

Barbara Priestman School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108879
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	377840
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2012
Lead inspector	Michele Crichton

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	118
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	54
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Valerie Milnes
Headteacher	Carolyn Barker
Date of previous school inspection	15 December 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Michele Crichton
Allan Lacey

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors conducted a learning walk with the headteacher and observed 11 teachers teaching 11 lessons, two of which were joint observations with the headteacher. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a variety of documents including student progress data, the school improvement plan and safeguarding information. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, leaders, staff, parents and carers, and members of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They took account of the 31 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and those completed by staff and students.

Information about the school

This is a small special school. Pupils come from a very wide range of backgrounds and the very large majority are of White British heritage. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, predominantly complex needs or autistic spectrum disorders with severe communication needs. Boys significantly outnumber girls. Approximately a quarter of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. There are very small numbers of students who are in the care of the local authority. Since the last inspection the school has gained a number of accreditations. These include specialist technology status, Investors in People, Thinking School, Healthy School status, Teacher Learning Academy, 14–19 Quality Mark and the International School award. Most members of the senior leadership team are new since the previous inspection, and there have been changes to membership of the governing body.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- This is a good school. The sixth form is also good. Leadership and management are outstanding and have improved dramatically since its last inspection. There is a crystal clear management structure outlining well-defined responsibilities, very high levels of continuing professional development to improve teaching and learning and a ceaseless focus on enhancing all students' life opportunities. Students are increasingly reaping the benefits of the many developments that have taken place. However, this has not yet been sustained over a prolonged period of time, which is the main reason why the school is not outstanding.
- Students make good progress in their learning, as well as in their behavioural and personal skills. Students benefit significantly from outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural opportunities and an excellent curriculum. They achieve well by the time they leave school and all groups of students make similar progress overall. The school's focus on improving skills in mathematics, reading and communication is very effective.
- Teaching is good overall. In some lessons it is outstanding. All school staff are trained to a high level and are very skilful at meeting the needs of students who are on the autism spectrum. Some variation in the quality of teaching occurs when teachers teach outside their subject specialism. The quality of resources for teaching and learning varies in a small number of lessons in different subjects.
- Throughout the school, including the sixth form, behaviour is good and students have a good understanding of keeping safe. Students respond well to the consistent approach of all staff and relationships are positive. Students and their parents and carers hold highly positive views of staff. They appreciate the good teaching and the safe, supportive and inclusive environment provided by the school. Across the school, attendance is consistently high.
- The headteacher, senior and middle leaders and governing body know the school well and share a vision for the school. They are unified and have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have used this knowledge effectively to improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain the accelerating rates of pupils' progress and improved achievement over time.
- Improve the quality of all teaching to the standard of the best by:
 - ensuring that staff have the knowledge, understanding and skills to be equally effective in all of the subjects they teach
 - ensuring that resources for teaching and learning are of the same high quality in all curriculum areas.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Students' achievement is good. Many parents and carers commented on their happiness that their child attended Barbara Priestman and some wrote at length to support the staff. Typical comments made were, 'The school has been fantastic with our child and us as a whole family,' 'It's an amazing school', and, 'Overall a fantastic school and a happy environment'.

The majority of students enter the school working at levels lower than those expected for their age. There are some students working at the lowest that can be recorded, and occasionally there are a few who enter at a significantly higher level. While attainment is still low in relation to the national average by the time they leave, all students, including those in the sixth form, make good progress overall from their individual starting points, and some make outstanding progress. This means that by the time they leave the school, all students gain a recognised accreditation that is appropriate to their abilities. There are rising numbers of students who have achieved a range of vocational accreditations or have achieved GCSEs at grades A* to G and, as a result, move on successfully to the next stage of their learning.

Extensive tracking systems show that there is an increase in the numbers of pupils making accelerated progress as developments and initiatives within the school impact upon students' achievement. For example, leaders recognise that students' communication skills are often much poorer than their other skills. Consequently, a recently appointed speech and language therapist is ensuring students' confidence and self-esteem develop in line with their growing academic skills. This was evident in an outstanding sixth form lesson, where all students contributed to the class discussion and used specific vocabulary regardless of their needs or abilities. This is because staff and other students gave them time to speak and to formulate their ideas into words.

There is a focus on reading throughout the school with planned links across all subjects. For example, in a music lesson, less-able students were observed reading a story with their teacher and then enthusiastically and enjoyably using a variety of musical instruments to illustrate its events. Additionally, there are other carefully planned opportunities to read at break time and in tutor time. This ensures that the majority of students read well and make at least good progress from the time they join the school. Additionally, skilful staff ensure that students' frequently rapidly developing reading ability is also accompanied by full

comprehension of the text. Overall, students are keen, enthusiastic learners who try their very best to do what teachers ask of them and take pride in their success.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers are extremely appreciative of the good teaching that their children receive. Their comments reflect an appreciation of the way staff support both their children's academic and personal development.

The diverse and excellent curriculum engages all groups of students well and promotes their good achievement. Throughout the school, teachers demonstrate a high level of subject knowledge in their specialisms and expertise in teaching students with autism. This has been promoted through extensive professional development. Lessons are of a high calibre. In an outstanding mathematics lesson, a good pace and challenging questions kept higher-ability students engaged. In reading lessons, teachers are successful in improving reading because they use a variety of teaching methods, including a phonics approach which links sounds to letters that are specific to the learning needs of each individual student.

However, in a very small number of lessons, when staff do not teach their own specialist subject, teaching is not of the usual quality. Teaching methods are repetitive and lessons are less interesting. Additionally, in these lessons, some activities and resources are not as engaging and stimulating for students.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding throughout the school, including the sixth form, because daily topics in tutor times and assemblies are based on relevant issues that promote these aspects, such as the lives and literature of people from other countries. This encourages empathy and enhances students' cultural awareness.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Although some students find behaving well at all times difficult, behaviour is generally good in lessons and around the school over time. Staff use praise effectively to reinforce small improvements in behaviour. Students are polite, friendly and respectful to adults and each other. This is throughout the school including the sixth form. Students who exhibit more challenging behaviour because of their learning difficulties increasingly learn to manage their own conduct. This is noticeable as the students progress up the school. Students understand what constitutes an unsafe situation and how to keep themselves safe.

One student recounted his initial shyness when he started school but said that teachers had encouraged him in drama lessons. Now in sixth form, he had recently auditioned for the National Youth Theatre. Another spoke of the help he consistently receives from all staff who are 'always fair and always there'. Other students spoke of the improvements in their behaviour because they are a 'thinking school'. This means that there are numerous opportunities throughout the day for them to consider and reflect on the potential outcomes of their actions or decisions on others. No students reported any issues with any forms of bullying, including prejudicial bullying. Students related that they enjoy coming to school which is reflected in their attendance, which is consistently high. Parents and carers commented on the strong caring ethos within the school, which helped their children to develop in a secure environment.

Leadership and management

Since the previous inspection, the new leadership team and the governing body have created a vision of excellence for the school and its students, and they are pursuing this relentlessly. For example, the school has achieved six accreditations, including Teacher Learning Academy, and they are currently awaiting the judgement of a further two. These developments have ensured a very high level of staff expertise in teaching students with autism. Staff also support other schools to share good practices. Additionally, Barbara Priestman is the first special school in the country to be designated as a 'Thinking School'. This latter development alone has had a pronounced effect upon students' outcomes. Students themselves speak readily of how these new strategies help them to organise their thinking for learning but also their emotional responses to situations and events. Consequently, they feel their own and others' behaviour has improved.

Changes to the curriculum have led to it becoming outstanding. Throughout the school students are provided with a highly impressive range of learning experiences that are well suited to their needs and aspirations. For example, six additional GCSE options are now offered, together with an extended range of vocational courses. The strong commitment to equality of opportunity is evident throughout the school. Just one example is that the curriculum can change annually as staff are highly aware of the needs of the next student cohort and it is adapted accordingly. The school is highly inclusive and discrimination is not tolerated. Promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. For example, staff have developed a 'forest school' within the grounds for students to acquire a range of practical skills, to extend their social abilities and cooperative skills, as well as enhancing opportunities for reflection.

These developments are extremely positive. However, while they are having a demonstrable impact already on improving students' outcomes, these have not yet been sustained over the longer term. Nevertheless, the school is demonstrating outstanding capacity to improve further. The arrangements for safeguarding are secure and are of a high calibre.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Barbara Priestman School, Sunderland, SR2 7QN

Thank you for making us so welcome when we inspected your school recently. It was lovely to meet and talk with you. I must also say thank you to all the students I heard read. You told us many things about your school such as what you have learned and about the many good things that go on all the time. It was very clear from our discussions and the questionnaire replies I received from you, and from your parents and carers, that you are happy at school, and feel that you are safe and cared for well.

We judged your school to be good. It is extremely well led and managed, and you and your teachers do many things well. Your behaviour is good, you are well taught and make good progress in your learning. Your attendance is high. However, we noticed that some lessons were not of the usual high quality or had less interesting resources and activities. To make the school even better for you, we have asked the school's leaders and teachers to improve this so all lessons are of the quality of the best. We have also asked them to make sure that you continue to make the good progress you are currently making into the future. I wish you every success.

Yours sincerely

Michele Crichton
Lead inspector

