



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR BARBARA PRIESTMAN ACADEMY

Name of School:	Barbara Priestman Academy
Headteacher/Principal:	Rachel Hargreaves
Hub:	North East Special
School phase:	Special
MAT (if applicable):	Ascent

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	25/04/2022
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Effective
Date of last QA Review	24/02/2021
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	13/11/2018

1. Context and character of the school

Barbara Priestman Academy is part of the Ascent Academies' Trust. The school serves students who have an autistic spectrum disorder or complex learning difficulties.

Students studying at the oversubscribed school are aged between 11 and 19. All have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). There are 177 students on roll, 51 of whom study in the post-16 provision. About one in every five students is a girl.

The pandemic has led to many students experiencing significant mental health concerns. Associated staff absence has exacerbated students' concerns. Recently, students have benefitted from a more stable and settled environment.

The curriculum is based on three phases – Key Stage 3 (Years 7 and 8), designed on a thematic, primary model, with Key Stage 4 (Years 9 to 11), and post-16 incorporating more specialist subject teaching.

Students' well-being is at the core of provision, particularly in the current global context. Leaders recognise the importance of this in terms of students' engagement in their learning.

The trust employs staff trained in a range of therapeutic work. Barbara Priestman benefits from staff skilled in a range of therapy areas, including speech and language (SALT), occupational therapy (OT) and trauma expertise.

The school has achieved the Advanced Thinking School accreditation. It is the only special school in the country to have the award.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The curriculum offer at Barbara Priestman is truly holistic. Leaders are intent on ensuring that each student acquires and embeds skills and knowledge in all subjects to enable them to be happy, successful and 'wonderful' adults. Hence, the curriculum offer encompasses academic and pastoral provision. Leaders' passion and drive are clearly evident. During the review, students were working with the National Shakespeare company, with a play being presented later that week with other schools. Students thrived on learning technical language, performing and enjoying the collaboration with peers and staff. Barbara Priestman is the only setting representing special education.
- Leaders monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum systematically. All diarised activities have a purpose which helps staff understand why such leadership work

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is being undertaken. For example, appraisal processes support individual staff in their pedagogical development, whereas subject leaders might monitor how the curriculum is being implemented via carrying out learning walks. Leaders encourage all staff to explore and pursue career routes. Many staff engage in relevant research and facilitate local networks and working groups.

- Senior leaders empower middle leaders well. This is done through a variety of means. An external adviser, for example, worked with each subject leader to help them clarify what strong progress looks like through their particular subject. Leaders have also been supported by therapy experts joining them on their learning walks. Trust frameworks have been developed which help secure accurate moderation of students' work. Examples of this are seen in core subjects.
- The Trust has established mechanisms by which leaders can build leadership skills collaboratively. Subject leaders, in each of the four Trust schools, work with each other in specific subject development. This work enables leaders to rehearse their thinking about their curriculum offer as well as learning about how their subject is delivered in settings which cater for students with different needs. Leaders at Barbara Priestman actively support Trust colleagues based in other schools.
- Leaders have a secure understanding of the curriculum design and can verbalise this well. They know the generic features across the three phases and where provision differs. For example, leaders recognise the importance of students recapping previously taught information in all phases, but with timetabling challenges that this will look different in each phase. Perhaps more importantly, leaders know how subject domains differ. For instance, students will benefit from mathematics being taught in a logical and sequential manner, whereas historical knowledge is better acquired cumulatively.
- Leaders recognise that reliable and valid holistic assessment information needs to be interpreted with caution. This is due to their knowing that students do not make linear progress. Leaders at all levels use information to help hone pertinent questions which feed into subsequent monitoring and evaluation work. Helpful Trust frameworks are in place for core subjects.
- Leaders have ensured that all staff understand the importance of students acquiring thinking skills. Often, this is about students developing their curiosity about the world around them and forming opinions based on sound information. The 'image of the week' enables students to consider and express opinions. In lessons, thinking frames (metacognitive visual tools) are used to help students structure their thoughts coherently. Students studying in the post-16 provision, most notably, use such frames well. Strong community links enable parents to support their children well. This was most notable during the pandemic.

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

...leaders captured the school's approach to develop a 'love of reading' in a succinct document (shared on the website), with rationale clarified for the teaching approach.
...leaders at all levels evidenced the impact of changes with holistic information shared with all stakeholders.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Staff have a secure understanding of the holistic needs of each student. They use this knowledge to inform the design of learning environments, with appropriate resources available to each student to enable them to learn well. Students demonstrate strong, positive attitudes to their studies as they recognise when they might struggle, to regulate their behaviour. On the occasions where adult involvement is required, staff know how to respond, using their emotion coaching training.
- Staff tailor pedagogy skilfully. They are confident in varying their strategies, as students and staff enjoy strong, trusting relationships. This links directly with the school being a Thinking and Rights Respecting school with students willing to take risks in their learning. Where adapting pedagogy is most effective, staff draw on their knowledge of what the students have been taught previously and relate this to future curriculum planning. Teachers know which aspects of study students need to recap and rehearse before moving on to next steps.
- Staff use technically correct language in their dialogue with students. For example, in a mathematics lesson, specific vocabulary was used to explain patterns in fractions. In a post-16 English session, the teacher modelled Shakespearian language skilfully before asking students for their perspectives. Staff use correct vocabulary when questioning students. Examples were seen in classrooms where staff skilfully drew students into dialogue. This helped the group build collaborative knowledge. Students are continually encouraged to give opinions.
- Staff understand the curriculum and deliver it well. For example, they know that students will benefit from explicit instruction and being clear about what is expected, '...this is what you will be able to know by the end of this lesson / sequences of lessons'. Staff use their knowledge of the curriculum intent and design, coupled with knowledge about each student, to teach subjects well. Through excellent subject leadership work, staff have engaged in curriculum development. Consequently, they understand the rationale for the curriculum.
- Classmates support and respect each other. Students encourage peers to express opinions and when this occurs classmates listen carefully to each other's opinions. They show this by responding in an informed way. A range of examples

were seen, including in a drama lesson and in a social interaction session where students' EHCP targets were assessed whilst enabling students to develop social skills.

- Students articulate their understanding of the curriculum offer well. They talk about their learning being fun and engaging, with opportunities available to help them prepare for adulthood. They express that they feel listened to, feeling a sense of learning ownership. For example, following students' views, 'preparation for adulthood' is to become part of core provision in the post-16 setting. Students recognise the calm and settled school ethos. Most importantly, students feel valued and well supported. One student said, 'They understand what I need and when I need it.'
- Leaders consider where best to deploy teaching assistants (TAs). In classrooms, teachers deploy TAs to support learning. TAs are well placed to do this as they draw on their training from therapy experts. This means that all staff contribute well to teaching and learning.

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

...classroom staff used 'in the moment assessment', using this information/intelligence to modify teaching to maximise learning time for each student.

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

- Students benefit from the excellent integrated work of therapy staff. All staff recognise the importance of shared ownership of provision at Barbara Priestman. This means that classroom staff take on board the advice and guidance of therapy staff, rather than such support being a bolt-on service. Consequently, students benefit well as they receive continuous support which enables them to engage well in learning.
- Leaders, staff and governors know what to expect when they see teaching and learning in action. This is because all staff attend professional development sessions, which means that key messages are reiterated and heard. Monitoring checks out how well therapy work, for example, is being integrated into day-to-day teaching. Evidence from this is very positive, with writing resources (for example) being visible and available to each student as appropriate. Trustees bring and use a wide and pertinent range of expertise to the school, including legal, finance, human resources and special educational needs.
- Leaders choose strategies carefully. Embedded strategies fit well and enhance curriculum provision. An example of this is 'emotion coaching'. Staff engaged with

Trust training in 2019. Those who did the two-day training became trainers at Barbara Priestman, which strengthens sustainability. The scripted approach aims to get a student back into learning quickly should dysregulation occur. Strategies such as this are built into induction for all new staff, with impact checked via monitoring and appraisal.

- Students studying in the post-16 setting enjoy provision which encourages and enables them to explore interests that will serve them well in adulthood. This work begins with careers thinking from Key Stage 3. All students in post-16 study English and mathematics with a bespoke study programme then set up. This includes a vocational aspect, covering courses such as business, construction and catering. The setting engineers success well, with placements (both internally and externally) for work experience carefully selected. One of many examples involves a student working in a local air force museum, which serves his fascination of aviation well.

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

...(to raise the bar even further), more students selected appropriate thinking skill resources independently to support their learning.

5. What additional support would the school like from the Challenge Partners network, either locally or nationally?

Leaders at Barbara Priestman are fully engaged with the Challenge Partners' networks.

This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.

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 network of schools.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.



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Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website.