



## QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

### ACE TIVERTON SPECIAL SCHOOL

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

<b>Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:</b>	N/A
<b>Date of this Review:</b>	09/02/2026
<b>Overall Estimate at last QA Review:</b>	N/A
<b>Date of last QA Review:</b>	12/03/2025
<b>Grade at last Ofsted inspection:</b>	Good
<b>Date of last Ofsted inspection:</b>	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/or pupils with additional needs** N/A

**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 students in Devon; the vast majority with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) and related Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and communication needs. The school is part of the Transforming Futures Trust which has four schools across Plymouth, Devon, and Cornwall.

Originally opened in 2019 with 35 young people, it now serves 118 students and 52 members of staff who work across two purposefully refurbished sites.

Each student has an education, health, and care plan (EHCP), which they are encouraged to own as their ability to advocate for themselves develops. The vast majority are male. The proportion of children with English as an additional language (EAL) is significantly below the national average. Disadvantaged students make up just under half of the cohort, which is below the national average for special schools.

An inclusive and highly relational ethos underpins the school's practice. 'Unconditional positive regard' for the individual member of staff or student drives the culture towards a vision of 'Learning for Lifelong Success.' The school's values are: respect, personalise, inspire, and achieve.

The Executive Headteacher was in place when the school opened in 2019 and has established a senior and extended leadership team who hold a range of strategic responsibilities.

### 2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- ACE Tiverton School is a welcoming environment where students feel safe, valued, and supported. The Executive Headteacher and her leadership teams provide calm and purpose-driven leadership, fuelling an atmosphere of collective optimism. Members of the student panel reflect this positivity, demonstrating strong advocacy skills and a sense of belonging where their views are taken seriously.
- Relational inclusion is the golden thread that drives all decision-making. Leaders assert that this ensures that each member of the ACE Tiverton Family flourishes. A Key Stage 4 student talking about his imminent interview for A-level entry to Exeter College said he was 'Learning for Lifelong Success' to summarise his Tiverton School experience.
- The Executive Headteacher drives improvement with great clarity. She is outward facing and determined to ensure the balance of wellbeing and exacting standards are maintained. The experienced Head of School is a 'visible leader' who exhibits impressive levels of expertise, models patience and pragmatism, resulting in a 'feet-on-the-ground' wisdom that benefits staff and students.

- The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) describe themselves as a growth-oriented leadership group that relishes challenge. This fosters a culture of aiming high performance and collective achievement. The Trust mirrors this ambition, where the link governor leverages her experience and deep sector knowledge to provide informed oversight. The SLT express pride in the school's role as a positive and productive part of the Trust community and wider Devon education system.
- Ambitious leaders and staff drive excellence through a shared commitment to high-quality pedagogy, evident in their strategic plan and through discussion with designated staff. This team 'hunger for success' is maintained via useful quality assurance and regular 'celebration briefings' that connect staff strengths to student progress.
- Leaders build a professional learning climate that is purpose led and aligns specialist expertise with a results-centric commitment to student progress. Its impact is evaluated through increased student independence, regulation, and academic achievement. Furthermore, teachers model aspects of evolved practice to more inexperienced staff. The teaching support team access opportunities to develop specialisms. This might include Occupational Therapy programmes, Fun-Fit and Thrive. This demonstrates the school's commitment to building a highly skilled workforce that strengthens personalised provision.
- Middle (extended) leaders bridge the gap between vision and practice by translating whole-school strategy into precise, daily classroom actions. Through the implementation of the 'Top 5' teaching priorities and metacognitive strategies, they are developing consistency across departments. Their impact is defined by a balance of individual accountability and purposeful collaboration, where shared expertise drives consistent academic standards and a unified approach to student success.
- Inspired and intellectually rigorous leadership fosters an inclusive, tailored pedagogical toolkit that empowers staff. By replacing rigid monitoring with formative 'learning statements' and professional dialogue, leaders ensure teaching quality is a continued focus while maintaining a culture where teachers feel respected and autonomous.
- Data is used effectively to determine organisational and individual success. Academic outcomes are consistently strong, with all students making robust progress against personal and academic targets. The majority of students transition to mainstream post-16 provision to study a range of subjects from Level 1 Preparation for Adulthood courses to A level subjects.

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

- ... students were further empowered to become active change agents in their life decisions.
- ... senior leaders further collaborated with strategic partners to influence and impact inclusive practice within the new Trust and the wider education system.

### 3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is broad and ambitious. The Pathway Programme is built on the principles of purposeful progression and flexible adaption tailored to individual need. Based on secure assessment, the school adheres to National Curriculum expectations while ensuring the specialist requirements of EHCPs are met. This assessment-rich approach results in an appropriate learning offer that reduces barriers to learning and aims to meet every student exactly where they are.
- Embedded routines and intelligent use of resources such as task lists, visual vocabulary lists, and a calm professional approach, empower students to develop socially and independently. This purposeful approach to learning allows students to thrive under challenge and broaden their insights. One student, for instance, proposed the benefits of resolving the lunchtime queue dilemma would be 'to reduce tension for both staff and students.'
- Where there is consistent application of the 'Teaching and Learning Top 5' principles, students embrace challenge, sustain engagement, and act on personalised feedback. This was exemplified in a Key Stage 4 mathematics lesson where students were connecting percentages and decimals. A teaching assistant (TA) asked, 'What do you already know?'—prioritising self-directed problem-solving over passive instruction, fuelling student optimism and independence.
- Through the cultivation of safe, high-energy spaces with embedded routines and expectations, both academic and therapeutic learning is optimised. An early career teacher (ECT) effectively hooked Year 7 into a deep exploration of genre. The resulting dialogue demonstrated significant emotional literacy, as students moved beyond literal definitions to evoke their feelings. When asked to describe an emotion a student replied, 'I am so happy I have a twinkle in my eye.'
- In a circuit session in the on-site gym, all students made rapid in-session progress. While some students boldly explored their limits, others adopted a reflective approach, observing then mirroring 'safe squatting' techniques. This high-engagement environment allowed even a less regulated student to smoothly transition from observer to active participant. This was due to inclusive planning and formative assessment working simultaneously.
- Staff who plan relevantly for personalised challenge cause students to be focused and sustain concentration. A group of Year 9 and 10 students translated Cézanne's compositions into 3D forms using multimedia techniques, including clay, blocks, and pencils.

- These tiered challenges ensured all learners progressed at their own level and were enhanced when the impact of the TA was maximised.
- In readiness for building a set of speakers, Key Stage 4 pupils explored amplification and frequency through a balance of direct teaching and paired student application of learning. They were able to orchestrate their own rhythm using visuals and benefited from indirect questioning from the TA.
- The Learning Outside the Classroom (LOTIC) curriculum provides progressive, real-world experiences—such as Forest School and hill climbing—that build student independence, resilience, and healthy risk-taking. By integrating cross-curricular communication and problem-solving, these pathways lead to recognized qualifications like the John Muir Award.
- At the heart of the Preparation for Adulthood Framework (PFA) is a broad and progressive culture of self-advocacy, where students evolve from early goal-setters into the designers of their futures. This bespoke vocational journey empowers learners to choose work experiences that align with their aspirations, ensuring a seamless and optimistic transition into mainstream post-16 provisions.

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

- ... all staff consistently used the metacognition toolkit strategies so that all students articulate how they learn and the progress they have made.
- ... a highly effective whole school oracy strategy resulted in all staff using agreed oracy routines, so that students engaged in purposeful talk and confidently led learning-oriented discussions more frequently.
- ... the Key Stage 3 Personal Development Curriculum was strengthened to secure students' insight, knowledge and understanding of other cultures and faiths.

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

- All leaders have a wise and grounded approach in the development of the specialist provision. The respect for the individual is paramount, and all staff adhere to a mantra of 'I see you, I hear you, how can I help you?'. Every Learning Family Leader fulfils the role of the SENCO for their group.

- There is a profound respect for the family unit. All staff know that students' success is a collaborative effort. The school has a dedicated Student and Family Support Team that strengthens relationships through the building of trust, considerate communication, and a shared understanding of how best to support each child.
- Transition processes are secure. Students begin accessing the school from February and steadily increase this to a weekly event by May. This ensures that the vision and values are communicated to families and students before formal entry. It provides opportunity to establish routines and for staff to understand well the social and academic needs of the students. Where 'Plus' sessions are required, such as 'Personalised Learning Approaches' and 'Understanding Self' these are implemented before formal entry to school. Additionally, the needs of the family, which may impact on their child's experience, are deeply understood.
- A beneficial therapeutic programme maximises the engagement and optimises the academic success of the ACE Tiverton student. Universally, staff create low-arousal spaces that respect individual sensory profiles and are generally vigilant to the behaviours that may precede harmful behaviours. These include occupational therapy programmes, interventions such as 'Walk and Talk' or 'Walk and Cook' sessions. Here students practise relational confidence in real-time, building secure relationships, increase communicative confidence, and participate in practical multi-sensory experiences which impact on the broader academic programme.
- Individual case studies demonstrate relevant planning for individual need, clear systems to track progress and the ways in which achievement is celebrated. One student increased their levels of both engagement and communication over time, which has impacted positively on home-school collaboration, reducing anxiety for the family and increased attendance.

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

None agreed at this review.

#### **5. Area of Excellence**

No area of excellence was submitted at this review.

## **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 partnership of schools and trusts 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 partnership 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>).