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Mr Steven Johnson
Barbara Priestman Academy
Meadowside
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Dear Mr Johnson

Short inspection of Barbara Priestman Academy

Following my visit to the school on 13 November 2018 with Tracy Millard, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have created an ethos in the school that promotes pupils' well-being and their social and emotional development as the highest priorities of the school. Staff responding to Ofsted's survey say that they are proud to be part of the school. Staff foster positive relationships with the pupils of all ages through their understanding of the specific needs of the pupils and their enthusiastic, sensitive and compassionate approach. The parents, carers, students in the sixth form and the pupils in the main school clearly appreciate the work that staff do to support them. Staff skilfully develop programmes to help pupils to develop personal skills which will help them in their future more independent lives. Consequently, pupils in the school make progress academically, socially and in terms of their life skills. Pupils conduct themselves in a safe and calm way around school.

In response to the area for improvement identified at the last inspection, to 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, leaders have focused on developing the mathematics curriculum and its teaching. This has ensured a more rapid rate of progress, in mathematics, for pupils and students throughout the school. This new approach is in its very early days in other areas of the curriculum and therefore has not yet had the positive impact that it has had in mathematics.

Another area for improvement from the last inspection was to consistently provide higher levels of challenge for the most able students in all lessons. Leaders have not

yet ensured that this is consistent across the subject areas. To better support this area, staff are embedding new curriculum planning and assessment systems so that leaders can better evaluate progress across academic subjects. This strategic overview is particularly important as the needs of pupils in the school are becoming increasingly diverse. They are also developing the communication between subject leaders in school so that they have a better understanding of the pupils' progress across their school experiences. In relation to the last action from the previous inspection, leaders have worked with staff in school to ensure that they do not do more than is necessary to support students' learning.

In the sixth form, students are being well prepared for their future independent lives due to a greater focus on developing skills through work experience, apprenticeships and work-related learning programmes. The improved accreditation offer, together with the very individualised approach to planning for learning, has helped students to achieve more qualifications. There is also heavy emphasis on developing pupils' independent living skills. This supports pupils to make good progress in all areas. The pupils benefit from many different programmes which support them to develop skills which will help them in their lives. Pupils spoke highly of their work in the school kitchens, the John Muir Award, the Duke of Edinburgh Award, animal husbandry and independent travel programmes.

Parents were very positive about the school's work. The parents who spoke to inspectors highlighted the care and commitment demonstrated by the staff team and the significant support that you and your staff team give to pupils and their families.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

You have an excellent understanding of your pupils' special educational needs and you work in close partnership with a range of professionals and health practitioners to make sure that pupils' needs are met. You and your staff are knowledgeable about the things that make children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) vulnerable. This is because you provide regular high-quality training and updates for staff and you make sure that concerns about pupils are identified and reported in a timely way.

You work closely and effectively with other professionals and services to make sure that pupils who may be vulnerable are identified quickly and their families receive the timely and effective help and support they need.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, we focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to look at the progress made by pupils from their starting points. Staff have very positive interaction with the pupils in their care. Adults

employ a range of different strategies to match the activities on offer in the school to the personalised learning targets of pupils. Pupils engage in their education because it is relevant and enjoyable. Their work records show a strong emphasis on developing pupils' social and emotional skills. Staff support pupils' behaviour to create positive learning environments. The progress in academic subjects is not yet consistent across the subject areas. There are areas where leaders are sharing best practice to ensure that progress is rapid and reflects the ability of the pupils in all subject areas

- I was also interested in how the school leaders have ensured that the quality teaching seen at the last inspection has been maintained and continues to have a positive impact on achievement over time. It was clear that staff have an understanding of pupils' needs and there are strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils. This, coupled with the very clear focus on the needs of the individual child, has led to a pupil-focused approach to teaching and learning. The lesson observations, work scrutiny, conversations with pupils, staff and parents, together with the data that we analysed during the inspection, reflected the leaders' view that teaching and learning continues to have a positive impact on achievement over time for the pupils in school. However, the quality of teaching and learning is not yet consistently of the best quality which the leaders would aspire to. Leaders are working to develop a new curriculum, assessment and tracking system to support the teaching staff to have better information about the progress of pupils so that they can use this information to plan more effectively.
- Finally, I also wanted to consider the school's approach to promoting positive attendance in school. Leaders in the school are aware of the challenges faced by some of their pupils which leads to high anxiety and can lead to a drop in attendance in school. Many pupils have had very low attendance before arriving at the school. The staff in school have a very rigorous approach to promoting attendance. They offer very high levels of support to pupils and their families to help improve attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new curriculum and supporting assessment system are embedded efficiently across the subject areas and the impact is evaluated to make sure that it is fit for purpose for all groups of pupils in school
- high-quality teaching is supporting pupils to make rapid progress across the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Garton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and trustees to discuss safeguarding and aspects of school leadership and management. Inspectors visited 17 classes to observe teaching and learning, including visits to the school kitchen where students were involved in work experience activities. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work and analysed pupils' progress data. Inspectors spoke to your teachers, pupils and students in the sixth form, informally during lessons, about their work and with the pupil and student representatives to talk about their experiences at the school. Inspectors reviewed safeguarding documentation, including the school's record of checks for behaviour incidents, and reviewed safeguarding arrangements. Inspectors also reviewed documentation which included the monitoring of teaching and learning, the school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses and the school development plan. The lead inspector took into account the 26 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 37 responses to the staff survey.