two local schools. The Academy is larger than the average secondary academy with a post-16 provision, including specialist resource provision called the Endeavour Centre for pupils with a primary need of autism. The Endeavour Centre was officially opened in November 2023. In January 2017, Strood Academy joined Leigh Academies Trust (LAT), which now incorporates 33 schools including nursery, primary, secondary, post-16 and special schools. Almost half of the LAT schools are now judged as outstanding. Strood Academy is an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, which was granted this status in 2019 and is now preparing for re-authorisation in January 2026. The academy delivers the middle years programme IB courses at Key Stage 5 as well as the IBCP (International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme).

The number of disadvantaged students is above the national average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) is below the national average.

The principal of Strood Academy was appointed from April 2023 with a reformed leadership team merging to drive the academy forward. The academy is organised into three colleges, each with its own pastoral and safeguarding team and a vice principal and assistant principals responsible for leading the colleges.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The dynamic leadership is driven by the shared vision of the principal and his senior team. The leadership team collaborate successfully and demonstrate a powerful impact in the areas they are leading. The academy's fundamental principles buttress all leaders' plans and leaders at all levels are clear on the academy's strategic priorities.
- Leaders use a wide range of indicators to determine the effectiveness of teaching including drop-in observations, book scrutiny, parent and student voice as well as progress and attainment measures. These indicators are underpinned by a clear and consistently high expectation from leaders. Consequently, teaching across the academy is of a high standard.
- A very strong sense of purpose permeates the academy, which is fortified by the determination that all students do as well as they can and is evident in the progress that students make, often in challenging circumstances.

- Middle leaders demonstrate an exemplary commitment to the academy and a passion for their roles. They make a very significant contribution to the continuing improvement of the academy. They oversee the work of colleagues in their departments through regular learning walks and are instrumental in driving many improvements and initiatives, such as the reading strategy.
- Leaders have created a friendly, calm and well organised learning environment for students and visitors. This enables students to make good progress in their learning. The academy uses the 3 Rs (*Remind, Reinforce and Remove*) protocol successfully to promote consistently good behaviour.
- A fundamental principle for the academy is the appointment of high calibre staff and the development of their skills. Personalised continuing professional development (CPD) and coaching are central to ensuring high quality teaching.
- A culture of self-reflection is deeply embedded and a keen focus on research enhances improvement and constant challenge. Teachers generate research questions from the academy's priorities, data and monitoring and then plan an approach to explore them.
- Staff wellbeing is a pivotal focus for the principal. As one member of staff opined: 'Every decision factors-in wellbeing and there is an atmosphere of psychological safety within the staff community'. Another stated: 'The principal is everywhere and highly visible, picking up litter, visiting every teacher and wishing all staff a good weekend on Fridays and ensuring that all staff take a wellbeing break on a Wednesday'.
- Students are given a wide range of leadership opportunities; for example, sixth-form students apply for positions in the Senior Student Leadership Team. Throughout the academic year staff encourage sixth-form students to lead assemblies both in the sixth form and for Years 7 to 11. Sixth-form students are also encouraged to take part in the peer mentoring scheme and provide mathematics support for Year 11 students and reading support for Year 7 students.
- All students follow a seven-year careers programme to ensure that all, including those with SEND and the disadvantaged, are prepared very well for their next stage, including a comprehensive work-related programme to support applications. Students receive strong careers and post-16 guidance, including a compulsory work experience programme in the summer term of Year 10. On average, nearly two thirds of sixth-form students proceed to university with some attending Russell Group universities.
- There are strong partnerships with parents, which promote consistency in meeting students' needs. Parents receive detailed information about activities and learning, there is a parent voice forum and the academy provides a rich vein of material to parents on several areas.

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

... leaders acknowledged that the expectations of many primary schools are varied and continued to forge deeper and meaningful relationships with local primary schools to eradicate any concerns, thus enabling all students to enhance their transition to Strood Academy.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Teaching and learning across the academy are efficacious as a result of the professional learning sessions and the CPD which have been well embedded to support teachers' knowledge and understanding.
- In the best lessons, learning is collaborative, leading to increased involvement in classroom discussions. In Year 10 English and Year 12 criminology lessons, peer discussions successfully deepened students' knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers exhibit strong subject knowledge. For example, in a Year 7 Spanish lesson, the teacher encouraged students to explore new Spanish adjectives while in a Year 9 art lesson the teacher's expertise produced an air of inquisitiveness among students during a study of relief sculptures.
- Teachers generally make effective use of adaptive teaching, which ensures that students of different abilities access the curriculum. In a Year 9 geography session, this was evident when the teacher and the support assistant circulated well to reinforce students' understanding of sustainability.
- A revised curriculum model from September 2023 enables modern foreign languages (MFL) to be taught as a compulsory subject from Year 7 onwards and this has resulted in a significant increase in the numbers taking MFL at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 5, new subject options include IB Film and English Language and Literature.
- The academy offers a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, and the newly implemented Strood Football Academy attracts students who wish to continue their sporting development alongside their academic study. The programme is led by a member of staff, an ex-professional football player, who leads training sessions with students after school each day with fixtures every Wednesday.
- In the sixth form, enrichment options include mindfulness, a debate club, exercise and fitness, the female empowerment programme, coaching, personal development and work experience. These successfully promote students' behaviour, self-esteem and personal and social skills.
- Teachers adopt a personalised approach to feedback which has greater relevance for individual students and assists them in the next steps of their learning. The teacher in a Year 10 English lesson provided insightful support

for a few students who struggled with Shakespeare's presentation of Macbeth's downfall.

- Reports, which cover progress, attitude and homework, are given to parents three times a year and there is a parents' evening to buttress the close relationships between the academy and home.
- Questioning in most lessons is challenging and encourages students to expand their answers. Strategies, such as cold calling, the use of the timer and Chromebooks, are embedded well by teachers and clearly impactful.
- There have been significant improvements to the reading strategy and reading interventions take place daily for the weaker readers. The Sparx reader, for example, is used purposefully to identify students with well below average reading ages and the clear focus on this area was highlighted when a Key Stage 3 student opined, 'this has encouraged us to read at home and I am now reading harder books as a result'.
- Behaviour for learning is a real strength in lessons and teachers have high expectations of their students. The systems for managing behaviour are exemplary and the academy's communication in this area is first rate. Staff receive daily updates, and behaviour meetings are purposeful in ensuring that nothing 'slips through the net'.
- The very positive working relationships between staff and students promote a vibrant learning environment. Students are confident in their working practices and are not afraid to make mistakes due to the nurturing and stimulating
- surroundings.

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

... leaders continued to further embed the development of student oracy in all lessons.

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

- The leadership team articulates a clear vision that Strood Academy gives all disadvantaged students and those with additional needs opportunities to allow them to break free from the cycle of low expectation. This encourages all staff, parents and students to work closely together to ensure that these students are consistently provided with high quality learning opportunities.
- There is a clear process of identifying students with SEND and strategies for supporting those students during their lessons. The highly successful SEND provision, including wellbeing tutors and mental health services, supports

vulnerable learners well. This provision equips students with the skills needed to achieve the most out of life and to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

- Leaders maintain a very positive relationship with parents by developing their understanding of the support their children receive at the academy. This is shown by the academy's clear message that it is opposed to all forms of overt and covert prejudice, harassment, discrimination and actively seeks to educate everyone at Strood to recognise that every person is equal and should be treated with respect.
- Leaders are ambitious for those students who access the provision of the Endeavour Centre. The students participate fully in the mainstream curriculum apart from form time and PSHE lessons.
- Support staff timetables are updated in line with data drops for all students and Key Stage 4 is a priority. Support staff attend after-school interventions for Key Stage 4 students, and they are carefully deployed to support interventions and target specific lessons and subjects. The interventions are planned forensically to target student learning gaps.
- Teachers are very aware of the importance of their role in addressing learning gaps for vulnerable students. They are supported by enthusiastic leaders who ensure that they have the resources to identify students' specific learning barriers and identify key objectives to address these. Teachers receive regular monitoring from the SEN team which provides immediate feedback.

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

... with higher percentages of disadvantaged students in Key Stage 3, leaders underpinned the importance of successful transition from primary school to Strood Academy and forged deep and meaningful relationships with local primary schools to ensure that all barriers are removed prior to students commencing Year 7.

5. Area of Excellence

Behaviour and attitudes to learning

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 Academy has chosen behaviour and attitudes to learning as a key area of focus, believing that a positive and supportive learning environment significantly contributes to improved academic outcomes and enhanced wellbeing for both staff and students. Strood Academy follows the Department of Education (DfE) guidance and implements consistent routines within the engagement curriculum, resulting in tangible benefits such as disruption free learning, strengthened relationships, a calmer and safer school environment, increased engagement and an overall improvement in the Academy's culture and ethos.

Vision 2028 emphasises high expectations and positive engagement. By investing in continuous staff training, assemblies and personal development for all, leaders have fostered a calm, safe, and supportive learning environment where all students can thrive. An unwavering commitment to high expectations has resulted in a significant decrease in lesson disruptions and removals compared to the previous academic year. By adopting a zero-tolerance approach to disruptive behaviour, leaders have created a highly effective learning environment for all students. This, combined with well-established high expectations, has led to vast and tangible improvements in classes. This has benefited both disadvantaged and SEND students.

The highly effective behaviour systems, implemented by extensive college teams, has led to a significant decrease in suspensions, removals, truancy and uniform infringements. This success is due to a multi-faceted approach: clear expectations; home-school agreement; positive reinforcement; fostering a positive learning environment through strong routines; and social emotional learning. This has been identified as a major strength in the Academy in line with the DfE's published guidance on behaviour in schools, including the importance of a school behaviour curriculum. This curriculum should teach students what behaviour is expected and encouraged, and what is prohibited. It should be reinforced through positive reinforcement when expectations are met and sanctions when they are not.

During the last year, the academy has welcomed many visits from leaders and staff of both local and national schools who are interested in these exceptional and outstanding practices. Additionally, the academy has actively supported schools beyond the local area by providing coaching support to leaders and staff.

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

This approach to behaviour management is distinctive because it has rapidly transformed the academy's ethos and culture. By prioritising student needs and fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, the academy has achieved exceptional results, such as a significant reduction in suspensions, disruption-free learning, and improved wellbeing for both staff and pupils.

The following data manifest clearly the impact;-

Attendance: the robust behaviour policy and a positive learning environment have led to increased attendance, which is directly linked to the improved academic outcomes.

Academic year 2022/23: 88.9%

Academic year 2023/24: 91.2%

Enhanced Academic Achievement: the disruption-free learning environment has allowed for focused learning, which has led to improved GCSE outcomes which are the strongest results the academy has received since forming in 2009.

Reduced Disruptions: excellent behaviour management has led to disruption-free learning, allowing for more highly effective teaching and learning time.

Removals for lesson: there is a reduction of 207 removals for module 1 this academic year in comparison to last academic year.

Reduction in suspensions: suspensions have reduced rapidly from 2022/23 compared with 2023/24.

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

Julie Lindsay, Vice Principal, Julie.Lindsay@stroodacademy.org

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>)