



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR SOLENT INFANT SCHOOL

Name of School:	Solent Infant School
Headteacher/Principal:	Emma Curthoys (Head of School) Lucy Wilby (Executive Headteacher)
Hub:	Wootton Bassett Hub
School phase:	Infant (Primary)
MAT (if applicable):	The De Curci Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Effective
Date of this Review:	25/11/2024
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Leaders opted not to publish the peer evaluation estimates for the previous review.
Date of last QA Review	04/12/2023
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	11/02/2020

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	Effective

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	Effective

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

Solent Infant School is a three-form entry school for pupils from four to seven years. It is located to the north of the city of Portsmouth, close to a tri-service housing estate. The school is a popular choice in the locality, having been over-subscribed for many years.

Most pupils are of White British backgrounds, with approximately one eighth from other ethnicities. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is below the national average, albeit the number of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) is above the national picture. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is well below average. However, the school has the largest proportion of service families in Portsmouth.

The head of school has been in post since 2019 and works closely with the executive headteacher who also works across the junior school. The school became an academy as part of The De Curci Trust in 2017, and leaders work closely with their partners in the nearby junior and secondary schools. The majority of pupils move on to the junior school which is based on a separate site.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The experienced head of school leads the school with confidence and conviction. She is supported very effectively by the inspirational executive headteacher who spends a lot of time in the school, together with a committed and knowledgeable senior leadership team. Leaders also provide extensive outreach to others outside of the trust, including to local pre-schools, schools with service pupils, and guidance around the development of artificial intelligence and cyber security.
- Leaders at all levels, including governors, are closely involved in the production and cyclical reviews of the education improvement plan. All staff have input into the plan, with autonomy to apply the targets in the context of their respective roles. This has created a real sense of ownership for all. The plan is designed to be a flexible working document, with overriding themes each year, such as aspiration, equity and justice for all, currently. Strategic planning is linked closely with appraisal targets, professional development, and monitoring and implementation systems.
- Leaders and pupils speak with passion about the school's six values, comprising friendship, aspiration, respect, perseverance, responsibility, and teamwork. A different value is focused on each month, in lessons, circle times, and assemblies, which has helped create the positive ethos.

- The learning environment is delightful, with a nautical theme throughout which reflects the school's location. Each classroom has its own large porthole window, giving the appearance of a ship from outside. Indeed, many classrooms even have a sea view! Consistency is evident across classrooms, with the well-utilised working walls displaying key subject specific, ambitious vocabulary across the curriculum. Outdoor areas are spacious and appealing, with much equipment and zoned areas. This leads to an engaging and purposeful climate for learning which pupils respond to with enthusiasm.
- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of initiatives which start to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. There are many visits and visitors organised to enhance each theme, many of which relate to the rich, local resources, especially the naval and armed forces links. Additional themed weeks, such as a recent anti-bullying week which aligned with the respect value, provide pupils with further insight and experiences. Popular extra-curricular clubs include gardening, Spanish, singing, football, musical theatre, computing, and outdoor explorers. Pupils also benefit from taking on leadership responsibilities, including being eco warriors, play leaders, and members of the school council.
- Warm, productive and friendly relationships are key to life at Solent Infants. Pupils show respect to both their peers and to adults which makes the school a happy place for all.
- Parents and families play an important part in school life, with a thriving friends association, and termly evening and daytime workshops when parents and carers learn alongside their children. It is especially notable that Year 11 students from the trust secondary school also lead sessions about social media and e-safety which parents and staff find incredibly insightful.

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

- ... leaders further built on the best practice evident to continue to develop those learning support assistants newer in their roles.
- ... leaders developed strategies to ensure that delivery of the many outreach opportunities are manageable for staff.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Leaders and teachers have worked hard to embed the exciting, broad and balanced curriculum. It focuses explicitly on skills and knowledge through the themes explored, with a clear emphasis on what pupils will be able to do by the time they move on from the school. Notably, coherence and progression have been planned very carefully in liaison with the trust's junior school, with continuing commitment to securing strong retrieval skills.

- All adults in the team benefit from an extensive range of school-led continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, informed by research. Subject leaders have become experts in their respective subjects and often lead aspects of training. Teachers and leaders work in professional learning streams, with colleagues from across both the infant and junior schools.
- A typical feature of lessons is the high priority given to developing pupils' oracy skills which permeates all aspects of the curriculum. Furthermore, teachers model clarity of explanations effectively and there is consistent emphasis on the acquisition of a rich vocabulary.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), outdoor learning is carefully planned with a variety of exploratory activities linked to the learning indoors, whilst encouraging turn-taking and reasoning. Children access the exciting provision very enthusiastically, with awe and wonder promoted through challenges related to language and designed to develop their fine and gross motor skills.
- Early reading and phonics are taught skilfully through the systematic programme, with twice daily sessions helping to embed learning. Progress is reviewed regularly, with additional interventions quickly introduced to address any sound gaps. The focus on building vocabulary is consolidated through reading practice sessions which improve fluency. Consequently, phonics outcomes have improved significantly.
- Pupils' love of reading is clear, with quality texts linked to each theme and story time enjoyed by all at the end of each day. In addition, music lessons often use storytelling in rhythm and rhyme, which generate high levels of engagement.
- Writing relates closely to the reading curriculum, starting in EYFS with stories being used as a hook to encourage creativity. These methods are built on throughout Key Stage 1, For example in Year 2, pupils were uplevelling their vocabulary to describe a setting, using structured talk in a language-rich environment which generated productive discussions. Work in pupils' books highlights impressive levels of written work, with rich and ambitious vocabulary used.
- A mastery approach is taken to mathematics teaching and learning, with tasks designed to encourage talk which helps to secure understanding. For instance, after the class teacher had discussed the thought processes necessary, with paired modelling from the learning support assistant (LSA) who used a whiteboard to complete the task, Year 1 pupils talked with partners whilst partitioning numbers to problem solve.
- Lessons across the wider curriculum show similar levels of consistency. For example, in Key Stage 1, history links were made to the previous week, the previous theme and the previous year, to encourage retrieval practices. Similarly, in Year 2 science, an enquiry-based activity, which explored whether applying force would change the shape of materials, focused well on pupil voice and the integration of scientific vocabulary.

- End of Key Stage One outcomes are typically above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Targets are aspirational, whilst realistic, and pupils are on track to achieve these. Hence, they are prepared successfully for their move to junior education.

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

- ... teachers consistently supported pupils to become more independent in challenging themselves.
- ... pupils' confidence was developed to enable them to select the right digital tool for the right purpose at the right time.

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

- The substantive SENDCo is currently on leave, so the position is being covered by the head of school which reflects the importance placed on this vital role. She was the previous SENDCo and is assisted effectively by a very proficient lead LSA. Similarly, the head of school has responsibility for disadvantaged pupils, including those from service families, and again works tirelessly to support these vulnerable pupils.
- The lead LSA fulfils a valuable role, knowing all pupils well and ensuring the correct provision is in place to support any need. She is non-class based, liaises with external agencies, and also leads the lunchtime team, empowering support staff, and providing continuity across the school day.
- The talented LSAs are valued members of the team and receive extensive CPD to develop their skills and understanding. They show much initiative when working in classes, or when leading small group interventions.
- The curriculum has been adapted to best meet the needs of all pupils, with many additional resources, such as visual prompts, sensory circuits, and a pictorial, alphabetical communication tool being used effectively to aid pupils' understanding. As a result, detailed case study evidence indicates that all groups of pupils are making pleasing academic progress from their individual starting points, together with increased emotional stability and resilience.
- Pupils from service families receive much care and nurture in the provision, as do young carers and other vulnerable pupils. For instance, events such as service family meetings and the forces' friends club provide opportunities for liaison and celebrations.
- Due to the proactive and supportive systems in place, attendance levels for all groups of pupils are above national averages, with low levels of persistent absenteeism.

- The behaviour and attitudes of pupils, including those disadvantaged, are excellent. This is due to the high expectations and caring relationships evident across the school community.

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

... the school implemented an effective succession plan for SEND and inclusion leaders, at all levels, to ensure the support model is sustainable.

5. Area of Excellence

Oracy – learning to talk and learning through talk.

Accredited

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

Since the pandemic, one of the school's key targets has been to improve pupils' communication skills. This has been necessary due to many children entering EYFS with unclear speech sounds, low levels of vocabulary, and difficulties with social and emotional communication.

To improve the oracy of all pupils, the school has focused on four key areas, namely speech sounds, vocabulary, speaking and listening, together with social and emotional communication. These foci are used to teach the knowledge and skills of how to talk and how to learn through talk. Notably, oracy has become the driving principle underpinning every aspect of pedagogy, it is not simply a programme nor an add-on to the curriculum.

The curriculum reflects the continuing drive to improve pupils' oracy skills, with knowledge organisers used to identify key vocabulary which builds on the phonics programme. Pupils plan writing opportunities on a writing journey template which identifies new and interesting vocabulary, this is then displayed on working walls and consistently used as a resource in lessons. In addition, the youngest children learn to express themselves using a fun and creative approach to writing, with additional resources which develop their emotional currency and resilience. In speaking and listening activities, pupils are encouraged to talk about their own thinking and to use learning partners across the curriculum, which encourages interactions related to

prior and current learning. For instance, in mathematics lessons pupils use stem sentences seamlessly to support articulation and reduce cognitive load. They are also encouraged to practise their oracy skills in a range of contexts, such as during assemblies, in pupil voice meetings, and when meeting visitors.

Circle time sessions and PSHE-themed weeks, such as arts or aspiration weeks, help pupils to understand their own feelings whilst taking part in collaborative projects. This is complemented by work with an emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA), particularly for SEND pupils. Furthermore, Year 2 play leaders have been introduced to support younger pupils' language around initiating play and turn-taking.

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

Monitoring and evaluation show there has been a significant increase in pupils' levels of engagement, improved comprehension, and participation in critical thinking and problem-solving tasks. Pupils talk more confidently, using a wide vocabulary, and collaborate more successfully with their peers, which additionally extends their reasoning skills. Importantly, the most vulnerable pupils have developed a voice, with the established use of stem sentences to articulate their emotions.

Notably, positive impact is evident during unstructured times, such as during break and lunch times. Pupils now co-operate more readily, whilst showing improved empathy and understanding of others, often using similar restorative conversations as those modelled by adults. As a result, there has been a considerable reduction in behavioural incidents, alongside boosts to individuals' self-esteem. Oracy is a very well-embedded part of everyday school life.

Leaders could offer support in planning and modelling their stepped approach to the development of oracy skills in all areas of the curriculum and wider school life.

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

Name: Emma Curthoys

Title: Head of School

Email: oracy@thesolentschools.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>)