



CONFIDENTIAL

Consultative Review

**The Marlborough
9 November 2022**

Dr Mick Megee

Context

The Marlborough is a resourced provision attached to a mainstream primary academy. It is funded currently for 80 places which is an increase from 65 in previous years. It is already oversubscribed with 83 pupils in the school. All the pupils have an EHC plan with a primary need of autistic spectrum disorder. A new head of provision was appointed in November 2021. The provision has eight classes two of which offer higher need support with increased staffing ratios. Most classes have a maximum of 11 pupils with a class teacher and three teaching assistants.

Activities during this review

- The review took place over one day.
- A face-to-face conversation was held with the Trust Chief Executive to discuss the visit programme, priorities, strengths, and areas needing further improvement.
- It was agreed with the Trust leaders that they, the senior leadership team and the external consultant, would form a review team for the day.
- Eight lessons were visited to observe teaching, learning and learners' behaviour and attitudes.
- Meetings were held with: the senior leaders, the SEND governor, the SENCO, the behaviour lead, middle leaders, and a group of learners.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised including that relating to information about learners' assessments and outcomes, EHC plans, and leaders' plans for further improvement.
- A deep-dive into the quality of EHC plans was undertaken by Trust leaders in parallel with this review. A report on their findings was received at the team meetings, and these views were taken into account in evaluating the provision.
- A Trust leader undertook an evaluation of the 'My Concern' system for recording and managing safeguarding concerns to see if there were any open cases within the system. If there were any open cases, the next stage was to ascertain why they were still open and what further actions were either being undertaken or were being proposed.

Areas focused on during this visit

- The extent to which the Marlborough provides an effective learning environment which enables learners to make rapid progress in their academic and personal development.

Key findings

OVERALL FINDING

Provision and outcomes at the Marlborough continue to go from strength to strength and provides a model of excellence.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

- Learning is consistently strong in all classes.
- Learning takes place in small groups or 1:1 and staff skilfully develop very close positive relationships with the learners so that the children feel comfortable and secure and they settle down to the tasks set quickly.
- Staff through their skilful teamwork demonstrate to the learners how cooperation and collaboration results in a calm and productive learning environment.
- Most teaching assistants are very quick to assist the teacher if necessary, taking over if the teacher is diverted away to deal with an upset child for example. In one or two lessons where an assistant did not respond immediately, other staff picked up on it quickly and intervened.
- Therapists and therapy assistants, such as for speech/language and occupation, complement the teaching teams very effectively within lessons thus sharing expertise and knowledge of each learner and their particular needs.
- The curriculum is highly personalised and adapted in a holistic way, and is supported by strong assessment processes which serve to monitor the quality of teaching as well as tracking progress.
- Curriculum leaders have incorporated fully the recently developed Engagement Model, as required by the government, using this framework alongside individual learning plans (ILPs) for priority targets.
- Staff have based their own bespoke framework on the governments recommendations and linked with their already successful MPAC assessment.
- Goals set in the ILPs are of generally high quality and linked closely to the EHC plans, as shown in the deep dive into the quality of these plans undertaken in parallel with this review, subject of a separate report.
- Achievement against ILP goals is tracked on Edukey and show strong progress for almost all learners. Almost all classes had averages consistently above targets last year and effective support was given to the teacher whose class achieved less success.
- The staff make very good use of a multiplicity of assessment tools, including autism-specific tools such as VBAPP and SCERTS, to capture the progress that the learners are making.
- The leaders carefully monitor how well each learner is moving forward at weekly pupil progress meetings, so that they can make adjustments to the level of challenge and the next steps that are required.
- Each learner is allocated to one of four 'pathways' according to their individual personal and learning requirements. This is an innovative and effective approach, devised by the

leaders, to determine the interventions that will be necessary for the learner to move forward quickly in the most appropriate and supportive way.

- The approach is understood and implemented by all classroom staff and most learners.
- In lessons, the team could clearly see that teachers are differentiating the tasks in accordance with the different pathways, and that this is having a positive impact upon learners' engagement.
- Progress for reading, writing and maths showed learners made expected or above progress against the provisions flight path. Almost all learners who were able to access the phonics programme 'Sounds Write' made expected progress with about a third making exceptional progress.
- Most learners with good communication skills were able to say what their next steps were, but one or two could not.
- Parents verified that the Marlborough does a good job of informing them of these goals so that they can assist their children's learning at home.
- The leaders have brought about considerable consistency between classes, for example, in the use of visual timetables and picture exchange so that learners will be familiar with the learning environment when changing classes, and in transition between lessons.
- In a survey carried out by the Marlborough a few weeks before this review, parents were overwhelmingly positive that the provision keeps them aware of what their children are learning and has high expectations of them. Parents reported that their children do well at the Marlborough and have a curriculum that suits them very well.
- In discussion with parents, one told the reviewer that her son would 'be lost without his teacher – she has been phenomenal'.
- The learners spoke very positively about the quality of the teaching saying how teachers were 'very good at their jobs'.

BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES

- The learners' behaviour for learning and conduct are excellent, given the nature of their complex interactional and learning difficulties.
- Behaviour for learning is strong because of the high quality of attention, planning and interest that teachers bring to lessons.
- The learners' behaviour improves throughout their school career because of the strong relationships they develop with staff who they trust and in whom they can confide.
- The Marlborough's behaviour support system is consistently applied by all members of staff and parents and learners say that rewards and sanctions are applied fairly by all teachers.
- Support is tiered so that staff can deploy the most appropriate responses to learners when they become upset.
- A parents' survey shows that the vast majority of them agree that the Marlborough makes sure that learners are well behaved, and that their children feel safe in school.
- For those learners who need it, the Marlborough has developed effective behaviour and well-being support plans setting out for staff and parents precise strategies for learners who are responding negatively to learning and are finding it difficult to control their emotions.
- All behavioural incidents are carefully recorded by staff using the IRIS software, which leaders check regularly to identify antecedents and whether the strategies used need to be modified in the face of changing responses from the learners.
- The Marlborough is making very good use of recently established approaches to support the development of self-regulation in children, such as 'Zones of Regulation'. In this approach, learners (and staff) identify the way they are currently feeling (happy, angry,

silly, etc.) and the states of alertness they are currently experiencing and describe these states with reference to four coloured zones.

- This approach allows the learner to have a dialogue about their current emotion, and how to behave appropriately within the zone or decide to move on to another zone.
- The learners spoken to have a good understanding of these zones and say it is helpful in shifting them to a more positive frame of mind.
- The learners say that classroom staff never shout at them or put their hands on them as a means of control and that they feel very safe in the Marlborough. They could all name a number of adults to whom they would turn in a crisis.
- Although the Positive Relationship and Behaviour system is used very effectively, the policy on the website is not dated, and refers only to the main school to which the Marlborough is attached. This is unhelpful for Marlborough parents looking for information on the systems at the provision.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- The Marlborough's personalised curriculum strongly supports learners' personal development so that they become increasingly resilient, self-confident and independent during their time at the provision. In this way the learners are well prepared for future success in education, employment or training.
- The leaders make sure that the learners feel safe and happy throughout the day.
- Each morning, leaders and staff wait at the entrance to meet and greet every learner so that they feel encouraged to be joining this harmonious and welcoming community.
- The nature of the learners' difficulties means that the Marlborough's topmost priority is to develop the learners' communication skills so that they can make their needs and wants known as well as purposively interacting with the world around them.
- The Marlborough recognises that learners need to be able voice their opinions and concerns on how well they are progressing and what will help them the most.
- In order to achieve this, the Marlborough is very successful in helping learners to gain the necessary prerequisite personal skills such as listening, understanding and following direction', taking part in work at tables and working as part of a group.
- The high-quality pastoral support within the Marlborough helps prepare the learners for the complicated and challenging adult world.
- Through the strong PSHE curriculum, learners are well prepared for life in modern Britain, and understand, at their own level, how to be responsible, active citizens that contribute positively to society.
- Many of the learners have serious difficulties coping with changes to their day and routines and so the consistency with which the leaders have brought about in the learning environment have a strong positive effect on developing their emotional resilience.
- The pathway system is a very effective holistic individualised approach that has enabled the learners to make fast progress socially as well as academically.
- The leaders are skilfully developing comprehensive ways to measure the success of the systems and strategies they are using on individual learners. For example, they make use of Leuven Scales to demonstrate improvement in learners' well-being, Coral PSHE intervention to show individual progress in social education, SCERTs observation sheets and Boxall Profiles.
- The PSHE curriculum contains all the required elements, at an age-appropriate level, and there has been an increased emphasis on consent and sexual harassment since the recent Ofsted report on this area.

- Equality and diversity are effectively promoted within the provision. The Marlborough holds a Bronze Award as a UN Rights Respecting provision.
- The leaders are committed to promoting student voice. This is done very effectively on an individual basis, and the Marlborough Council plays an important and prominent part in the provision's decision-making, for example, by discussing how to implement the PBIS system and in making classes aware of the UN Rights for Children.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The leaders' vision for the future is clear and ambitious and they have successfully developed strong shared values, policies and practices among the Marlborough community.
- The Trust has provided outstanding support to the leaders in providing sagacious guidance and timely interventions as necessary.
- The Trust leaders have overseen a very smooth transition between the Heads of Provision last year, and all stakeholders have registered that there has been a strengthening of the leadership group as a result of it.
- The leaders have ensured that all staff have the requisite skills to meet the changing needs of the learners. For example, teaching assistants have been offered yoga training, Lego therapy and autism-specific training (e.g. SCERTS).
- Teaching assistants have also enjoyed very good cross-MAT training provided by the Trust. They have great confidence in the senior leaders and say that they 'feel part of a big family' and that no question they ask them is a silly one.
- The leaders have developed and delivered a well-received induction programme for new staff, ECTs and teaching assistants. The staff who attended, particularly the ECTs, told the reviewer how helpful this had been and allowed them to settle in and hit the ground running in the classrooms.
- Each term, class teachers report on all aspects of their work and produce all the progress information relating to their own learners that they have gathered. This enables them to share their concerns and identify any barriers to achievement that they are experiencing.
- The leaders have made good use of HLTAs, supporting them to lead classes where there have been staffing issues. This has meant that learners have experienced continuous high-quality teaching without interruption. HLTAs are also trained and deployed as speech/language and art therapy assistants and as Forest School leaders.
- The recent staff survey shows a high degree of satisfaction with the leaders' and the Trust's provision for training, for allowing them the freedom to innovate in the children's interests, and for the way in which the Marlborough is led and managed.
- All staff name the new headteacher as key to the improvements they have witnessed in what is provided to the learners and their families. She is regarded as a great role model in the provision, and one member of staff said that she was trying to be a 'mini-Louise'. Her presence is palpable throughout the school and her ideas are gaining national recognition through leading presentations for the Partners in Excellence Organisation.
- The leaders' engagement with learners and stakeholders, especially parents, is first class. Almost all parents agree that the Marlborough is very well managed and responsive to their concerns and requests. Some say that the provision has 'upped its game' considerably since the arrival of the new headteacher even though it was good before. They appreciate the regular phone calls about their children's progress.
- Staff say that the senior leadership team is extremely proactive and approachable, never walking away from a problem, and intervening quickly and effectively should the need arise.

- The middle leaders work very effectively in monitoring their areas of responsibility and feel 'nurtured and cared for' by the senior leadership team.
- The SENCO has returned to work after a short period of leave, and is picking up any concerns and issues that may have arisen during her absence.
- She is well supported in her role by the Trust and attends a SENCO strategic day held each term and the SEND forum.
- The parallel deep-dive reported 'The SENCO has set up a Provision Mapping system called Edukey where each child has a file evidencing the assess-plan-do-review cycle. The Marlborough has excellent systems and procedures to compliment this graduated approach to identification of additional needs. The senior leaders are very much at the forefront of these procedures and continually review, adjust and improve these to ensure the best outcomes for their pupils.'
- The Marlborough and Trust leaders have kept staff wellbeing at the very front of their focus, and made several judicious changes to make sure that individual workloads are manageable and not excessive.
- In a meeting with teaching assistants, they said how much they loved working at the Marlborough and how supported they feel by the leaders and the Trust leaders who frequently visit the provision.
- Systems and practices to keep children safe are mostly effective although the reviewer did not have his identity or DBS checked on arrival and there was one omission on the Single Central Record.
- The external site has a vulnerability in that there is no security fence separating it from the secondary site next door. This means that a determined stranger could enter the site undetected, or a vulnerable learner could leave the grounds unchallenged. There are plans to erect a fence but this needs to be done as a matter of urgency to completely ensure the safety of the children.
- Staff effectively mitigate against this with their proactive safeguarding measures around entry and exit procedures.
- According to the Trust leader who undertook an evaluation during the review, the safeguarding procedures in relation to 'My Concern' are very strong and DSLs are very knowledgeable and proactive in ensuring that cases are dealt with and actioned in a timely and effective manner. Support amongst the team is strong with regular meetings around the open cases and decisions are never made in isolation. Where cases remain open, there are identified reasons and clearly defined next steps in place.
- Parents say that the arrangements for dropping off and picking up their children (through the grounds of the adjacent secondary school) is achingly slow.

GOVERNANCE

- The local governing body, which also represents the primary school on the same site, carries out its role effectively. There are a few governors who have not yet received the required training.
- The Trust gives first class support to all levels of staff at the Marlborough. The Trust CEO attends the governors' meetings to support the discussions and her presence is found very useful and is much appreciated.

Suggested improvements/next steps

In order to improve further, the Marlborough should:

- improve the security of the site as a matter of urgency
- attend to the minor safeguarding breaches
- consider ways to speed up drop off and pick-up arrangements
- update and date the behaviour policies and make them easier for parents to find on the website.