

Name of School:	The Deaf Academy
Headteacher/Principal:	Sylvan Dewing
Hub:	London Special and AP
School phase:	Special
MAT (if applicable):	Not applicable

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Working towards effective
Date of this Review:	07/12/2022
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	This is the school's first review.
Date of last QA Review:	Not applicable
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Requires improvement
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	School: 16/01/2019 College: 15/03/2022

1. Context and character of the school

This is the Deaf Academy's first review. The setting is a charity and has school, college, children's home and residential provision. Education is provided via the school and college. About half of the 62 students, aged between 9 and 22, are in residential care. Two students attend the children's home.

The non-maintained special school (for students up to 18 years of age) and the specialist provider institution (for students aged 19 years and older) are for deaf students with additional needs. This bi-modal context is important. All students have additional needs, for example SEMH, ASD, various medical conditions and learning difficulties. Leaders are redesigning provision in light of the ever-changing student characteristics.

Twelve students attend the post-19 provision, which is the only post-19 exclusively deaf provision in England. Plans are in place to develop a new ten-bed, post-19 centre (very close to the main setting) to enable a more adult-focused provision.

The principal has been in post since 2020. The assistant principal (head of school) took up post at the start of this academic year. The assistant principal, who leads college provision, including the post-19 provision, has performed various roles in the setting for many years.

The school has a range of national accreditations. These include a national award for responding to the covid pandemic.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders take the 'ethical high ground'. They strive for the best. Leaders have secured many achievements in regard to strong practice for effective teaching pedagogy of deaf students. They are now seeking how best to connect this practice with curriculum intent, thus maintaining deaf identity. Research and development work with Exeter university, focusing on bi-modal education, is a good example of this. This current development is a potential area of excellence for the future.
- The Deaf Academy is a unique setting. Leaders embrace its complex nature. Senior leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for developing a bespoke offer for deaf students with additional needs. Leaders recognise that they are developing a cutting edge offer for their deaf students who have additional needs. Leaders refer to 'deafhood' (a positive way of understanding deaf culture, language and identity). Leaders cite deafhood when exploring each

student's personal learning journey in understanding themselves as a deaf person.

- Leaders recognise that they are in the early stages of evaluating the impact of curriculum development work. A monitoring cycle is set up. This includes leaders' termly auditing of learning environment, scrutiny of students' work, learning walks and more formal lesson visits. Such activity is helping leaders develop coaching work with individual teaching staff. Student progress meetings require staff to 'show' evidence.
- Leadership capacity is developing. This is illustrated by the principal's restructuring of leadership, with new roles for assistant principals and the development of deputy roles. There is more strategic engagement with external support. For example, the college leader engages with an external consultant to verify personal reflections on the quality of teaching. The capacity for further improvement is strengthened.
- Leaders worked with teaching staff to build the current curriculum offer. Such collaboration has helped develop consensus. This has led to staff understanding and buying into the offer. In turn, staff engage well with early monitoring, which is designed to check out the effectiveness of the implementation of the curriculum. In hindsight, leaders feel that curriculum development has occurred at a fast pace. Consequently, the whole academy team needs a period of time to reflect on the work done to date and to plan strategically for the next stages of development.
- With leadership capacity being strengthened, more strategic thinking has begun. An example of this is the implementation of a 'holding' curriculum in school alongside creating a more bespoke curriculum. Here, leaders and staff know that whilst there is work to be done in some areas (including the foundation subjects), the attention is currently on others (including core areas of study, such as reading). This clarity contributes effectively to staff well-being.

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

...leaders made their curriculum offer more explicit and concise.

...leaders strategically planned the next stages of curriculum improvement, to include the continued development of their workforce.

...leaders developed a glossary of vocabulary which all staff rehearsed in their day-to-day work (including differentiation, adaptation and fluency), which will lead to a common understanding of key educational terms.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Students benefit from trusting relationships with their classmates and staff. These relationships have been skilfully built, with staff and students finding the best ways to communicate. The academy is a safe place in which to learn and express ideas. Staff create an atmosphere which is warm and supportive. Students are valued because their voices are heard.
- The teaching team has developed effective and efficient communication and language approaches. These are tailored to suit each individual student in both the school and college. In a science lesson, for example, the teacher skilfully and smoothly moved between different approaches so that each student was able to access learning well. This included signing for some, speaking with others and adjusting assisted listening devices to make access easy for all. Occasionally, students themselves model this adjustment in their interactions with each other.
- Staff have created language-rich classroom environments. Everyone understands the importance of supporting each student to acquire and use a broad range of vocabulary. Classroom clutter is minimised and staff wear plain clothing, which reduces distraction and consequently leaves students less fatigued during the day. Staff are very conscious of visual and sensory overload.
- Patience is a common feature in classrooms and around the building. Staff are empathetic, knowing that it is hard work to sustain concentration when learning. Further, given the additional needs of students, staff adhere to carefully designed regulation approaches for each student. This means that, for example, they wait for a student to become regulated before expecting them to return to their studies.
- Leaders and staff thought carefully about how they group students. Evidence from the class groupings this year suggests that this investment is paying dividends. Students attend more frequently than they did previously (including those with very poor attendance in previous settings). Students conduct themselves well and show positive attitudes to their learning. They already benefit from the very recently introduced 'thrive' programme. Together with other developments, including the sensory room, the academy is well placed to enrich the educational offer for its students.
- Teaching staff collaborate well with in-house therapeutic and external clinical colleagues. Students benefit from tailored therapies, including speech and language, occupational, audiology and physio. Effective work often goes unnoticed, as students engage 'easily' in their learning. Thoughtful timetabling

contributes well. For example, many therapies are delivered during the first period of the day ('all about me'). This means that students are rarely pulled away from their learning during other periods.

- Education staff, many of whom are deaf themselves, know that in order for their students to learn well, they need to acquire secure language skills and knowledge. Consequently, modelling and repeating teaching are features of lessons. Often staff engineer future success well, using visual and physical resources to help students develop language.

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

...leaders ensured that all curriculum planning was clearly sequenced (with teaching staff understanding the rationale for this sequencing) with staff emphasising what is important for students. Subsequently, evidence in students' workbooks and folders will align with such emphasis.

...the teaching team made explicit to students what they are learning today and why (emphasising learning rather than doing).

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

- The in-house therapeutic team is experienced and skilled. Staff possess a range of expertise, including counselling, health and specific knowledge around audiology. The team continues to expand, with new colleagues joining this year. Some students benefit from external clinical support. The therapies co-ordinator oversees all clinical provision.
- Students benefit from education staff embedding agreed therapeutic provision in their day-to-day teaching. All staff recognise the importance of students not being disturbed in their studies. Hence, almost all therapy programmes are carried out during designated time (often at the start of each day).
- Annual education, health and care plan (EHCP) reviews, together with more frequent in-house review cycles, anchor the therapeutic provision. Some aspects fit easily with day-to-day teaching, such as teaching staff modelling language structures as part of the routine pedagogy. Whilst other aspects, such as physiotherapy, need to be deliberately planned.

- Provision continues to evolve. Education and clinical staff are currently considering how they might better evaluate each student's progress against their EHCP targets and entitlements. Individual therapy plans have recently been created, which identify who supports the student with which form of provision when and where. Weekly team meetings occur, where staff consider each student liaising with local authorities and parents.
- Teaching staff welcome the engagement of various colleagues, including safeguarding and clinical. This is because it helps them reflect on and improve their day-to-day teaching. They are not overwhelmed – rather they seek out further advice and guidance as and when required.

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

...leaders ensured that optimum capacity was achieved for the therapy team, along with the development of the education team, to better meet students' therapeutic needs.

...leaders continued to engage in research and development, connecting deafhood with students' additional needs.

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.



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR THE DEAF ACADEMY

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>)