

## CHALLENGE PARTNERS: Quality Assurance Review Written Report

<b>Name of School:</b>	<b>St James School</b>
<b>School Address:</b>	Summer Lane, Exeter EX4 8NN
<b>Hub:</b>	Kingsbridge

<b>Telephone Number:</b>	01392 209922
<b>Email address:</b>	admin@st-james.devon.sch.uk

<b>Unique Reference Number:</b>	113507
<b>Local Authority:</b>	Devon
<b>Type of School:</b>	Secondary
<b>School Category:</b>	Academy
<b>Age range of pupils:</b>	11-16
<b>Number on roll:</b>	829
<b>Head teacher/Principal:</b>	Amy Grashoff

<b>Date of last Ofsted inspection:</b>	17-18 March 2015
<b>Grade at last Ofsted inspection:</b>	Good

<b>Date of Quality Assurance Review:</b>	1-3 March 2017
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## QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW – SUMMARY OF ESTIMATES<sup>1</sup>

<b>School Improvement Strategies:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Outcomes for Pupils are:</b>	Good
<b>Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Area of Excellence:</b> <b>Mathematics</b>	Confirmed and valid for 3 years
<b>Previously accredited Areas of Excellence:</b>	Pupil premium English and mathematics

### Overall Review Evaluation

The Quality Assurance Review found indicators that St James School appears to have moved beyond the Good grade as judged by Ofsted in the school's previous Ofsted report and is working just within the Outstanding grade. Leaders are fully aware of the next steps needed to ensure that this grade is secure and strategies are already in place to address this.

1. Please note that a Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Review is not equivalent to an Ofsted inspection, and agreed estimates from the review are not equivalent to Ofsted judgements.

## Information about the school

- St James School is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is broadly average. The numbers of students for whom English is an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is above the national average.
- The school became an academy in 2016 and is now part of the Ted Wragg Multi-Academy Trust. The school works in close partnership with other institutions as part of the Ted Wragg Trust and across the local area.
- The acting headteacher has been in post since January 2017 when the substantive headteacher moved to lead another school in the Trust on an interim basis. Other senior leaders have also taken on promoted posts, some without additional time allocation.

## School Improvement Strategies

### What Went Well

- Senior leaders have established a culture of continual improvement, borne of a deep understanding of students' needs and a desire to offer students positive learning experiences. Self-review and reflection are constant and inform development and the way forward. As a result, actions from the last inspection and 'EBIs' from the last Challenge Partners' review have been addressed.
- There is a vibrancy about leadership at St James. An ethos of collaboration, respect and determination pervades the school to which students and staff subscribe fully. Staff share strategies for improvement openly, such as the English team working with PE and drama teams on approaches to the development of writing.
- Leaders know their school well due to the robust and regular monitoring systems of the 'QAR'. Accountability is high at all levels of leadership through the quality assurance systems. Middle leaders are positive about the 'QAR' process and, through consultation with them, senior leaders made changes to make the process more useful and informative. They feel both challenged and supported.
- Senior leaders place great importance on the development and wellbeing of staff. Through its Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme, the school is committed to building teaching and leadership skills. This enables staff to take on posts of responsibility or lead initiatives within the school or beyond. Opportunities for shadowing through the 'toes in the water' programme offer further development possibilities and lead to good levels of retention and job satisfaction. A culture of openness lends a confidence to staff to set up 'golden lessons' where they try out new approaches and invite colleagues to assess their effectiveness.

- The leadership of teaching and learning is highly effective and has resulted in consistently strong teaching and learning and the school's best ever results in 2016. Learning walks, lesson observations and work scrutinies are frequent and feedback to staff is prompt and meaningful. Leaders have in depth knowledge of all staff through monitoring activities and CPD is tailored to staff needs; staff appreciate the shorter, sharper development slots. The impact of CPD is measured through the regular observations of individual teachers and their classes.
- The school's NQT programme has been judged by external professionals as 'inspiring' and it is impacting positively across the school. This model of best practice will now be shared across the trust.
- There is a culture of collaboration across the school in which departments share successful strategies. For example, a successful approach to teaching study skills in humanities was shared with the mathematics team; and, the science department is working with mathematics colleagues to ensure consistency in the teaching of numeracy.
- The school is data rich and leaders at all levels are using this to track progress and identify opportunities for targeted intervention. There has been a shift from a focus on attainment to progress and this is in the process of being embedded across departments. Leaders have developed creative approaches to intervention from the data. In Year 11, students are placed in tutor groups with specialist subject teachers and, during this time, they receive an additional session each day, according to their areas of weakness. Leaders have made very good use of the Year 7 Catch Up funding by running 'Fast Track' mathematics and English classes for lower ability students. The title of this session is highly motivational for these students.
- Students are proud of their school and its improved reputation. They praise the quality of the experiences they receive and the fact that teachers have high expectations; for example, by introducing GCSE style learning from Year 7. In particular, they value the e-safety curriculum and the support systems which look after them in school and beyond the school gates.

### **Even Better If...**

... the focus on progress data and its use from Years 7-11 was prioritised consistently by all leaders.

... whole school priorities for improvement were simplified to enable staff to articulate, action and evaluate them.

... leaders in mathematics and English extended their established collaboration further to include a sharing of their strategies for success in teaching boys and girls.

## Pupil Outcomes

- Students enter St James School with attainment which is broadly in line with the national average and the profile is improving gradually year on year. However, the current Year 11 comprises two-thirds boys to one-third girls. The percentage of low ability students is above the national average in most year groups. The number of high ability students entering the school is rising, with approximately half of Year 10 students categorised as most able.
- The Attainment 8 figure was above the national average in 2016 for all students. However, in both attainment and progress measures, the most able students in 2016 did less well than their peers.
- The 'Basics' indicator of at least a C grade in English and mathematics was well above the national average in 2016. The percentage of students achieving the English Baccalaureate was also well above the national average.
- Attainment in mathematics was significantly above the national average for both A\*-C and above the national average for A\*/A. Students achieved above the national average in A\*-C in English language in 2016. English literature was well above the national average at A\*-C and in line with A\*/A. These outcomes represent very strong progress given students' average starting points.
- Despite continued improvements in French in 2015 and strong classroom practice, attainment in French in 2016 was just below the national average in both measures. Students performed well in humanities and science.
- In 2016, the Progress 8 measure for all students was well above the national average and in the top 25% of schools nationally. The progress of middle ability students is in the top 10% of students nationally. However, when compared with their peers in school and nationally the progress of disadvantaged students is variable with real successes and some weaker performance. For example, the most able disadvantaged students outperform the most able students nationally and in English and mathematics.
- The progress of SEND students in 2016 was variable, with success in mathematics and the open element. The Progress 8 score was weaker for the four students with education, health and care plans (EHCP) in English and the EBacc element. The progress of SEND students in science and humanities was well above and above the national average respectively. Progress in languages was less strong.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the progress of current cohorts. Teachers have been cautious with the predictions for 2017 in the light of the new specifications and grading. Where there is a disconnect between the quality of learning and progress seen in lesson observations and data, teachers are challenged and actions are taken to address this. This leads to adjustments in predictions and approaches to classroom practice.

- The progress of current Year 9, 10 and 11 students is good as evidenced from data and students' books; there were examples of outstanding progress overtime in some classes seen. However, variability remains in the rates of progress in a few areas.
- Current assessment data shows that most students in Key Stage 3 are making expected or better progress although there is no overarching data for Years 7 and 8 currently. This good progress was confirmed by observations of learning in lessons and books although there is some inconsistency in current cohorts.
- For the past two years, the school has had zero NEETS, a significant improvement on previous years. The high quality guidance at this transition point is a key factor in this, coupled with the strengthened quality of teaching and learning.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **What Went Well**

- Students have mature and positive attitudes to learning and they are ready to learn from the outset of lessons. They embrace the opportunities teachers offer them and take ownership for their learning. The pride in their work is evident in the high quality presentation and the detail and frequency of written work in books. Note taking skills are being developed well and this prepares students well for the next stage of their learning. Students are confident to choose their own way of working which in turn develops their independence.
- Teachers have established strong routines for learning which are appropriate to students of different abilities. As a result, lessons progress at a brisk yet appropriate pace. In the best lessons, transitions between different learning phases are smooth and coherent.
- Students rise to their teachers' high expectations of them. For example, in one Year 9 lesson, the teacher had set out Advanced level and GCSE books, with the relevant pages marked; students chose to use these books to make additional notes.
- High levels of engagement and enjoyment are a strong feature of almost all lessons. When teachers present certain topics or activities, students are visibly delighted. 'We love doing this', said one group of Year 7 students about a topic the teacher had announced.
- Skilful questioning in most lessons ensures that students' understanding is checked, as well as challenged. Teachers have established a culture where students understand that there will be probing questioning to draw out responses. Teachers plan their questioning and, in the best lessons, they develop their questioning based on on-going assessment of students' understanding and use questioning enable students to make links between key topics.
- There is an expectation amongst students that you need to be ready with an answer – and they are! Students are willing to make mistakes and understand that their teachers will return to them to check if they now grasp key learning.

- Teachers plan and use resources well to address students' different needs and to spark their interests. Students value the variety in approaches in lessons and one student commented that the subjects chosen for GCSE were 'even better than I thought it would be'.
- Students display high levels of confidence when contributing verbally in lessons. They offer extended answers in lessons and in books. Students are keen to take part in discussion.
- Most teachers offer written feedback to students which is detailed and clear in its 'next steps' guidance. As a result, most students are well informed about their progress and know specifically what to do to improve their work. They respond consistently to feedback by making improvements to their work or answering challenging questions posed by their teacher. This process deepens students' understanding and good and better progress ensues.
- Positive working relationships make a significant contribution to the quality of learning in lessons. Teachers' positive language encourages students' interaction.
- During the review, the quality of teaching in mathematics was consistently strong across all abilities and year groups in classes and books, reflecting the school's choice of this as an area of excellence. Students commented that they felt challenged to think deeply in mathematics, English and French through the difficulty of the work, as well as the questioning of their teachers.

#### **Even Better If...**

... all teachers ensured that students' responses to written feedback extended and deepened their learning.

... all teachers developed the intuitiveness to know when to step in and when to step back to allow students to learn best.

### **Quality of Area of Excellence**

#### **Mathematics**

##### **Why has this area been identified as a strength?**

Attainment and progress in mathematics over a number of years has been above and well above national averages. Strength and depth have been established in the department in terms of staffing with mathematics teachers embracing development opportunities wholeheartedly. Key staff have provided support and outreach to a number of local organisations, including presentations to a local teaching school alliance and hosting visits from other schools to look at the school's best practice in mathematics.

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

The mathematics team has established very strong routines and approaches in the classroom. These, coupled with ambitious content and teachers' enthusiasm for learning, ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently high. The head of

mathematics has gained a very strong 'buy-in' from his team and they utilise the systems established in the department to maximum benefit. For example, the information that goes into and comes out of the 'QAR' monitoring is scrutinised by all teachers and used to refine their planning further – they embrace a 'your class, your results' culture. Teachers have established very high expectations throughout each key stage. Strong routines around homework have resulted in other departments now looking to adopt the systems used in mathematics. The department makes excellent use of 'Sparx' which facilitates independent student progress, both in and out of the classroom. Students are very clear about the benefits this brought them and there was strong evidence of 'Sparx' allowing teachers to provide differentiation in lessons.

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

Outcomes in mathematics have been consistently strong over a number of years. This culminated in outstanding rates of progress for all groups of students in 2016 in mathematics when they were in the top 6% nationally for progress. The head of mathematics has introduced further mathematics GCSE and, as a result of promoting the course to female students in particular, the gender balance in this class is equitable. Students enjoy the challenge of their mathematics lessons and books reflect the high expectations and pride in their work.

**What additional support would the school like from the Challenge Partners network, either locally or nationally?**

Following discussion with the headteacher, the school would like to reflect further about what support they might like.

**This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.**