

Name of School:	Five Acre Wood School
Headteacher/Principal:	Peggy Murphy
Hub:	London Special and AP
School phase:	Foundation Special
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	The school close not to have estimates
Date of this Review:	20/05/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	N/A
Date of last QA Review:	06/11/2023
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding all categories
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	02/07/2024

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers, agrees that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels N/A

Quality of provision and outcomes N/A

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged students and/or students with additional needs N/A

Area of excellence Innovation

Previously accredited valid areas of excellence The Curiosity Approach

Overall peer evaluation estimate N/A

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a school's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the school chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the school

Five Acre Wood (FAW) School is believed to be the largest special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND) school in England and Wales with over 870 students. All students who attend have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Situated in Maidstone, Kent, the school operates across four different sites; two of those are situated 25 minutes' drive away at Snodland which are home to students who follow the 'formal' learning approach, as well as a sixth form provision. The school caters for primarily for students with profound, severe and complex needs (PSCN) but has started to take an increasing number of students with social, emotional and health (SEMH) needs who follow a bespoke non-core offer.

Given the size of the school and the scope of its remit, there is a range of curricula to suit all types of learners. The school is organised into six different learning approaches - early years, practical, sensory, formal, structured and functional.

The school takes in students from all over Kent. Almost one half of students are looked after, or are in need of help and protection now and previously. One third of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- 'One wood many trees' is a fundamental truth of the FAW philosophy. It serves as a driver for all interactions with students. Senior leaders understand that the sheer size of the school and economies of scale mean that they must facilitate distributed leadership so that students' needs and ambitions are met at an individual level. Leaders do this by ensuring that students are at the centre of decision-making through actively seeking their opinions about their interests and future goals and then empowering staff to make them happen. These are then woven into targets that often go beyond those on ECHPs because leaders simply believe nothing is impossible. For example, a carefully curated path had been planned for one student in the sixth form who wanted to work with animals at a high level. Great care has been taken to preserve the student's aspirations, whilst gradually building social skills, knowledge and confidence to work in this sector and achieve their dream at a level which is fulfilling, realistic and authentic.
- Evidence and researched based approaches are rooted in a deep pedagogical understanding of how students with different types of need learn best. This means that the approach leads view themselves as teachers of children. Consequently, they have developed curriculums that are readily accessible and progressive. They further transmit distributed leadership and thinking confidently through collaborative planning, support and training with teaching teams. This means that teaching staff have a secure understanding of how to deliver learning within each approach. Leaders have excellent

knowledge of how other approaches work and so can accommodate and stretch students with 'spiky' profiles.

- Inclusive practice is underpinned by having specific knowledge of the individual as a 'non-negotiable'. Information shared efficiently with teaching teams, coupled with consistent, embedded trauma-informed practice, have created a fertile climate for learning. An example of this was a research project focussing on trauma-informed approaches to help restructure a more inclusive delivery of reading. The school has been recognised for this being only one of eight schools awarded the Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM) National Inclusion Champions Award for the academic year 2023-24.
- A rich provision builds cultural capital, incorporating learning and enjoyment that are extraordinary. Meaningful partnerships with multi-national corporations have led to a site that includes planes, trains and automobiles as part of a small village of onsite opportunities that empower learning and bring teaching to life. This brings an enormous sense of joy and wellbeing for both staff and students. Learning built around these provisions has helped students develop authentic, industry standard skills. Student agency is promoted by giving them genuine autonomy in how they shape their learning. For example, the outdoor learning environment has an array of fencing and paving construction techniques that students had done by themselves to showcase the high level of technical competence of which they were capable. These skills are utilised by the outdoor learning environment team who enlist the help of students in other projects around the school as part of their curriculum.

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

- ... leaders consolidated existing systems to analyse the impact of therapy and interventions to inform planning.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is built around six approaches designed to meet learners at their starting points, with EHCP provision planning running through each one. All approaches draw on recognised frameworks matched to learner profiles. For example, the structured approach uses the Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support (SCERTS) framework to support the high number of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), while the functional approach incorporates Skills Builder alongside other developmental models. Framework elements appear across all pathways, with emphasis shifting according to need, ensuring that each route remains coherent, personalised and well scaffolded.
- Leaders apply the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) skilfully for younger learners, embedding a hygge inspired philosophy that nurtures curiosity and

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creates a calm, predictable environment. This foundation allows staff to identify strengths, needs and learning preferences early. As students move through the school, these insights guide decisions about the most appropriate curriculum approach, supporting smooth and well matched transitions.

- Phonics provision is targeted and sequenced, enabling students to build skills progressively. A more inclusive and adaptable reading approach has evolved, allowing staff to adjust teaching to the individual needs of students, as acknowledged by IQM. In a formal approach class, students made steady progress because teaching aligned closely with their starting points and tailored strategies were used to support those struggling with comprehension.
- A graduated response supports regulation through consistent classroom strategies based on the six principles of trauma-informed practice, strengthened by specialist input for harder to reach learners. Counselling and play therapy further support emotional growth, and trauma-informed practice ensures calm, attuned interactions. This has improved students' ability to recognise and manage emotions, resulting in settled, engaged learners. For example, a sixth form student described how therapeutic support helped them to cope with emotional distress and negative thoughts and to better understand their feelings.
- The school uses a total communication approach, combining Makaton, symbols, visuals, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), communication boards, SCERTS strategies, spoken language, gestures, and personalised systems to meet diverse communication and interaction needs. This provision has strengthened students' ability to express their needs, thoughts, feelings, and choices, resulting in greater engagement, independence, participation, and overall wellbeing. Evidence of this impact is seen in communication plans, EHCP targets, SCERTS assessments, visual supports, signing, and the effective use of AAC across classrooms.
- Opportunities for students to demonstrate prior knowledge are built into lessons, with responsive assessment strategies used consistently to check understanding and respond to learners' input. This enables students to showcase what they already know, explain their reasoning, and support peers, strengthening both confidence and conceptual understanding. This helps teachers adapt teaching in real time, and students articulate their thinking. For example, in a formal approach mathematics lesson, students used mini-whiteboards to demonstrate place value knowledge and convert decimals, allowing the teacher to address misconceptions immediately. This happens differently in other approaches where the teacher's knowledge of students is important. In the sensory approach, an eye gaze after intensive interaction will inform the teacher of the next micro step of learning to introduce.
- Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) is embedded from the earliest stages of development with students accessing planned outdoor provision that builds functional, real-world skills. Learning is made authentic and meaningful through practical experiences, such as barista tasks, retail activities, public

interaction and travel training, helping students develop confidence, independence and a sense of purpose using world-class, purpose-built environments. Travel training opportunities further strengthen community participation and independent living skills. For example, students in a primary practical approach class used litter pickers to place beanbags into a bucket, practising coordination, problem-solving and early vocational skills in a playful, accessible way.

- Carefully managed transitions from EYFS and back into sixth form provision ensure that children and students move smoothly into the most appropriate approach and next phase of learning or employment. As a result, destination data shows that almost 7 in 10 of leavers over the past three years have progressed to college vocational courses or employment.

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

... None identified

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

- The school has developed a specialised, non-core offer for harder to reach students placed at the request of the local authority when needs cannot be met elsewhere. Staff identify gaps in provision and work closely with parents and carers to shape bespoke packages, supported by ongoing communication between school therapists and non-core teams. Multi-agency involvement is embedded throughout, and staff access targeted training which is then cascaded to teaching assistants (TAs) and the wider team. In response to the lack of specialist settings locally, the school has expanded its provision, increased the allocated budget and ensured trauma-informed practice remains central to the offer.
- Disadvantaged learners receive bespoke, highly personalised packages designed around their needs, interests and real-world aspirations. This multi-layered support is delivered by practitioners with deep expertise, enabling students to access pathways that are genuinely tailored to them. The impact is seen in students' ability to advocate effectively with external partners, supported by staff who hold agencies to account to secure the right outcomes for the most vulnerable. The breadth of therapeutic interventions further strengthens this offer, with highly skilled staff recruited to provide timely support around domestic violence, emotional regulation and trauma, thus ensuring that students receive specialist input when it is most needed.
- TAs are deployed efficiently across the school because leaders have full confidence in their ability to implement strategies underpinned by focused continuing professional development (CPD). TAs understand students' needs and how they learn best, leading groups confidently and creating calm,

purposeful learning environments. Their input enables high engagement, as seen in a formal Key Stage 4 English speaking and listening lesson where students were fully absorbed in the activity. Cohesion with class teachers is strong; for example, in a secondary structured approach class, a TA adapted letter formation tasks with precise micro steps to secure success and progress because shared planning had given them the time and autonomy to adapt the task.

- Cultural capital is intentionally developed to a level far beyond what would typically be expected for any child. Every student is valued as an individual and provided with experiences that extend well beyond their starting points, backgrounds or circumstances, including those from the most privileged contexts. This is particularly significant given that almost half of students are known now or previously to social care. Leaders ensure that all learners access rich, meaningful opportunities that broaden their horizons and deepen their understanding of the wider world.

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

... None identified

5. Area of Excellence

World-Class Innovation That Prepares SEND Students for Adulthood

Accredited

5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength? What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?

Five Acre Wood School has developed an innovation model that transforms life chances for students with complex SEND through authentic, real-world learning, employability pathways and inclusive enterprise. Rooted in evidence-informed practice and measurable impact, the approach is sustainable, scalable and transferable, offering other schools these practical frameworks for preparing students for adulthood.

The school demonstrates high levels of expertise in innovation through a disciplined, evidence-informed approach. Innovation is embedded strategically through their TRANSFAWM framework, where projects begin with student need, research, collaboration and desired outcomes rather than isolated ideas. The framework

serves as an implementation guide, alongside a co-constructed set of business principles in the school's innovation development plan and strategic portfolio framework, developed in collaboration with multi-national corporate executives that donate high-end industry equipment to the school.

Practice is also informed by implementation research such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) School's Guide to Implementation, SCERTS, Total Communication principles and analysis of student destination data. Practice is monitored through student outcomes data, destination data, engagement measures, stakeholder feedback, operational reviews and external evaluation. Innovation priorities are reviewed through the schools' innovation development plan and strategic portfolio framework, ensuring coherence, capacity and long-term impact. External validation from Ofsted, Challenge Partners and IQM further evidences sustained, embedded practice over time.

Sustainability is strengthened through long-term partnerships with organisations including Costa Coffee, The University of Kent and local employers, alongside business models supporting projects, such as The FAWrient Express and Platform FAW.

Five Acre Wood's innovation model is highly transferable because it is built on clear systems, implementation frameworks and real-world outcomes rather than isolated projects. Through the TRANSFAWM framework, schools can adapt the principles of student-centred innovation, authentic learning and preparation for adulthood to their own context. Partner organisations have also adopted ideas from the implementation of projects into their everyday practice and policies for supporting equality and diversity.

Professional learning is central to the sustainability of projects. Staff receive ongoing training in communication, employability, trauma-informed practice and experiential learning, supported by external partners. Innovation is continuously reviewed by the school through monitoring, stakeholder feedback and action research to ensure consistency, impact and scalability.

5.2 What evidence is there of the impact on students' outcomes?

Innovation at Five Acre Wood has transformed outcomes for students with complex SEND through innovative, real-world learning environments that prepare them for adulthood. For example, The FAWrient Express, a public-facing train-carriage café, Peggy's FAWtique, a student-led retail outlet, and Radio FAW All, an accessible digital broadcasting platform, develop independence, communication, emotional regulation and employability through authentic experiences.

Over 200 students each week, nearly one quarter of the school, access the FAWrient Express, building skills including teamwork, problem-solving, handling

money and interacting confidently with unfamiliar adults. Six students are currently undertaking pioneering work placements with Costa Coffee, creating pathways towards paid employment. Students benefit from the school's proactive approach to work experience and close links with the local further education, business and voluntary sectors. Increased student agency in relation to their future employment and training has been a direct result of this.

Families report increased confidence and greater community participation, with students accessing cafés, shops and public spaces more independently.

5.3 What is the name, job title and email address of the staff lead in this area?

Tim Williams - headteacher (Loose Site)

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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



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report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)