

Written Report

CHALLENGE PARTNERS: Quality Assurance Review Written Report

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| Name of School: | Plymstock School |
| School Address: | Church Road, Plymstock, Plymouth. PL9 9AZ |
| Hub School: | Kingsbridge |

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|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Telephone Number: | 01752 402679 |
| Email address: | info@plymstock.org.uk |

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| Unique Reference Number: | 136568 |
| Local Authority: | Plymouth |
| Type of School: | Academy converter |
| School Category: | Community |
| Age range of pupils: | 11-18 |
| Number on roll: | 1551 |
| Head teacher/Principal: | David Farmer |

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| Date of last Ofsted inspection: | 22-24 April 2013 |
| Grade at last Ofsted inspection: | Good |

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| Date of Quality Assurance Review: | 22-24 June 2016 |
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QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW – SUMMARY OF ESTIMATES¹

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| School Improvement Strategies: | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for Pupils is: | Good |
| Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: | Good |
| Area of Excellent Practice: | Not submitted for this review |

Overall Review Evaluation

The Quality Assurance Review found indicators that Plymstock School appears to be at the top of the Good grade as judged by Ofsted in the school's previous Ofsted report 22-24 April 2013 and is working towards Outstanding.

¹ Please note that a Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Review is not equivalent to an Ofsted inspection, and agreed estimates from the review are not equivalent to Ofsted judgements.

Information about the school

- x Plymstock School is a larger than average 11-18 secondary school on the east side of Plymouth.
- x The proportion of students with special educational needs and disabilities is close to the national average. Most students are of white British heritage and the proportion of disadvantaged students is below the national average. The school has a significant number of children from service families.
- x The sixth form provides a broad range of subjects to meet students' needs and there is a partnership with a local school to facilitate this.

School Improvement Strategies

What Went Well

- x The Headteacher and his team of senior leaders have a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement of their school. Clear direction and commitment, coupled with an ethos of collaboration, are driving whole school improvement. Leaders have brought about key improvements in a short space of time and there is a desire to ensure that all students achieve their best. For example, a focus upon literacy has improved students' reading skills and their attitudes to reading; student leaders of literacy assist in mentoring younger students and the school has developed its own 'Hogwards' awards to celebrate the best fiction.
- x A culture of care and respect pervade the school. All members of the school community reflect this: leaders, teachers, support staff and students alike. A recent focus on encouraging kindness amongst girls has resulted in display boards of 'kindness pledges' and 'kindness cards' being written by students; the impact has been significant. Anti-bullying and tolerance posters emphasise this aspect of life at Plymstock. The current focus of senior leaders on mental health issues embraces its commitment to looking after all members of the school community. The school's newly introduced marking and feedback policy was created due to a recognition that the volume of marking had become unsustainable and was putting pressure on staff.
- x School self-evaluation is honest, accurate and based on evidence. Whilst it focuses upon the key issues for improvement, these are not always reflected in the whole school improvement plan. Senior leaders are aware of this and they have started to work on ensuring that the 2016/2017 SEF and school improvement plan are closely aligned.
- x The school has strengthened its data system for analysing and tracking students' current progress in all year groups. As a result, leaders at all levels have a strong understanding of students' current progress and are taking appropriate action to address any underperformance.

- x A robust and well-planned assessment system is in place through learning pathways which are embedded in students' learning. These pathways have been shared with staff, students and parents.
- x The progress of disadvantaged students has improved significantly. Leaders have put in place highly effective strategies to support these students in their learning through a personalised approach. Leaders interview each student with their parents/ carers and ask them about the barriers to their learning. Solutions such as adapting a student's workspace at home and providing English and mathematics tuition in students' homes have had a significant impact on outcomes. Leaders develop action plans which are based on a deep analysis of progress and welfare data.
- x Senior leaders realise the importance of empowering all middle leaders in the drive for improvement. They have increasingly involved middle leaders in the monitoring and evaluation process through joint lesson observations and data analysis. Middle leaders have access to a broad range of training both within school and through external partnerships and this is building capacity even further.
- x The school has developed a broad range of partnerships to support leadership and teaching and learning. Partnerships such as the 'Plym' consortium of four local schools, the South West Teaching Schools' Alliance and Challenge Partners bring opportunities to lead regional subject networks, learn from and share with other schools and gain an independent view of the school's effectiveness. Leaders are open to this form of development and this is enriching practice within the school. 'Challenge the Gap' work has led to significant improvement in outcomes for disadvantaged students. Through the well-established links with primary schools, staff are developing a deeper understanding of changes to the primary curriculum to ensure that learning builds on students' prior knowledge in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

Even Better If...

...all middle leaders assumed full responsibility for the outcomes of their own areas of responsibility through monitoring, evaluation and actions to bring about improvements.

...leaders continued to embed key priorities such as cooperative learning and extended writing across the school in preparation for curricular changes.

...leaders continued to close gaps in the achievement of key groups and transfer the successful strategies from its work with disadvantaged students to these other groups.

Outcomes for Pupils

- x Students enter the school with attainment levels broadly in line with the national average. However, the attainment on entry profiles change significantly year on year. The current Year 8 and Year 11 students entered the school with attainment

which was significantly below national averages and, in Year 11, there are above average numbers of low ability students, whilst the numbers of more able is below national average.

- x Attainment measures over the last three years have been broadly in line with the national average in 5 A*-C grades, including English and mathematics. However, in 2015, the percentage of students attaining 5 A*-C grades, including English and mathematics, fell to 52% from 59% in 2014. Attainment in English and mathematics in 2015 was below the national average in both A*-C grade and A*/A grade measures. Students performed exceptionally well in English literature, core and further additional science and performing arts in A*-C and A*/A grades. Attainment was well below national averages in French and German. Middle and lower ability students attained significantly above national averages; high ability students did not make such positive gains in their attainment.
- x In 2015, KS2-4 value added progress was significantly above the national average and shows an upward trend of improvement from 2013. This was also reflected in the school's Best 8 progress measure. Girls made significantly better progress than boys and their rate of improvement has been greater. Disadvantaged students made good progress in 2015. Progress in languages in 2015 was significantly below national averages and has been so for two years. In 2015, most able students did not make the same gains in learning as middle and lower ability students.
- x Progress in English and mathematics was broadly in line with national averages in 2015, although there was variability amongst the progress of students in the different prior attainment groups. In particular, in 2015, most able students did not make the same gains in learning as middle and lower ability students.
- x In 2015, disadvantaged students made similar progress to their non-disadvantaged peers which was significantly above national averages. This gap has continued to close due to the intensity of the work in this area. The gap between the progress of students with special educational needs and other students was wide and current data suggest that it remains a challenge for the school as students with special educational needs and disabilities currently make significantly less progress than their peers.
- x Lessons and students' books showed good progress overall, although this was not consistently so. Current predictions indicate that students' attainment and progress in Year 11 in English and mathematics are good and improved. The gap between the progress of boys and girls in Year 11 remains the same. Progress in Years 7 to 10 is good progress overall although the school might consider developing its transition matrices to investigate the progress of different groups in Years 7-10.
- x Post-16 L3 VA data for 2015 showed students' progress to be consistently above national averages for its post-16 outcomes. The post-16 data dashboard cites no weaknesses. Predictions for outcomes in 2016 remain strong and, where there are weaker areas, leaders are tackling this by building capacity in leadership and

teaching and learning. Observations of post-16 learning during the review were limited but those seen showed good progress.

- x The school has had no NEETs for the past five years, assisted by the extensive work with local businesses, independent information and guidance and strategies to raise students' aspirations.

Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

What Went Well

- x There are strong working relationships at all levels in lessons. Students are ready to learn and they are considerate to the needs of other students. This results in a positive climate for learning. The warmth in relationships was evident from learning conversations on the front covers of history books and students' loyalty to staff, 'teachers go above and beyond in this school'.
- x Teachers set high expectations from the start of lessons and routines are well-established. There is a strong emphasis on examination preparation from Year 7 linked to the new assessment system. This is raising students' aspirations and skills in preparation for the rigour of the new GCSEs.
- x Teachers plan well-structured learning in all of the lessons observed. During this year, the school has piloted 'cooperative learning' to develop students' independence and resilience. Where teachers used these approaches, almost all students were engaged and learning conversations deepened their understanding. These cooperative strategies are also being used effectively in the post-16 lessons observed during the review. For example, in one theatre studies lesson, students deciphered a new play in groups and discussed it maturely and purposefully, culminating in a highly professional performance. In other lessons, where learning was most effective, students' learning was deepened through work tailored to their needs and through a high level of challenge, particularly for the most-able. However, this did not occur in all lessons seen.
- x Teachers use a variety of approaches and activities to hook students' interests and secure their understanding. The use of 'real life' examples in several lessons enabled students to make links with their own experiences and a 'real life' garden design project for the school hooked students' interests and developed independence well. Where teachers use exemplars and showcase students' work, students understand what is being asked of them and they strive to achieve it. Homework is regular and interesting; for example, in science, students were asked to complete a practical experiment using cooking equipment which students would usually have at home.
- x Teachers focus on developing students' literacy skills through classwork and thorough feedback on their work. When students discuss their learning in a structured way and where teachers' questioning challenges students' thinking,

students develop good oral skills. In one set of books, the work of low ability students was scaffolded precisely, resulting in extended written work which was redrafted as needed.

- x Students' work is marked regularly and students find the feedback on their work useful. Most teachers are following school policy with students responding to their teachers' comments. However, students are not always encouraged to redraft and correct their work despite the very clear 'next steps' guidance given by their teachers. There are examples in different subjects where this is done particularly well but it is not yet consistently so. The high quality guidance document provided by the school is a useful tool to encourage all teachers to give time to students to deepen their understanding by acting upon the written feedback on their work.

Even Better If...

...all teachers ensured that planning consistently took account of students' different needs, whether these are EAL, SEND or the most-able.

...all students, particularly the most-able, were challenged to produce higher level responses both orally and in writing.

...all students seized the opportunities offered to them by their teachers and set high expectations for learning for themselves.

...all teachers provided opportunities for students to redraft their work from the clear 'next steps' guidance on their written work in order to deepen their knowledge and understanding. It would be useful if existing good practice is embedded across the school.

Quality of Area of Excellent Practice

The school did not submit an Area of Excellence

Partnerships

How have you used Challenge Partners schools to address your previous 'Even Better Ifs'?

This was the school's first Challenge Partners review.

How have you worked with, or supported, other schools in Challenge Partners?

- x The school has been a member of Challenge Partners for the past year. In that time, it has accessed additional consultancy support for its leadership team and two members of the senior team have attended reviewer training. However, the school has not sent a member of its senior leadership team onto a review. It plans to do this next year.

- x Through Challenge Partners, the school has collaborated with the hub schools on a range of topics, both supporting and learning, and they also work within the South West Teaching Schools' Alliance.

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.

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

Following discussion with the headteacher, the school would like to reflect further about what support they might like.