

Unsted Park School

Munstead Heath Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1UW

10–12 May 2016

Inspection dates

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	Good
Quality of care and support in the residential provision	Good
How well children and young people are protected in the residential provision	Good
Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have brought about rapid improvement to provision, including in the sixth form. Consequently, pupils benefit from a particularly well-designed curriculum.
- The leadership of boarding provision is excellent. There are very strong links between provision during the day and evenings, particularly with access to therapies. Pupils benefit from very positive relationships.
- The development of pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem is excellent. Pupils recognise for themselves that they benefit from the support they get over time.
- Leaders have made very good use of targeted and useful external support from the Priory Education and Children's Services.
- Governance arrangements are very effective. Governors hold leaders rigorously to account to improve the school.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very effective.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good, including in the sixth form. New leadership arrangements to improve teaching are working particularly well.
- Pupils' outcomes are good and improving. Pupils fulfil their potential and secure successful further education, employment or training.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teachers do not expect as much of pupils when they are writing as they do in other parts of their learning.
- Evening activities for boarders are not as well organised as they could be.
- Leaders have not secured the confidence of all parents. The systems for communication mean that parents are not always aware that the school has improved.
- Students in the sixth form do not always have access to accredited courses.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

- 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.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching so that staff consistently set high expectations for pupils when they are writing.
- Ensure lower-attaining students in the sixth form have access to accredited 16–19 study programmes.
- Strengthen communication with parents to ensure that they are fully aware of the improvements that have been made to provision.
- Ensure that residential pupils have a planned and structured evening activity programme.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	is outstanding
Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	is outstanding
How well children and young people are protected in the residential provision	is good

- The principal has successfully raised the expectations and effectiveness of those around him. His calm, open and resolute approach has been instrumental in improving every aspect of the school. He has been exceptionally well supported by those in other leadership positions, including those who have oversight of education and boarding provision. Together, leaders have systematically and carefully tackled a number of weaknesses that had emerged at the school since the time of the last inspection. As a result, the quality of teaching is now consistently good, behaviour is well managed and pupils' outcomes are improving.
- Leaders' assessments of the school's strengths and weaknesses are accurate. Leaders scrupulously undertake a range of activities to test out how well pupils are learning. This ensures that leaders can focus their efforts in a targeted, systematic way and to good effect. Plans for improvement are precisely targeted on improving the quality of teaching and learning. They are underpinned by the highest expectations which leaders communicate at every opportunity. Staff at the school appreciate the changes that leaders have made. They report that the school is improving.
- The leadership of boarding provision is exceptionally well developed. The residential community is a central and important aspect of the school. An experienced and strong leadership team provides clear and efficient direction and management. It ensures that residential pupils' complex and individual needs are met precisely. Consequently, pupils receive a consistent approach in meeting their specific needs by an effective, cohesive and collaborative team.
- Continuous monitoring of the residential provision is an integral part of the drive to advance opportunities for residential pupils to succeed and achieve. Leaders deliver 'lessons learned' meetings which aid their evaluative approach. This ensures that all residential staff are striving to constantly improve and develop the service and ensure that changes are embedded.
- Leaders' management of staff performance is robust. The development of a lead practitioner who works with identified staff to help improve their practice has successfully and rapidly improved provision. Staff receive regular and useful feedback, which leaders are careful to follow up to ensure that it makes a difference. Weaker performance is not tolerated. When necessary, appropriate support packages are implemented to help staff improve the quality of what they deliver. Leaders take decisive action if improvements are not secured.
- Leaders have implemented carefully designed and regular opportunities to support staff with their professional development. For example, leaders have recently drawn on their learning when networking through the South East Inclusion Steering Group, facilitated by Brighton University, to focus on ways to improve inclusive approaches to teaching.
- The curriculum is designed precisely to cater for the specific needs of the pupils. The use of therapies to support pupils' particular sensory and speech and language needs is excellent. Many of the opportunities that are woven into the curriculum are also available to pupils who board at the school in the evenings. Pupils benefit from bespoke programmes of study that are linked to their interests, needs and aspirations. Consequently, they learn how to manage and cope with the challenges they face because of their autism. By the time they leave the school, they secure and sustain placements in further education, employment or training at an appropriate level for their abilities.
- Fundamental British values underpin the vision and values of the school. Equality of opportunity is central to the ambition and drive to ensure that pupils succeed. Pupils regularly discuss what it means to be a member of British society through the exploration of multiculturalism and different faiths. Pupils are taught the importance of tolerance and the difference between right and wrong. Pupils make a strong contribution to their local, national and international communities by raising money for specific chosen charities, as an example. Opportunities to experience local amusements are planned into the day and evening curriculums. This helps pupils identify as members of their local community very effectively.

- Middle leadership is very strong. There are leaders of faculties who have oversight of teaching and learning across a range of subjects. They undertake useful activities to support the work of leaders when judging the quality of provision overall. Through the leadership of their teams, they help ensure that teachers deliver the school's policies consistently.
- Leaders make very good use of the external support and challenge they receive from consultants from Priory Education and Children's Services. Senior colleagues within the quality and operations teams of the company regularly visit the school and undertake useful and rigorous analyses of what is going well and where further attention is needed. Leaders respond very positively to the issues that are raised and so take effective action to bring about rapid improvement.
- Leaders have been less successful in securing the confidence of some parents. Systems for communication, although improved, are still not well enough developed to ensure that parents are aware of the changes that have been made at the school for the better. Staff are conscientious to contact parents when there have been incidents, but do not readily enough let parents know when things have gone well. Leaders have rightly identified this as something to improve moving forwards.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance arrangements are robust and delivered through the mechanisms of the Priory Education and Children's Services. Members of the regional quality and operations teams have determinedly challenged and supported leaders to be more aspirational for the pupils. They place an unwavering focus on improving pupils' outcomes.
 - Members of the regional quality and operations teams ask searching questions of leaders to better understand how well the school is progressing. They regularly carry out focused visits to check for themselves if leaders' work is making the difference that is needed. They oversee performance management arrangements with rigour to ensure that weaker performance is not tolerated.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have engendered a culture of openness and transparency among staff. They have developed a number of ways that pupils can share information with adults if they are worried or have a problem they need to share. Leaders have developed very strong working relationships with other agencies. As reflective practitioners, they have used feedback they have received from external sources, such as the local authority safeguarding officer, to strengthen practice in the school. For example, there have been occasions when older pupils have left the site without permission. Senior staff review and evaluate such incidents to improve and adapt practice to protect pupils. Clear protocols, robust risk assessments and strategies to reduce risk are in place to safeguard pupils.
- Highly effective safeguarding measures protect residential pupils. Appropriately trained senior staff implement robust procedures to consider any issues affecting the welfare of pupils. These designated safeguarding officers work effectively with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), ensuring that concerns are addressed appropriately and promptly.
- Recruitment processes are robust. All necessary checks are completed before staff commence working with pupils.
- Comprehensive health and safety measures protect pupils. Appropriate fire checks are routinely applied including regular fire drills. Staff appropriately assess risk in the school and when carrying out trips and visits. The specific needs of the pupils who attend the school are considered as part of these processes. This ensures that pupils are safe in the school and when accessing the different and varied parts of the curriculum.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

is good

- Teachers are well equipped to deliver learning experiences that help pupils to make good progress, while catering for the challenges pupils face because of their specific needs. Teachers ensure that they plan lessons that capture pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Consequently, lessons are characterised by an atmosphere of calm industry. Pupils respond very well to teachers' high expectations.
- The relationships between teachers and pupils are a key element to the strength of teaching seen across the school. Teachers know their pupils exceptionally well and so ensure that they use opportunities to help them develop personally and socially, as well as academically.
- Teachers use assessment precisely to plan lessons that build on what pupils already know and can do. Where practice is particularly strong, teachers ensure that they assess pupils' understanding through lessons so that they can amend their questioning and deepen pupils' understanding.

- Teachers make good and creative use of technology to support learning. For example, in a Year 10 GCSE physics lesson, the teacher used visual animations and insightful questioning to improve pupils' understanding of sound waves and echo.
- Other adults are skilled and support learning well. They have a strong understanding of the specific needs of the pupils they are supporting. This means they respond to their needs well to ensure that lessons are not distracted by sensory need. On a few occasions, more could be expected of pupils. Some teachers and support staff structure too much of the learning and do not give pupils extra time to process information before intervening. They do not always expect enough of pupils when they are asked to write independently.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is also a strength. They deliver lessons that help build on what pupils already know. They use questioning very effectively to help pupils think more deeply about the subject-specific skills they are studying.
- The best teachers ensure that lessons help pupils work on their social communication skills at the same time as learning academically. When this is the case, the most able pupils achieve particularly well. For example, in an advanced level physics lesson, the teacher facilitated a discussion between pupils about light refraction equations. This allowed the pupils to develop their debate and reasoning skills in a way that avoided conflict.
- The teaching of reading is effective. Pupils develop good attitudes to books and enjoy the opportunities they are given to read across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The excellent relationships between staff and pupils help instil a nurturing culture. Consequently, over time, pupils develop much greater self-confidence because they feel valued for who they are. Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from individualised support through times of trauma or transitions. Pupils themselves recognise how staff have helped them during difficult times and to better understand their own needs.
- Leaders track and analyse pupils' attendance very effectively. They have used this information to put in place effective strategies to reduce unauthorised absence. Leaders also monitor attendance at alternative provision closely. As a result, pupils' attendance is much higher than is typical. Most attend all the time. No pupils are persistently absent from lessons.
- Excellent careers advice is woven into the curriculum. Pupils have access to a wide range of work experiences that are closely linked to their skills, courses and aspirations. Opportunities within personal, social, health and economic lessons are used to discuss these with pupils to help them develop their own understanding of potential and realistic career pathways. This helps pupils to seamlessly transition into the next stage of their education, employment or training. For example, one pupil in key stage 5 used these experiences to secure a coaching role at Chelsea Football Club. Pupils report that they find the guidance they are given very useful.
- Pupils have a very strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe, particularly when using the internet. They benefit from bespoke study programmes that help them with their own specific learning needs, as well as broader learning around the use of social media. Pupils make use of the open and trusting culture that has been developed by leaders to discuss concerns they have when they arise. Regular and focused meetings between day and residential staff mean that pupils benefit from a consistent approach to developing their independence skills.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare is well supported in alternative placements. Pupils access study programmes that allow them to thrive and develop at their level of ability. Leaders ensure that they quality assure the experiences pupils are getting and the difference they are making to their development. This helps to ensure that placements are very well suited to pupils' interests and skills.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Many join the school with a negative view of schooling and struggle to manage their own behaviour because of their autism. Leaders have established a strong curriculum that helps support pupils to develop better attitudes to learning and strategies to cope with social situations. The impact of this work can be seen in the good attitudes pupils show to their learning and the respect they develop for staff over time. Relationships are exceptionally positive and each individual is known and their strengths celebrated.

- Pupils conduct themselves very well in and around the school. They contribute to the calm and purposeful atmosphere in classes, particularly in key stages 4 and 5. Staff work very effectively together to support pupils with their behaviour. For example, the transitions between residential and education for boarders are managed very effectively and pupils' needs are put first.
- Leaders analyse behaviour exceptionally well. This has led to a number of strategies to improve how behaviour is managed and positive attitudes rewarded. Pupils understand and appreciate the points system that helps them know when their behaviour is good and when they are learning well. Leaders continually support staff to implement these systems effectively. As a result, serious incidents have been very successfully reduced. Exclusions are now very rare and there have been no permanent exclusions.
- Leaders have introduced highly effective anti-bullying strategies. This has included means through which pupils can share anonymously if they are concerned. Leaders have monitored the impact of their work very carefully. This has led to a significant reduction in the reports of bullying at the school.
- A few pupils still struggle to manage their own behaviour, particularly those lower down the school.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils enter the school following often turbulent and fragmented experiences of education. There are effective systems used by teachers to assess the abilities and needs of the pupils. These are used to ensure that pupils benefit from personalised programmes of study that meet their specific academic, social, emotional and therapy needs. Pupils' abilities are wide and varied. Nevertheless, they make good and often better progress in their time at the school. This is because work is very well matched to their abilities and needs.
- Pupils make rapid gains in their personal development. Staff support them very effectively. There are tight systems to ensure that the support is seamless between day staff and those who care for boarders. Consequently, pupils' attitudes to learning strengthen and their progress improves as they move up through the school. Pupils learn to understand their own needs and this helps them to regulate their behaviour. This ensures that they are very well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training by the time they leave the school. Pupils successfully secure and sustain placements on the courses they have been guided to take by staff.
- Pupils make good and sometimes better progress. This is particularly the case in mathematics where pupils often have stronger aptitudes and enthusiasm because of their autism. Staff have high expectations of what pupils should achieve. Pupils are expected to apply their skills and abilities across the curriculum and this helps them embed their reading and calculation skills particularly well. At times, teachers do not expect the same of pupils when they are writing. Consequently, pupils do not always develop writing skills as quickly as they could.
- Pupils often leave the school having successfully attained strong passes in GCSEs and A levels. Due to the raised aspiration of leaders, more pupils are now going on to secure college and university places than was historically the case.
- Pupils try hard and show pride in their work. They are often keen to discuss what they are learning and show exceptional knowledge in areas of particular interest to them. Teachers' strong subject knowledge helps pupils to deepen and broaden their understanding. Consequently, pupils often leave the school with exceptionally strong subject knowledge themselves.
- The most able pupils make very strong progress at the school. Lessons are regularly challenging and engage their interest. Consequently, the most able pupils achieve particularly well in their GCSE and A-level examinations.

Sixth form provision

is good

- Recent changes to leadership have helped raise aspirations for the students in the sixth form. They have access to bespoke and appropriate 16–19 study programmes according to their abilities and aspirations. Many students now leave the sixth form having secured more ambitious placements than was historically the case.

- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is at least as strong as in the rest of the school and sometimes better. Teachers are particularly skilled and have deep subject knowledge which they use to good effect to help students make progress. This was very well demonstrated in an AS-level history lesson about British politics. The teacher enthused students in the reasons why the Labour Party formed. Students shared their own strong views about the different political viewpoints with confidence and gusto. The depth of discussion and debate helped the students make rapid gains in their understanding.
- Students benefit from the effective use of alternative placements to offer them courses that are relevant and challenging. Consequently, the majority of students leave the sixth form with appropriate, and often strong, passes in a range of qualifications. Students' success in the sixth form is supported very well by the impartial careers advice they are given. Leaders show no preference to where students secure college placements to support their studies. Colleges are matched carefully to students by the specialisms they offer, as well as what will be most beneficial for students at their level of need. The most able students, for example, study for advanced level exams either at the school or at alternative placements. Several go on to secure placements at university as a result.
- Several students rightly continue to study English and mathematics at an appropriate level for their needs. These are offered to pupils within the school, which ensures that pupils benefit from extended time to study with familiar teachers.
- Lower-attaining students have access to bespoke life skills and vocational courses. The majority of these are offered at the school. Leaders have rightly identified the need to ensure that these courses are accredited so that lower-attaining students more regularly leave the sixth form having achieved a recognised qualification.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision

are good

- Residential pupils make good progress from their starting points because of the excellent care and support they are given. They develop good social, communication, independence and self-management skills. Their capacity to learn in school increases as their confidence and self-esteem strengthen.
- Residential pupils develop good relationships with staff who have a warm approach and listen to them. They know they are valued as individuals. Consequently, pupils readily accept the support staff offer and this helps to promote positive outcomes.
- Staff provide very good support for pupils as they approach their transition from the school. Preparation for adulthood underpins the work that is delivered. With a strong focus on developing independence skills, residential pupils become confident young adults ready to take responsibility for themselves.

Quality of care and support in the residential provision

is good

- Staff provide residential pupils with individualised care and support. Working closely with the therapy team and parents, staff identify their specific needs and implement tailored support to promote their development.
- Individual health plans highlight residential pupils' medical and health needs. A nurse oversees these plans and ensures that they receive appropriate support to maintain their physical health, lead healthy lifestyles and develop the ability to take responsibility for their own health.
- The emotional and psychological health of residential pupils has a high priority. Senior leaders recognise the vital contribution of specialist psychological and mental health professionals to provide necessary therapeutic support to promote their psychological well-being. Leaders have rightly identified the need to strengthen this provision to benefit residential pupils further. Collaborative working among all staff in the school promotes the well-being of residential pupils.
- Staff are proactive in seeking residential pupils' views and opinions. Weekly pupil meetings provide a forum for residential pupils to raise issues relating to their day-to-day residential experience. Staff are responsive to their views. Informal conversations with staff occur as part of daily routines providing opportunities for residential pupils to voice their thoughts and feelings. The recent introduction of an independent listener is providing them with a further opportunity to put forward their views. She visits regularly and spends time with them, and this developing role is having a positive impact.

- Evening and weekend activities provide opportunities for residential pupils to relax, enjoy their leisure time, and extend their independence and social skills. They pursue individual interests on site and in the local community, thus promoting their confidence and self-esteem. The evening activity programme is not always as well planned as it could be to ensure that pupils benefit from a wide enough range of experiences.
- Accommodation for residential pupils is comfortable and suited to their needs. Recent redecoration provides them with a bright, homely environment.
- The catering manager provides healthy, nutritious meals and these are excellent. Menus ensure that there is provision for special dietary needs.

School details

Unique reference number	135419
Social care unique reference number	SC363144
Inspection number	10017962
DfE registration number	936 6592

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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 residential special schools.

Type of school	Other
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	19
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	18
Proprietor	Mark Underwood, Priory Education and Children's Services
Chair	Sophie Garner
Principal	Richard Johnson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£74,500
Annual fees (boarders)	£101,500
Telephone number	01483 892061
Website	www.priorygroup.com/location-results/item/unsted-park-school
Email address	unstedparkschool@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	2–4 July 2013

Information about this school

- Unsted Park is a residential special school, part of the Priory Group, offering full-time education to male and female pupils between the ages of seven and 19. The school is registered for 75 pupils.
- The school caters for young people with Asperger's syndrome, and high-functioning autistic spectrum disorders and associated comorbid conditions.
- There are currently 58 pupils on roll, of whom 19 are resident. All but four of the pupils are boys.
- The school opened in October 2007. Its last full integrated inspection was in July 2013. An emergency inspection took place in January 2014. A further emergency inspection took place in May 2014. There was also a progress monitoring inspection that took place in November 2014.

- The principal took up his post substantively in January 2015. At this time, the headteacher was also made permanent following a period when both posts were filled temporarily by the same staff. More recently a new deputy headteacher has been appointed. There is also a head of care, who is responsible for the residential provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was an integrated inspection, which took place at a day's notice.
- Inspectors observed 10 lessons or parts of lessons across all departments, all jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school was observed, and during lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, those who have responsibility for safeguarding, leaders of boarding provision, staff at the school, a group of governors and groups of pupils, including day and residential pupils.
- Inspectors analysed school documentation, including minutes of governing body meetings, reports completed by external consultants, the school's self-evaluation and tracking information about pupils' achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures were scrutinised, including correspondence between the school and the LSCB. Records linked to work with other agencies were reviewed, as well as those relating to how the school has responded to complaints.
- Inspectors considered 19 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. They also analysed 37 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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