

Name of School:	Watergate
Headteacher:	Linda Matthews
Hub:	London Special and Alternative Provision
School type:	Special
MAT:	N/A

Date of this visit:	19/06/2024
Estimate at last QA Review:	Outstanding
Date of last QA Review:	11/03/2021
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	10/03/2022

Please note that Challenge Partners is a school improvement charity and not a statutory accountability body. The QA Consultancy Review does not audit schools' safeguarding procedures, handling or behaviour policies, however, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' Safeguarding Policy and report any concerns.

1. Information about the visit

In place of a QA Review, Watergate School was visited by a Lead Reviewer who spent 2 days reviewing the following areas with them:

Area 1: What is the impact of the support and guidance from senior leaders on the progression and development of staff, particularly middle leaders and Early Career Teachers (ECTs)?

Area 2: How does Watergate's holistic curriculum impact on the learning and progress of pupils, with a particular focus on the development of communication and interaction?

Area 3: What is the impact of a low arousal approach to positive behaviour support on the pupils' regulation, engagement and learning?

2. Information about the school

Watergate is a primary special school in the London Borough of Lewisham, for pupils aged 4 -11 years, presenting primarily with severe or profound learning difficulties, and associated complex needs, including autism spectrum condition. The school is currently based on two sites, one at Bellingham and a temporary site at Ladywell. All 187 pupils on roll have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Pupils come from Lewisham and surrounding boroughs. The majority of pupils come to school on Local Authority school transport. A small proportion of pupils are brought in by families/carers. The school is supported by a multi-disciplinary team, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, who work closely with class teams and pupils, to comprehensively meet their needs. The school employs a music therapist who works with a number of pupils on both sites.

Watergate has a diverse pupil population. As a majority of pupils are socially disadvantaged, Watergate aims to provide an "equity" of offer, developing cultural capital to facilitate their progression into secondary provision and beyond.

At Watergate pupils, families and staff live the values, *'I can, you can, together we will.'*

3.1 Area 1 – What went well

- Senior leaders have developed a highly effective approach to developing and supporting all staff including ECTs, support staff and middle leaders, based on high aspirations, high standards alongside an ethos of care and support.

- Continuing professional development (CPD) is well organised and delivered using skilled and knowledgeable staff from within the school and using networks beyond the school.
- The ECT policy is clearly set out, with roles and responsibilities well defined. Learning observation processes are clear, constructive and developmental. Records of learning observations over time suggest a positive dialogue and ECTs taking up suggestions to improve their practice over time. The records show that ECTS reflect on their practice, growing in competence and confidence over time.
- ECTs value the personalised support and 'open door' policy from mentors and senior leaders. Feedback is delivered honestly and carefully. ECTs recognise that leaders and mentors always put pupils' needs first and adopt a Growth Mindset approach. All staff, including ECTs, are encouraged to take risks and learn from them.
- ECTs take opportunities to plan with and alongside more experienced colleagues, to learn from them and share their practice. ECTs use the innovative 'Sharing Sofa' to share, develop and adapt their practice. The 'Sharing Sofa' has also been used to problem solve and share practice to develop the class leadership role of the new teachers.
- ECTs value regular 'What, Wow, Wonder' observations, used by all staff to develop and share practice.
- ECTs recognise their role in learning from their experienced Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) as well as leading and managing the class team. Some ECTs are actively developing the culture that we are all leaders of learning, by encouraging TAs and HLTAs to lead sessions, using their passions, interests and skills. There is a recognition that modelling and encouraging staff to share their feelings and concerns is positive in developing team culture.
- In a Key Stage 2 class, led by an ECT, pupils used the well set up classroom activities with varying levels of independence. The teacher skilfully used a visual support to resolve a small dispute between pupils. Visual supports were personalised, available and used to support pupils to find their voices and make choices. The teacher showed clear in-the-moment leadership to direct staff and move the learning forward.
- Some middle leaders are comparatively new to their role while others have many years of experience. However, they are all passionate and skilled with the highest aspirations for pupils. They recognise that leading by example is key to modelling and developing best practice.

- Middle leaders are clear that a current priority is to refine and clarify the intent of their curriculum areas. They are monitoring the delivery of their areas of responsibility and the impact of their CPD, using evidence from the online assessment and recording platform, analysing teachers' planning, as well as monitoring the quality of Individual Education Plans and annual reviews.
- All middle leaders are delivering CPD. A newer middle leader recognised that she felt empowered by the confidence that senior leaders showed in her by encouraging her to deliver a session to teaching staff at a curriculum meeting.
- Middle leaders said that they feel empowered and trusted to trial initiatives, for example using virtual reality to promote reading.
- Middle leaders play their part alongside senior colleagues in campaigning to improve inclusion and access in the local area and beyond, for example, addressing signage in a local major supermarket and the 'See me, hear me' campaign in conjunction with a local special school, to improve facilities and play opportunities in the local area. The school worked with artists to produce banners and alongside pupils and families protested creatively and peacefully at the Southbank. Recently representatives from Lewisham have met with families as part of their review into play facilities for all.

3.2 Area 1 – Even better if...

... ECTs had more time to network and support each other, both informally and formally.

4.1 Area 2 - What went well

- The Watergate curriculum aims to develop pupils' skills to be motivated and confident communicators, who are independent, self-aware and able to self-regulate. Pupils are encouraged to be motivated, persistent and enquiring, enabling them to be active members of their community.
- The curriculum areas are My Communication and Interaction; My Independence; My Thinking and Problem Solving; My Wellbeing; My Creativity; and My World. The core skills of communication and interaction, independence and thinking and problem solving are woven into all aspects of the curriculum. Topics are creatively developed to bring curriculum delivery to life.
- Pupils enter school with joy and purpose. The focus on independence was clear to see, with pupils leading interactions and only being supported when required. Teaching staff used their deep personalised knowledge of pupils, individually and warmly greeting pupils. Pupils with a wide range of needs showed a willingness to communicate, greet staff and visitors.

- As pupils entered classrooms, they were greeted with well thought out activities. One pupil used a spinner in the play area to self-regulate while others used the sand trays to use tools for a variety of purposes. A member of staff enjoyed modelling using a bubble making machine and passed this to a pupil to enjoy.
- In a Key Stage 2 class morning settling session, TAs were well deployed to promote learning. A pupil was immersed in reading her Peppa Pig book, surrounded by Peppa Pig materials. Well-rehearsed routines and structures enabled pupils to maximise independence in 'tidy up time,' including a pupil quietly washing the cups. In circle time, pupils found and used their voices in a variety of ways. A pupil with a tracheotomy chose to use her eloquent 'quiet voice'.
- The well organised teacher in a Key Stage 2 class with 13 pupils with ASC and complex needs, used a highly structured and individualised approach using many aspects of Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-Handicapped Children (TEACHH). The teacher had high expectations, carefully tailoring activities to meet needs, to stretch and challenge. Pupils chose their name, their photo or wrote their name on the class register. Due to well established routines, transitions were exceptionally slick. A group of pupils followed clear visual instructions to use vinegar and bicarbonate of soda to make seeds dance!
- Leaders ensure that Watergate approaches have an impact at home and beyond school. Regular coffee mornings for parents and families cover topics such as emotional regulation, Autism and toilet training. 19 parents joined a 'Making it real' session, facilitated by an external consultant, to better understand practical activities to promote reading and learning at home. Communication and Interaction leads, a Speech and Language Therapist and the Family Support Worker (FSW), were on hand to support and build bridges with families. A parent was supporting translation for some Spanish speaking parents. The highly effective FSW has worked tirelessly and successfully to bring families in to school and has provided 1:1 support, advice and signposting.
- The MOVE approach is a longstanding area of excellent practice at Watergate. Recently families at the feeder secondary school have encouraged the school to adopt the highly effective approach from Watergate. This is being facilitated by the relevant middle leader for Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) and Physical Development.

- At the highly effective but somewhat irreverent lunchtime 'Fart Club,' pupils with PMLD were highly motivated by strategically placed whoopee cushions, to encourage physiotherapy and MOVE activities. A Teacher from the feeder secondary school took part, to better understand the approach. Pupils exerted choice and control using their communication skills, facilitated by staff who know how and where to look. All concerned had a great time!

4.2 Area 2 – Even better if...

... the Watergate approach to learning was further shared within Lewisham to improve accessibility, inclusion and SEN provision.

5.1 Area 3 – What went well

- The exemplary Behaviour Policy is clear and concise, encompassing a thoughtful and positive rights-based approach. The principles which underpin the policy are that pupils' behaviour occurs for reasons which need to be understood with tools provided for them to learn to better meet their needs and have their needs met. The approach is relational as opposed to compliance based. Leaders have high expectations for both pupils and staff. There is a clear understanding that the approach to addressing behaviours which concern should not be based on punishment and sanctions. Leaders are supported by a company providing positive behaviour support training. The company is signed up to the Restraint Reduction Network. The school has an assistant headteacher who works alongside an assistant headteacher from Brent Knoll, who are both accredited trainers for delivering positive behaviour support to staff at both schools.
- Leaders consulted with staff during a whole school meeting and collaboratively devised a clear, simple document detailing exactly what staff do and do not do in response to behaviours that concern. All staff signed up to the final document. Mainstream and other special schools would benefit from finding out about this approach.
- Relational Support Plans (RSPs) are concise and user friendly. They are person centred, with sections on protection, connection, understanding and care and include sections on 'people who help me', strengths, interests and qualities, and 'things I don't like'. The approach is trauma informed. Short versions of RSPs are being developed for every pupil.

- RSPs have sections on what calm, mild stress, dysregulation, crisis and recovery look like and what support staff need to do to help the pupils to regulate, co-regulate and ultimately calm.
- CPD to support the approach is clear, high quality and user friendly. The training ensures that staff understand the clear links that are made to communication and sensory processing, with access to associated practical tools. Training continues to 'drip feed' the approach to staff.
- Environments around school promote communication and ensure that the visual environment is not overwhelming. Sensory activities are available close to where the pupil is learning and are built in to their daily learning routines.
- Leaders recognise that staff need skilled support when life happens, and a pupil becomes dysregulated. Debriefs are in place at the end of the day or the next day if appropriate.
- Numerous successful case studies are characterised by improved relationships and joint working with families, the effective use of internal and external professionals, functional analysis of behaviours and increased understanding and confidence of teams, leading to pupils' improved quality of life and access to learning. Although there are currently no restrictive physical interventions used, there are robust recording and reporting processes in place.
- Family engagement and support, as previously mentioned, is a key part of improving the quality of life and learning for each pupil. This includes checking in with parents who are often under extreme pressure, sharing approaches and equipment and signposting families to access a range of support and services.
- Leaders recognise the need for appropriate boundaries for pupils. However, they are inventive in finding the right approach for every pupil. An example of this was where a pupil, who was initially placed in one class, communicated that he wanted to visit other classes and then chose the class that was right for him. This brave, person centred approach has yielded great benefit for the pupil in question.

5.2 Area 3 – Even better if...

... Not applicable.

Following the QA Consultancy Review

The consultancy 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 report content to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector each year.

For further support following your QA Consultancy 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.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice (SLP) events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>).

Finally, following the QA Consultancy 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>).