QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR PETERHOUSE SCHOOL

Name of School:	Peterhouse School
Headteacher:	Calvin Wallace
Hub:	North West
School phase:	Special
MAT:	Non-maintained special school

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	The school chose not to have published estimates
Date of this Review:	18/03/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Not applicable
Date of last QA Review:	24/03/2025
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Requires improvement
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	10/05/2023

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	N/A
Quality of provision and outcomes	N/A
AND	
Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs	N/A
Area of excellence	
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

Peterhouse school is a non-maintained specialist day school for pupils with autism, aged 4 to 19. 70 pupils attend, 15 of whom learn in the sixth provision. All have a primary diagnosis of autism, each having an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Ten pupils are flexibly educated. Most pupils are boys. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average. Over half of pupils are known to social care, a large minority of pupils have an additional diagnosis and over a quarter have social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Pupils attend Peterhouse from four local authorities. Peterhouse is part of the Autism Initiatives group of companies. Peterhouse recently celebrated it's 50th anniversary. The blended curriculum offer is bespoke, incorporating formal and semi-formal pathways, along with the 'hidden' ingredient', linking to therapeutic input.
The school has gained and retained a variety of relevant and prestigious awards, including Leading Parent Partnership, Wellbeing, Artsmark Gold and Quality in Careers Awards.
Peterhouse is committed to empowering each individual to reach their full potential and thrive in the world beyond Peterhouse, preparing pupils for fulfilling and independent lives, to become successful adults with autism.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Highly aspirational and experienced leaders have a clear vision for their school, pupils and families. The Peterhouse Way, provides a specialised, flexible and responsive learning environment, equipping pupils to become successful adults with autism. The 54321 model eloquently describes the approach. The five point star describes the Peterhouse understanding of autism. The four drivers; identity, knowledge of the wider world, independent learning and creative thinking underpin the curriculum, delivered with three key styles, modelling, guiding and coaching. Learning is bespoke, delivered in agile semi-formal and formal pathways, recognising the spiky profiles of Peterhouse pupils. The one voice recognises the pupil always at the centre of their learning.
- Continuing professional development is rigorous and highly effective. This begins with the excellent, recently updated staff induction booklet, which ensures that staff are active in their learning, linking theory to practice.
- Leaders monitoring is rigorous, with well-defined roles, including governors, subject and wider leaders. Peterhouse uses a network of internal and external moderation including non-maintained independent special schools and the Southport Learning Trust. Regular pupil progress reviews are attended by teachers, senior leaders and multi-disciplinary specialists. The exemplary annual review process and documentation captures holistic progress and supports relevant and challenging target setting.

- The behaviour approach is trauma informed. Leaders use pupil engagement with learning data, alongside reductions in the frequency, intensity and duration of adverse behaviours, to plan for and assess progress. Recording of how behaviours were avoided is carefully analysed so that pupils and staff learn, reducing the need for reactive measures.
- Personal development is a strength at Peterhouse. Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from a well-planned programme which supports preparation for life. Pupils are supported to advocate for themselves and deal with life issues. A pupil was coached to speak directly to his mother about a sensitive issue which troubled him. Older pupils act as peer mentors for younger pupils.
- Pupils access a wide variety of enrichment activities. Leaders solve problems with pupils and families to enable access. Lunchtime clubs are well attended and monitored, ensuring that pupils develop their interests and use these opportunities. Recently, a pupil who was formerly a 'school refuser' enjoyed a concert by the Liverpool Philharmonic orchestra. Learning from this trip allowed them to access further community events.
- Leaders have significantly improved attendance. A third of pupils who attend the school did not attend school in the previous two years before placement. Leaders at all levels develop flexi and inclusion timetables and use engagement logs to tailor curriculum delivery to enthuse and reduce anxiety. Relevant plans, including Wellbeing and health, are complemented by rewards, alongside effective partnership with Sefton local authority colleagues. As a result, attendance is well above the special school average when inclusion and part time pupils are accounted for. 'Flex Ed' is a remarkable success story engaging pupils with previously no attendance and severe school attendance anxieties.
- Leaders engage and support families, to increase their understanding and confidence. This is enabled by family support and safeguarding teams alongside leaders at all levels. Families are signposted to practical, emotional and educational support to find creative solutions to build trust, confidence and attendance. Families benefit from occupational therapy, speech and language therapy (SALT) and sleep support. Leaders offer a comprehensive six week family training package.
- Knowledgeable and enthusiastic subject leaders understand how to develop and monitor their subjects, supporting teaching teams to make their subjects accessible. For example, a pupil who 'hated phonics!' enjoys phonics by stealth, in rebranded 'Red Panda activities.' Leaders recognised that almost all pupils had issues with hypermobile joints, affecting writing. Occupational therapy, laptops and scribes have supported pupils to write and record their learning.
- Leaders ensure that relevant therapy support is available in lessons and at lunchtimes to boost staff competence and support pupils. They meet families informally and at workshops to support progress in all areas.

- Leaders have developed a discerning and effective culture supporting staff wellbeing. This is based on genuine culture of 'give and take,' with the alignment to the school values alongside access to formal supervision, debriefing and access to external support. Workload and planning time are always taken in to account. This is complemented by a variety of fun activities, including, 'words and wine online.'

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if…

… leaders further refined the evidence of the impact of the Peterhouse Way on pupils and their families within education and beyond.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Due to staff knowledge of pupils, their knowledge of good autism practice and high expectations for all, trusting and productive relationships are a strong feature at Peterhouse. Around school there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere and a positive climate for learning.
- Pupils benefit from thoughtfully designed routines and structures which are clearly embedded. As a result, pupils generally transition well between activities and around school.
- Teaching teams, supported by relevant therapist input have produced 'what you might see in this class' posters outside classrooms to help visitors to understand pupils' needs.
- Classrooms are well organised, providing bespoke and personalised communication supports and systems to support total communication, supported by SALT advice and support. Pupils use them to find their voice and to navigate the world.
- Teaching Assistants (TAs) use their subject knowledge and relationships with pupils to support engagement and independence. They know when to hold back and when to calmly intervene, for example to enable a movement break. They are mobile, quietly moving to where they are needed.
- Pupils use bespoke visual supports well. In an English and phonics lesson, pupils used their bespoke visuals, including 'What I am working for' token systems to engage and stay on task.
- EHCP targets are visible in classrooms in a variety of ways, taking account of pupils' sensibilities. Targets are regularly addressed, for example a pupil met their target to ask before leaving the room for a sensory break.

- Pupils sensory needs are well understood and their needs acted upon. Pupils use a variety of seating, twiddlers, fidget toys and benefit from low arousal spaces, when required, to be calm and ready to learn.
- Teaching teams understand when and how to challenge pupils. In secondary English and mathematics lessons the teaching team used a variety of methods to assess pupils' understanding.
- Where appropriate, learning walls are used highly effectively, supporting pupils' recall of prior knowledge to build new skills and knowledge.
- Pupils learn to read for pleasure. Pupils chose a wide range of texts in calm purposeful sessions. In one lesson a pupil appeared to be aimlessly flicking through their book. When questioned, they firmly stated that they were finding their favourite page and related a litany of facts that they had learned and related this to their art work. Some pupils read drawing instructions, while in a Post 16 class, some pupils were reading theory test questions. A pupil who was new to the school in September 2025 read a passage and excitedly related to anyone who would listen that 'I can read it now, I couldn't read it before!' One pupil read to the class with confidence and superb expression.
- Teaching teams promote and model respectful discussion between pupils. As a result relationships between pupils are positive. In a digital media lesson pupils were engaged by the teacher and TAs modelling evaluative approaches, igniting a passionate discussion around a Toy Story clip. Pupils were able to agree and disagree respectfully.
- In several classrooms a few pupils were taking steps to becoming fully integrated in to the classroom. In all cases the pupil was at the centre of the planning. One pupil observed has a blended offer which includes gradually reducing online learning while increasing time in school.
- Outcomes are exemplary. Almost all pupils are on track to meet their EHCP and academic targets. Pupil attendance is above the local and national special school average. Almost all leavers tracked over the last four years continue to be employed. Since 2022 no leavers were not in education, employment or training (NEET) after Year 11.
- Since the inception of Flex Ed over half of them have successfully transitioned to the main school and a third of Flex Ed leavers have moved from NEET to paid employment.
- A pupil who enjoys making music began recitals behind a curtain and recently performed on stage for 300 people. A former Flex Ed pupil who previously would not leave their room is now employed as web designer.
- A pupil councillor, a former Flex Ed pupil, eloquently related how he had spent a few years in his room after his mainstream placement had broken down. He

related how ‘he had mixed with the wrong crowd.’ Now, he is predicted to achieve English and mathematics GCSEs, a college place and has aspirations for his future.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if…

… teaching staff noticed every opportunity to support when adaptations are able to be reduced to support independence, resilience and self-management.

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

Not applicable

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

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 report content to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector each year.

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.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice (SLP) events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events 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).