
CHALLENGE PARTNERS: Quality Assurance Review Written Report

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

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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:	1650
Head teacher/Principal:	Robert Diment

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

Date of Quality Assurance Review:	21-23 November 2016
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QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW – SUMMARY OF ESTIMATES¹

School Improvement Strategies:	Outstanding
Outcomes for Pupils:	Outstanding
Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:	Outstanding
Area of Excellence: Reading Enrichment	Confirmed and valid for 3 years.

Overall Review Evaluation

The Quality Assurance Review found indicators that Plymstock School appears to have moved beyond the Good grade as judged by Ofsted in the school's previous Ofsted report and is working just within the Outstanding grade. Leaders are fully aware of the need to ensure that their clearly defined improvement strategies improve the key areas swiftly in order to move into a secure place within the Outstanding grade.

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

- Plymstock School is a larger-than-average 11-18 secondary school on the east side of Plymouth.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) 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 sixth form providing a broad range of subjects to meet students' needs through its own staffing and through a partnership with other sixth form provisions in the city.
- The new Headteacher has been in post since September 2016 and was previously the Deputy Headteacher at the school.
- Students enter Plymstock School from a wide range of primary schools in the locality and across the city of Plymouth. The school is already oversubscribed for Year 7 entry to the school for September 2017.

School Improvement Strategies

What Went Well

- The shared vision and clear direction led by the inspirational Headteacher and his dedicated leadership team permeate all aspects of Plymstock School. There is a relentless drive and commitment to raising the achievement and life chances for every student. This is coupled with high quality provision which looks after the well-being of both staff and students. The newly established Middle Leaders' Forum is addressing ways to support colleagues with workload.
- Leaders have high expectations in all they do. They model this through their interactions with staff and students and their high quality performance in their roles. Staff are eager to step up to join a range of school teams and they subscribe fully to the 'Plymstock Way' and its path to improvement.
- The School Improvement Plan (SIP) is linked intrinsically to a thorough self-evaluation process and document. This takes full account of the views of all members of the school community and is a critical factor in the commitment of all stakeholders to the renewed direction of the school. The SIP is an effective tool for self-improvement, with additional strategy documents providing in-depth guidance on the implementation of key systems. As soon as an area for improvement is identified, leaders develop a strategic approach. There is clear evidence of improvement as a result of the actions taken by leaders at all levels. The recent focus on mathematics and the progress of disadvantaged students have improved outcomes significantly over time.
- Students' needs and aspirations are at the heart of school improvement. Everything is done for the benefit of all students and whole school improvements are linked to

this. The school puts in place a range of strategies to meet students' diverse needs. For example, it makes available careers advice and guidance for Year 11 leavers up to October after their results, even if they have left for another place of training or education. As a result, destination data show that all students enter employment, education or training at 16 and the destinations of 18 year olds are broad and appropriate.

- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning through a systematic approach and this is leading to continuous improvements in learning and outcomes for students. Leaders have used the new GCSE and Advanced level specifications to put a curriculum and corresponding assessments in place across the school. This ensures that Year 7 students start the journey to GCSE achievement. The 'Plymstock Pathways' system is embedding well and opportunities for teachers to moderate assessments provide validity and rigour. Middle leaders feel that this system has helped raise expectations for all teachers as 'no-one wants to let their team down now'. It has led to an increase in resources being shared and genuine collaboration, a 'look what I've done' approach.
- The quality of middle leadership is high. They have embraced fully the expectations of their role set by the Headteacher. They understand the need to address key issues. Middle leaders feel there is now less need for challenging conversations as staff know what is expected of them and they self-identify if they are not meeting expected standards. The consistency brought about by 'The Plymstock Way' has been particularly evident in improved practice with assessment and feedback. Middle Leaders feel well-supported yet empowered by the 'Matrix' line manager as a critical friend. They have ownership of the next steps in their own areas and the ways to move forward. The informal walkabouts by senior leaders have also helped ensure that colleagues are maintaining high standards.
- There is a rigorous approach to tracking students' progress. Leaders at all levels use data from assessments through progress checks to identify individuals who are falling behind on their pathway. Strategic summaries after the progress checks enable Heads of Year and Heads of Department to put in place personalised strategies to address any individual's underachievement or need.
- Leaders have achieved great success in engaging with parents. There are successful strategies across a range of initiatives and with considerable impact. A new parents' forum has been set up to consult parents on a range of matters. This is already providing support for parents through booklets with strategies to support their children with learning. The new 'Learning Evenings' have been successful with specific foci for different year groups.
- Students were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of teaching, care and guidance from their school. They praised the opportunities offered to them to develop their wider skills such as being 'trusted to run charity and other events'. They feel listened to and their request for a focus on mental health and well-being for

students and staff has been addressed. There is currently a Year 10 and 11 trial of 'mindfulness' activities whose aim is to create a calmness when taking examinations. For Year 7, there is a focus upon resilience through programmes such as 'Growth Mindset'.

Even Better If...

...school leaders maintained the momentum and the direction of improvement to embed consistency and sustainability.

...leaders at all levels continued to monitor and quality assure the new strategies to ensure that there is a measurable impact on outcomes for key areas.

Pupil Outcomes

- Students enter the school with attainment levels broadly in line with the national average. However, there are significant variations in this reflecting the changing profile of the students entering the school year on year. The attainment on entry profile for the 2016 cohort of Year 11 students was significantly below national averages, with above average numbers of low ability students.
- The trend of attainment has been broadly in line with national averages from 2013 to 2015. However, in 2016, attainment in 5 A*-C including English and mathematics rose to 67% from 52% in 2015. The Attainment 8 figure is similar to 2015. However, the 2016 cohort were a significantly weaker year group on entry. English, mathematics and EBacc measures are well above national averages. These figures are particularly impressive given that this Year 11 cohort entered the school significantly below national average. This shows significant gains in the progress of these students over time at the school.
- In 2016, the Progress 8 measure is arguably above the national average with a confidence interval of 0 to +0.27; it may be significantly positive. The school is reporting a Progress 8 score of 0.17; this excludes three students who did not attend school for much of Key Stage 4. For disadvantaged students, progress is well above the national average and the progress for both boys and girls is above national. However, there is in school variance between boys and girls which the school has recognised and is addressing.
- The Progress 8 measure for SEND students is -0.33 for those with school support and -0.39 for those with a statement or with an education health care plan (EHCP). These are the lowest progress measures for all groups in the school but represent small numbers of students. The school has measures in place to address this in its SIP, including the additional support given by a SEND consultant together with an action plan.
- Mathematics outperformed English in terms of progress and with 77% in the A*-C measure which is above the national average. The school had focused its improvement strategies on mathematics and this has clearly had an impact on

outcomes. Most able students made less progress than their middle and lower ability peers.

- In 2016, students' attainment in science, humanities and languages appears weaker than English and mathematics. It is important to remember that the school had 65% of its cohort entered for the EBacc which is well above the national average. As a result, the school has significantly more students doing these more academically challenging courses than many other schools. It would be useful for the school to prepare progress data to demonstrate their success with students in these curriculum areas to demonstrate their gains in learning.
- The progress and attainment of students whose parents are in the armed forces is a high achieving group for the school. It was recommended that leaders use this attainment and progress data to celebrate this achievement and include it in the SEF.
- Post-16 value added data for 2015 showed students' progress to be consistently above national averages for its post-16 outcomes. The post-16 data dashboard for 2015 cited no weaknesses. However, the progress data for Level 3 in 2016 was below expectations and represented a fall in progress, calculated using a new formula. In addition, 45 students who did not complete their courses with the school were 'added back' into the 2016 cohort. Student attainment was equivalent to a C grade overall for a cohort which were significantly below average upon entry to the school in Key Stage 2.
- Progress data for Year 11 shows improvements on the 2016 data for key groups, including SEND students with statements or EHCPs. Leaders are analysing assessment by groups and sub groups including ability bands for all groups. This assessment for Year 11 has resulted in a high quality Year 11 action plan which details differentiated approach to the intervention needed.
- Current assessment data shows that students in Years 7 to 9 are making strong gains in their learning. This was corroborated by observations of learning in lessons and work in books. Data shows that Year 10 students are making good progress although the numbers making more than expected progress in English are lower than in mathematics.
- NEET figures for the past five years have been at zero. The school has a well-established careers education and guidance programme and the school has a high number of students entering higher education, including Russell Group universities and Oxbridge.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What Went Well

- High quality teaching and learning is characterised by positive working relationships between staff and pupils and between peers. Students offer to help each other routinely with learning and they enjoy working together to extend their learning. The

'Plymstock culture' is embedded in classrooms and this builds upon the shared values. Students consider their teachers to be the greatest strength of the school. They have confidence in their teachers and appreciate the need to set them difficult work to challenge them and make them think.

- The introduction of the 'Kagan' approach has enhanced the use of peer learning and talk for learning in lessons. Meaningful peer support is evident in many lessons; for example, most able students use technical and subject specific language to support each other and deepen their understanding. A culture of security, created by teachers, encourages students to take risks.
- A variety of teaching styles is leading to high levels of student engagement. Students enjoy the different approaches to hook their interests. For example, in one mathematics lesson, the teacher put the wrong answers on the board and students enjoyed the challenge of putting this right. Lessons build students' skills well; in languages, students were able to use these skills to manipulate language and write extended pieces.
- Stimulating resources create both interest and atmosphere in lessons. A roaring fire on screen and spooky music created Macbeth's castle and inspired learners' writing. Familiar examples engage students and then rewind the clock to show parallels with current, familiar institutions. For example, in a history lesson, the teacher showed the Houses of Parliament being blown up and then compared this to the Reichstag in Nazi Germany. In drama, the recording of students' performance enhances their confidence and performance. High quality teacher produced resources support learning well.
- Teachers have a deep understanding of the needs of all students and plan well to meet both ability and interests. In one PE lesson, three different tasks met the skill level of a range of abilities; in one Year 10 performing arts lesson, students chose the support they needed enabling them to grow in confidence, as well as deepen their understanding of key dramatic techniques. In another lesson, a 'Nando's menu' set different levels of challenge based on chilli peppers. Staff now feel that this part of good teaching and expectations. Where teachers have the confidence to devolve learning to students, students delve into information confidently.
- High quality questioning which is directed and probing promotes deeper thinking. Where teachers give students thinking time, responses are thoughtful and accurate. In some lessons, teachers are relentless yet supportive in challenging and checking students' understanding.
- Almost all books showed evidence of high quality written feedback to students in line with school policy. Where students took responsibility for their learning by reshaping and redrafting their answers, progress was greater. Departments use different and highly appropriate approaches for students to follow up on teachers' written and verbal guidance. For example, 'now try...' in languages requires students to apply their learning; in mathematics, students are directed to online resources to

consolidate or deepen their understanding; in drama, a spoken commentary on students' recorded performance is delivered via email and assists the lower ability students in this GCSE group.

Even Better If...

...all students, especially the most able, seized the opportunities through their own motivation to take up the challenge activities teachers now provide in lessons.

...there was consistency in the quality of students' response to feedback so that they used the information to assist them in making further progress in their work.

Quality of Area of Excellence

Reading Enrichment

Why has this area been identified as a strength?

Through the variety of reading enrichment initiatives, there is a strong reading culture embedded fully across the year groups and ability ranges at Plymstock School. A tangible love of reading is obvious amongst the students and staff members. Reading is celebrated throughout the whole school and is a vibrant part of daily life at the school. There is a wide range of exciting, engaging reading initiatives led by the inspirational Library Manager, her highly motivated team and the Literacy Coordinator. Students' enthusiasm for reading has led to improvements in students' reading ages, literacy skills and confidence.

What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?

The initiative is led by a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) together with the Library Manager and her team. The Library Manager developed her own skills and training to enable her to better support the reading of weaker students and to motivate and challenge more able students.

The school timetable is designed to ensure that library lessons take place each week, throughout Year 7. During these sessions, Accelerated Reader sessions further encourage reading and improvement in reading comprehension skills. Students in Years 7 to 9 also have literacy lessons as well as thirty minutes of daily reading within their timetabled lessons. All students are encouraged to have a reading book as part of their school equipment. Students who struggle with reading receive support during sessions in the library through peer assisted learning such as paired reading with student mentors. In addition, small group guided reading takes place with Teaching Assistants and the library staff. Every student in Years 7 to 11 engages in an additional thirty minutes quiet reading time per week during morning tutorial sessions.

How have you capitalised on the area of excellent practice in your own school?

The reading enrichment programme is characterised by the following:

- All staff have a significant role in promoting reading, it is not seen as purely the domain of the English department. The whole school staff support actively the development of reading skills through sharing their favourite reads with students; they act as reading role models and read alongside the students during the sessions.
- Whole school reading initiatives play a significant role in the promotion of reading across the school. For example, through the week long 'Reading Festival', reading assemblies, posters which advertise teachers' own love of reading, displays of 'Teachers' Favourite Reads' and bookmarks which contain the recommended reads for different year groups, including Years 6/7.
- Positive relationships with parents whose children struggle with literacy have been developed through the provision of a Year 7 'Learning Evening' and the 'Settling In Evening'.
- Students have ample opportunities for responsibility through our reading enrichment initiatives. They become 'Literacy Leaders' in Year 9 through to Year 12 and visit Year 7 tutor groups to promote the 'Tutor Group Reading Challenge'.
- The 'Literacy Leaders' Club' runs after school twice a week in which students receive one-to-one tuition from an older student who has been trained to deliver literacy skills. The club is an extremely vibrant learning environment and well-attended.
- A 'Reading School' takes place over two days in the Easter holiday which allows Year 7 students who are underperforming the chance to develop their reading through additional staff and student support.
- Highly positive relationships with primary schools have been formed through schemes such as the Year 4, 5 and 6 book groups coordinated and run by Year 9 and Year 10 students.
- Year 7, 8 and 9 students participate in Plymstock's own book award, 'The Hogwards'. This is an initiative introduced by the Library Manager who wanted students to have more ownership over the choice of books they read. Students participating read up to 35 books in a few months and the books are nominated for the award by the students. A Hogwards' trip, with close to 100 students participating, will take place for the first time this year as a reward for the Literacy Leaders and other students who have made great progress in reading. Knowledge of this trip has inspired other students to become involved in reading initiatives.

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

Across the school, a reading culture and a positive attitude to reading has a significant impact on the progress of lower attaining readers and has led to an increase in the amount and range of personal reading. This is demonstrated in library records and 'Tutor Group Reading Challenge' records. Reading data, such as the 'Year 7 Catch Up Reports' over the last two years and an impressive set of reading age data, illustrate that students are making significant progress in their reading. GCSE English Literature results also reflect this.