

Priory School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Dorrit Andrews
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good: this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Priory School provides education for children between the ages of nine and 16 years who are subject to a statement of special educational needs. All of the children have been assessed as having a learning difficulty at some level and a number will have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. There are two boarding houses and pupils are accommodated in single bedrooms and dormitory areas in groups of four or less. The boarding provision can cater for a maximum of 24 boarders from Monday to Friday. However, the majority of pupil's board for one, two or three nights each week; a small number board for four nights. A total of 43 pupil's access boarding and a small number of pupils stay at the school into the early evening before being collected by parents.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This was an announced inspection and all key standards were inspected. A high proportion of boarders participated in the inspection and contributed their views. Outcomes for being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution and organisation are all judged as outstanding. The remaining area, economic well-being, is judged as good.

The leadership and management of the school continues to be very strong and effective. Staff remain highly committed to their roles and continue to provide pupils with high quality care and outstanding pastoral support. The school's strong ethos of teamwork and effective partnerships with parents, carers and external professionals contribute greatly to pupils' progress and social development.

Pupils say they feel safe at the school, staff know them well and they are treated fairly. Parents also extend high praise to the work of the school and state staff are 'friendly and supportive', 'very understanding' and 'make us feel welcome, very included and involved'.

Although there are effective systems in place for the monitoring of pupils' welfare, not all local authority monitoring reports clearly evidence the areas checked. A recommendation has been raised in relation to this matter.

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations were raised at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The health care needs of pupils continue to be promoted and supported extremely well. Effective procedures and robust recording systems support the management of medication both on and off site. Medication is securely stored and administered by designated staff who have received appropriate training. Qualified first aid staff are always available on duty and they have access to refresher training. Staff understand the importance of regular medication routines for children and discuss these openly with pupils and parents. Where necessary, staff provide additional support to establish and maintain medication routines throughout the school week and not just when children are boarding. This practice supports children to understand their needs and enables them to self-manage their health care with support.

Specific care plans are in place to manage particular health needs, such as epilepsy and diabetes. These are monitored and reviewed by community health services in conjunction with parents, pupils and staff. Parental contact details together with health care information are regularly updated to ensure staff have access to the most current information. Pupils report they are well looked after at school if they feel ill and arrangements are made for their return home. Comprehensive records are maintained of accidents, injuries and treatment and parents are kept informed.

The school's 'Learning for Life' programme promotes and addresses a range of personal issues, health and social matters. Topics are discussed and explored in a variety of forums, including visiting speakers, school assembly and pupil presentations from members of the school council and youth parliament. Regular coffee mornings organised by the school also provide opportunities for parents and carers to raise and discuss a range of health and lifestyle issues with visiting professionals.

Pupils are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs; they are able to contribute ideas to menus through the newly created food forum. They are very satisfied with the quality and quantity of food provided and many enjoy trying new foods. Meal times continue to be well-managed, orderly, social occasions. Pupils are familiar with routines and sufficient time is allowed to finish meals properly. Staff sit with pupils, talk with them about their day, encourage positive social interaction and sensitively monitor food intake. Catering staff receive appropriate training for their roles and are familiar with children's individual dietary needs. Senior catering staff attend induction and admission meetings of new pupils and their parents to discuss any specific dietary needs and the sharing of school menus.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils' privacy is well respected and information is confidentially handled. Private telephone facilities are available for pupils to make and receive calls in private if they wish. All pupils surveyed agreed they have enough privacy. Pupils are encouraged to be independent and responsible for their own personal hygiene wherever possible. In circumstances where support is needed, staff are sensitive to children's dignity and follow good practice guidance to safeguard and respect children's privacy.

Complaint procedures are provided to pupils, parents and carers. Pupils know what to do if they need to complain. There have been no complaints received by the school or Ofsted since the last inspection.

Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils both at school and in the community. All staff continue to receive safeguarding training relevant to their role with regular updates. Strong working partnerships with other professionals concerned with safeguarding children continue to be maintained and support the school's work with individual pupils and families. For example, talks from the local police officer to pupils about keeping safe and involvement of the community nurse services to raise pupils' awareness of their dignity and vulnerability. Pupils' report they learn about keeping safe in lots of different ways and that they feel safe at school.

Positive behaviour is promoted and pupils do not identify bullying as a problem at the school. Bullying is not tolerated and any incidents are taken seriously, closely monitored and analysed. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's expectations of behaviour and how to respond to one another. They report children are generally kind to one another and are confident from experience that any issues will be dealt with quickly by staff. Recent work has been undertaken with pupils, parents and carers in relation to cyber bullying to highlight the potential risks to children's welfare.

The standard of behaviour is very high and is based on establishing positive relationships with pupils, being consistent in approach and communicating clear expectations. Staff continue to receive regular behaviour management training to support them in their work. Pupils clearly know the daily routines of the boarding houses regardless of how many nights they stay. They greatly benefit from this knowledge as it enables them to settle well, develop their confidence and feel safe and secure. Few sanctions are used in the residential provision and pupils report they are dealt with fairly if they break rules. Parents also report that the school deals effectively with any unacceptable behaviour.

Health and safety matters continue to be taken seriously by the school and the services of safety and security consultants are sought where appropriate. Risk assessments, policies and procedures are in place to support the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils, staff and visitors. Records demonstrate that regular

safety and servicing checks are undertaken to fire, electrical, water and gas installations. Regular fire drills take place at different times and pupils are familiar with fire evacuation procedures.

Comprehensive procedures are in place for the recruitment and checking of staff and the monitoring of visitors and contractors; key senior staff have completed safer recruitment training. These practices reduce the potential risks to the welfare of pupils.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school's boarding provision continues to actively support children's educational progress. For example, the after school activities programme and the established routines of the boarding houses provide a range of opportunities for pupils to develop life and social skills and increase their confidence and self esteem. These include shopping, cooking, team games and attending a community based youth group. Staff provide consistent bed time routines, support with basics skills such as getting organised for school and regularly listen to boarders read before school, thereby actively promoting children's engagement in education. Pupils report they enjoy the evening activities on and off-site and making new friends. The after school activities are open to all pupils and the school assists in co-ordinating transport where needed to enable pupils to participate. All parents surveyed agree that the boarding experience makes a positive contribution to their child's personal development.

Pastoral care remains a strength of the school and pupils continue to receive outstanding pastoral support in line with their needs. Pupils say that staff know them well and care about how they are doing and that they feel able to talk to adults at school if anything is worrying them. Interactions between staff and pupils are observed to be warm, caring and calm. The school works extremely effectively with the local authority and a wide range of agencies and professionals. External support is requested when required to support individual pupils and their families. The school's very strong working partnerships with other agencies contribute greatly to the overall outcomes for pupils.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils are actively consulted and encouraged to express their views about their daily lives and contribute ideas to the development of the school community. Opportunities include annual reviews, residential and school council meetings, the use of governor surveys and daily contact with staff. Pupil consultation is so well established at the school that pupils spontaneously seek the views of their peers about ideas and suggestions before presenting them to staff. This is particularly evident in pupils' preparation for the food forum and 'green week'. Pupils report they

feel listened to, they receive timely feedback to their suggestions and changes are made as a result. Recent examples include arranging for menus to appear on the school's electronic information system, conducting fund raising events in response to pupils' own ideas and deciding on how to utilise monies donated by Friends of Priory.

Great emphasis continues to be placed on the involvement of parents and carers in relation to the care of their child and the life of the school. All parents and carers surveyed agree that the school takes account of their suggestions and concerns. They are also consulted on the topics of discussion for parent and carer coffee mornings and how to best reach and involve them more. These practices actively promote and contribute to positive outcomes for children.

Admissions and leaving processes are planned, handled with care and tailored to individual pupils. The potential impact of a new admission into the residential provision is carefully considered and monitored. Pupils say they are helped to settle in by staff and other pupils and have written and pictorial guidance to remind them of routines. Preparation for moving on continues to be facilitated in conjunction with individual pupils, parents, carers and appropriate agencies. Older pupils benefit greatly from the school's recently revised residential 'Independent Living Skills Programme'. The programme is individualised and focuses on intense areas of work for four weeks in preparation for leaving school. The programme encompasses a wide range of life and social skills including shopping, preparing meals, laundry, cleaning, the use of public transport and self-management. Involvement in the programme is by choice and with parental agreement and support. Once completed, pupils evaluate their experience and feedback is welcomed from parents and carers.

Pupils' needs are effectively assessed and regularly reviewed. Individual placement plans are linked to each pupil's statement of special educational needs and are regularly reviewed and updated in conjunction with parents, carers, pupils and the local authority. Staff maintain daily records of their work with pupils to monitor their progress and reflect any significant changes in circumstances.

Pupils are able to retain contact with their families and carers if they wish. A convenient pay telephone is available for pupils' private use although a number of pupils have their own mobile phone. Staff maintain regular contact with parents and carers with regards to progress as well as concerns. Where appropriate, staff undertake home visits. All parents surveyed agree their child can contact them easily and that they are kept informed of their child's welfare.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarding accommodation is pleasantly decorated and furnished, well maintained and clean. There is a continual programme of refurbishment in place to maintain standards and to ensure that boarding accommodation meets pupils' needs. Effective displays of pupils' achievements, art work and posters throughout communal areas continue to provide a welcoming environment. All pupils surveyed agreed their

boarding house provides good accommodation and that their belongings are safe. A revised pocket money system has been introduced since the last inspection allowing pupils to manage their own money. This is greatly appreciated by individuals and supports the further development of independent skills.

A number of school resources are accessible to boarders during evenings with supervision. These include the new skills centre, library, gym, computer room and school grounds. The school's former conference facilities are now relocated in the skills centre away from the main school building. The facilities are self-contained thereby reducing public access to the main building.

Very positive links continue to be promoted and maintained with the local community. These include providing gardening support to residents at a nearby sheltered housing complex, involvement with a local Olympic art project in conjunction with other schools and organisations and pupils engaging with a local cycling club based at the school.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The leadership and management of the school continues to be very strong and effective. Staff remain highly committed to their work with pupils, parents and carers and they have a very clear view of the benefits of boarding to individuals.

The provision of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school positively promotes the integration of all pupils and recognises pupils' individual needs and personal circumstances. The views of all pupils are valued, care and support is tailored to meet individual needs and pupils are encouraged to understand the differences and needs of others. All parents surveyed unanimously agree that the school treats their child fairly and with respect, and meets their child's particular needs.

Comprehensive information regarding the school and the boarding provision is provided to parents, carers, pupils and other interested parties and is regularly updated. Information is easily accessed direct through the school, on the school's website and on pupil notice boards.

Pupils benefit from experienced and competent staff who know them well. The deployment of staff is effectively managed to support the residential programme and provide pupils with consistency and continuity of care. Daily briefings, regular team meetings and formal supervision sessions support staff in carrying out their roles and responsibilities. There is an effective induction programme for new staff and good training opportunities for professional development. Staff state they work well as a team and are able to discuss issues openly. They identify good communication, management support and established routines as particular strengths of the team.

Effective systems are in place for the monitoring of pupils' welfare and the operation of the boarding provision. Regular checks of records are conducted by senior staff as

required and the headteacher prepares regular reports to the governing body. Regular monitoring visits are conducted by the local authority and detailed reports prepared. However, not all reports clearly record that the required areas have been checked.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- ensure monitoring visit reports conducted by the local authority report clearly evidence the areas checked. (NMS 33.3)