



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR ACE TIVERTON SPECIAL SCHOOL

Name of School:	ACE Tiverton Special School
Headteacher/Principal:	Hannah Smart
Hub:	London Special and AP Hub
School phase:	Secondary/ Special
MAT (if applicable):	Transforming Futures Academies Trust Ltd

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	N/A
Date of this Review:	12/03/2025
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	N/A
Date of last QA Review	N/A
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	23/01/2024

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers, agrees that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels N/A

Quality of provision and outcomes N/A

AND

**Quality of provision and
outcomes for disadvantaged
pupils and pupils with additional
needs**

Area of excellence N/A

**Previously accredited valid areas
of excellence** N/A

Overall peer evaluation estimate N/A

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a school's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the school chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the school

ACE Tiverton Special school is a free school academy serving secondary age (11-16) students in Devon; the vast majority having a diagnosis of autism. Originally opened in 2019 with 35 young people, it now serves 115 students, on two sites. All the students have an education, health and care plan (EHCP), and the vast majority are male. The proportion of children with English as an additional language (EAL) is significantly below national averages. Disadvantaged students make up just under half of the cohort, which is below national average for special schools.

The school mantra is 'unconditional positive regard' with a firm belief that every day is a new start. This is the basis for their vision of 'Learning for Lifelong Success', realised through the values of respect, personalise, inspire and achieve. The school makes relational practice the focus for supporting the students to re-engage with education as many of them have had a disrupted primary and /or Key Stage 3 experience. The students follow one of three pathways— engage, experience and explore— although they can move between the pathways as appropriate.

The current headteacher was in place when the school opened in 2019 and has established the school and staffing. The school is part of the Transforming Futures Trust which has four schools across Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Professional development of staff is strategically driven by robust self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Weekly timetabled sessions are used to deliver the training which is evaluated for impact, both on staff's knowledge and the experience of students. This then informs the provision for the following year. As a result of providing 'Team Teach' training for all staff, the number of physical restraints and situations where problems escalate, have reduced significantly this year.
- Relationships with parents and carers are strong. Positive relationships between the school, students and parents are maintained through regular phone calls and communication from their child's learning family lead. This enables the school to understand students' particular triggers and needs and therefore support them effectively. Conflicts between students were resolved because the school first ensured that it understood what was causing the problem. It then put strategies in place to effectively diffuse the situation.
- Middle leaders feel empowered to lead their areas and therefore make a significant contribution to quality assurance and school improvement. For example, as a result of 'book looks' there is now a more coherent approach to students responding to feedback.
- The trust oversight of the school is robust. The board of trustees know the school and have a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The

link trustee receives reports from the local governing body, regarding the progress of the school towards its improvement objectives. In addition, 'Teams' links and in-person visits ensure that first hand evidence is used to check the information provided by the school.

- Students are guided and supported towards pathways for their futures. Students in Year 11 are clear about their aspirations for the future and motivated to achieve well in their qualifications. One student, who wanted to move on to teaching in a special school, was given the opportunity to support phase one students in the Haven. The school has researched the possible college places and next steps towards achieving her aims, overcoming the disrupted education in her earlier years.
- There is a well-structured, and consistently implemented, 'actions and consequences' scheme which staff use to deal with behaviour. This is combined with a system whereby they attribute positive or negative behaviour points. As a result, house points are awarded, which result in rewards that the students value.
- Staff feel valued and are very aware of leaders' concern for their wellbeing. The school has developed teachers and middle leaders from amongst the staff and provides the training they need to deliver at a high level. This leads to a commitment from staff to the school and the students, stability of staffing and continuity of provision.

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

... teachers on the upper pay spine had more explicit roles of responsibility within the school, to further reinforce the work and self-evaluation of middle leaders.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is designed to prepare students for their next stages of education, employment and training. This has enabled almost all students to move on to mainstream further education or sixth form provision. For example, music lessons, taught by external tutors, are offered as part of the core curriculum. This means that students can mix with an unfamiliar adult and acquire skills and hobbies to help them identify with peers outside school and prepare for their aspired career.
- The curriculum has been carefully planned. Learning is structured to progressively develop the required skills. A lesson for pathway one students sequentially built the capacity for descriptive writing. Students went on an outside visit, developed the vocabulary to describe what they had experienced, then moved to sentence construction and writing the final description.

- Reading is prioritised. Students are helped to develop a love of reading because they are encouraged to take ownership of the books they read. Teachers adopt strategies that are appropriate to the age and pathway children are on. In a Year 9 DEAR (drop everything and read) session, a student had selected a text for the group, which was focussed on the experiences of an autistic girl.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is secure, meaning that students are confident using technical vocabulary when talking about their work. In a Year 7 English lesson, the teacher used the phrases 'fronted adverbials' and 'coordinate adjectives' which the students understood.
- Teachers use a range of retrieval and recall tasks to reinforce the learning from previous lessons. Prior learning is secured, and students can engage with future learning. In a Year 7 science lesson, true/ false questions about sound and vibrations, followed by a 'Hangman' game reminded students of key vocabulary. This engaged students in the development of their understanding of sound waves.
- Learning outside the classroom (LOTC) is used to build relationships, enable students to re-regulate and provide stimuli for the work done in school. Community walks provide an opportunity for pupils to disclose information in a more informal environment. Increased attendance and engagement in the classroom are measures of the impact of this strategy. The LOTC instructor quickly built strong relationships with pupils in the Year 7 nurture class. Pupils engaged with and enjoyed the experience.
- Assessment for learning is evident in most subjects with the option for student evidence given. Students review their work and respond to feedback. In art, students were able to read their 'what went well' and 'even better ifs', and to reflect on the feedback.
- Teaching assistants (TAs) use high quality questioning to develop learning and students' understanding. Students make corrections to their processes and learning. For example, in a Year 11 practical food technology lesson, the TA asked a student which step they might have missed and persisted without providing answers, so that the young person worked out their mistakes.
- High expectations of student engagement are evident. Students respond positively to this and demonstrate a commitment to their learning. All students in a Year 9 mathematics lesson were on task and engaged in either teacher-led, or TA-supported activity, so they all had the opportunity to consolidate or extend their knowledge.

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

- ... teachers consistently made explicit the links between the work done in a lesson with that done in previous lessons, and how it would lead to future learning in this topic or subject.

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

- The school has focussed on the development of additional adults in order to maximise the impact of teaching assistants (MITA). This has led to greater effectiveness of the teaching assistants (TAs) in developing the independence and learning of the students they support. In a Year 9 – 11 nurture English lesson, the TA encouraged students to write using targeted questioning. One student was reminded that they had felt a stone yesterday and encouraged to produce appropriate adjectives, rather than the TA suggesting the words.
- Teachers adapt the environment to support the specific needs of the children. This means that the students can work in an environment that is conducive to their learning. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, two students were working with a TA behind a screen separate from the rest of the class. One of these young people had previously been unable to work with others. They have now been supported to work with one other student, on the pathway to becoming fully integrated.
- Pupils' sensory needs are met so that they can engage with learning. For example, wobble chairs and Thera-putty were available for students in lessons, which clearly supported engagement in learning.
- Relational practice is a strength, with not only the teacher and TAs having excellent knowledge of students, but also the students themselves. In a Year 9 – 11 nurture lesson, students and adults understood the triggers for one member of the class, and suggested strategies to ensure that this individual did not become dysregulated.

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

- ... there were consistent therapeutic training opportunities for all TAs, across both sites, so that students had a wider choice of who can deliver the therapies that they need.

5. Area of Excellence

No area of excellence was submitted at this review.



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Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse content reports from across the hub networks including using AI tools to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector (sharing these with the partnership) each year. The QA Review reports remain confidential to Challenge Partners and the host school. This ensures that schools embrace the review as a development process, acting as a catalyst for their ongoing improvement. This is the primary purpose of the QA review. However, our aim is that the thematic analysis will demonstrate the additional value of a sector wide overview, illustrated with real-life examples.

For further support following your QA Review, 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. The School Support Directory can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)