



Assessment for reaccreditation

School name and postcode Danes Hill School. KT22 0JG	School more able coordinator Saira Mc Nicol
--	---

NACE lead assessor Christabel Shepherd	NACE support assessor Dr Keith Watson
--	---

School context

Danes Hill School is a large independent co-educational preparatory school for pupils aged 3-13. The number of pupils on roll is approximately 850. The main school for pupils aged seven to thirteen is divided into three sections: lower school for pupils in years 2 and 3, middle school for pupils in years 4 and 5, and upper school for pupils in years 6, 7 and 8.

Danes Hill School was inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in January 2020. The inspection judged the school as 'excellent' in both areas of the Educational Quality Inspection and found that all of the standards contained in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements were met.

The school has an impressive scholarship record. For the next stage in their education, pupils move on to a wide range of top independent senior schools.

Danes Hill School's mission is to 'take every child in our care on a most extraordinary journey, and one which can nurture the talent and provide the skills and experience to last a lifetime.'

Summary statement

- One of the central aims at Danes Hill is to encourage 'boys and girls to become confident, articulate individuals by providing them with values, skills and a desire for learning ready to take on the challenges of the next stage of their education and life beyond. Their school life will be full of wonderful experiences and achievements.' This 'golden thread' was clearly evident throughout the reaccreditation process.
- Pupils are confident and aspirational individuals who are extremely well-supported and celebrated. They are eager learners and very proud of their school and speak about it with great sincerity.
- A range of reward systems are in place which are valued by all pupils and considered highly prestigious. These encourage all pupils to consistently aim high.
- The headteacher leads a reflective learning community which has the capacity and determination to innovate and continue to develop. Strategic documentation accurately identifies strengths and areas for development, helping to ensure a strong ethos of self-evaluation and continuous self-improvement.
- Teachers are well-qualified, skilled and passionate about their work.
- The 2020-2021 global Coronavirus pandemic proved to be an unprecedented and challenging period for the school. The Danes Hill leadership team and school staff were proactive in minimising the potentially negative impact on pupils' learning created by this period by developing and capitalising on innovative online pedagogy. Newly developed blended learning plans were created to facilitate the delivery of highly creative, online interactive lessons. This approach ensured a continuum of learning for all.
- Led by the relentless work and determination of the MATCo, leaders and school staff have worked diligently during trying times to maintain, further develop and implement new strategies to help to meet the needs of MAT learners.

Progress towards previous identified key action points

The school has made strong progress in addressing all the areas for development identified during the initial assessment.

- *Continue to work on identifying and embedding effective classroom challenge strategies, especially in the lower sets, and systematically share the good practice which exists in the school.*

Since the first Challenge Award accreditation, there has been a distinct culture shift as regards the provision of challenge and substantial strides have been made in developing and embedding challenge pedagogy for all. Teachers work together to share ideas for challenge activities and build these into their planning. These include, for example, strategies such as weekly challenges, the use of higher order questions and opportunities for dialogic talk and debate. Leaders know that this work needs to continue to ensure that all staff challenge every child, regardless of ability, and that the tasks set for the more able are truly cognitively challenging.

- *Continue to refine and review identification processes, especially to consider where there may be able pupil underachievement. Consider the expansion of identification to include a wider range of skills and talents e.g., leadership skills, entrepreneurial skills etc.*

Identification processes across the school are robust. A range of effective identification approaches have been developed and staff are ably supported by the MATCo and Heads of Department in their use. These include summative, formative/teacher assessment data, outcomes from CAT tests, generic and subject-specific checklists as well attendance at specialist clubs and activities where pupils might show an ability or talent not easily recognised in the classroom. Such approaches are also used to identify pupils who demonstrate strong leadership behaviours and skills.

Underachieving more able learners are quickly identified throughout the year and, particularly following mid-term reviews which analyse attainment and effort.

- *Build on the work already in place to regularly consult with able pupils on their views of their school learning experience. Consider how pupils could contribute to the design of learning opportunities.*

Year 7 and 8 Scholars are formally consulted about the Scholarship programme, through discussions and questionnaires. Their views are reported back to Heads of Department to shape teaching and learning approaches and content for future years.

- *Continue to explore how the use of technology and the VLE could be used to enhance learning, especially to support the most able pupils.*

Danes Hill has fully implemented the use of MS Teams. High quality remote provision using this platform was developed during the recent Covid pandemic. From this starting point, an impressive hybrid approach has been implemented. Resources, homework, virtual lessons and pupils' online work are now in one central place. The school has maximised this approach to allow bespoke resources, homework, challenge and extension activities to be set for and accessed by pupils. The development of this platform has also encouraged staff to adopt more creative pedagogical strategies, whilst encouraging pupils to become more independent and creative in how they approach and present their work.

- *Continue to use the Challenge Framework to audit and plan strategically to ensure high quality able pupil provision. Make clear from the outset what the intended impact of actions are and how the school will check that they are on track to meet those outcomes.*

The Challenge Framework has been effectively used to sustain the school's focus on more able and challenge provision. This work is reflected in the focus school development plan. Clear actions and targets with measurable intended outcomes are in place. Leaders understand the need for a continuing focus on teaching and learning strategies to fully embed cognitive challenge for all learners across the curriculum. Plans are in place to address this.

Continue to hone assessment for learning approaches so that:

- *Teachers plan opportunities for higher order questioning and learners are prompted to develop and justify answers, speculate and hypothesise.*

Higher order questioning is evident across the curriculum and in all year groups as a result of the focused introduction of Blooms Taxonomy. Pupils are regularly encouraged to 'add a bit more' to their answers, as well as to predict and hypothesise.

- *There are planned opportunities for pupils to ask questions.*

More able pupils are regularly given the opportunity for independent research whereby they are encouraged to seek out answers to their own questions. There are also opportunities for pupils to shape the course of a lesson or unit of work by asking key questions at the start.

- *Teachers have a range of planned strategies to check for pupil misconceptions, especially when there is a very high level of challenge.*

Many teachers are skilled at the swift identification of misconceptions. As a result of their strong subject knowledge, alongside the clarity and accuracy with which they explain concepts, misconceptions are generally dealt with effectively and as learning opportunities, therefore supporting pupils' understanding of the importance of adopting a growth mind-set. Work is continuing in order to ensure that such practice is consistent across the school.

- *Continue to develop pupils' ability to assess and increasingly manage their own learning.*

More able pupils are able to choose more challenging tasks at the start of a lesson in some subjects. They are also provided with a range of opportunities for independent learning through research and investigation. Self-assessment and peer marking are increasingly used as effective formative assessment tools. In Year 8, pupils are involved in developing their own assessment checklists, helping them to understand examination requirements and identify specific examples of these in their own and others' work. This is supporting pupils in becoming increasingly metacognitive. The school recognises the need for this to remain a priority.

- *Able pupils receive incisive feedback which help them improve their work, especially when already working at a high standard.*

More able pupils are provided with clear verbal feedback throughout lessons to enable them to make further progress. Likewise, written feedback encourages deeper thinking and provides next steps for future learning. Both effort and attainment are assessed and rewarded accordingly.

Summary of strengths for provision and outcomes

Discussions were held with senior leaders, teachers, 'scholars' and pupil leaders.

Lessons were observed from Year 3 upwards. Curriculum areas observed were: Science, English, History, Geography, Maths, Design Technology. A tutor group session focussed on leadership was also observed.

- In developing provision for more able learners and challenge for all, contributions from members of the school community are valued and all are encouraged to have high expectations.
- Provision across the curriculum and wider aspects of school life provides challenge for more able and talented learners. Leaders and staff are committed to the best for every child. Talents are explicitly recognised and celebrated. Teachers actively seek to continually identify more able learners and provide learning opportunities to support this process. One member of staff said, 'We try to nurture those who may become more able.'
- School leaders and staff have worked hard to develop pupils' confidence and independence, providing a range of opportunities of them to follow their own interests and develop their abilities and talents. This includes regularly presenting at school assemblies. For example, recently a Year 3 pupil talked about aviation and others have reported on sports events and fixtures.
- Learners often show high level of independence. They are keen to learn and complete tasks well. They discuss their learning with peers, which includes pairs, trios and larger groups. They demonstrate excellent levels of articulacy.

- As the learning environment is non-judgemental, pupils are happy to share their thoughts and personal opinions. This was clear to see in the tutor group session observed and through the interviews and conversations with pupils throughout the assessment day.
- Behaviour is exceptional. Learners listen well, answer confidently and manage their own learning and emotions well. They are polite, considerate and friendly.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are warm, caring, mutually, respectful, and hugely supportive. This was evident in every lesson observed.
- Personalised interventions to ensure wellbeing needs are met and appropriate academic interventions are made the cornerstone of provision. Individual pupil profiles have been developed for each pupil which help to ensure this bespoke provision and support such as maths and English clinics.
- The school developed an innovative and highly effective approach to remote learning during the recent pandemic and associated lockdowns which is worthy of wider dissemination. The proactivity and creativity of staff, alongside their determination to ensure that no learning time was lost, resulted in a remote learning approach and programme of very high quality. The remote offer included 4 hours of contact time daily, access to the full curriculum, bespoke provision for all ability groups (including high levels of challenge and independence for the more able) and, as required, learning support. As a result, the excellent reputation of the school has been further strengthened as evident through the recent significant increase in applications to the school.
- Leaders and teachers have applied learning from the development of the school's 'remote approach' to their current teaching, leading to increased creativity in teaching particularly in terms of the methods used to provide pupils with greater independence in their learning.
- Pupils are provided with specialist teaching, equipment and resources to enable them to aim for and create high quality outcomes, raising their aspirations in terms of what is possible and what excellence looks like. This includes, for example, a laser printer in DT and a full-size climbing wall in PE. The school is equipped with a state-of-the-art sports hall, an excellent library, and a paddock with an outdoor classroom and an area used for Forest School activities.
- More able learners consistently achieve outcomes significantly above those of their peers both within the school and nationally. Average CAT scores for pupils are 110 (National: 100). The average score for more able learners is often 130. These outcomes are reflected in the high numbers of pupils gaining scholarships and/or moving on to highly selective and prestigious independent schools post-Year 8.
- The Scholars Programme provides more able learners with bespoke learning opportunities to effectively strengthen their high levels of ability. Pupils on the programme were able to explain what being a scholar means in lessons 'People push you harder and give you slightly different work. You have to work quicker'. They understand the value of this approach: Working hard pays off'. *'How does it pay off?'* 'SMARTER!'
- This approach has been developed within a supportive whole school environment which does not encourage elitism but, instead, teaches learners that everyone gets what they need. The pupils themselves were able to articulate this ethos and understand how the school's approach means that everyone is supported and gets the education they need. As one Year 6

pupil said 'The idea here is that everyone feels good about themselves but they just go at different paces.'

- The development of student leadership opportunities has been a key priority throughout the school. These opportunities include, for example, School Councillors, and new roles such as Heads of School, Head Boys and Head Girls, Charities group leaders, and Eco leaders who aim to, 'make a change to the environment of the school' and to 'protect the natural environment in general', thus promoting global citizenship. Inspirational quotes and examples are used to motivate pupils and encourage an understanding of the key features of successful leaders and the importance of leadership for their future lives.
- Pupils on the leadership programme who were spoken to during the assessment day were able to articulate the importance of leadership in terms of:
 - their own personal development: 'You can learn skills for life, and it teaches you to be a good leader by listening.', 'Leadership can help build confidence for life', 'I care about what we can achieve.'
 - providing support and being role models for others: 'It feels special to know young people are looking up to me.', 'You can help people get what they want, done.',
 - preparing them for future life and careers: 'Leadership appears in all sorts of jobs, including being a teacher.', 'You need to be a good leader if you want to be a sportsperson and help other people get good at sport - you need to listen and help other people listen to you.'
- An excellent range of extra-curricular clubs and activities supplement and further extend the opportunities to identify and develop abilities and talents. For example, monthly drop-in 'book groups', themed 'book parties', a bouldering club, science club and sports clubs.

Summary of strengths for teaching and learning

- Teachers consistently demonstrated high expectations of the more able.
- Subject knowledge is strong which meant that teachers were able to explain clearly and accurately. This helped learners grasp more abstract concepts or new learning more effectively. This also meant that teachers were consistently able to skilfully address misconceptions
- All children observed demonstrated a secure understanding of core knowledge and key terminology. The more able had appropriate access to higher level concepts.
- Links with past and future learning were made explicit in lessons. This supported pupils in developing connections between concepts and themes, strengthening prior learning.
- More able learners were provided with several opportunities to take their learning further both in terms of breadth and depth through the provision of open-ended tasks or by being encouraged to 'go deeper'.
- Learners in many lessons were exposed to an excellent range of disciplinary vocabulary in context and were confident in using this. An example of this was seen during a Year 7 science lessons where all pupils were confidently and accurately describing and identifying parts of cells in discussion.
- Strategies used to effectively challenge learners included:
 - Questioning which encouraged children to build on others' responses and/or 'add a bit more'.
 - Opportunities for high level discussion and dialogue through focused dialogic talk
 - The teacher providing hints but not over-scaffolding the learning which allowed the students space to think, discuss and investigate
 - Being given a choice in the tasks they select, with different levels of challenge and support available where learning is underpinned by a growth mind-set mentality of purposeful effort leading to improvement.
 - Expecting them to 'Think, Feel and Connect' their learning.
 - Open questioning leading to the recall of previous learning which was then developed into high level pupil discussion about the learning.
- Challenging tasks set for pupils were often subject specific so effectively supported the development of high-level specialised skills.
- In a number of lessons, learners were provided with focused opportunities to reflect on and evaluate the approaches they had used to solve a problem. This helped their levels of metacognition increase.
- The learning environment celebrated learning and provided examples of excellence.

Areas for development

- Ensure that there is a shared and agreed understanding of terminology such as ‘challenge’ and ‘extension’ so that, across the school, more able pupils are consistently provided with learning tasks which have cognitive challenge inherent within them and that they themselves understand cognitive challenge and how this feels.
- Continue to develop increased opportunities for more able learners to be provided with less scaffolding and greater independence within learning tasks.
- To strengthen questioning for challenge:
 - Develop ‘wait time’ to ensure that pupils have the time to consider and articulate higher-level responses,
 - Introduce ‘no hands up’ questioning so that teachers avoid choosing those pupils who raise their hands first. This strategy also ensures that all learners have to be ready to respond,
 - Ensure that questions are routinely ‘bounced’ from one pupil to another to create cognitive challenge and promote deeper thinking.
- Review differentiation strategies to ensure that approaches do not inadvertently hold some learners back – particularly the middle and lower ability pupils.
- If written feedback is given, ensure that it consistently promotes reasoning or deeper thinking by expecting more. Similarly, ensure that explicit instructions are provided which lead to visible progress by avoiding terminology such as ‘can you’ or ‘next time try to.’
- Further develop the learning environment to promote learning and deeper thinking using carefully considered questions on displays.
- Further develop opportunities for ‘more able voice’ for Year 2 onwards so that these pupils can share their views about the ways in which they are challenged and impact on future approaches. Consider the introduction of ‘Challenge Ambassadors’ or similar.
- Consider updating monitoring proforma so that the term G and T is replaced with ‘more and exceptionally able’. Terminology such as G and T can be misleading for staff as well as being very emotive.

Key issues

Key action points:

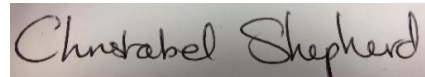
*to be included on the school's **Key issues matrix***

- Ensure that there is a shared and agreed understanding of terminology such as ‘challenge’ and ‘extension’ so that, across the school, more able pupils are consistently provided with learning tasks which have cognitive challenge inherent within them and that they themselves understand cognitive challenge and how this feels.
- Continue to develop increased opportunities for more able learners to be provided with less scaffolding and greater independence within learning tasks, and to move on to more challenging learning tasks more quickly once the core knowledge has been understood and/or fluency has been achieved.
- Ensure that the differentiation strategies used for lower and middle ability pupils in the lower school do not inadvertently limit their progress and attainment by expecting less work rather than less complexity.
- Further develop questioning strategies so that these are consistently used to promote cognitive challenge and lead to deeper learning.
- Further develop opportunities for ‘more able voice’ for Year 2 onwards so that these pupils can share their views about the ways in which they are challenged and impact on future approaches.

Date of Challenge Award reaccreditation

19th November 2021

NACE lead assessor signature



Date Challenge check-in due

(+ 18 months)

May 2023

Deadline for next reaccreditation

(+ 3 years)

19th November 2024