

Name of School:	Oaklands School
Headteacher/Principal:	Sarah Osbourne
Hub:	Ash Field Hub
School phase:	Primary Special
MAT (if applicable):	Not applicable

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	09/02/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Leading
Date of last QA Review:	10/10/2022
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	13/02/2024

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 Leading

Quality of provision and outcomes

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with additional needs	Leading
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Area of excellence	Accredited
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Previously accredited valid areas of excellence

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

Oaklands School is a specialist provision for 138 primary aged pupils in Leicester. Its vision, '*Building foundations for fulfilling futures*', is encapsulated in the school's UNIQUE motto and underpins all aspects of its work. The school supports pupils who are unable to access mainstream education due to severe learning difficulties, autism, communication and interaction needs, and social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

Oaklands serves a highly diverse community, with multiculturalism viewed as a strength. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language is above the national average. The school consults closely with parents and the wider community to promote greater understanding and acceptance of autism across Leicester.

The school has an experienced leadership team, who have responded positively to previous areas for improvement. Provision is structured through four learning pathways aligned to pupils' cognitive stages and individual needs, delivered across fifteen classes.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The headteacher has established a cohesive and highly effective leadership team united by a clear and compelling vision. This vision permeates all aspects of school life and has created a distinctive culture rooted in the school's unique values. Staff and governors articulate these values confidently and demonstrate a shared commitment to them in their daily practice.
- School improvement is sharply focused and strategically aligned to the vision. Three clear whole school priorities drive development planning and underpin a coherent programme of continuous professional development (CPD). Leaders ensure that improvement activity is purposeful, measurable and responsive to need.
- Assessment systems are comprehensive and robust. Leaders have developed a bespoke framework comprising over 1,600 small steps, closely linked to pupils' EHCP targets and co-constructed with parents. Progress is shared regularly and meaningfully with families. For example, in an elm lesson, a teaching assistant used the assessment ladder effectively to recognise and celebrate a pupil's development in kicking and ball skills. The system is underpinned by thorough training to ensure consistency and confidence across staff.
- A strong culture of wellbeing is evident. Open communication and recognition of success are embedded, exemplified in weekly staff briefings. Leaders respond proactively to staff needs, including adjustments for neurodivergent

colleagues, menopause support meetings and flexible wellbeing initiatives such as early finishes once per half term. Staff report that workload and time implications are carefully considered. Regular staff surveys inform leadership decisions and demonstrate sustained improvements in wellbeing over time.

- The school operates an authentic distributed leadership model. All staff contribute to school improvement teams aligned to strategic priorities, promoting ownership, engagement and shared accountability. CPD is both aligned to whole school priorities and adaptable to emerging needs. For instance, training on assessing 'zones of regulation' was introduced in response to identified inconsistencies in practice. Senior leaders quality assure the impact of CPD, and a thorough induction process equips staff to lead others confidently.
- Leaders articulate a clear curriculum vision delivered through carefully structured pathways, grouping pupils by stage of development. Teachers and teaching assistants are empowered to make informed decisions about the right learning at the right time. Lead teachers take responsibility for curriculum design, reflecting the distributed leadership ethos.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, with strong cultural and extracurricular enrichment embedded throughout. Pupils benefit from immersive musical experiences linked to literature, visits from religious leaders and partnerships with external organisations, including an artist in residence.
- Attendance is a strategic priority. Governors rigorously scrutinise data and set ambitious targets. Attendance is analysed by group, with targeted interventions demonstrating measurable impact. Leaders prioritise pupil voice and belonging, alongside strong communication with parents and effective collaboration with external agencies, to promote sustained improvement.

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

- ... the impact of professional development within and beyond the school was collated and celebrated.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The school has embedded a positive behaviour approach that is based on emotional regulation and wellbeing. Rooted in the principle of 'connect before you correct', the culture prioritises understanding each pupil's individual way of being. This relational approach has built high levels of trust, resilience, confidence and independence among pupils. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in physical interventions and suspensions.
- Staff receive targeted professional development to establish a shared language around regulation and behaviour. Daily debriefs enable teams to reflect, identify triggers and plan proactive strategies for the following day, such as the targeted use of visuals or environmental adjustments. Emotional

regulation and wellbeing are explicitly taught within the curriculum, equipping pupils with strategies to manage themselves increasingly independently. Staff adapt skilfully in lessons to reduce barriers to learning. For example, allowing a pupil to keep their coat on to feel secure or relocating an activity outdoors. These thoughtful adjustments enable pupils to remain engaged and successful.

- The reading strategy is carefully adapted to meet pupils' developmental stages and ensure they make meaningful connections with the world around them. Structured around a progressive 'three worlds' approach, reading provision aligns with pupils' cognitive and communication needs. In phonics lessons, effective modelling, visual supports and structured practice enabled pupils to form sounds confidently and apply their knowledge.
- Teaching across the school is highly personalised and adaptive. Staff model language consistently and use appropriate resources, including visuals and communication aids, to support pupils' expressive and receptive skills. In lessons, pupils confidently communicated their needs, for example, requesting the toilet or a drink, demonstrating the impact of explicit modelling and supportive scaffolding.
- Helpful modelling and carefully structured scaffolds are strengths of teaching. In a mathematics lesson exploring the concepts of 'in' and 'out', pupils engaged in a practical, physical activity that enabled them to grasp abstract vocabulary through experience. All pupils were engaged and able to explore the concept in ways suited to their developmental stage. Teaching assistants reinforced learning effectively, using a shared mathematical language modelled clearly by the teacher. The teacher then quality assured delivery, ensuring consistency and precision in support.
- The curriculum is ambitious, personalised and coherently sequenced. It is adapted thoughtfully to meet diverse needs while maintaining high expectations. A mastery approach was evident in phonics, where repetition, modelling and dual coding enabled pupils to consolidate learning securely. Teaching assistants played a strong role in reinforcing understanding, ensuring pupils could access and retain new knowledge.
- Pupils' progress is tracked systematically through the school's assessment system. This enables leaders and teachers to monitor small steps of development and adjust provision swiftly. The impact is evident in pupils' growing independence, cognitive development, confidence and overall wellbeing.
- Community engagement is a clear priority. Communication with parents is strong and increasingly effective, resulting in higher attendance at workshops and school events. Initiatives such as the 'curiosity programme' support families to extend learning at home. Parents are guided towards inclusive community opportunities, including autistic-friendly events.
- Pupils benefit from a rich range of wider experiences that promote belonging and cultural awareness. Participation in competitive New Age Kurling, where pupils won the Spirit of the Games award, reflects both sporting engagement

and positive values. Different faiths and cultures are celebrated meaningfully, pupils wear cultural attire and celebrate events such as Holi, promoting understanding, pride and inclusivity across the school community.

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

... a system for capturing in-the-moment pupil progress and achievement was developed.

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

- Teachers have exceptionally positive relationships with pupils. Staff know pupils' needs in depth and anticipate potential barriers, enabling them to respond proactively. Pupils are consistently provided with their preferred communication tools in lessons, reducing frustration and supporting self-regulation. This culture of trust ensures that pupils feel heard, understood and confident in using their chosen voice.
- Clear, well-established routines underpin learning and resilience. Over time, pupils have developed strong readiness to learn behaviours because expectations are consistent and predictable. Structured starts to lessons and regular emotional check-ins, particularly during morning registration, help pupils identify and regulate their feelings. The use of 'now and next' supports pupils in managing transitions and coping with change, strengthening their independence and emotional security.
- The curriculum is carefully adapted through four distinct pathways to match pupils' cognitive and developmental needs. In an outdoor learning session, pupils developed social interaction skills and physical independence, learning to use their body weight to move a swing independently. In the ladybirds' provision, visual resources were readily available to support pupils in making requests, reinforcing communication and choice. These adaptations ensure that learning is both accessible and ambitious.
- Progress for all pupils is closely monitored, with careful consideration given to individual vulnerabilities. Leaders identify when additional interventions are required, including targeted behaviour support programmes that teach appropriate interaction skills. Resilience building initiatives are also in place. For example, a structured food desensitisation programme has supported pupils with sensory needs. Impact is tracked through regular progress review meetings and resilience measures, ensuring interventions are purposeful and effective.
- Staff collaborate closely with parents and families, particularly those facing challenging circumstances. The school proactively engages multi agency support and demonstrates a deep understanding of family contexts. In one

instance, staff prepared a hot meal for a family without cooking facilities. Parents speak positively about the non-judgemental support they receive. One parent described how strategies shared by the school helped her child become more regulated and focused at home, illustrating the wider impact of the school's work.

- Attendance is promoted through a strong culture of connection and belonging. Pupils feel valued and understood, which encourages consistent engagement.
- Professional development partnerships (PDPs) and school improvement teams (SITs) drive meaningful CPD. Staff have developed practical communication aids, including personalised communication books linked to the reading curriculum. These tools enable pupils to communicate proactively and during times of crisis. Staff feel empowered by their involvement in these groups, demonstrating passion, ownership and collective responsibility for improvement.

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

... the effectiveness of the school's provision for its most vulnerable pupils was further evaluated.

5. Area of Excellence

Distributed leadership to support a deliberately developmental ethos

Accredited

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

Over the past four years, this distributed leadership approach has become a distinctive and deeply embedded aspect of the school's culture and ethos. Through a strong distributed leadership model, the vision is authentically owned by all staff and consistently translated into practice. The culture is coherent, values driven and visible in daily interactions, decision-making and provision. Staff at all levels participate in classroom based PDPs, engaging in action research to improve teaching and pupil progress. Each PDP begins with a clearly defined question linked to practice or outcomes. Action plans are developed collaboratively, reviewed across the academic year and refined in response to evidence. Teams share their findings at a whole staff end of year celebration, strengthening collective accountability and professional pride. Staff feedback confirms high levels of engagement and investment in this deliberately developmental model of school improvement. The curriculum vision is research informed and led by area of learning leads, drawing on

child development, neurodiversity and educational theory. This is captured in detailed handbooks and underpins the school's bespoke assessment systems, 'Oaklands Progressive Assessment Ladder' (OPAL). Co-constructed by staff, these systems reflect best practice and integrate recognised frameworks such as Autism Education Trust (AET) standards, developmental milestones and diagnostic criteria. Assessment ladders are reviewed regularly by SITs, including governor involvement, ensuring they remain responsive to the evolving complexity of the pupil cohort. SIT documentation evidences the direct impact of this collaboration on curriculum refinement and assessment precision.

SITs engage all staff in advancing strategic priorities, building expertise while positively influencing wellbeing, retention and career progression. This shared purpose has resulted in measurable improvements in assessment accuracy and classroom practice. The model has been shared externally through Challenge Partners 'Growing the Top' trios. It has been recognised by the Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM) and featured within a directory of schools exemplifying inclusive practice. IQM highlighted the positive impact on staff knowledge, confidence and professional fulfilment, contributing to strong retention. A clear and consistent professional language underpins this work. PDPs replace traditional appraisal with collaborative goals, enabling staff to learn with and from one another. Impact is evidenced through staff feedback and sustained improvements in pupil progress.

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

The SITs include staff from all pathways, contributing to collective pedagogical and subject expertise, and positively impacting on pupil outcomes. The impact of the SITs work is evidenced in pupil voice reports with positive feedback about the curriculum, and in parent voice relating to their children's progress. All staff are actively engaged in PDPs. Having also been trained in positive behaviour support and mental health strategies, the impact of staff working together on PDPs has seen a continued reduction in the need for physical interventions across the school, with no physical interventions in the previous term. All classroom staff are also empowered to contribute to pupils' personalised resilience building plans, the impact of which is evident in case studies and documented progress review meetings.

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

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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>)