

Mark College

Mark House, Blackford Road, Mark, Highbridge, Somerset TA9 4NP

Inspection dates 23–25 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school because:

- Students with specific learning and communication difficulties make good progress in English and mathematics because they are taught well.
- The curriculum is effective as it has been matched to meet the learning and communication needs of the students and the work given to them is set at the right level so that they can achieve well.
- Approaches to teaching students are varied to accommodate the needs of different groups and individuals. There are good tailored programmes for teaching students to read and express themselves verbally.
- Students confirm that they are happy and settled at the school, some after experiencing difficulties in their previous school. Their behaviour is outstanding.
- The leadership and management are good and have ensured that students receive a high quality teaching and achieve well.
- The sixth form is good. It equips students well for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The arrangements for safeguarding the students are secure and the school is a safe place for them.
- The residential experience is good and the outcomes for these students are outstanding.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- The new senior management team have not ensured that the quality of teaching and levels of achievement are outstanding in all subjects.
- Information from assessments is not used consistently well by all staff. Marking does not always provide sufficient guidance on how students can improve their work.
- The management of staff performance and its impact on achieving excellence in teaching and learning has not yet been effectively implemented.
- Placement plans require some improvement as does the work to fully ensure students' safe use of the internet.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools (if RSS)

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was undertaken with one day's notice.
- The inspectors observed 17 lessons or parts of lessons, most of which were joint observations with the headteacher or principal.
- Meetings were held with the school's leaders, teaching staff and students. A range of documentation was examined, including policies, assessment records, the curriculum and teachers' plans. The inspectors heard students read and looked at their written and other work. The inspectors observed them at break times and ate lunch with them.
- The views expressed by 23 members of staff through survey questionnaires were considered.
- There were 10 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey. Several parents and carers emailed to comment on the extent to which their children enjoyed being at the school.
- This was an integrated inspection as the provision and outcomes in the residential setting were evaluated by the social care inspector.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement for children looked after, those eligible for free school meals and the most-able pupils. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of support services.

Inspection team

Jill Bainton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Helen Griffiths

Additional Inspector

Guy Mammatt

Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mark College is a residential special school near Highbridge in Somerset which provides education for students with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, language disorder and dyspraxia. Students on the autistic spectrum are also admitted. It was registered in 1986 to provide education for up to 88 students. Currently there are 73 students on roll aged between 10 and 19 years. Around half of the students have a statement of special educational needs. Two students are looked after children. There are 32 day and 41 residential students.
- Students are placed by local authorities and parents or carers. There are 12 students from overseas.
- The school is owned by Priory Education Services, which is a national provider of education services for children with special educational needs. The school was last inspected in March 2011 when it met all but one of the regulations.
- A new principal was appointed in February and a new headteacher in September 2014.
- The school uses local college provision for the sixth form students.
- The school seeks to raise students' self-esteem through promoting their academic and sporting achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement in all subjects by ensuring that:
 - all staff have an accurate knowledge of each students' attainment and they use this information to plan their lessons
 - develop a more consistent system for making checks on students' achievement with a better analysis of how well they are progressing over time
 - the students' work is marked regularly and with guidance on how to improve their work.
- Raise the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that there are effective systems to check on the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise all teaching to the highest standard
 - improving the resources that are used to teach subjects, especially those for computing
 - fully developing systems for managing staff performance.
- Ensure that the supervision of the residential support staff evidences they are fully familiar with residential students' placement plans.
- Ensure that placement plans produced are carefully tailored to fully match the needs of each residential student and provide residential support staff with detailed information about those needs.
- Explore further ways of educating all residential students in the safe use of the internet and social media.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

are good

- Leadership and management are good and enable the students to learn and achieve well. The new principal and headteacher, although having only been in post for a short time, along with the established vice principal, are already making a considerable impact.
- The senior management team have devised a new school development plan and identified the right areas in which they wish to make improvements. The school's view about its own performance is accurate with a focus on ways to drive the school forward.
- The proprietors and senior and middle leaders ensure that teaching and learning are good. As a result, students achieve well and their personal development is very good. The curriculum is effective and meets the specific learning needs of the students.
- The management of staff performance does not yet demonstrate clearly its impact on achieving excellence in teaching and learning.
- School leaders consider the initial contact with Somerset local authority, when young people are placed at the school, to be good, however they are aware of the need to improve placement plans. After the initial settling in period for students the school has limited contact with the local authority. Although the school always invites the local authority to the annual review for students with a statement of special educational needs on most occasions this has been declined due to lack of available officers. The school provides written reviews for the local authority but is not confident that the authority has an accurate view of the school's performance and standards. Inspectors judge that the local authority does not carry out sufficient monitoring of the students after placement at the school. The school has not had any additional support, such as training or governor support, from the local authority nor has it been made aware of the authority's strategy for school improvement.
- Communication between the school and residences is good. Most staff who responded to the questionnaire were very positive and proud to be a member of the staff.
- The premises provide a safe and effective teaching environment and the residential accommodation is good.
- Parents, carers and placing authorities receive the full range of required information and feel well informed of each student's progress. Placing authorities spoken to confirm that their students have settled well at the school and are making good progress. The complaints procedure fully meets requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**

The proprietors, Priory Education Services, take an active role in the governance of the school. The Principal is engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the proprietors who hold him to account for the administration of the school. Very regular meetings are held between the Principal and Priory Education Services to ensure that the school is run in accordance with prescribed procedures.

The proprietors ensure that all the regulations for independent schools are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The students' behaviour is outstanding. This is the case in lessons and around the school which enhances students' learning. Students confirm that they are happy at the school, with one commenting, 'They treat you as normal here... I like it here because they understand my feelings.' Students' attendance is very good and often a great improvement from their last school.
- The students believe there is no concern about bullying, including cyber bullying. The school works very hard to ensure that relationships between students are positive. Therapists often play an active role in this area, enabling students with communication difficulties to work and play alongside one another more confidently.
- Students confirm that they feel safe at school and always know who to turn to should they need help. Students mix very well together at break and lunchtimes. Lunch is a relaxed occasion with staff eating with students. In the play areas students share the play equipment and mix with other age ranges. Staff are very good role models.
- The school's rigorous recruitment procedures make sure that all staff are checked for their suitability to work with young people and that these checks are recorded accurately. There are thorough procedures to

ensure that students are safeguarded and that all staff are trained to the appropriate levels. The safeguarding policy meets the latest guidance from the Department for Education.

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Risk assessments on all aspects of the premises and activities both on and off site are completed well. All the required welfare, health and safety policies are in place. Their content is clear and they are implemented effectively. The school is aware of the need to do more to ensure that students know how to use the internet in a safe way.
- There is good provision made for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students. They have many opportunities to learn about their own and other cultures. Students learn about how democracy works and the school council has a 'voice', for example, with the recent introduction of new uniform initiated by them.
- The curriculum provides students with an increasing knowledge of different beliefs and ways of life. Students learn about English services and institutions through frequent outside visits, visitors to the school and regular community events. Racial harmony is effectively promoted.
- The school does not promote any partisan political views and ensures that any controversial issues are addressed in a balanced way.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The learning is good throughout the school as a result of the effective teaching. This enables students with specific learning difficulties to make good progress over time in their academic learning and personal development.
- Students are taught in small class groups. Staff break down the work into small steps so that students can understand and learn well. Work is set at the right level, including for the more able students, because staff constantly check if they understand it well before they move on to more difficult work. This leads to good learning and often outstanding behaviour. Students listen carefully, join in paired or groups discussion if able to do so and answer questions confidently.
- Some of the more vulnerable students are introduced to group lessons gradually. Students grow in confidence during their time in these lessons, partly through the effective support of sympathetic staff and the school's recognition of their needs. Students commented that they feel safe because they are no longer worried as they know that their concerns are listened to.
- Well-informed staff know the students and their individual characteristics well. The learning activities in classrooms, especially in English and mathematics, build very closely on the students' previous learning. Staff build high-quality relationships with the students and this is a key factor in the students' success.
- Staff that work closely with the students have a clear understanding of each individual's ability and levels of confidence. As a result, students respect staff and are enabled to contribute to their own learning. Therapists make a valuable contribution to the students' progress. A few staff do not have a secure enough grasp of each students' attainment or use this information consistently well to plan learning.
- The school uses a range of effective tailored strategies in teaching students to read and express themselves verbally. These approaches also assist them in developing writing skills.
- Students are assessed carefully when they enter the school to find out what they know and can do. This process enables teachers to provide work at the correct level for each student. Those who need additional help are given extra support while others are challenged to move on in their learning. These are both key factors contributing to the students' enjoyment of learning.
- The ongoing assessment of students' work is accurate and based on National Curriculum guidance. Leaders rightly identify that the school's systems to track pupils' progress in learning require refinement. The marking of students' work is regular, but inconsistent across subjects. Teachers do not always give students clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Learning support assistants play a vital role in aiding and guiding students, for example, keeping them focused on the tasks set.
- A range of resources is used to provide interesting activities to develop students' skills. For example, in an art lesson students used a varied range of materials to construct dream catchers. However, the school's current provision for ICT is more limited in meeting the needs of the students.
- Careers advice is provided through an outside agency. Students are given many opportunities for work experience, both on and off site.

The achievement of pupils**is good**

- Students with specific learning difficulties achieve well as a result of supportive teaching and mentoring and the wide range of learning opportunities provided for them.
- Attainment on entry is different for each student. Typically students enter the school with levels of attainment which are below average for their age in English and mathematics. This is as a result of their specific learning difficulties and disruptions to their previous education, including persistent absence. Once they have settled into the routines of the school, the majority make good progress from their various starting points and the more able are enabled to reach their potential.
- Students in Key Stages 2 and 3 make good progress in reading, English and mathematics. Some students make more rapid progress in these core subjects as they move through the school as a result of the effective support they are given.
- Key Stage 4 students make good progress in English, mathematics and a range of GCSE subjects. The 2014 group of students achieved commendable results in GCSE examinations. Attainment by Year 11 is in line with the national average for some students. Other students achieve or exceed their predicted outcomes against national expectations. In view of the specific learning and communication difficulties which some of the students present, their progress is notable.
- Students who have a statement of special educational needs are well served by carefully devised education plans which set realistic targets for them and which are very regularly reviewed. Annual reviews are carried out and very well documented.
- Improvements in students' attendance and attitudes to learning make a positive contribution to their achievement.

The sixth form provision**is good**

- Sixth form students achieve well. These students acquire important skills including those in literacy and numeracy, so they are well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Students attending the sixth form follow well planned programmes that lead to both academic and vocational qualifications.
- At the end of Year 11 most students successfully transfer to full-time or part-time college life. Students follow a range of courses, including A level, BTEC Levels 2 and 3 and Foundation Studies. Older students achieve a wide range of externally accredited qualifications, which are appropriate to their levels of learning. A number of students have recently gained success in A-level examinations. The school currently teaches art, design and technology and mathematics A-level courses on site. The local college where the students attend commented most favourably on the attitude to work of students from Mark College and the positive communication between the school and college.
- Sixth form students are provided with an appropriate range of vocational courses in construction, ground maintenance and animal care. Students following these courses confirm that they enjoy the more practical aspects of their learning. Students follow a course of English and mathematics if needed at the school.
- Teaching in the sixth form provides the students with sufficient challenge and is relevant to their needs. The sixth form is led and managed well.
- Sixth formers were very positive in their response to questions about their school experience. They make comments such as, 'What the school teaches is to accept everyone and acknowledge others' difficulties and not to judge.'

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

- Outcomes for residential students are outstanding. They receive exceptional holistic care that supports their physical, social and emotional needs. Students say that they are happy at the school, for example,

one student reported, 'I am in the best environment to suit my needs.'

- Residential students take part in an extensive range of stimulating activities after school and trips at weekends. One student told their parent or carer that they enjoyed the yoga classes and that, 'Yoga is better than any medication I have had for my anxiety or stress and worry.' The range of opportunities available builds students' confidence as well as providing them with occasions to make new friendships in the local community.
- Residential students' behaviour is excellent. They make outstanding progress socially through their boarding experience and have a respectful approach to others.
- The boarding experience clearly benefits students' development. They make some strong attachments to their surroundings and to individuals. Attendance at school and college is excellent which allows them to learn valuable academic, vocational skills and in living independently.
- Most of the residential provision is well decorated and furnished to a good standard. Some remaining areas are scheduled to be completed during the next school holiday. Placement plans are factual and succinct; they support the educational and health needs of the residential pupils well. However, they do not always contain all the personal information available on the residential students to fully inform staff's practice.
- There are good arrangements for healthcare and an active encouragement for residential students to take responsibility for their own fitness. They have good access to specialist services such as art, speech and language and occupational therapies. This provision benefits them tremendously and has helped some students overcome a deep-rooted lack of self-confidence.
- Residential students are allowed some access to the internet depending on their age and the suitability of the website. Even so, some are not permitted to use social networking sites despite being of a legal age. The school has completed some work with students regarding the safe use of the internet. However, not all students have access to desired sites and have not been taught well enough how to ensure their own safety while using the internet.
- The supervision of the residential support staff provides effective support. However, the process for performance management does not evidence that staff are fully familiar with residential students' placement plans.

What inspection judgements mean

School and residential provision

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

Grade characteristics for the judgements made on the school's boarding/residential provision can be viewed in the *Evaluation schedule for the inspection of boarding and residential provision in schools* which is also available on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110096.

School details

Unique reference number	123933
Social care unique reference number	SC033024
Inspection number	446389
DfE registration number	933/6185

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as inserted by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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 boarding schools.

Type of school	Residential special school for students with specific learning difficulties
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	10–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	25
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	41
Proprietor	Priory Education Services
Chair	Helen Sharpe
Principal	Chris Sweeney
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 March 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£19,488 – £40,743
Annual fees (boarders)	£27,537 – £65,000
Telephone number	01278 641632
Email address	markcollege@priorygroup.com

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