



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR LEIGH ACADEMY MARDEN

Name of School:	Leigh Academy Marden
Headteacher/Principal:	Hannah Penning
Hub:	Leigh Hub
School phase:	Primary
MAT (if applicable):	Leigh Academies Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	24/01/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Effective
Date of last QA Review	20/10/2022
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	28/02/2023

1. Context and character of the school

Leigh Academy Marden is situated in a rural Kentish village in the borough of Maidstone, and it joined the Leigh Academies Trust in 2020. The demographic of the school population is changing with housing development locally. The catchment area is mixed, including a third of pupils considered to be disadvantaged. The school is growing into a two-form entry primary school and has taken 60 children into Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for the past two years. Pupils are taught in single age-groups although classes are smaller in Key Stage 2.

There are currently 323 pupils on roll; the vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with a small percentage speaking English as an additional language (EAL). The school also includes 10% of pupils from a local Gypsy, Roma Traveller community. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is below the national average. Two pupils have education, health and care plans (EHCPs) which is significantly below the national average.

The school is accredited as a World School by the International Baccalaureate. They follow the Primary Years Programme (IB PYP), an inquiry-led learning framework where the national curriculum is delivered through in-context experiences. As a result, pupils are encouraged to be risk-takers, life-long learners and global citizens.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leigh Academy Marden is a community at the very heart of the village where leaders' vision of 'Ambitious for All' is shared by all stakeholders.
- Leaders are ambitious for their pupils. They believe in putting pupils first, developing and nurturing them to be aspirational and lifelong learners by becoming the best they can be. Pupils are proud to be part of the school community. They say that they feel safe because adults are kind and caring. There is a real sense of belonging through positive relationships between staff and families.
- The principal leads a strong, cohesive team with drive, passion and compassion. This empowers them to lead by example with a collective responsibility and as a model of excellence within the trust. There are many examples of best practice being shared beyond the school, including provision in EYFS and SENCo-led training with a particular focus. The Community Board incorporating three local primary schools has also enabled sharing of good practice within this group.
- Continuous professional development (CPD) is provided for staff at all levels, whether as a whole staff, group focus or on a more individual bespoke basis. This has created a culture for learning together in school with the purpose of

both developing pedagogy and enhancing teaching and learning within classrooms.

- Middle leaders talk enthusiastically about developing their individual subject areas. They are actively involved in creating action plans, identifying key priorities, monitoring and tracking progress and next steps.
- Pupils relish the opportunity to take on leadership roles as democratically elected house captains, working with younger pupils as sports leaders and supporting as well-being ambassadors. They enjoy making a difference within the school as school council members and raising awareness of sustainability as eco warriors.
- There is a high uptake for a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including by the most disadvantaged pupils. Clubs include cooking, debate and drama, as well as a range of sports. Pupils talk enthusiastically about these opportunities to develop their social skills, talents and hobbies.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning within lessons and there is a consistent approach to managing behaviour with clear expectations. They learn how to co-operate, communicate and be kind to each other.
- The curriculum is enriched by broadening experiences and creating enrichment opportunities. Pupils take part in visits within the locality, as well as further afield, including the Natural History Museum, Tate Modern and a Year 6 residential visit. They particularly enjoy 'Create Day' when they combine art, music and dance or being part of a 'Rock Steady' band.
- Leaders support the well-being of both staff and pupils. They aim to be very approachable to staff who feel both supported and valued. Building pupils' character is important so that they become well-rounded individuals who contribute to the community in which they live. Within lessons, and through assemblies, pupils learn about other religions and cultures, building upon their global understanding, whilst promoting an understanding of their role in modern Britain.

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

... none were identified

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The school has embedded the Primary Years Programme curriculum framework as a tool to deliver the national curriculum. This promotes inquiry-based learning and, within classrooms, pupils are excited about learning and are able to make deeper connections. As a result, they develop many learning attributes as inquirers, thinkers and by being reflective. The curriculum is

robustly planned and sequenced to engage pupils. Their progress in individual subjects is tracked, capturing how they build on their knowledge, understanding and skills in each area as they move through the school.

- Reading has a high profile with a strong focus on using quality core texts linked to inquiry, visits to the newly refurbished school library or taking home a book to share with an adult. There is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics so that pupils develop this core skill early on and can access the broader curriculum.
- Classrooms are set up as purposeful learning environments where current displays set the tone for learning. Within lessons, teachers show secure subject knowledge. They use modelling well with oral rehearsal and vocabulary development built into lessons across the school.
- Writing lessons follow a clear sequence, linked to inquiry so that pupils write with a real purpose and audience across a range of genres. Year 5 pupils had been learning about fronted adverbials and verb tenses to include in their writing when planning a diary entry. In the moment marking and feedback mean that pupils respond by editing and improving their work.
- The development of oracy has a high priority from the time pupils start their educational journey. Within EYFS, activities are purposeful with opportunities for children to develop and practise key skills, be creative and explore across the areas of learning within an exciting and stimulating environment. Through adults modelling and high-quality interactions children are ready for Year 1. Staff training in Elkan to support speech and language development has been shared across the school and the English leader has identified oracy as a continued focus across the curriculum. Within lessons, pupils engage as 'talk partners' to discuss and debate.
- Strategies such as flashbacks, hinge questions and knowledge harvests are used effectively to recall, assess and recap learning. These allow the pace of the lesson to be maintained and create further challenge. Within mathematics lessons, pupils were encouraged to explain their reasoning, using manipulatives to support conceptual understanding. Through their assessments, teachers can address misconceptions at the right time and provide appropriate feedback.
- Well-trained teaching assistants are deployed well and play an active role as part of the teaching team so that they know when to intervene. They are highly skilled in adapting learning, enabling all pupils to access tasks at an appropriate level which has a direct impact on their learning and progress. For example, in a phonics session pupils with SEND were able to recognise phonemes, using their skills of segmenting and blending to create simple words.
- Pupils use Chromebooks to access the 'learning zone' where they can choose resources which are appropriate to their need and the set task. This enables them to work more independently. Teachers also use AI as a tool to support

them when planning to meet the needs of individuals and groups of pupils by creating resources.

- Expectations for attendance are clearly set out. There is a whole school approach to promoting strong attendance and punctuality so that attendance is in line with national averages. Rigorous systems are in place to follow up persistent absence with support for families and improvements in attendance are celebrated.
- Pupil progress meetings are held half-termly to ensure that all pupils are on track to reach their potential. There are secure tracking systems in place to identify pupils who are potentially underachieving to maximise progress from their starting points.
- Pupils build on their attainment and progress as they move through the school. Over time, the percentage of children reaching a good level of development in EYFS has been significantly above the national average. Historically, at the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have attained significantly higher than other pupils nationally in all areas.

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

- ... leaders continue to drive opportunities for challenge across the curriculum for all pupils.
- ... subject specific vocabulary is not only taught but evident in how pupils talk about what they are learning.

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

- This is an inclusive school where the inclusion leader brings experience to the role, being approachable to both teachers and parents of pupils with SEND. Relationships are built up with families as pupils start school with early identification of the specific needs of pupils. The vision is for all pupils to feel part of the class and community with adaptive teaching and targeted interventions to enable them to fully access the curriculum.
- Staff know their pupils well; they understand any underlying issues and any needs that impact pupils' behaviour. This supports pupils in regulating their emotions and behaviour so that they are ready to learn.
- Core knowledge tracker is used to track pupils who are working below expectations. This enables staff to track the small steps that pupils make and informs the impact of interventions for individuals or small groups. Adaptive practice is embedded across the school. Where specific adaptations are

required, such as on personal plans, they are consistently applied and purposeful.

- The inclusion leader seeks support and expertise from external agencies, including the educational psychologist and speech and language therapist, when needed. Parents are signposted to access resources for well-being, including therapy through the local GP surgery. Through involvement in the 'This is Me' initiative, families with neurodivergent children are fully supported in their unique needs both in school and at home so that they become more confident in themselves. The inclusion leader makes regular observations to ensure that pupils have the right support at the right time, supported by relevant external agencies.
- Leaders use funding to close gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, whilst providing them with the same opportunities. For example, educational visits are supplemented and families supported in purchasing uniform. Leaders have created lunchtime clubs to increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, as well as the opportunity to attend breakfast or after school club.
- Pupils with SEND are making positive progress from their starting points. Disadvantaged pupils' outcomes are in line with national averages. These groups of pupils are closely monitored through pupil progress meetings to ensure that adaptations and interventions are having the greatest impact.

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

... none were identified

5. Area of Excellence

Ambitious for all – empowering staff, challenging pupils, enhancing learning.

Accredited

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

Through the school's vision of 'Ambitious for All' comprehensive training is provided for all staff. Whether as a whole staff or group focus or on a more individual bespoke

basis, the purpose is to both develop pedagogy and enhance teaching and learning within classrooms. This has created a real culture for learning together in school.

Alongside regular weekly professional development for teachers and teaching assistants, leaders have identified six strands of development for individuals and groups of staff to support their practice:

- Inclusion
- International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP)
- Curriculum
- Senior leadership team
- Trainees and early career teachers (ECTs)
- National Professional Qualifications (NPQs)

The training and development model is based on the Education Endowment Foundation's guidance for successful implementation. All senior leaders have had training on this and understand the importance of sustaining the development and the changes that need to be made.

All staff members are assigned a key colleague who engages with them to discuss their professional development needs at designated intervals throughout the academic year. Steplab and ECT meetings provide educators with dedicated opportunities to deliberate on incremental changes that enhance their teaching and learning practices. These sessions facilitate reflection, rehearsal and modelling.

Leaders use feedback from learning walks and external visits to inform the direction of future continued professional development (CPD). This is tailored to meet the individual needs of all staff, facilitated by a diverse group of leaders within the school and external specialists and experts. CPD is systematically reviewed during senior leadership team (SLT) meetings to ensure alignment with whole school priorities and to identify and plan for emerging areas of focus.

CPD is tracked for staff at all levels to ensure that additional development is purposeful both for their role and career path. Strengths are identified across the school and best practice is then shared in school and across other schools within the cluster and trust.

Leaders work collaboratively with schools within their cluster and in the wider trust, meeting regularly to discuss plans and identify support the school can provide or needs from others. Examples of this include:

- Curriculum training and development within the cluster, including moderations
- Supporting senior leaders in other schools with preparation for inspections
- SENCo collaboration group across the cluster, involving primary and secondary schools
- Subject leadership networks

- Developed tools, such as the 'core knowledge tracker' that is now in place across the trust

This approach has ensured that a culture of learning is embedded within the staff team at all levels. Staff are keen to learn from others and develop their expertise which has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning as well as pupils' outcomes.

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

Pupils build on their attainment and progress as they move through the school. Over time, the percentage of children reaching a good level of development in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has been significantly above the national average. Historically, at the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have attained significantly higher than other pupils nationally in all areas. In Year 6, pupils take complete responsibility for organising an exhibition to celebrate what they have been learning through the Primary Years Programme. This demonstrates the impact of their teaching and learning experience and their ability to independently apply their learning.

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

Hannah Penning (Principal)
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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 report content to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector each year.

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.

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 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>)