

Priory Woods School

Tothill Avenue, Netherfields, Middlesbrough, TS3 0RH

Inspection dates 5–6 March 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils' achievement is outstanding because they make excellent progress from a very wide range of starting points, academically, socially and emotionally.
- This is because of the exceptionally good teaching and care they receive. Staff teams work very closely together and ensure pupils' care and educational needs are equally well supported.
- A small group of more able pupils often start at the school in Year 7. Although the quality of teaching overall is excellent, occasionally in English lessons teachers' questions do not stretch the knowledge and understanding of these pupils sufficiently and as a result progress slows for this group.
- Children start in the school's Early Years Foundation Stage with a wide range of needs that include both learning and physical difficulties. Staff provide an excellent range of experiences and activities which enable them to learn through play and achieve exceptionally well.
- Students who attend the school's sixth form make excellent progress in developing the skills and knowledge needed to prepare them for the next stage in their education.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding; both inside and outside the classroom. Pupils often display impeccable manners in the corridor towards each other, staff and visitors. They arrive in lessons with high expectations and are very keen and eager to learn. They know how to keep safe because staff offer excellent guidance which enables them to make the right choices.
- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, senior leaders, managers and governors has improved the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement since the last inspection. Their continuous and relentless focus on improving outcomes for all pupils demonstrates their ability to continue to improve.
- Governors ensure safeguarding checks are carried out rigorously and regularly and records are kept to a high standard. However, the recording of more minor accidents and incidents is not always sufficiently detailed and does not always provide a clear description of the incident.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons and parts of lessons taught by 20 teachers and teaching assistants. Joint lesson observations were undertaken with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. The inspection team also examined the quality of work in pupils' books from across the school.
- The inspection team held meetings and had discussions with 12 pupils, senior leaders, members of the school staff, five members of the governing body and a parent.
- Twenty parents made their views known to the inspection team through the online questionnaire (Parent View). Two more parents who were unable to access the website made their views known directly to the team.
- The inspection team studied health and safety documentation, teachers' curriculum planning, documents about checks on the performance of staff and the school's system for checking pupils' progress.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Halford	Additional Inspector
Angela Shaw	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school has attained specialist Arts College status.
- Pupils attend between the ages of four and 19 and have a range of difficulties which affect their ability to learn. These include severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and moderate learning difficulties.
- The majority of the 166 pupils who attend are from Middlesbrough. A small number are from neighbouring authorities.
- The majority of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and post-16 pupils who attend are of White British heritage with just a small number from other ethnic backgrounds. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2 are predominantly of White British heritage. However, approximately 40% are from other ethnic backgrounds.
- A higher than average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in the care of the local authority and those from service families.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school currently has extended school provision, which provides a range of activities and clubs for pupils and families outside school time.
- Since the last inspection, the school has moved to purpose-built premises on a site shared with a secondary school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attainment in English for the very small number of most able pupils by ensuring that questions asked by staff in lessons offer sufficient challenge to pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding and enable them to accelerate the pace at which they learn.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring records kept of accidents and incidents are sufficiently detailed and provide a clear explanation of the incidents and actions taken by staff.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Despite the high levels of need of many, all pupils make excellent academic, social and emotional progress from their different starting points.
- Pupils known to be eligible for free schools meals also make excellent progress. School tracking data shows gaps in the attainment of this group compared to others have now closed. This is because of the excellent use of pupil premium funding through, for example, one-to-one support in the classroom and the excellent work on pupils' sensory awareness and communication undertaken by trained staff in the primary section of school.
- Many children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage Reception class. The overwhelming majority come with skills well below those expected for their age. A significant number also lack the behavioural skills needed for learning.
- Despite this, the majority settle quickly and enjoy the well-organised and imaginative activities on offer within the unit, discovering, sometimes for the first time, the fun of learning and exploring through play.
- The vast majority of parents believe their children make exceptional progress when they come to the school and several were keen to share their views with the inspection team. A comment made by one summed up the feelings of others, 'Priory Woods school is fantastic and staff deserve an award for the care they have given my child.'
- The school's recent focus on developing pupils' reading skills has improved reading scores across the school and has engendered a love of books in pupils. 'I am such a good reader now, I read to my brother', one pupil proudly explained. 'Last year I couldn't read much at all.' This is evidence of the success of the school's carefully tailored literacy teaching, which not only improves pupils' reading skills, but also helps develop their understanding and comprehension, ensuring pupils make outstanding progress.
- Achievement in mathematics is also excellent because staff are outstanding at matching activities to the needs of individual pupils.
- Currently, the most able pupils make slightly better progress in mathematics than in English. This is because teachers in a small number of classes do not ask sufficiently demanding questions which promote and accelerate pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding. As a result, learning is slower than it could be for this group.
- Students who attend the school's sixth form are offered a wide range of opportunities to develop both academic accreditations and social skills. Opportunities to undertake courses in dance, drama and music are exceptionally well promoted through the school's Art College status. The impact of these opportunities could clearly be seen in the destinations for last year's leavers, over one-third of whom left to take up places in drama and dance groups.
- Pupils from other minority ethnic backgrounds and those that are new to learning English also make excellent progress and achieve well in English and mathematics because staff provide closely-targeted extra help and guidance that meet their needs. This demonstrates how exceptionally well the school promotes equality of opportunity for all pupils.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The quality of teaching across the school is outstanding. Opportunities for learning in the vast majority of lessons engage pupils well and teachers have exceptionally high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Further evidence of excellent teaching could also be seen in the high quality of work observed in pupils' books during the inspection.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is excellent. Children engage happily in the wide range of activities and opportunities for play in the classroom and outdoor space. During the inspection, the focus of the topic was dinosaurs. Activities offered ranged from a dinosaur swamp in the water tray to counting the number of sweets decorating a home-baked dinosaur biscuit and manoeuvring dinosaurs to help them escape predators on an interactive computer

screen. Children gleefully moved between the activities, imitating dinosaur roars with great delight. All were clearly enjoying being involved with the wide range of innovative activities, which promoted their literacy, numeracy and social and communication skills well.

- Teachers are exceptionally good at meeting the differing needs of the pupils in their care. They work closely with teaching assistants to plan the next steps in pupils' learning and are particularly effective at using the information on how well pupils are doing to plan learning for individuals and groups of pupils. Evidence of this was particularly well illustrated in a hydrotherapy lesson in which pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties were floating in the water supported by staff, clearly enjoying the feeling of weightlessness and free movement whilst listening to the music playing and following the patterns made by the coloured lights on the water. Each staff member followed a planned activity and the pupils' progress towards the targets set was recorded by the lifeguard.
- The vast majority of pupils make excellent progress in English despite their high levels of need. The recent involvement of the school in the national Shakespeare Schools Festival demonstrated the high quality of drama teaching at the school. Pupils took great pride in recounting to the inspection team how much they had enjoyed performing the Merchant of Venice at Middlesbrough theatre and a corridor wall display clearly shows the confidence and professional performance put on by pupils.
- Teaching in the sixth form is excellent. Well-organised opportunities for work experience in a range of organisations, including the local hospital and college, prepare students exceptionally well for the world of work. Regular visits to a bungalow on the school site offer students' excellent opportunities to develop skills for independent living.
- Teachers use praise exceptionally well to motivate pupils and are highly effective at encouraging reluctant learners. Feedback given to pupils shows them clearly how to improve their work.
- Teaching in art, design and technology, drama, dance and religious education support pupils' development of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. The vast majority demonstrate outstanding attitudes to learning, as evidenced by the keen and eager attitudes displayed by pupils as they arrive in lessons.
- Pupils all show caring and friendly attitudes to each other, staff and visitors. The excellent behaviour and polite manners shown to them by pupils are frequently commented upon by visitors to the school.
- Parents who completed the on-line questionnaire, Parent View, agreed with the view of school leaders that behaviour in school is excellent and that their children are kept safe and happy.
- The school's behaviour logs show that incidents of difficult behaviour are low across the school. This is because of all staff's consistent application of the well thought-out behaviour policy. Records also show that no pupil has been excluded in the last three years, which is further evidence of the exceptionally calm and harmonious atmosphere within the school.
- Attendance has continued to slowly improve over the last three years and is now higher than that expected for similar schools. When pupils are absent, it is frequently for unavoidable medical treatment. The recent improvement is due to the work of the staff team, in particular the parent support advisor who works exceptionally hard with both parents and other professionals to ensure pupils spend as much time in school as their health will allow.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils spoken with were clear about how to identify bullying behaviour and the different forms it can take. They feel incidents happen very infrequently because staff 'show us of how to keep safe' and they are very clear about where to turn should an incident happen inside or outside school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The headteacher and senior leaders know the school exceptionally well and have an excellent understanding of how to move the school forward.
- Their consistent and determined approach to continuous improvement since the previous inspection has resulted in the achievement of pupils and the quality of teaching moving from good to outstanding as evidenced by the consistently high quality of work recorded in pupils' books.
- Senior leaders' vision for the future is shared by all staff and their continued quest for improvement identified in the targets within the school's development plan clearly illustrates their capacity for further improvement.
- Middle leaders, including curriculum coordinators, rigorously check and monitor the quality of teaching in their subjects and this has contributed directly to improvement in pupils' achievement across the school.
- School leaders ensure performance targets for staff link directly to pupils' achievement and targets within the school's development plan. Checks on the performance of staff are undertaken and the headteacher has used this information to make decisions on teachers' pay.
- The school's curriculum is exceptional. Links between subjects are clear and enrichment activities offer pupils a myriad of exciting opportunities and experiences. For example, a school trip to Valencia is planned, when pupils will experience and take part in the build up to the city's fiesta. The anticipation of this experience was described by one pupil as, 'The most exciting thing I will ever do in my life.'
- Staff have ensured that plans are in place to meet the expectations of national changes to the curriculum.
- The school has developed an exceptionally clear plan for using their allocation of the primary school sport funding. An audit of staff skills established that gymnastics and physical fitness were both areas for staff development. Coaching sessions for both are now in place and are benefiting both staff and pupils by improving the quality of physical education (PE) teaching and the health and well-being of pupils.
- Since the previous inspection, the local authority has offered school light touch support.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors bring a wide range of skills and experience to the governing body. They regularly update and improve these skills through further training. As a result, they have a good understanding of pupils' achievement and offer senior leaders good levels of support and challenge to improve standards of achievement. In partnership with senior leaders, governors have developed an effective system for checking the performance of all staff which rewards good teaching and addresses underperformance. The governors manage the pupil premium funding exceptionally prudently and this careful management has enabled them to support eligible pupils well. Safeguarding procedures and policies meet current requirements. However, the recording of accidents and incidents is not always as carefully undertaken as it could be. As a result, records do not always describe incidents sufficiently accurately.

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>

School details

Unique reference number	131425
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	431566

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	166
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Suzie Hamlin
Headteacher	Bernadette Knill
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2009
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