Consultative Review school	Reading Girls'School
Lead Reviewer	Martin Spoor
Reviewed on:	7 – 9 May 2019
Team	Richard Sutton (8 May only)

Context

The review focuses on how well the school will measure up to the new Ofsted framework, currently published in draft form. Since the school opened as an academy in September 2017, it is due for its first inspection as an academy next academic year.

The school has posed two specific questions:
  (i) Is the school's curriculum intent shared at all levels of leadership?
  (ii) What are the current barriers to realising this intent?

The lead reviewer made it clear over the telephone and during the review that any measurement of the school against the EIF must be done with caution. The framework is in draft form, and inspectors have not been trained on its use. As any new framework comes into operation, there is an embedding process during which norms are set and the text of the framework interpreted in its application during actual inspections. This is particularly true of the EIF, and the recognised issues of convergence with the government's curriculum expectations.

The review's evidence base is set out below. It did not contain first-hand evidence about some aspects of safeguarding, attendance and behaviour, nor did it look at governance and the school's relationship with the trust. Reviewers did not speak with parents. The school generally chose the lessons observed, the pupils that reviewers spoke to and the books that reviewers scrutinised. Although the reviewers believe that the evidence they gathered was representative, the sample size in some instances was small.

School Context:

o The school re-opened as part of the Baylis Court Trust in September 2017. The trust comprises two girls' secondary schools (the other is graded outstanding, and is in Slough), and an infant school, also in Slough.
o It is a girls' school, with a selective stream.
o There is no post-16 provision, although there was in the predecessor school and the DfE still lists the school as 11 – 18.
o The school has a PAN of 170, and recently about 100 pupils have joined Y7. The school anticipates up to 160 girls joining Y7 in September 2019. Older year groups comprise about 80 pupils.

There is no PIR, because this is a new school.

In December 2015, an Ofsted team visited the school initially under s8, but the inspection converted to a full inspection, which placed the school in special measures. The report was published in February 2016.
The findings of that report are all but irrelevant but have naturally been a focus for school improvement.

There was a monitoring inspection on 29 – 30 June 2016 that found leaders were not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures. At this point, a new interim HT had just joined the school. Leaders and governors had taken the decision to close the sixth from. Changes in leadership had led to slow progress, although safeguarding by this point was effective. Baylis Court School was providing some support.

The current headteacher joined the school in September 2017. Since that time, there has been an exceptionally high turnover of staff. Most leaders have been in post less than two years, and many are less experienced than that. Gaps in staffing have created difficulties in maintaining the curriculum and in sustaining a consistently high quality of teaching. These difficulties have been compounded by the relatively small size of the school. Many departments comprise one teacher. In some instances, most significantly in music, the headteacher has prioritised the quality of teaching over curriculum entitlement. At the same time, he has been exceptionally resourceful in finding good teaching, leadership and advice from several sources.

Review Evidence

Documents

Reviewers looked at a wide range of documents, both prior to the review and during it. These included:
- the school's electronic SEF, with nested documents including curriculum plans, questionnaires, presentations, reviews, policies and templates
- the school development plan
- timetables and plans, for example of personal development days
- examples of lesson observation records and departmental data analysis
- records showing the impact of the school's policies on attendance and behaviour
- IDSR, outcomes information and analysis for 2017 and 2018, and – briefly – results from the assessment of current pupils
- leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching over time.

Meetings with staff

Reviewers met with a wide range of staff over the three days. Most meetings were scheduled, but there were also several less formal conversations.

At the end of day 2, the reviewers provided detailed feedback to SLT on their findings thus far. The lead reviewer provided a brief update at the end of day 3.

During day 3, the lead reviewer met with heads of subject to discuss how they might draw on the findings of the review. In particular, they discussed curriculum planning.

Meetings with pupils

Reviewers met with four groups of pupils formally, and spoke with many others around the school.

Lesson observation

Reviewers observed learning in nine lessons, one presentation by an external provider and two 1 – 1 sessions on day 2 of the review. On day 3, one reviewer conducted a further four observations jointly with senior leaders, and discussed the observations with them.

The reviewers looked at some exercise books both in lessons and outside.

Review Findings

1. Overarching strengths.

The review recognises the importance of the following:

1.1 The school achieved very strong key stage 4 outcomes in 2018. The Progress 8 score was +0.66, placing the school in the top 10% of schools nationally. Progress was strong in English, mathematics, languages and the Open element.

1.2 There is a universal and strongly-held belief that the school has improved rapidly under the leadership of the current HT, and is well placed to improve further.

1.3 Partly as a consequence of **1.1** and **1.2**, the school is expecting to admit in September approximately 160 Y7 pupils. This represents a substantial increase on previous cohorts. The increase in the number of pupils will raise the school's income. This in turn will provide greater flexibility in staffing and timetabling.

2. Quality of Education: curriculum intent

2.1 In 2018, the school entered 19% of pupils for the EBacc, well below the national average. The school has set no target for the proportion of Y9 pupils who will begin key stage 4 courses in September 2019 that will lead to the EBacc. Leaders have not committed to a target for subsequent years. The current curriculum model suggests that the proportion of pupils choosing a modern foreign language is likely to be the limiting factor for EBacc outcomes in 2022.

2.2 In 2018, the school moved to a 3-year key stage 4, meaning that both Year 9 and Year 10 pupils began their key stage 4 courses simultaneously. At the same time, the school adopted a timetable comprising 60 hours of teaching over a fortnight. The teaching pupils are receiving at key stage 3 is therefore rather more than they would receive over two years of a conventional timetable, but less than they would receive over three years.

2.3 Leaders were unable to explain how the current key stage 3 curriculum provides pupils with a coherent learning experience that allows them to acquire 'cultural capital'; nor how, in foundation subjects, the scheme of work provided a suitable end point for those pupils who choose not to continue with the subject.

2.4 There is a strong commitment in the school to disadvantaged pupils, those with English as an additional language, and pupils with SEND. These categories of course overlap. In general terms, the school adapts the curriculum in practical ways to meet the needs of these pupils, for example by providing laptops and keeping the library open after school.

2.5 Staff understand that many disadvantaged pupils come from backgrounds that lack aspiration. They rightly point to greater contact with employers and other education providers – such as the University of Reading – as an important contribution to raising the aspirations of pupils and so overcoming one of the major barriers to the learning of disadvantaged pupils. However, in discussions, staff offered no other explanation of how the content or structure of the curriculum had been adapted - or might be adapted - to make it particularly suitable for disadvantaged pupils. There is no current pupil premium plan on the school's website.

2.6 Pupils received individual guidance as well as taster opportunities in the final year of key stage 3 to inform their choices of key stage 4 optional subjects. However, staff had different views about how pupils should and did choose the different subjects on offer.

2.7 The school is currently unable to offer music as part of its main curriculum. A private company provides extra-curricular sessions allowing some pupils to learn musical instruments.

2.8 In the past, the school taught French and Spanish. It now teaches French only. Some pupils study Spanish at key stage 2.

2.9 Some Year 7 pupils told reviewers that their experiences on induction days had led them to believe they would study drama as a discrete subject which is not the case. They would welcome this opportunity.

2.10 Leaders have arranged departments other than mathematics in pairs or threes so that they can plan their key stage 3 curriculums jointly. Examples are geography and science; history, English and RE; art and design with expressive arts; and PE and food technology. There is a clear intent to highlight similar skills, with a view to both reinforcing pupils' awareness of them and how they can be applied in each subject.

2.11 Leaders have also required heads of subject to consider deeper applied learning. There are two strands: pupils learning how to apply the skills they have learnt in new contexts within the same subject; and subjects identifying links with external organisations and companies. These links will demonstrate to pupils how they will be able apply their learning in the workplace or community context.

2.12 The school library is currently well used. Homework tasks often require pupils to read around or research a subject. Leaders intend to ensure that all pupils have an hour's proscribed reading a week from September.

3. Quality of Education: curriculum implementation

3.1 In the lessons which formed part of the review, teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge, and good knowledge of the details of examination syllabuses. This academic year, the school has been able to ensure that staff are teaching within their area of expertise.

3.2 Teachers present subject matter clearly, although during the review, some exposition was protracted. Teachers generally use subject-specific vocabulary accurately and highlight key words and new vocabulary. Sometimes pupils would benefit from more help in how to use unfamiliar words and phrases. Teachers are aware of the need to build up detailed knowledge, especially at key stage 3.

3.3 Other than through this attention to new vocabulary, reviewers did not identify any strategies to promote literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

3.4 Teachers do not routinely use questioning to check on pupils' understanding. They frequently rely on volunteers to answer questions. In this sense, teachers do not use assessment to inform teaching as effectively as they might.

3.5 There is a well-established procedure for encouraging pupils to recall their previous learning at the start of a lesson with the 'Do it now' task. However, there is no evidence that the curriculum in each subject is based on an understanding of sequencing that would maximise the usefulness of such recall.

3.6 The school uses two data drops (three in Year 11) to enable leaders to check on pupils' progress and to form part of the evidence through which leaders evaluate the quality of teaching. Teachers regularly set other assessments, which they mark, providing feedback on those aspects in which pupils were successful, and those where they can improve. Pupils complete a 'boost' task which allows them to demonstrate that they have learnt from their misconceptions and deepened their understanding. In Year 11, reviewers saw feedback from their assessments automatically generated by PiXL. Pupils understand the procedure and said that they generally found it helpful. A few said that feedback was not sufficiently tailored to the individual, and that it was possible to complete the boost task and still not understand some of the ideas.

3.7 The school prepares 'passports', that give information about individual pupils' learning needs. During the classroom observation, teachers made inconsistent use of such information. Staff reported that this was not unusual.

3.8 The school has not circulated detailed information about pupils with EAL. Staff are unaware of which of the five stages in the acquisition of English each pupil has reached.

3.9 Classroom observation, pupils' books, discussions with staff and patterns of behaviour indicate that teachers are not meeting the additional needs of a small number of key stage 3 pupils representing vulnerable groups.

3.10 Communication between teachers and the TAs who work in their classes is inconsistent. Teachers sometimes do not plan what they would like TAs to do.

3.11 Most, but not all, of the weaker teaching was of science or mathematics. In mathematics, reviewers saw little evidence of teachers explaining why pupils should take a particular approach to a problem or that sometimes different approaches can be equally valid.

3.12 HLTAs are highly effective at addressing, in 1 – 1 sessions, the barriers to learning experienced by Year 11 pupils.

4. Quality of Education: curriculum impact
4.1 See **1.1** above

4.2 See **3.7** above. The review identified and drew to the school's attention a small number of younger pupils who appeared not to be making strong progress. Reviewers did not look in detail at the school's information about key stage 3 pupils' achievement.

4.3 Reviewers saw good examples of teachers referring to the practical application of ideas (see **2.11** above). They linked new learning well to commercial contexts and everyday life outside school. For example, one teacher was aware that few in the class would understand how a play script was turned into an actual theatrical performance.

4.4 Most, but not all, younger pupils said that they read regularly and with enjoyment.

5. Behaviour & Attitudes
5.1 Almost all pupils behave very well in lessons and at social times. The schools' records show that the good behaviour that reviewers observed was typical.

5.2 Pupils and staff said that the consequences system was effective. However, some teachers resorted too quickly to a 'C2', removing the pupils from the class, and others were reluctant to issue a C2 at all.

5.3 The school operates an effective internal isolation room (IER). The atmosphere in the IER is calm and supportive. Pupils in the room knew why they were there and accepted the sanction. Pupils often do not have their own work which would represent a continuation of their curriculum, so that staff had to set generic work instead.

5.4 Almost all pupils demonstrated positive attitudes to learning, presenting their work neatly and expressing a strong support for the school. This extended to an understanding of why leaders had made some decisions that were to their disadvantage, for example discontinuing some courses.

5.5 Relationships between staff and pupils are cordial. However, pupils and some staff explained that pupils are reluctant to trust staff who are less established in the school. For example, when reviewers asked pupils why they did not ask teachers for additional help and explanation if they had not fully understood a topic (see **3.6** above), they said that they would only do so if they got on well with the teacher concerned. Conversely, staff and pupils attributed some of the HLTAS' success (see **3.12** above) to their established reputation in the school.

5.6 Pupils' compliant behaviour in class can mask a lack of engagement, and a lack of pace and challenge in the teaching.

5.7 In some lessons, the teachers managed the behaviour of a few potentially disruptive pupils very well.

5.8 Attendance is above the national average.

5.9 The school's records show that staff have been commendably persistent in seeking to improve the attendance and behaviour of a small number of girls whose backgrounds or attitudes present a particular challenge. Case studies demonstrate significant successes.

6. Personal development

6.1 Throughout the review, staff and pupils demonstrated a strong commitment to equality of opportunity and the overcoming of barriers to learning. Where the review identified instances in which vulnerable pupils might not be receiving the support that they need, such as those at **2.5, 3.7, 3.8 & 3.9** above, these resulted from weaknesses in the school's procedures rather than any lack of will.

6.2 The school has considered pupils' mental health, including the stress created by the requirement to sit a large number of terminal examinations in Year 11. Staff and pupils are aware that one of the advantages of a key stage 4 curriculum that includes one or more BTEC qualifications is that the pupil has to sit fewer terminal examinations.

6.3 The school appoints prefects to assist with the running of the school. Those who spoke with a reviewer believed that being a prefect had increased their confidence. Pupils also said that anti-bullying ambassadors contribute to the low level of bullying in the school.

6.4 The school has a programme, The Pledge, which encourages pupils to attempt a number of challenges such as taking up extra-curricular opportunities, or, representing the school.

6.5 Pupils learn about all aspects of personal development during days on which the normal timetable is suspended. The learning is led by outside presenters, such as health service personnel or visitors from voluntary organisations. They bring with them the specialist knowledge and credibility associated with their roles. However, leaders are aware that the quality of the presentations has been uneven, reflecting the presenters' variable pedagogic expertise.

6.6 Year 11 pupils believe that they have received effective careers advice, and appreciated the mock interviews they had. Some younger pupils said that they would have liked more guidance at a younger age. Pupils expressed a wish for a period of work experience. See also **2.11** above. The school appears well on track to meet the Gatsby benchmarks. Pupils spoke enthusiastically to reviewers about the benefits they have gained from visiting employers, including the NHS, Metro Bank and BMW.

6.7 The school has good links with a number of post-16 providers, which staff use to help pupils in transferring to the most appropriate institution.

6.8 Reviewers identified no safeguarding concerns.

7. Leadership & management

7.1 Leaders' ambition for the school is abundantly clear. Staff understand very well the priority that the headteacher has placed on raising the school's academic performance, and celebrating the improvement to assist in the recruitment of pupils. This, they realise, has been essential in securing the longer-term future of the school. See also **1.2** above.

7.2 Leaders have taken a number of steps to reduce staff workload. These include abolishing tutor periods, increasing non-contact time and requiring the marking only of periodic assessments. Staff appreciate the benefits of these steps. They point out, however, that the emphasis that the school has placed on key stage 4 outcomes means that there is more pressure on staff who have a high proportion of Year 11 classes. Staff believe that leaders are considerate of their personal circumstances and make appropriate arrangements to support them.

7.3 The recent history of the school has meant that many heads of subject / department (hereafter heads of subject) are very inexperienced. Necessarily, senior leaders have carried a heavy load in supporting these leaders and stepping in to act for them when necessary. Some middle leaders referred to jostling priorities during the course of this academic year, and the difficulty of fitting everything in.

7.4 Heads of subject are well aware of the school's requirements to integrate their subject with one or more others (see **2.10**), and to arrange opportunities for deeper applied learning (**2.11**). Although they describe their planning as at an early stage, they are confident that, given time, they can achieve these objectives.

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7.5 However, heads of subject have a weak understanding of important issues in curriculum planning, and in particular:

- the sequencing of the curriculum (see **3.5** above, and paragraph 168 in Ofsted's draft EIF, especially bullet 5)
- whether their curriculum meets effectively the needs of all pupils, including those from vulnerable groups (**2.5**)
- the concept of 'cultural capital' (see **2.3,** and the definition at paragraph 163 in the draft EIF)
- the relationship between knowledge and skills, and especially the view of that relationship implicit in the EIF; Ofsted has published the research that underpins this view

and for those subjects which are not compulsory at key stage 4

- how the learning of their subject at key stage 3 might provide a coherent and sufficient experience (**2.3**)

7.6 As senior leaders are well aware, leaders' existing requirements for curriculum development at **7.4,** and those effectively required by the new Ofsted framework at **7.5**, constitute a great deal of work for heads of subject to do.

7.7 The school has made strong links with a number of primary schools, and key stage 2 pupils visit the school to use its facilities and to be taught by Reading Girls' School staff. Several pupils transfer from each of four local schools, and smaller numbers from many other primary schools, some at a considerable distance. Currently staff have a limited awareness of the curriculum offered in their subject by the partner primary schools, and the standards pupils are attaining.

7.8 Joint lesson observations showed that heads of subject have a good understanding of what constitutes good teaching, and are well placed to develop their evaluative roles further.

In terms, therefore, of the specific questions posed ahead of the review:

(i) staff understand curriculum integration and deeper applied learning as the terms are used by school leaders; but in a wider sense, the school's curriculum intent is unclear, and not shared at all levels of leadership.

(ii) the barriers to realising this intent are:

- the absence of a published policy for the uptake of EBacc
- the absence of a formal justification of a two-year key stage 3
- weak understanding amongst subject leaders of some key curriculum ideas articulated in the EIF
- subject leaders' inexperience in the face of the requirement to undertake a substantial and complex revision of the curriculum, especially at key stage 3.

It should be recognised, however, that many schools will be in a similar position, as the EIF recognises.

Recommendations

In making these recommendations, the reviewers know that leaders are aware of most of them, and that some are already in hand. However, it seems more helpful to present a fuller – and hopefully more coherent – list of recommendations rather than seek to distinguish between what leaders already may or may not intend to do.

For senior leaders, in conjunction with the trust where appropriate.

1. Clarify the school's medium-term EBacc policy. They should:

- decide on the value that the school attaches to girls being entered for the EBacc, and attaining it at grade 5

- ensure that the whole school community, including parents, are aware of the policy

- identify and address any practical issues, such as staffing or timetabling, which might inhibit the school from achieving its EBacc aims

- explain whether the school intends to meet the government's 2022 ambition, and if not, its reasons for this

- clarify the values and expectations that underpin the key stage 4 options and the process through which individual pupils make their choices [relates to findings **2.1, 2.6,** and **6.2**].

2. Clarify the school's reasons for allocating two years to key stage 3, or consider reversing the decision. They should:

- either explain how the curriculum, its timetabling and organisation allow pupils to achieve more than in a conventional model

- ensure that each subject, and especially those that are not compulsory at key stage 4, provides a coherent learning experience which is rich, varied and deep enough to give them the best possible opportunity to thrive as members of society [relates to **2.2, 2.3, 2.10, 2.11** and **7.5**].

- or recognise the implications of the republished Education Inspection Framework and commit to a return to a three-year key stage 3.

3. In the context of current scepticism about the benefits of formal assessment, ensure that pupils derive maximum benefit – directly and indirectly – from regular assessments, including those used to inform data drops**.** They should:

- ensure that all assessments have an appropriate degree of validity, reliability, and comparability for the use that is subsequently made of them

- ensure that teachers' feedback and use of the 'boost' task is effective in addressing misconceptions and deepening understanding [relates to **3.5** and **3.6**].

4. Address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, especially at key stage 3. This may require clarifying the role played by senior leaders, and that delegated to middle leaders. [Relates to **3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7. 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 4.3, 5.2, 5.6, 5.7** and **7.8**]

5. Clarify the school's pupil premium strategy. This should include how the intent and the implementation of the curriculum are addressing social disadvantage and helping disadvantaged pupils to succeed in life. [Relates to **2.4, 2.5, 3.7** and **3.9**]

6. Disseminate information about which of the stages each pupil with EAL has reached, and the implications of this for their learning [Relates to **3.2, 3.3, 3.8** and **3.9**]

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7. Ensure that teachers make full use of agreed procedures to adapt the curriculum for particular pupils [relates to **3.7, 3.9** and **3.10**]

8. Take all possible measures to ensure that, in practice, the curriculum is at least as broad and challenging as that represented by the national curriculum [relates to **2.7** and **2.8**].

9. Provide heads of subject with the training, guidance and ability to prioritise that will enable them to plan the curriculum in their subject effectively. They should:

- ensure that heads of subject have an abstract understanding of the key principles of curriculum design, and in particular the concepts of: sequencing and progression; recall and memory; cultural capital; appropriate end points; and how the curriculum can compensate for social disadvantage*
- clarify how heads of subject should combine the obligation to reflect these concepts in their new schemes of work alongside existing priorities of integration and deeper applied learning
- explain how subjects should approach literacy and numeracy
- steer the work that heads of subject do to improve liaison with primary schools and curriculum continuity from key stage 2 to key stage 3 [relates to **2.3, 2.5, 2.10, 2.11, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6** and **7.7**]

*These concepts are, of course, summarised in paragraphs 154 – 169 of Ofsted's draft EIF.

10. Improve the quality of presentation by external providers to personal development days and STEM sessions [relates to **6.5**]

11. Retain a focus on the centrality of reading, including an awareness of the skills of those for whom English is an additional language [relates to **2.12, 3.2, 3.3, 3.8, 3.9** and **4.4**]

For heads of subject, under the direction of senior leaders

11. Plan a curriculum and associated schemes of work that provide the best possible outcomes for pupils. They should:

- draw up schemes of work that address the issues of sequencing and progression, recall and memory, cultural capital, and how the curriculum can compensate for social disadvantage
- incorporate where appropriate in schemes of work how the subject contributes to pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy
- for subjects that are not compulsory at key stage 4, be able to explain how the learning of their subject at key stage 3 provides all pupils with a coherent and sufficient experience
- reflect in their planning a growing understanding of the primary curriculum and pupils' key stage 2 starting points [relates to **2.3, 2.5, 2.10, 2.11, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5** and **7.7**]

12. Check on the effectiveness and consistency with which assessment contributes to pupils' learning [relates to **3.4** and **3.6**]

13. See **4.** above.

For all staff, and in particular pastoral staff

14. Encourage pupils to place a greater confidence in all staff, and to take a greater responsibility for furthering their

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own learning [relates to **3.12** and **5.5**]

Appendix 1: KS4 Outcomes 2018

Attainment

Cohort: 86	School	National	Difference
A8	47.4	46.5	+0.9
G5+ EN&MA	40.7%	43.3%	-2.6%
G4+ EN&MA	62%	64%	-2%
Maths at G5+	47.7%	49.3%	-1.3%
Maths at G4+	65.9%	69.5%	-3.6%
A8 Maths	8.9	9.0	-0.1
English at G5+	56.0%	60%	-4%
English at G4+	77.9%	75.4%	+2.5%
A8 English	10.3	9.9	+0.4
EBacc entries	19%	38.4%	**-19.4%**
EBacc achieved at G5+	15%	17%	-2%
A8 EBacc:	11.7	13.4	-1.7
MFL entries:	29		
Hum entries:	56		
Entries in single sciences	37 (42%)	27.4%	**+14.6%**
A8 Open slots	16.5	14.2	+2.3
A8 Open academic	9.1	12.0	-2.9
A8 Open vocational	7.4	2.2	**+5.2**

KS2 - 4 Progress

Cohort: 86	School
P8	+0.70 **sig+ & top 10%**
Progress 8 in MA	+0.64 **sig+ & top 10%**
Progress 8 in EN	+0.78 **sig+ & top 10%**
Progress 8 EBacc	0
VA Science	+0.22
VA Humanities	-0.08
VA Languages	+1.34 **sig+ & top 10%**
Progress 8 Open	+1.38 **sig+ & top 10%**
P8 disadvantaged	+0.37 **top 10%**