

Barbara Priestman Academy

Meadowside, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 7QN

Inspection dates

28–29 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher is highly ambitious for the academy. She leads a committed and highly effective staff team who have the highest expectations for their students. As a result standards are rising.
- English and mathematical skills are practised in all subjects so that students achieve GCSEs and other external awards which reflect the good progress they make from usually low starting points.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good. Teachers and teaching assistants use a range of strategies, including questioning, extremely well to help students develop their thinking skills.
- The quality of teaching is improving through an excellent system of performance management which drives professional development. All staff are involved in research projects which provide information to improve staff practice and this is shared with the other academies in the Trust.
- The curriculum is exceptionally rich and varied to match the different needs, interests and abilities of the students. It ensures students' personal development is exceptional. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed extremely well to prepare students for their future lives.
- Students enjoy excellent relationships with staff and this supports outstanding behaviour and helps them to feel very safe. Students have extremely positive attitudes to learning and work hard in lessons.
- The sixth form is good. Teaching is at least good in an exciting curriculum. Students mature into responsible and considerate young people who are ready to take their place in British society.
- The partnership work with other special school academies in the Trust is driving forward school improvement. The academy has an excellent capacity to improve further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding. The steps taken to remedy a particular weakness identified in the teaching of mathematics have not yet taken full effect.
- Very occasionally staff do more than is necessary to support students' learning.
- In a few lessons, the most-able students are not given hard enough work to fully challenge them.
- Students are not always given time to respond to the advice given in teachers' marking to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed a number of lessons or parts of lessons. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and an assistant headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at students' work during lessons and also reviewed samples of work books and files separately.
- Students were heard to read during Accelerated Reading sessions.
- Meetings or discussions were held with a group of students, the Chairs of both the Ascent Trust and the academy's own Governing Body, a headteacher from another of the Trust's academies, members of the multi-disciplinary support team, and several senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors took into account the 33 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), the school's own stakeholder surveys and the 36 staff questionnaire responses received.

Inspection team

Hilary Ward, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Angela James

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Barbara Priestman Academy converted to become an academy school in August 2012. When its predecessor school, Barbara Priestman School and Technology College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall. Barbara Priestman was a founding member of the Ascent Academies' Trust.
- The academy provides for students from Sunderland and other local authorities who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum conditions or other complex learning needs. All students have a statement of special educational needs and/or education, care and health plans.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium is about average compared with national figures at just under a third of the student population. (Pupil premium is additional government funding for students up to the end of Key Stage 4 who are known to be eligible for free school meals and/or are looked after by the local authority).
- Almost all students are of White British heritage.
- About 80% of the student population are boys which is typical for such provisions.
- About 40% of the students are in the sixth form.
- Although the majority of students enter the academy at Year 7, students are admitted at any time, especially at Year 9 and into the sixth form.
- No academy students currently access alternative provision.
- Ascent Trust has recently established 19 to 25-year-old provision in partnership with Sunderland College to provide appropriate courses to academy leavers who wish to remain in education within the local authority.
- A new sixth form building was opened in the summer of 2014. The academy has applied for an Academy Capital Maintenance grant with matched funding in order to refurbish and extend the existing building.
- The academy has gained a number of awards including Investors in People Gold, National Autistic Society accreditation, Thinking Schools, Arts Mark Gold, National Foundation for Educational Research Mark and International Schools Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more of it is outstanding in order to raise achievement further by:
 - continuing to establish a secure foundation for students' mathematical skills and building on them more rapidly
 - consistently providing higher levels of challenge for the most able students in all lessons
 - making sure staff do not do more than is necessary to support students' learning
 - giving time for students to follow up on suggestions for improvement in the marking of their work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- As a founding member of the multi-academy trust, Barbara Priestman Academy has strengthened its senior and middle leadership teams so that there is a vision for excellence which they share with all staff and a continual drive to raise the quality of teaching and students' achievements. The headteacher provides exceptionally effective leadership.
- There are thorough systems in place to keep continual checks on students' progress. Careful and frequent analysis of this data quickly identifies any students or areas giving concern so that action can be swiftly taken. This is evident in the action taken to improve the teaching of mathematics when it was found that students lacked a secure understanding of early concepts.
- Pupil premium funding is used very effectively for eligible students as a result of which disadvantaged students achieve at least as well as others.
- Performance management of staff is outstanding. There is a very strong commitment to continuing professional development. Best practice is shared across the Trust through coaching, mentoring and training. All members of staff are involved in research projects to improve knowledge, determine the impact of provision and inform school development planning. For example, staff researched gross motor programmes for students who were having difficulties which affected their reading and writing skills. A programme was developed which has been effective in securing improvements. The excellent professional development of senior and middle leaders has ensured they are highly effective in their areas of responsibility.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school's provision. It not only covers all required areas in Key Stages 3 and 4 but provides exciting and highly relevant learning to help students develop key skills, social skills and resilience. Technology is used highly effectively across all subjects. Outdoor learning, including Forest School, physical education, Duke of Edinburgh Award and residential trips feature highly. They foster team building, leadership skills and individual's confidence.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional. Students demonstrate increasing self-control, empathy for others and a willingness to participate in all that the academy has to offer. Students are prepared extremely well for their future lives in modern Britain. They are given effective guidance to prepare them for possible future careers and to make informed choices about the next stage in their learning.
- Partnerships with parents are very strong. Parents appreciate the information they receive from staff on a regular basis and the workshops provided for them. Their responses to both the online questionnaire and the academy's own survey are extremely positive. Parents know that the multi-disciplinary staff team will provide support to manage students at home if they need it.
- The academy's leaders work in partnership with the other Trust members and have developed a relationship with the local college to make provision for students aged 19 to 25 years. For many students anxious about leaving the security of Barbara Priestman this is a preferred option for the next stage in their education. This development is an example of the academy's extremely high levels of care and support for students' well-being and their concern to ensure they have equal entitlement to continuing education locally. Planning with the college has focused on ensuring access to appropriate courses and attention to learning styles. This is in addition to the academy's promotion of equal opportunities, good relations with staff and other students and the tackling of any possible discrimination, all of which are excellent.
- Safeguarding is given the highest priority. Investigation of concerns and record-keeping are carried out meticulously.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are highly effective and have undertaken a skills audit following which membership of the board has been strengthened. Governors have good links into school so that they understand the work of the school at first hand. They are fully aware of the quality of teaching in all subjects and how well students are progressing. They monitor the use of the pupil premium very effectively to ensure there are no gaps between disadvantaged and other students.
 - Governors are very confident to challenge leaders to ensure the best outcomes for students and share with them a secure knowledge of areas requiring improvement. They make sure staff's pay progression is linked to high quality performance. They ensure resources are used well. Governors fully support the academy's bid for capital funding to ensure the building meets the needs of students and have worked

- with senior leaders to identify matched funding.
- Governors ensure safeguarding meets statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. It is clear that students enjoy school and demonstrate extremely positive attitudes to their work. This makes a significant contribution to their good achievement.
- The academy's work to develop students' self-esteem, their resilience and their understanding of their own behaviour is excellent. As a result of the positive behaviour management and assertive discipline which is used consistently throughout the academy, students grow in maturity and learn to manage themselves well in lessons and out in the community.
- Incidents of negative behaviour significantly reduce as students move through the academy so that by the time they leave they are able to take their place as responsible British citizens with clear moral values.
- Students enjoy taking on increasing amounts of responsibility. The student council ensures students have a say in developments such as fitting basketball hoops or joining with members of the Jewish community to erect a memorial for Holocaust Day in the Forest School. Students fundraise for all the major national fundraising days and for local charities and enjoy their links with a school in India.
- A wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs give students opportunities to try new things. The small number of girls have their own group who can meet to discuss issues of particular interest to them while others enjoy attending the dance, drama, gym, computing and chill clubs, to name but a few.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The culture and atmosphere in the school is calm, warm and supportive. Students report they feel safe in school and are supported to raise any concerns. In a meeting with inspectors students commented that 'This is a community of loving and caring people.'
- Attendance is high because students feel valued, safe and respected. One student said 'This school has saved me from going off the rails.'
- Students say there is no bullying but if there was, staff would not tolerate it and would deal with it straight away. Parents agree with them. Students are well informed about all forms of bullying and have a particularly good awareness of internet risks.
- The academy works to develop students' resilience by providing them with the personal thinking, empathy and team building skills they will need in their lives. The academy supports students' personal development exceptionally well so that they leave as caring and concerned adults in modern British society. The staff work hard to help students understand their own conditions and to be able to self-advocate.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers know students well and assess their achievements effectively to plan lessons which build quickly on their learning and ensure they make at least good progress in all lessons. This is particularly evident in the rapid progress students make in their reading and writing when they join the school. Although there was a dip in the teaching of mathematics, this has now been addressed and students are on track to achieve as well in mathematics as in English this year.
- Teaching assistants are very effective. They use questioning and a range of other strategies to help students think for themselves. However, on a few occasions staff do more for students than they need to do. The academy's leaders have been working on this and developing staff understanding of support for students to become more independent learners. As a result, teachers increasingly encourage students to develop thinking and questioning tools to explore their own ideas more effectively.
- Very occasionally not enough is expected in lessons of the most-able students but generally activities and tasks are well matched to students' individual abilities.
- Teachers have high levels of specialist skills and deliver their subjects with enthusiasm. This engages students and motivates them to want to learn. For example, in a design technology lesson, Year 8 students were very keen to learn the skills they needed to make a wooden football game and avidly

watched demonstrations of equipment and the techniques they needed. They were keen to follow the health and safety rules which they were reminded of frequently and by the end of the lesson had almost completed the games which they will either play with or sell to raise funds.

- Team work is very strong. If a teacher is having difficulty in teaching a topic or skill to particular students, coaching, mentoring and support from leaders and therapists can quickly identify a solution.
- Teachers' marking provides good suggestions to help students know how to improve their work but students are not always given the time they need to follow up on the comments made. Advice and guidance to improve students' work often takes the form of a conversation between teacher and students which promotes higher levels of achievement. This was seen in Year 10 science work on the breaking points of different masses when students were encouraged by written as well as verbal suggestions to enquire more deeply into the topic.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good overall and prepares students well for their future lives. The curriculum develops their special interests while also ensuring the continued promotion of key skills and work-related learning. The academy does not currently make use of alternative provision but students are offered courses which might normally be on offer in further education settings.
- Teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff in the academy give freely of their own time to offer their particular interests and skills to students in the myriad of lunchtime, after-school and holiday clubs on offer and on the many residential trips which students clearly enjoy to the full.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Although the majority of students join the academy at Year 7, a significant number join at later times. From generally low and sometimes very low starting points, good teaching ensures students make at least the progress expected of them in reading, writing, mathematics and science. By the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4, all students make good and some make outstanding progress from their starting points to gain GCSEs or Entry Levels in a number of subjects.
- The school's leaders identified that students were not achieving as well in mathematics at GCSE as in other subjects. Swift action was taken and students are now gaining more secure skills and knowledge on which to build their learning. Year 11 students are expected to achieve as well in mathematics as other subjects in their GCSEs this year.
- Students with autism spectrum conditions do not always perform well in examination situations and teachers ensure they are provided with plenty of examination practice or, where appropriate, other forms of accreditation are found.
- Students are making rapid progress in their reading since the introduction of a daily reading programme which includes even the most-able readers. Reluctant writers make good progress because of the support from staff and the occupational therapist.
- Students make particularly good and often outstanding progress in their communication and personal social development due to the excellent multi-disciplinary teamwork, consistent support from all staff and positive behaviour management. They develop their confidence extremely well through performing arts lessons and participate in events such as the National Shakespeare Festival and National Theatre Connections Programme. Students are already honing their communication skills as budding politicians to take part in mock elections in May.
- All groups make similar progress and there are no gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students who are supported by the pupil premium and others. This is because of the well targeted use of the additional funding to meet individual needs of eligible students. The small number of girls and the very small number of ethnic minority students do at least as well as others.
- The most-able students make good progress from their starting points because staff generally provide the necessary challenge to help them develop their independent thinking skills. However, in a few lessons, not enough is expected of these students, for example rather than writing their own sentences students sometimes simply complete work sheets.
- Students enjoy their sixth form experience and say they feel well prepared for their futures. They achieve well in a rich and varied curriculum which allows each individual to develop their own interests and abilities to gain a range of vocational qualifications. Students continue to build their confidence and last year eleven sixth formers performed a piece of original drama at the Special Schools Academy Trust (The School's Network) conference exploring what it is like to live and learn with autism.

Sixth form provision is good

- Teaching in the sixth form is good and sometimes it is outstanding. All students make good and some make outstanding progress in developing work-related skills and further developing literacy and mathematical skills to use in their everyday lives.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good and ensure students progress well during their time there. They provide students with an excellent curriculum which, as far as possible, is matched to meet individual needs and interests so that students are well motivated and really enjoy their sixth form experience.
- Students study subjects such as travel and tourism, photography and small animal care, all of which may lead to future employment opportunities. They are under no illusions about the negative as well as the positive aspects of work. Students enjoying a lesson in animal care were learning to clean out cages, find damage on the shells of large land snails, transfer stick insects onto new leaves or feed small mammals to snakes. They seemed to enjoy it all.
- Behaviour and safety in the sixth form are outstanding as in the rest of the school. Students enjoy the move-on from Key Stage 4 into their new building. Sixth formers are supportive of younger students and act as good role models because they have developed a good knowledge of themselves and their place in society. They have high aspirations because of the strong support which staff have provided to build their self-worth.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be promoted very well across the curriculum, in assemblies and in personal, social and health education and citizenship lessons. Students become thoughtful of others and acquire the confidence to express their views on a range of current issues such as forced marriage and science versus religion. They take a question and explore it through drama or research. As across the whole school, students are encouraged to use a range of tools to develop more flexible thinking skills. When real-life situations arise, the multi-disciplinary teams may set up scenarios to help students to find solutions and explore the point of view of other people.
- Students access a huge range of extra-curricular activities including a number of residential opportunities which promote team-building and build resilience and confidence in trying new things. Students are encouraged to volunteer, for example at The Great North Games. They undertake internships with the hospitality team, planning, cooking and serving meals to students, staff and visitors to the academy. All students participate in achieving the Duke of Edinburgh Award and for the first time last year students gained the award at gold level.
- At the present time sixth form students do not access alternative provision. Although staff support the transfer to further education very well, this has sometimes seemed daunting, particularly as students have had to look outside the local area for placements. Many of the sixth form students will now leave to join the new 19 to 25-year-old provision which the academy has set up with Sunderland College.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138530
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	448066

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
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	123
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	52
Appropriate authority	Ascent Academies Trust
Chair	Dame Dela Smith
Headteacher	Mrs Carolyn Barker
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
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