



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

**REVIEW REPORT FOR
EXETER ROYAL ACADEMY FOR
DEAF EDUCATION**

Name of School:	Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education
Principal:	Sylvan Dewing
Hub:	London Special and AP Hub
School phase:	Non-maintained residential special school
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	N/A
Date of this Review:	27/11/2024
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Effective
Date of last QA Review	29/11/2023
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	23/02/2023



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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	N/A
Quality of provision and outcomes	N/A

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs

Area of excellence	Communication for All: how inspired implementation of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) leads to independence and learning for all. Accredited
Previously accredited valid areas of excellence	An applied integrated approach for Deaf young people with additional and complex needs 29/11/2023
Overall peer evaluation estimate	N/A

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

Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education is a non-maintained residential special school and specialist independent provider, located in Exmouth, East Devon. The provision includes a school for students aged nine to 16 year-olds, and a college for 16 to 18 year-olds and 19 - to 25-year-olds. About half of students are residential and there is also a children's home for four students. The school is run by a charitable trust, with a board of trustees and a governing body.

The 77 students come from 26 different local authorities across the United Kingdom, with two fifths of students from Devon. There are 180 staff on roll, of which one fifth are Deaf.

All students are Deaf or have an auditory processing disorder and have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). They also have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Almost half have social, emotional, and mental health difficulties (SEMH). Almost half have a multi-sensory impairment, including Deaf/blind. A quarter have autism and over a third of students have learning difficulties. In addition, many students have complex medical profiles. A small number are PEG fed.

A new leadership team is supporting the established Principal to continue the pioneering work of the organisation. The school moved to a purpose-built campus in September 2020.

The school is a multi-modal environment using spoken English and British Sign Language (BSL). Many students also use a broad range of augmentative alternative communication devices and strategies (AAC).

The school's mission: 'Enabling Deaf people to acquire language, achieve independence, develop socially and emotionally, and excel educationally' drives each member of staff.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The school is a dynamic, inclusive organisation that strives to maximise the potential for its community. Leaders are uncompromising in wanting the best for the students in their charge and embrace change with optimism.

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- In collaboration with the Board of Trustees and the Governing Body, leaders share a vision based on high aspiration and genuine care. A deep sense of responsibility is central to their work, and they diligently and deliberately seek out excellence.
- Leaders and staff collaborate intelligently, creating new knowledge that underpins an evolving progressive curriculum that is relevant for 21st century Deaf SEND communities. The state-of-the-art learning environment, designed specifically for Deaf students and staff, is a learning space that prioritises safety, personalised and preferred communication, and spaces to work, meet and socialise. It promotes independence, social confidence, and enjoyment.
- The senior leadership team (SLT) continue to evolve their curriculum offer, innovating its specialist aspects with courage and purpose. A fusion of relevant curriculum pathways that include a discrete focus on English, mathematics and Deaf Studies continue to evolve. Together with their 'working parties,' leaders focus on 'what matters' in a curriculum for Deaf students. This encourages a creative space to explore, plan and continue the curriculum journey.
- Departmental leads continue to develop an expert pedagogy and, alongside highly skilled staff, full immersion in a total communication approach. This impacts positively across all areas of progress.
- A programme of therapeutic support for Deaf young people, the majority of whom have significant accompanying additional needs, is led in an exemplary way. There are high levels of expertise across this team.
- A 12-week onboarding programme secures all new staff, equipping them to understand Deafness, the range of complex needs and the impact the environment has on the learning experience. The professional learning strategy is ambitious and is evolving to ensure the organisation becomes a research-led professional development and training hub for professionals working for Deaf students with additional and complex needs.
- There is a clear cycle of review across school, college, and therapies, with a consistent set of expectations for teaching and learning staff to guide performance. The quality improvement process is in its preliminary stages of implementation. With a carefully considered evaluation of their exploratory approaches leaders are taking their teams into unknown territory, giving them the confidence to evaluate new ways of working so that they continue to define a forward-looking curriculum that equips students to take their purposeful place in the world. Department leaders are gaining greater insight into the quality of the learning experiences.

- Students demonstrate ethical, informed leadership capacity and engage in authentic solution-focused action. The Eco Committee achieved the Eco School award with distinction and ensured the first BSL Eco code. The student council advocated for a Deaf-friendly puffin crossing, demanding safety for Deaf people. Students contribute to their community through volunteering roles as part of the Duke of Edinburgh 'Young Leaders in Service' award.

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

- ... senior leaders collaborated purposefully to further develop a progressive curriculum, underpinned by innovative pedagogy and robust assessment practice.
- ... a distributed leadership model resulted in middle leaders influencing the curriculum, inspiring pedagogy and applying impactful assessment across both the school and college.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Professional working relationships abound and result in a calm and productive learning atmosphere. All staff engage purposefully and are immersed in their work, impacting positively on students' attitudes and development. A sense of joy permeates the organisation.
- All staff demonstrate high levels of expertise and expectation, especially in relation to students' communication, social interaction, and classroom behaviours. They are inspirational role models.
- Staff who are Deaf inspire student confidence, self-assurance, and a sense of belonging. There is visible pride in their Deaf identity, which is a core value applied in and outside of the classroom. Students proudly participated in a student march to fight for the rights of Deaf students to access appropriate, high-quality education.
- Content-rich, coherent curriculum pathways empower student participation, whether through a formal or informal route. Also, students follow a blend of Deaf Studies, English/BSL and AAC, and mathematics.
- Teachers are skilled practitioners, adapting strategies in response to students' complex and communication needs 'in the moment.' During a Key Stage 3 science lesson a dysregulated student removed himself but was expertly supported back to his activity sensitively to experience the joy of success.

- Effective planning includes the key principles of positive relationships, rich language acquisition, and a focus on aspiration and independence. Here students celebrate their achievement, 'I can do it' and collaborate well. In an art lesson staff maximised opportunities for resilience and interdependence, with students ensuring they became 'even better artists.'
- A profound understanding of students' communication needs sees highly competent staff switch communication methods to engage students, dynamically. This creates opportunities for students to use their preferred strategy and feel secure, especially when accessing new concepts. During a Key Stage 2/3 science lesson students recalled previous learning and embraced new vocabulary. This was accompanied and scaffolded by visual support, BSL sign and the use of vocabulary cards.
- During a literacy comprehension lesson, students retold a story, using AAC devices to write sentences. Adults used a wide range of total communication strategies, ensuring students could confidently communicate their understanding. This included, BSL, aspects of AAC and sensory objects of reference.
- There is a consistent approach to the formal teaching of English with students accessing high quality model texts in an effective sound environment. As a result of highly skilled staff, students confidently communicate and collaborate. This creates a love of learning, and an enthusiasm for the task.
- In a post-16 mathematics lesson, students demonstrated a powerful sense of confidence and pride in their learning, successfully using calculation methods mentally and with physical resources to solve problems. Similarly, in an 'All About Me' lesson in the upper school students accessed age-appropriate resources, and enriched language opportunities to address misconceptions which led to inspiring conversations related to the importance of accurate language use.
- The use of visual resources enables students to make rapid progress towards their learning outcomes, independently. The use of video to show the life cycle of the bee meant students could work independently immediately and ask own questions to lead their own learning.
- Older students develop trust and confidence to access new experiences that will prepare them for life. They are enabled in lessons through purposeful use of resource such as newspapers, and calculators, but also provided with opportunities that develop from personal interest. A student with an interest in photography has been enabled to access a photography course off-site, through sensible adaption of the entry criteria.

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

... all teaching and learning staff strengthened their use of assessment taking account of students' access to and progress across all areas of their learning and development.

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

- The school ethos of care and cultural identity is a 'golden thread.' All staff place high priority on the SEMH of students. The provision has a far-reaching impact on both students and their families, reducing isolation and ensuring an optimistic view of each student's future.
- There is a dedicated lead for the SEMH team, who is continuously garnering expertise to evolve practice and increase the impact of all staff. This committed team applies their expansive knowledge, ensuring robust implementation of their multi-faceted programmes. This includes but is not restricted to, physiotherapy, counselling, speech and language, and Thrive practitioners.
- Regular check-ins with staff and students and robust collaborative monitoring result in timely intervention and secure progress. Assessment-focused dialogue with teachers ensures the target setting process works effectively. Specific and targeted provision has become adept. The team is now supporting colleagues to embed the universal provision consistently and effectively.
- Across the school the use of BSL is emphatic and staff, especially Deaf staff, are championing this through commitment and high expectation. A focus on total communication is individualised for each student and enhances this inclusive provision.
- Each student has their own communication device that incorporates personalised AAC strategies and is supported to continue using human gesture and BSL. They are equipped to use all modes effectively. Devices stay with the student once they leave the school, so is sustainable. Students develop the confidence and independence to access the wider community with confidence.

- The culture of integrated working continues to secure effective transition for each student. Staff use transition meetings in a 'multi-agency' manner. Collective input to planning and collective responsibility for levels of success are undertaken seriously. Difficult conversations and purposeful decision making secures the best possible destination for the students. The independent advocate collaborates alongside the broad range of professionals to represent students as they transition to the next stage of work, education, and learning.

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

N/A

5. Area of Excellence

Communication for All: how inspired implementation of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) leads to independence and learning for all.

Accredited

5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength?

Leaders and staff are resolute in their vision for a communication approach that provides equity and choice for all students, so that they can contribute valuably to the communities to which they belong. A shared mission to develop Deaf students who are proud of their identity and who can advocate powerfully is tangible.

Staff believe strongly that their approach of personalising the use AAC, alongside BSL, is unique. All forms of communication are honoured so that students feel valued. Collaboration with the Deaf Community to ensure that the use of high-tech AAC respects and supports the culture and language of BSL has been central to this work.

Students are equipped to use high-tech AAC devices, which they would not have access to ordinarily. The team creatively sources software and devices and carefully plans the implementation process sustainably. This pioneering use of high-tech AAC devices to overcome the barriers that Deaf students face when interacting with the hearing community is galvanising practice and people.

Developing student expertise, particularly for Deaf students with low levels of literacy who are unable to use traditional forms of communication, such as writing, is interesting. The AAC approach provides a pictorial representation of the English words to support students' understanding.

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

The team continues to implement sensitively and respectfully alongside the Deaf community within and beyond the academy. This robust and compassionate approach has resulted in a 'change of heart,' with expert staff once reluctant and suspicious of AAC and its role in de-valuing their identified language and therefore their voice, now seeing huge benefits of a multi-lingual and multi-modal environment.

Academy-wide implementation of Grid for iPad and bespoke induction processes ensure that professional development is focused and pragmatic. All staff have relevant programmes on their own devices so that they can freely model their use. They demonstrate a good understanding of what AAC is, the purpose of a total communication approach and how to use high-tech AAC with their students.

In many classes teachers present using a multi-modal and multi-lingual approach, with BSL signs alongside the use of high-tech AAC proving inspirational. For those students who have some hearing, speech is also used. All these modes combined give the students a very secure understanding of the language and vocabulary of BSL and its place within their broader learning experiences.

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

Progression sheets are used robustly moving students to become 'natural' users of AAC devices and strategies. There is evidence of significant progress against Academy bandings, especially within the semi-formal school pathway.



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The addition of AAC as part of a suite of communication skills has enabled greater access to and improved understanding in students' learning. This is particularly noticeable in students' phonic progression and the impact on reading.

AAC AQA unit awards were introduced in September 2024 which all AAC users are following. There is already pleasing evidence of progress from a number of students. There are nine students across the school and college who have achieved the AQA unit awards in level device management, navigational skills, and communication skills.

In social situations, students are communicating with hearing people when 'out and about' which increases their self-confidence. Previously students relied on a member of staff to interpret for them and now order a drink at a cafe or ask for help in a shop.

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

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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 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.



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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>).