

Priory School

Mount Road, Bury St Edmunds, IP32 7BH

Inspection dates 4–5 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils make outstanding progress in English and mathematics because these subjects are taught exceptionally well.
- Pupils develop excellent communication (speaking) skills.
- Year 11 pupils gain outstanding life and work-related skills. All achieve the qualifications required to go to college when they leave the academy.
- Pupils are very skilful in setting up and running a small business.
- Pupils' gains in learning how to shop and travel on a bus independently are outstanding.
- Pupils' artwork is inspirational reflecting the creativity in the teaching of this subject.
- Teaching is outstanding because teachers plan work at the correct level of challenge for each pupil.
- In a very few lessons, there are minor deficiencies in the teaching.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils' understanding of how to keep safe is excellent.
- All leaders, including governors, check the quality of teaching rigorously and provide extensive training for teachers. This enables teachers to teach more effectively, thus raising pupils' achievement and contributing to the academy's improvement.
- Research and innovative practice enable pupils with Down's syndrome to excel.
- The academy provides outstanding support for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools throughout West and South Suffolk.
- The academy meets the minimum standards for residential special schools. The effectiveness of the residential provision is outstanding. Parents are thrilled with the valuable support it gives their children.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 14 lessons taught by 12 different teachers and a teaching assistant. Eight of these lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors heard pupils from different disability and special educational needs groups read. They looked at their work in lessons.
- The social care inspector joined pupils in the residential provision for an evening meal and spent time with them as they participated in a range of activities.
- Meetings were held with academy staff and the residential care team, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and an external consultant (the services of this consultant are purchased by the academy from the local authority).
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation, including assessment and attendance information, the academy’s improvement plan, monitoring of teaching information, all of the documents and records required in residential special school provision, the appraisal policy, all safeguarding documents and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors examined 29 questionnaires completed by staff.
- There were 27 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) at the time of the inspection. These views were taken into account by inspectors along with letters sent in to the academy by parents marked for the attention of the inspection team.

Inspection team

Jeffery Plumb, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kathleen Yates

Additional Inspector

Louisa Bayley

Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy makes provision for pupils with complex and moderate learning difficulties. Over 50% of the pupils on roll also display autistic spectrum disorders. About 10% of pupils have Down's syndrome. Other additional needs include severe learning difficulties, communication and interaction difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, physical difficulties, hearing impairment, visual impairment and attention deficit hyperactive disorder. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- There is residential provision for 23 pupils. The flexible arrangements support 51 part-time pupils who stay between one to four nights each week in the residential provision.
- This school gained academy status on 1 September 2011. As such, it has gained funding to build accommodation for sixth form students. It will admit sixth form students from 1 September 2013.
- Although designated at the time of the inspection as an academy for 7–16-year-old pupils, it only had pupils aged 9 to 16 years on roll.
- The academy does not make use of alternative schools and locations to provide education for its pupils. All work-related courses are delivered on the site of the academy.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those from families who speak English as an additional language, are below average. These pupils are represented across all of the different disability and special educational needs groups in the academy.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding, which is extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals among others.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that the teaching in even more lessons is outstanding by making sure that:
 - teachers do not spend too much time explaining to pupils what they are expected to do and learn so as to sustain a brisk pace to pupils' learning
 - pupils' books are marked in such a way that they are given very clear pointers as to what exactly they need to do to improve their work and that teachers check that pupils act upon the guidance they are given so as to accelerate their learning
 - teachers check that all pupils understand what they are taught step by step as the lesson moves along so that every pupil realises her/his full learning potential.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- From the time they join the academy, pupils make outstanding progress in English and mathematics whatever their particular disability, medical or special educational needs.
- By Year 11, pupils' attainment is variable; one may attain a GCSE pass in mathematics, yet another an Entry Level 1 qualification. In English, attainment for these pupils varies from an Entry Level 1 to an Entry Level 3. However, measured from their starting points, the progress of each pupil is outstanding.
- The range of qualifications they achieve is outstanding. They gain GCSE passes in art and science; Entry Level qualifications in history, child development and food technology; and all receive a nationally recognised accreditation in physical education.
- Achievement in art is outstanding. This is evident in a recent stunning mosaic created in art lessons to celebrate the legacy of the 2012 Olympics which now hangs in the leisure centre in the town of Bury St Edmunds. This wonderful achievement is enjoyed by citizens of the town.
- By the time Year 11 pupils leave the academy, they have excellent life and work-related skills because of the vocational subjects they study and the businesses, such as 'Spic and Span', a car valeting company which they set up and run at the academy as part of their City and Guilds programme.
- Pupils' make outstanding progress in their development of communication (speaking), problem-solving, literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy skills through these vocational subjects and the independent living skills they learn during the time spent as boarders in the residential accommodation.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in relation to their personal non-academic targets. For one, that may be the freedom of travelling on a bus independently; for another, having the confidence to speak publicly at a county sports day; and yet another lobbying the cause for people with disabilities with a member of parliament.
- Every pupil learns to read. Pupils with severe learning difficulties read the instructions to follow a simple recipe when cooking. More-able pupils sound out the unfamiliar words they come across when reading books. The most-able pupils enjoy reading more difficult texts and have the dictionary skills to find out the meanings of words they encounter for the first time. A few enjoy using a thesaurus to discover the range of alternative meanings of the new words they discover.
- Progress in writing is outstanding. Attainment ranges from copy writing, where pupils form the shapes of letters accurately as they copy a simple sentence written for them by their teacher, to writing high-quality poems independently. The most-able pupils write speeches using powerful words to make an impact on their intended audience. These pupils spell words and use punctuation accurately. They benefit significantly from the additional support they receive from their residential care staff in the evenings, for example, when preparing a written speech to present in public.
- Progress is exceptional in mathematics. Pupils' mathematical development builds step by step, whatever their ability or needs. All, within their capability, develop relevant skills such as using money to shop, asking for change, telling the time and dividing a cake into four equal portions.

The most-able pupils, particularly some with autistic spectrum disorders, grasp the geometry and algebra skills required to be extremely successful in nationally recognised examinations.

- Specialist equipment and attention to careful positioning help pupils with hearing and sight impairment to make the same outstanding progress as their friends. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, are treated as individuals and receive support based on all of their needs. They make the same outstanding progress as their friends. Pupil premium funding pays for one-to-one support for pupils' eligible for free school meals to speed up their rate of progress in English and mathematics. They achieve equally as well as their friends who are not eligible for free school meals.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Most teaching is outstanding. All teaching is at least good. Typically, teachers use their knowledge of pupils' prior learning to plan interesting activities at the correct level of challenge to move them on quickly with new learning. As a result, they successfully accelerate the learning of every pupil they teach.
- Flexible planning and imaginative approaches mean that the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is outstanding. For example, in an inspirational mathematics lesson, the teacher used an interesting starter activity to gain the interest of the pupils, then briskly moved them into a challenging problem-solving activity. Planned activities were creative, resources were fit for purpose and the probing questions from the teacher were challenging. By the end of the lesson, each pupil was successful in coming up with a meaningful solution and presented data to convey their ideas in a clear and organised way. Teaching assistants made a valuable contribution to pupils' learning in this lesson. This is so in most lessons.
- Typically, teachers have high expectations and combine their subject and special education expertise. They are very skilful in bringing the very best out of pupils with Down's syndrome. They use the fixations (obsessions with number or specific attention to minuscule detail) which pupils with autistic spectrum disorders have positively to enhance their learning, by turning a potentially negative fixation into a positive learning outcome.
- Teaching of life and work-related skills is outstanding. For example, in an energetic food technology lesson, pupils in Year 11 developed important life and work-related skills as they prepared party food for their after school 'Prom' event. The girls chatted excitedly about the dresses they had bought as they worked as a team on making their tasty party foods. Earlier in the week, they had planned the foods they were going to prepare, made shopping lists and went to the supermarket to purchase the items they required.
- Very occasionally, teachers take too long explaining to pupils what they need to learn. This slows their learning. Mostly teachers are adept at checking pupils' understanding of what is taught as lessons progress. But, in a few lessons they do not do so. When this happens certain concepts and words are not fully understood by all pupils in the class.
- Most teachers mark pupils' work exceptionally well and follow up on the guidance they give to ensure the pupils make the improvements required. However, a very few teachers do not do this sufficiently rigorously.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils enjoy every aspect of academy life and have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. Boarders describe the residential provision as 'home from home'. Because teachers and residential care staff are highly skilled at removing the obstacles that interfere with their learning, pupils engage with the interesting and challenging activities provided for them in the classroom and in the residential part of the school.
- Teachers sit pupils with autistic spectrum disorders away from resources or areas in the classroom that are likely to distract them. When these pupils wander off task, teachers quickly re-engage them with learning. The few pupils with hearing impairment are supported by signing and specialist equipment so that they know what their teachers say.
- Residential care staff are instrumental in supporting pupils in managing the challenging behaviours associated with their disabilities. Parents are delighted with what the residential care staff achieve in helping their children improve their behaviour.
- Behaviour is outstanding. There are no recorded instances of racism. Bullying incidents associated with pupils' particular difficulties are exceptionally rare. When they occur, they are dealt with very swiftly and there is a positive outcome. Pupils have an outstanding knowledge and understanding of cyber- and prejudiced-based types of bullying.
- This is a calm academy. Pupils relate well to one another and to staff. Older pupils look out for the younger ones. Pupils respect the site, including their residential accommodation, and value the displays of their high-quality work. They are polite and most welcoming of visitors. They are keen to tell visitors how much they like the academy and express a wonderful sense of humour as they do so.
- Pupils are safe at the academy and in the residential accommodation. They say that they have a trusted adult they can turn to and share any problems they may have.
- Pupils are adept at assessing risks and keeping safe. For example, they carry a garden fork with the sharp end pointed towards the ground; know they must wear a helmet when riding a bike; and keep their fingers away from the blade when using a saw. They understand how to keep safe when using a computer.
- Older pupils understand the potential harmful effects of unsafe sex. Pupils in Year 11 recently made a short animated film on the health risks of smoking. They won an 'Oscar' when they presented it in a short film competition with other special schools.
- Attendance is high. Absence is linked to stays in hospital or frequent visits to off-site medical clinics.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Over the past three years, the headteacher, supported by other members of the senior leadership team, has been relentless and highly effective in his drive to improve teaching. The amount of outstanding teaching has increased very significantly as a result.
- Targeted training is provided to help teachers improve their practice. They respond eagerly. For example, recent lesson observations showed that the expectation of the achievement of pupils

with Down's syndrome was not always high enough. Focused training and a programme of supportive coaching was put in place using experts. Pupils with Down's syndrome now achieve exceptionally well.

- The academy analyses its work rigorously and diligently. It has a clear and accurate picture of what it does well and what requires further improvement. It uses its analysis very effectively to improve.
- Leadership and management of therapies, specialist programmes, subjects and key stages are outstanding. The management of the residential provision is outstanding and in respect of the minimum standards there are many examples of exemplary practice. For example, the independent visitor's reports are of a high quality and contribute to significant improvements for pupils.
- Work with parents is outstanding. Parents of children with autistic spectrum disorders are supported in helping them manage their children's challenging behaviours and in providing structured bedtime routines. Residential care staff willingly accompany parents on visits to see health professionals.
- Management of the service to provide support to mainstream schools in managing pupils with disabilities and special educational needs is outstanding.
- All pupils have equal chances to succeed and leaders tackle any discrimination rigorously. There is no noticeable difference in the rate of progress between different groups of pupils.
- Pupils' learning is enhanced by visits overseas, exciting evening activities provided by the residential care staff, and clubs such as the cycling club run by the school. This complements a wide range of subjects, enterprise projects, learning outdoors such as animal husbandry and horticulture, work experience and opportunities to participate in sport at county level.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Reflecting on the suffering of children in Guatemala, pupils initiated fund raising to purchase equipment for the babies' unit in the hospital of that country. A link with Ruanda, trips to France and the celebration of Islamic festivals promote pupils' awareness of cultural diversity.
- As an academy, governors purchase support from the local authority. Consultants from the local authority provide valuable advice about assessment procedures and support the performance management process of the headteacher.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body supports and challenges senior leaders very effectively. It is well informed about pupils' personal and academic progress and does not hold back from asking the headteacher 'hard' questions. It targets pupil premium funding appropriately and also ensures that the academy's budget is monitored tightly. Involved pro-actively in the academy's analysis and planning cycle, governors have a clear picture of the strengths and areas in need of improvement in the academy. The governing body led the successful bid for funding sixth form accommodation, staffing and subject provision to be launched September 2013. It monitors the residential provision rigorously. Although highly skilled, governors keep abreast of training provided by the local authority and beyond. They make sure that a robust policy links teachers' performance to pay, based on how effectively teachers promote pupils' learning. The headteacher's performance is reviewed in accordance with regulations. All safeguarding requirements are met.

Outcomes for residential pupils	are outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	is outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	is outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	is outstanding

- Residential pupils make outstanding progress in reading and in their development of social interaction (getting on with one other and with adults) and independence skills. This is because residential care staff work very effectively with the teaching staff to ensure each pupil reaches her or his full personal and learning potential.
- The extensive range of activities across the 24 hour provision is fun, interactive and highly individualised. Residential pupils' needs are given high levels of individual attention; this results in their excellent personal development.
- Parents are delighted with the outstanding progress their children make. Parental comments such as, 'Our daughter's confidence has rocketed and her independence skills have really increased' and 'Our son is making huge strides, the boarding provision is the aspect we are ecstatic with' typify the views of parents.
- Behaviour is exceptional because of clear boundaries and expectations. Pupils say that bullying is not an issue. Pupils are exceptionally safe. They are always listened to and fully understand the 'I want to know' system, which enables them to raise any issue with staff.
- Leadership and management are outstanding and there is a commitment to consistent improvement. The care staff team evaluate their work rigorously. From their findings they make changes that benefit pupils very significantly. This is particularly effective in enabling pupils to reduce their negative behaviours.
- The head of care's exceptionally strong leadership ensures that there is an extremely effective management structure that supports and challenges the whole residential care staff team. As a result, in all that they do they are always focused on the outcomes for pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

Boarding/Residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	137433
Social care unique reference number	024610
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	403831

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Academy special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	121
Number of boarders on roll	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maureen Eade
Headteacher	Roger Mackenzie
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2010
Telephone number	01284 761934
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