

CHALLENGE PARTNERS: Quality Assurance Review Written Report

Name of School:	Milestone Academy
School Address:	Ash Road, New Ash Green, DA3 8JZ
Hub:	London Special and AP

Telephone Number:	01474 709420
Email address:	nigel.jones@milestoneacademy.org.uk

Unique Reference Number:	119061
Local Authority:	Kent
Type of School:	Special
School Category:	PSCN
Age range of pupils:	2-19
Number on roll:	320
Head teacher/Principal:	Nigel Jones

Date of last Ofsted inspection:	March 2016
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding

Date of Quality Assurance Review:	27-29 March 2017
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QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW – SUMMARY OF ESTIMATES¹

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

Overall Review Evaluation

The Quality Assurance Review found indicators that Milestone Academy appears to be firmly within the Outstanding grade as judged by Ofsted in the school's previous Ofsted report.

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

- Since 2012, Milestone Academy has been the sole special school member of the Leigh Academies Trust. In October 2016, it was one of seven MATs nominated by HMCI that has proved to have exemplary methods of practice and effectiveness.
- Milestone is a large special school in Kent. It is, by special school comparisons, much larger than that found nationally with 315 pupils aged from 2-18.
- The school has recently expanded into two satellite settings; one is in a primary setting and the other in a secondary setting, both within mainstream Leigh Academies Trust academies.
- In-house services include speech and language provision and nursing.
- The academy re-organised its leadership and management structure in September 2015 and now operate four small schools or phases, each led by an assistant vice-principal known as a phase director.
- Each phase reflects an age range from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to post-16 and has around sixty-five pupils with six to eight classes.
- There are many more boys than girls. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is just above the national average and the percentage of pupils whose first language is not English is well below the national average.
- Ofsted graded the school Outstanding for a second time in March 2016.

School Improvement Strategies

What Went Well

- School leaders have consistently maximised the opportunities for development and successfully managed any challenges arising from membership of the Leigh Academy Trust. Leaders have nurtured a mutually supportive professional partnership with Trust leaders and schools and continue to develop their role within the Trust.
- Leaders share a clear vision for continuous improvement and development, which arose from discussion among senior leaders, a whole-staff agreed common moral purpose, secure assessment, data collection and analysis. These steps, along with the effective distributed leadership structure and appropriate delegation of authority, have led to secure and sustainable improvements.
- Staff share the school's common moral purpose and this agreed statement is displayed around the school and embedded in the culture of the school.
- Leaders have retained a team of loyal and talented staff and have successfully built on and developed their expertise. Staff share an ethos of teamwork, which can be particularly seen in the senior leadership team and in the class teams as they deliver teaching and learning in all year groups.

- Self-evaluation is robust and well-developed in all aspects, and leaders take every opportunity for external quality assurance of their judgements.
- School improvement planning is rigorous, structured and systematic and based on accurate self-evaluation. Areas for development, once highlighted, are securely planned; there is, for example, research into best practice and discussion among senior leaders and the distributed leadership structure. Good practice and improvements are disseminated successfully throughout the school. The themes of leading, learning and sharing are explicitly stated and support a solution-focused ethos.
- Milestone Academy is an outward-facing school and is committed to working with, and supporting when required, Kent County Council, the Trust and local schools. The opportunities for leaders to be involved in school to school support is embedded and is being deepened.
- There is an ethos of care, collaboration and support as well as opportunities for leadership development. Regular college meetings of senior leaders and subject leaders, focussed on outcomes for pupils, give rise to discussion and the development of teaching and learning. Focus group meetings look at different aspects of the school, bringing leaders together. It is another opportunity for needs and areas for development to be identified.
- The intertwined layers of self-evaluation activities and distributed leadership discussions facilitate effective and individualised continuing professional development (CPD).
- The school has a robust assessment and accountability framework. Pupil Asset was introduced, has been personalised for the school context, and is embedded in the assessment framework. There is thorough triangulation of data and a 'belt and braces' approach to target setting, when data is checked and re-checked until leaders are sure it can form a secure basis for targets to be set.
- The school has excellent links with the community and leaders are committed to further developing the good relationships with parents by working on the Leading Parent Participation award.
- There is an effective and multi-disciplinary individual pupil need team which plans bespoke interventions for pupils to close gaps and enhance provision. There is a register of pupils with new cases flagged up from a range of individuals and sources. There is a robust training programme for new and existing staff to ensure that individual pupil needs are met.

Even Better If...

... leaders developed a system of action research projects which involve staff at all levels to develop leadership skills and capacity, particularly for middle leaders.

... leaders continued to develop and embed personal and social development programmes, provision, assessment and the tracking of progress.

Pupil Outcomes

- Tracking and analysis of pupil progress uses Pupil Asset, in collaboration with a regional alliance of special schools to provide an assessment framework. The large data set enables rigorous target setting and robust moderation. The analytical algorithm has recently been reviewed to adapt to the patterns in the region. Milestone Academy has adapted to this by analysing its raw data, only including pupils who have met targets and not those who are just below.
- Outcomes at the end of 2015/2016 were very good, with more than 80% of pupils meeting or exceeding their targets in all core areas of the curriculum, except speaking and listening where 78% of pupils met or exceeded their targets. Those who did not meet their end of year targets were identified and trends analysed. Individualised interventions and support structures were put into place to support progression for these pupils.
- Data is collected and analysed six times a year for English and mathematics, with three in-depth reviews and three 'light touch'. All other core subjects are analysed three times a year. The data is analysed looking at different groups, as well as on an individual level. This allows for actions and interventions to be planned and put in place in a timely manner.
- The 2016/2017 prediction for pupils to meet or exceed their targets has been raised to 85%. Since using Pupil Asset from September 2015, there is a trend of significantly accelerated progress between term 1 and term 2. This is attributed to the transition and familiarisation process at the beginning of each academic year. Steps to reduce the impact that this process has on assessment have been identified.
- The school sets additional targets for pupils who make good progress which have helped to compensate for the change in algorithm.
- Analysis of vulnerable groups shows a slightly lower percentage of progress for PMLD pupils. Additional analysis for this group using Routes for Learning and Maps demonstrates the story for these pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What Went Well

- There is extensive and thorough planning and assessment. The planning format makes the learning journey clear.
- The triangulation of assessment data ensures accuracy. Data is 'drilled down' to individuals and groups so that both leaders and teachers can plan bespoke interventions to close gaps and enhance provision. This also allows the setting of challenging targets to achieve aspirational goals.

- Staff know the pupils very well and understand their individual needs. Their expectations of pupils are personalised and realistic.
- There are three distinct curriculum pathways to match the needs of pupils and the changing profiles of the school. For example, teachers worked alongside Kent County Council staff and local schools to produce KASS maps, which provide a highly appropriate curriculum structure and age appropriate reading lists.
- Clear routines and expectations support pupil behaviour and ensure that pupils feel safe and secure. Relationships between staff, and between pupils and staff, are very good. Pupils have high levels of tolerance and understanding of each other which can be seen in teaching and learning activities.
- Pupils show excellent learning behaviours, are highly engaged in learning and clearly enjoy their work. This is supported by descriptors of what excellent learning behaviour will look like for each pupil. Class teams work exceptionally well together, supported by each member of the team having easy access to key areas of the daily timetable including planning and expectations of learning. This helps to ensure that the well-deployed and skilful teaching assistants are empowered to lead learning. Class teams communicate well, staff respond well to feedback and have very good working relationships.
- Teachers plan carefully for independent, differentiated and personalised learning. This is facilitated by a range of strategies including splitting the class into different groups, facilitating personalised learning and high engagement. Staff also use personalised communication aids, the fluent use of signing, carefully planning a carousel of activities and the use of praise to encourage the correct option for pupils to choose.
- Learning areas provide a secure and safe environment, allowing individual development and empowering pupils to be involved in their own learning whilst being confident to make mistakes, and learning by correcting them.
- Class teams manage the logistics of busy and diverse classes well and very successfully engage pupils. They adapt to the sensory needs of pupils in the moment as well as in proactive and planned intervention. Class teams have an excellent understanding of why learning is organised and planned the way it is in each lesson.
- The school uses the indoor and outside spaces it has for learning effectively and makes good use of their links with the local community.
- The school provides a broad, often bespoke, offer for post-16 students and the phase four college environment facilitates the transition to adulthood.

Even Better If...

... class teams used all opportunities, including the forest school development, for pupils to take charge of their learning by developing their questioning, encouraging them to take risks and be confident to make mistakes.

... leaders considered how transition can be further refined to maximise teachers' knowledge and understanding of pupils at the beginning of the new academic year.

... the induction programme for new staff, as well as ongoing CPD, included developing the confidence to know when and when not to intervene in learning.

Quality of Area of Excellence

Not submitted for this review.

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.

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.