

Inspection of a good school: Barbara Priestman Academy

Meadowside, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7QN

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 March, and 24 April 2024

Outcome

Barbara Priestman Academy continues to be a good school.

The executive headteacher of this school is Adele Pearson-Atkinson. This school is part of Ascent Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Carolyn Morgan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Lynn Watson.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel safe and happy at Barbara Priestman Academy. They describe confidently how staff listen and give them the support they need. Many parents and carers speak highly of the positive difference that the school has made to their children's well-being and development.

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, behave well. Lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils enjoy learning, and most pupils attend school regularly. They engage positively with the teachers and staff who support them. Pupils are willing to contribute to lessons. They confidently describe to visitors what they are learning.

Leaders want all pupils to be 'wonderful adults'. They have high expectations of pupils. Staff use clear routines and thoughtful approaches that help pupils to manage their own behaviour effectively. Pupils are respectful to one another, staff and visitors. As a result, there is a calm atmosphere throughout the school.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of personal development opportunities. These include residential trips and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Some pupils enjoy experiences such as performing in dance shows. Enrichment clubs help to further develop pupils' talents and interests. Members of the student council are proud that they have had a say in improving their school's outdoor spaces.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have reviewed and redeveloped the school's ambitious curriculum. They have strengthened the curriculum offer to better meet the needs of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have mapped out what pupils will learn across

subjects and curriculum pathways. Leaders are mindful of pupils' SEND. They have considered what pupils should know and remember carefully. Where appropriate, this leads to qualifications and accreditation. This includes the curriculum for students in the sixth form. Most subjects are highly developed and embedded. However, some aspects of the recently introduced English and communication curriculum are less well embedded. They do not consistently match the quality of the strongest subject areas.

Leaders prioritise the development of pupils' communication skills. Reading is an important part of the curriculum. The school has implemented a new phonics programme to help pupils who struggle with reading. Pupils who need support to develop their reading skills receive effective personalised interventions to strengthen their phonics knowledge.

The school prioritises pupils' broader personal development. Leaders have developed a well-designed personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. The school has reviewed important learning about relationships and health education to ensure that it is age-appropriate for all pupils. Individual pupils' vulnerabilities, linked to their SEND, are well understood. Pupils take part in all aspects of school life. They experience a broad range of learning opportunities to support their personal development. Pupils learn about keeping safe, including when online, healthy lifestyles and how to look after their well-being. They learn life skills, such as cooking and how to shop independently.

Students in the sixth form receive focused support. This prepares them well for when they leave the school. For example, the independent travel training programme helps students learn to travel by themselves so that they develop the confidence to get to college or work. Students study a range of accredited courses and complete work placements. These experiences help students to develop the skills they need to be successful. The school has links with employers and colleges. This supports students' transitions into the next phase of their education or employment. The school has supported students to find part-time jobs.

Staff feel well supported by leaders, including trustees. They appreciate the time they receive for planning and their continued professional development. Staff feel that leaders manage their workload well. Trustees provide effective support and challenge to the school. The CEO and trustees know the school well. They are open and honest about its strengths and the areas needing further work. They have sharply focused their attention on reducing any pupil absences, developing new leaders and ensuring all newly introduced curriculum initiatives are as strong as each other.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some aspects of the recently introduced English and communication curriculum need further time to embed. Staff need additional time and support to deliver these new curriculum developments consistently well. The school should ensure that subject leaders monitor developments in their subjects to ensure the curriculum is equally strong in all subject areas.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138530
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10297370
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	173
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	55
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lynn Watson
CEO of the trust	Carolyn Morgan
Headteacher	Adele Pearson-Atkinson
Website	https://ascenttrust.org/barbara-priestman
Date of previous inspection	13 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes to school leadership. The executive headteacher joined the school in May 2023.
- Barbara Priestman Academy is a special school for pupils aged between 11 and 19 years. It is based across two sites. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils have a diagnosis of autism.
- Students in the sixth form attend a dedicated provision based in the grounds of a nearby secondary school.
- The school is one of four schools in Ascent Academies Trust.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative education provision.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

An inspection team first visited the school on 26 and 27 March 2024. His Majesty's Inspectors returned to the school on 24 April 2024 to gather additional evidence in some areas.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgment about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, and teaching and support staff in the school. The lead inspector met with the CEO of the multi-academy trust, the chair of the trust board and other trust members. An inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English and communication, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work. Curriculum maps for science and careers were closely scrutinised.
- The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including at breaktimes, lunchtimes and in lessons. Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their perceptions of behaviour and bullying in the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils, staff and parents. This included any free-text responses to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

David Mills, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
James Duncan	Senior His Majesty's Inspector
Jean Watt	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Barton	Ofsted Inspector

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