



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR ORCHARD MEAD ACADEMY

Name of School:	Orchard Mead Academy
Principal:	Subrina Johal
Hub:	East Midlands South
School phase:	Secondary
MAT (if applicable):	The Mead Educational Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Effective
Date of this Review:	02/03/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Effective
Date of last QA Review:	10/02/2025
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	08/02/2022

1. Context and character of the school

Orchard Mead Academy is a large 11-16 mixed comprehensive school with just over 1,100 students on roll. It joined the Mead Educational Trust in September 2017, which has six secondary schools, eight primary schools and one special school. It is located in an area of high social deprivation on the eastern edge of Leicester. Two fifths of students are disadvantaged although there are more who do not receive additional funding. Over one third of students face complex difficulties that make them vulnerable. Three fifths of students come from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. A large proportion of students speak English as an additional language, with 59 different first languages. The proportions of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) are above the national averages and rising.

The school has opened an on-site Designated Specialist Provision (DSP) for Year 7 and 8 students with communication and interaction needs. This provision also has students with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) between Year 10 and Year 11 from the legacy SEMH and DSP.

The Orchard Oath of Work Hard, Be Kind, Be Responsible provides a framework for personal conduct and growth for students.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders have a deep and clear understanding of their school and the community it serves. They fully understand both the emotional and economic barriers for which their students need support to overcome and they take a trauma informed approach to everything they do. As a result, the school is highly inclusive and all students are known, valued and supported.
- The principal is a passionate and driven leader. She, side by side with an experienced executive principal, has established an equally dedicated senior leadership team who work very well together and share the vision for improvement. Their individual skills and strengths compliment one another's well. Although most leaders are relatively new to their roles, the impact of their work can be clearly seen in the improving outcomes, particularly in English. Leaders are quick to identify and address any gaps in provision. For example, they have strengthened the careers provision to ensure that any gaps in the revised Gatsby benchmarks have been swiftly remedied.
- Leaders ensure that the day-to-day atmosphere of the school is calm and positive both in classrooms and around the school. Leaders are highly visible and ensure that all students are met and greeted in the mornings, particularly welcoming any who have missed the previous day. As a result, students feel valued and cared for. As one student said, "It's nice to know we have been missed."

- Leaders regularly review and adapt the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all students and supports them to make the right choices as they move to the next stage of their education. For example, they have recently established a vocational learning centre to provide more opportunities for students.
- Leaders are deeply committed to supporting the wellbeing of staff. Yearly staff reviews always contain a focus on personal wellbeing. Leaders listen to and act upon issues arising from staff voice. For example, staff wanted greater face to face communication which has resulted in the establishment of a weekly briefing on a Monday morning. Through the Trust there is a range of support for the physical and mental health of staff. For example, they have prompt access to GP appointments and counselling services.
- Professional development for staff is highly responsive to individual and whole school needs, for instance, the drive to improve literacy across all areas of the school. Staff said that they really appreciated the professional development that they received and that it made them more confident in the classroom.
- There is a highly effective behaviour policy in place, with a clear focus on behaviour being everyone's responsibility. The culture around behaviour is very much around restoration rather than punishment.
- Leaders at all levels have supported schools to improve both within the Trust and further afield. Subject leads, for example in English, have supported subject leads in other Trust schools. Outside of the Trust, leaders have helped deliver national training programmes. Students from Orchard Mead have worked with students in other Trust schools to help establish student councils.

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

... explicit reading strategies were embedded consistently across all subjects.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and their relationships with students are warm and mutually respectful. As a result, students fully engage and enjoy their learning. This could be seen in In a Year 10 film studies lesson where students enthusiastically and successfully identified the key elements of mis-en-scene.
- Behaviour throughout the school and in classrooms is consistently good. Students move purposefully around the school and, as a result, arrive on time for their lessons and are keen to learn. Staff greet students at the door and see them out at the end. Students appreciate this approach; as one student commented, "Teachers understand you and get to know you really well." Learning routines are well established and underpinned by the FAST (Follow the teacher, Answer questions well, Sit up straight, Take responsibility for learning) approach. All lessons begin with a starter activity, usually linked back to previous learning which ensures that students are swiftly engaged

and no learning time is lost. In a Year 10 science lesson, students quickly settled to the task of recalling the effect of electrolysis on a range of compounds.

- Teachers use questions and cold calling effectively to ensure that there is a fair distribution of questions and that vulnerable students are fully included and involved in group discussions. In a Year 8 history lesson focused on answering the big question, “Why was slavery abolished?” the teacher carefully targeted questions towards a number of disadvantaged students.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and supports all students to follow a path that is right for them. Students can pursue two languages and triple science. The school also requires all students to choose either geography or history. Students in the DSP have their curriculum adapted accordingly and receive a greater focus on literacy, reading and numeracy. Recently, in response to student need, the school has opened a vocational learning centre on site and the first cohorts are enjoying their level 1 courses in construction and hair and beauty.
- Pastoral care is a real strength of the school, and the Growth (personal development) programme is wide ranging and inclusive and helps to prepare students for adult life. Students are also taught about British values and the importance of democracy and voting. The impact of the latter was clearly seen in a Year 9 assembly where it was announced who had been elected as a cabinet minister and deputy for the student council. This was the end point of a process which involved students writing manifestos and preparing speeches which were then recorded and presented to the whole school.
- The school proudly describes itself as a reading school because leaders know that being able to read well is the key to unlocking every student’s potential. At the heart of the school is a welcoming, well-stocked library where students can hide away and enjoy the pleasure of reading. The school has a clear well-researched reading strategy in place which stresses the importance of all staff being teachers of reading. Two hours a week of curriculum time is dedicated to the specific teaching of reading skills. All members of staff, mostly form tutors, follow a carefully structured programme built around a specific text, for example, “The Hunger Games.” There is a clear focus on enriching students’ vocabulary and improving their inference and comprehension skills. For those students who find reading particularly challenging, there is a wide range of interventions in place, including the teaching of phonics, to help them catch up.

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

- ... teachers thoroughly checked all students’ responses on mini white boards so as not to miss any misconceptions or gaps in knowledge.
- ... all teachers actively circulated the classroom to check the progress of students and support their individual needs .

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

- The leadership of the provision for vulnerable students, including those who are disadvantaged, have additional needs or for whom English is an additional language is strong. Leaders in these areas have a detailed knowledge of individual students. Consequently, vulnerable students make good progress from their individual starting points and the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students is beginning to close.
- All vulnerable students, many of whom are disadvantaged, have a check in at both the start and the end of the day to support their wellbeing and confidence. Additionally, there is a full-time counsellor available for students to talk to if they need extra support and guidance.
- The school provides a whole raft of additional measures to ensure that barriers to learning and achievement for disadvantaged students are removed. Where appropriate, students receive help with both food and clothing. There is an award-winning breakfast club which is regularly attended by over 300 students, many of whom are vulnerable. Trips for disadvantaged students are heavily subsidised or, in some circumstances, free.
- The DSP is highly effective in supporting students who struggle with the basics in English and mathematics. A primary specialist works with these students including, when needed, their phonics skills. As a result, many of these students can access the mainstream curriculum and make good progress
- Classroom teachers know who their vulnerable students are and this is reflected in their detailed seating plans that ensure students are positioned in the best place to optimise their learning. Teachers use cold calling, questioning and targeted circulation sensitively to check vulnerable students' learning and understanding.
- There are learning passports and provision maps in place to support students who have additional needs. Teachers make effective use of these to help these students make progress in their learning.

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

- ... leaders formalised the sharing of the intervention strategies used by HLTAs with subject teachers to further develop their expertise in using adaptive teaching and building relationships.

5. Area of Excellence

None submitted

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 partnership of schools and trusts 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.

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 partnership 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>).