



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR KILTON THORPE SPECIALIST ACADEMY

Name of School:	Kilton Thorpe Specialist Academy
Headteacher:	Sarah Gunn
Hub:	North East Special
School phase:	All through Special
MAT:	Not applicable

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leaders chose not to have estimates
Date of this Review:	14/05/2025
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Not Applicable
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	17/05/2022

Quality Assurance Review

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

Leadership at all levels Not applicable

Quality of provision and outcomes Not applicable

AND

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

Area of excellence Not applicable

**Previously accredited valid areas
of excellence** Not applicable

Overall peer evaluation estimate Not applicable

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

Kilton Thorpe Specialist Academy (KTS) is a stand-alone academy near Brotton, serving 189 pupils, including eight children in the Nursery, from the ages of 3-19 years. Pupils come mainly from Redcar and Cleveland with a small number from North Yorkshire and Middlesbrough. All pupils have education, health and care plans (EHCPs) with profound and multiple, moderate, severe, and complex learning difficulties. Most pupils have a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum condition (ASC). The complexity of referrals to the school is increasing over time.

Nearly half of pupils are socially disadvantaged. Four fifths of pupils are boys. The school is based in three buildings within walking distance of each other. The curriculum has been further developed to take account of pupils' needs. Children in the early years follow a curriculum based on the EYFS statutory framework. In primary and secondary phases, pupils access the curriculum in the Engagement, Pre-formal, Semi-Formal and Formal pathways. In the post - 16 phase, pupils work towards relevant accreditation and preparation for adulthood (PfA) according to their pathway.

At KTS, the vision of supporting lifelong learning, and happiness, through quality education, respect and equality for all is delivered through the values of the unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments, learning and development.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Highly skilled, aspirational and committed senior and wider leaders model the school values and lead by example. Leaders use their detailed knowledge of pupils and their families, providing exemplary support and holistic outcomes.
- Leaders build trusting relationships and partnerships with families. Leaders signpost families to a range of relevant practical and educational support, enabling support from external agencies, such as Early Help and practical support, including food bank referrals. Parents say that the workshops, such as Early Bird, had real impact, reducing isolation and increasing understanding of their child's needs. Class Dojo provides families with regular celebration of pupils' achievements and 'Wow moments.'
- Leaders support pupils to experience similar milestones to their mainstream peers. All pupils are supported to attend the end of year prom. Where necessary, pupils are picked up and provided with formal clothing.

REVIEW REPORT FOR KILTON THORPE SPECIALIST ACADEMY

- The highly effective person centred, and trauma informed positive behaviour support culture is based on a strong universal offer, empowering pupils, class teams and families. Sensory and communication needs are well understood and addressed. Leaders use data discerningly, engaging external agencies, building competence with well-targeted support systems.
- Highly skilled and collaborative middle leaders plan together, sharing and modelling excellent practice, ensuring that their areas of responsibility are cohesive. Information from learning walks is shared and acted upon in a timely manner.
- Approachable leaders at all levels are relentless in promoting staff wellbeing. Leaders consult, listen to and respond to staff, including their 'What Went Wells' (WWW) and 'Even Better Ifs' (EBI) and ideas from 'Feedback Friday,' alongside regular informal check ins. Regular 'shout outs' and thanks are well received. A culture of flexibility exists and 'appropriate give and take.' Teachers can complete their planning, preparation and assessment at home. Leaders use their detailed knowledge and concern for staff to provide tailored support.
- The well-established culture of developing staff expertise has led to staff working their way for example, from lunchtime supervisor or apprentice teaching assistant (TA) to high level teaching assistant (HLTA) or teacher. Some TAs choose to develop additional responsibilities within their roles. Teaching teams have protected time to plan, train and debrief together.
- Outward facing leaders are influential and highly effective in improving expertise beyond the school. For example, training Early Help and Portage staff in relevant approaches, including Attention Autism. The new KTS+ building is a venue available for 'in reach' events. Other partnerships with mainstream and special school colleagues include the Tees Valley Creative Arts group and a regional physical education partnership. Leaders participate in contemporary research, for example with the Laurel Trust, examining the relationship of play-based learning with improving tolerance of demands.
- Relationship and sex education and personal, social, health and economic education are delivered informally and in discrete sessions. Useful external resources are carefully adapted to meet pupils' needs. Families are openly and sensitively consulted and supported around these issues. The 'Risk Roadshow' and rights respecting assemblies have resulted in most pupils gaining a clearer understanding of consent, what is right and wrong and when they might need to ask for help.

- The lively, articulate and witty student council meets regularly to promote positive changes for the school. They clearly take responsibility and feel involved and valued. For example, the basketball nets and Astroturf were their ideas. They feel safe at school. They value many things including friends, teachers, football, art and talent shows.
- PfA processes are thorough and highly effective. Leaders recognise that PfA starts from when pupils join the school. PfA is 'tagged' on the online recording and assessment platform. Families are well supported in this exciting and often daunting next step. Careers days and transition events with external providers inform pupil and family choice. Three transition meetings ensure that pupils' needs are well understood and shared so that arrangements for transition are well planned.

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

- ... leaders facilitated deliberate and intentional collaboration opportunities to share best practice.
- ... leaders continued to develop staff knowledge, confidence and competence in delivering play-based learning.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Teaching staff use their detailed knowledge of pupils, with high expectations and strong subject knowledge to build trusting relationships where pupils engage and build on their learning.
- Pupils enter school in an orderly fashion. 'Magic Breakfast' enables pupils to have a purposeful, 'soft start', ensuring that they are regulated and ready for the school day.
- Nursery and Reception provision is exemplary. The environment is clearly zoned with well-planned, irresistible opportunities for learning. Teaching staff skilfully follow childrens' leads, resulting in improved engagement and regulation over time. A child who recently joined the school in some distress was calmly playing with a member of staff. Children confidently communicate their wants and needs. For example, a child used a visual aid and stood by the door to ask to go outside. Children who initially play alone learn to interact with their peers. A child initiated a lively chase game with a peer with a simple smile.

- Well thought out, clear routines and structures support pupils to build confidence and engage with learning. In a Key Stage 2 class, pupils were highly engaged in days of the week and phonics songs.
- Pupils' sensory needs are well understood and subtly supported, using bespoke equipment, including weighted vests, adapted rocker chairs and seating, alongside proactive and reactive movement breaks.
- The wide variety of communication strategies supports understanding, engagement and expression. In a Key Stage 2 class with mainly pre-formal pupils with ASCs, a pupil chose the happy symbol. He explained that he was happy because he had rebound later in the day.
- Leaders have recognised that play-based learning, well established in the earlier phases of the school, is appropriate for many older pupils with more complex needs. At KTS, a more playful, enquiry approach is replacing the rigid application of approaches, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System. A growing number of pupils who were formerly, regularly in crisis, in their 'narrowing world' are becoming more settled and their world is opening up. Teaching staff develop pupils' interests using continuous provision to engage them in their learning. In a secondary class, a pupil who formerly would not allow their hair to be brushed, has enjoyed hairdresser role play. They are now willing to help to brush their hair.
- In Key Stage 3 and 4 reading and mathematics sessions, pupils were fully engaged. Teaching staff used their strong subject and pupil knowledge to facilitate independent transitions at the right pace. Teachers effectively used cold calling to assess comprehension. Pupils were encouraged to evaluate their work. Some pupils accurately evaluated and articulated their learning to their visitors.
- The vibrant KTS post-16 pathways provide meaningful learning opportunities. In 'Make and Bake' and 'Support and Create,' pupils were highly engaged. One group designed and ordered equipment for a soon to be opened creative play space. Pupils identified the essential skills they were using. Pupils use high level vocabulary. A pupil recognised that after much discussion they achieved a consensus. In the 'Make and Bake' session, pupils prepared food for the Friday Café with appropriate levels of independence. A pupil noted that their 'Make and Bake' experience enabled them to make cheese cake at home. They also wash up at home and give mum a well-earned rest! Some pupils articulated how their learning in school supports external work experience. In both sessions pupils were supported and challenged to evaluate their performance and complete accreditation portfolios.

- In the Friday Cafe, pupils gave '5 star' front of house customer service to staff and external visitors.
- Pupils develop character and teamwork through a variety of sports. Recently, the school football team narrowly lost to a neighbouring special school, after being well behind at half time. They demonstrated excellent resilience and sportsmanship.
- Staff support physical development well, despite a lack of ideal resources onsite. Pupils travel to a primary school to access a sports hall. TAs skilfully play their part, leading smaller groups to develop cricket skills. A pupil gave their visitor a tour followed by a critique of their performance in the session, using what went wells and even better ifs. This represents significant progress.
- Pupils want to come to school. Attendance is strong. Pupils make good or better progress from their starting points against moderated EHCP and curriculum targets. Behaviour data shows that pupils make strong progress. Pupils gain relevant accreditations and move to appropriate destinations. A few pupils make exceptional progress and move on after Year 11.

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

... class teams built on best practice at KTS to ensure that approaches and activities are consistently tailored to be meaningful and engaging for each pupil's needs.

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

- Social disadvantage is not a factor in pupils' experience and progress at KTS. This section has been covered in the main body of the report.

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

... Not applicable

5. Area of Excellence

Not applicable



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR KILTON THORPE SPECIALIST ACADEMY

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>).