

# Priory School

Priory School, Mount Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 7BH

## Inspection dates

27/02/2017 to 01/03/2017

## The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding** **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is outstanding because

- The residential service delivers consistent outstanding care to children and young people who have learning disabilities. Opportunities for personal development through play and learning are exceptional. The children and young people who spend time in the residential provision do better at school than their peers who do not access the service.
- A skilled leadership team prioritises the welfare and safety of children and young people extremely well. There are excellent systems for new admissions. Risk assessments and care plans are rigorously reviewed. Managerial oversight of individual children's and young people's progress is highly effective.
- Safeguarding lies at the centre of all planning and is embedded in the ethos of the school. All staff share information or concerns promptly so that the children and young people benefit from a totally protected environment. Innovative practice, which focuses on the needs of children and young people who have a learning disability, means that the children and young people are learning how to use the internet safely.
- Staff are energetic, insightful and skilled at making relationships with children and young people. The staff promote good behaviour and respect between children and young people. Children and young people develop secure and trusting relationships with the staff and value their opinions.
- Respect for children's and young people's views is exceptional. The children and young people know who they can talk to if they have an issue and are confident that they will receive a prompt reply. Children and young people participate in a residential

council and their views are taken into account by senior managers. This means that they have an influence on how the school is run. They know this and it means a lot to them.

- Partnership working is extremely good. Feedback from parents and professionals emphasises the willingness of the school and residential service to provide highly individual packages for children and young people. Families feel that they are not alone and are working as part of a team.
- The residential service is valued as a vital element in a wide range of services available in this school. Staff, senior managers and Directors work in a highly integrated way to provide a safe and supportive service.

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Consider refurbishing bathrooms in the residential areas.
- Present the annual report on the compliance with the national minimum standards and review of the quality of care in an organised manner, with actions required to develop the residential provision further.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of the residential provision, covering two boarding houses, took place within two hours of announcement. The inspection activities included meetings with children and young people and their carers, residential care staff, a governor for the school, the headteacher, head of care, business manager, head of catering, caretaker and external professionals. Contact with parents took place through direct meetings and telephone discussions. Observations included a tour of the premises, activities, meal-times and residential routines. Information was taken from children's and young people's care plans, activity records, documents and policies plus a review of a survey carried out by the school, featuring seven responses from parents and carers.

## Inspection team

Fiona Littlefield

Lead social care inspector

# **Full Report**

## **Information about this school**

Priory School is a residential special academy for male and female pupils who have complex moderate learning difficulties. It caters for pupils from western Suffolk aged between eight and 18 years. The school provides a 24-hour curriculum to support cognitive, social and independence skill programmes. The school has 154 pupils on roll of which 34 board, with a maximum of 23 children and young people accessing the residential provision each night. The residential accommodation is provided in two boarding houses located on the school site.

## Inspection judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding**

The children and young people make exceptional progress from their starting points. They learn how to keep themselves healthy, build their confidence and improve their emotional resilience. They express their views and wishes freely and are increasingly willing to try new experiences which enhance their self-esteem. The children's and young people's parents consistently report that their children look forward to their stays. One parent said, 'The main difference is how he has relaxed. He is calmer and more confident and he will try different things.'

The residential provision has a very positive impact on the children's and young people's education achievements and willingness to learn. For instance, children and young people who stay in the residential accommodation have additional opportunities to practise their reading with staff as part of the regular evening routine. They achieve consistently better results than their peers in the rest of the school, in core academic subjects such as English and mathematics. In addition, children and young people take increasing responsibility for their personal routines. This increases their independence and encourages them to participate. The mother of one child said, 'She'll do more. She'll make a cup of tea or peel some spuds. She and I can spend some time together in the kitchen now. It's great.'

The children and young people learn to live harmoniously with one another. Their parents attribute this to the warm relationships that they can develop with staff whose opinions matter to them and whom they want to please. The children and young people respond to consistent expectations about how they should behave. For instance, each week they receive feedback on their behaviour, presentation and attitude. They respond enthusiastically to praise and are delighted to show their awards to visitors. As a result, negative incidents are very low and positive behaviour is celebrated.

The staff and managers understand that many of the children and young people have little sense of danger. The staff set out to provide a totally safe environment with a high staff ratio and consistent routines. The management team follows extremely careful admission procedures for individual children and young people so that any risks and vulnerabilities are clear and are consistently reviewed. Safeguarding practice is scrutinised so that it offers tailored support to children and young people who have a learning disability.

Respect for the children's and young people's views is exceptional. Children and young people participate in daily house meetings, where the staff make a note of their views. These comments are followed up in monthly residential council meetings, when the children and young people have the chance to discuss them with a senior manager from the school. They are clearly very proud to be part of this initiative. They feel valued and can see that they have an influence on the way in which the school as a whole is run.

The residential service work is a crucial element of the services the school can offer. Communication between the residential staff, teaching staff, the senior management team and the governing body is exemplary. This integrated approach is highly valued by

families and external agencies. One external professional said, 'They [staff] may not have a solution but parents feel supported. They never give up. Partnership is excellent.'

## **The quality of care and support**

## **Outstanding**

The children and young people make progress because staff, who know their needs and vulnerabilities well, look after them. The staff and managers in the residential service liaise extensively with their colleagues in the school so that information about individual children and young people is shared promptly. The residential and teaching staff work in both services, which means that children and young people are familiar with all of the adults who look after them. The children and young people prefer to talk directly to staff but they can raise any issues in different ways, including a suggestions box or an 'I want you to know' form if they want to talk directly to the head of care. Children and young people confirm that they do use these systems and that they get a quick reply. This greatly enhances their feeling of security.

The management team has developed a new initiative known as 'link' visits for new children and young people who find it hard to separate from their families overnight. This allows children and young people to enjoy the early evening activities and have a meal with their friends. They are collected by their families later in the evening. This is an imaginative option for children and young people who need to settle at a slower pace. The carer for one child said, 'When he eventually started the link evenings, the transformation was amazing. They [staff] are so patient and he is totally safe. They helped him to realise that he can manage.'

The residential accommodation is clean and well-maintained. However, the bathrooms are out of date and in need of refurbishment. Children's and young people's art and craft work is displayed throughout. This provides an attractive and colourful background and a running history of the children's and young people's achievements. In the sleeping area, children and young people are separated according to gender to ensure privacy. They sleep in different areas according to their age. A high staff ratio ensures that these arrangements are supervised closely. Consequently, the children and young people rest properly in preparation for the school day.

Staff and managers promote the importance of nourishing and attractive meals as a way of supporting a child's health. All children and young people are encouraged to eat fresh vegetables, salad and fruit and they do so willingly. In addition, staff encourage them to treat mealtimes as pleasurable social events. Children and young people are high-spirited but learn to behave politely and respectfully to one another. As a result, they know what is expected. They develop social skills and make friends.

Children and young people benefit from a range of activities, both in the school and the community. In the winter months, many activities take place in the school grounds, including creative work such as arts, craft and cookery. They have access to the gym under supervision, practise cycling on static bikes and learn about road safety, which they can put into practice in the summer. Some of the children and young people go bowling with the school's scout group and compete with other scout teams. The mother of one child said, 'She loves the social life and it has given her so much confidence. She goes cycling. She has improved so much that we can all go out on family bike rides

now.'

The staff and managers have robust arrangements for medication. This is critical given that the children and young people stay for short periods and change frequently. The records are kept meticulously. The managers have been creative in involving children and young people at an appropriate level. For instance, the children and young people will confirm that they recognise their medication and know how to take it. Afterwards they will write their name alongside the two members of staff. This is a very effective way of helping them take some responsibility for their health.

## **How well children and young people are protected**

**Outstanding**

The staff and managers plan new referrals comprehensively to ensure that they can safeguard the children effectively. The staff collect detailed information from the child's parents and from the teaching staff, and develop risk assessments which are matched with robust management strategies. The managers use this as an opportunity to establish goals for the children and young people that reflect their academic and social development. These plans and goals are reviewed with the parents every term. This is a very thorough approach that helps to identify important patterns in a child's progress and highlights the crucial role of residential care. The social worker for one child reported, 'It has clarified some differences in behaviour. In the classroom he has been aggressive in the past but not in boarding or at home. In boarding he is learning without realising.' The children and young people are safeguarded and their well-being is actively promoted.

The staff and managers place the safety of the children and young people at the centre of their practice. The staff have all received safeguarding training, which is regularly updated and monitored by senior managers. All staff in the school, including the cook and the caretaker, confirm that it is their personal responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of the children and young people. On one occasion, different staff throughout the school reported concerns about a child, including his lack of enthusiasm in class, loss of appetite in the canteen and unhappy demeanour in residential accommodation. In turn this was all reported to the child's allocated social worker who took robust action to safeguard the child. This extremely responsible attitude throughout the school means that children and young people are secure.

The residential staff are particularly aware of the importance of e-safety. A recent staff development day focused exclusively on this topic. Children and young people have limited access to internet in school and are closely supervised by staff. Notices about internet safety are displayed prominently around the school. The children and young people understand the basic principles. One child said: 'You have to be careful because you don't know who you are talking to.' However, staff and senior managers are proactive and feel that this can be improved to provide specialist support for children and young people. The staff are currently participating in a pilot research study to develop more targeted advice to children and young people who have learning disabilities.

The children and young people choose to come to the residential provision and they enjoy their time there. The atmosphere is purposeful and enthusiastic. The children and young people rush to greet each other and the staff before settling down to well-established routines. The staff and managers have an absolute emphasis on politeness and respect between children and young people so that they know what is expected. The carer for one child said, 'Mainly he has the opportunities for social interaction and he is growing in confidence. This is huge for him.' Incidents of negative behaviour are extremely rare. There is no bullying and sanctions are used minimally. As a result, children and young people are relaxed and calm.

The children and young people have little sense of danger, so the senior management team in the school constantly reviews the whole premises to ensure that the environment is secure. The school entrance has recently been completely rebuilt to provide an exceptionally secure base for the children and young people. Visitors have to sign in and can now only access the rest of the school if collected and escorted by staff. The staff and manager supervise arrangements at the end of the school day extremely closely. No child has gone missing.

### **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers** Outstanding

A well-established management team runs the residential service effectively. The head of care has a level 4 qualification in both social care and child care management. She has nearly 40 years' experience in this work. The deputy head of care gained her level 5 qualification in 2012. The staff team consists of a mixture of permanent long-standing staff who have level 3 qualifications and staff currently completing a level 3 diploma course. New staff are completing their induction before starting to undertake their qualifications.

The staff work together as a team extremely well. Information is shared consistently so that nothing is left to chance and the residential evening can progress smoothly. Staff are positive and ambitious for the service. They value the professional manner of the senior staff, which provides a clear model for them. All staff and managers receive termly supervision, which allows time for reflection. In addition, new staff are following a rigorous induction programme which they have found to be supportive. One member of staff said, 'They want you to progress and have a real career. They are kind and thorough, so it gives you confidence.'

Although the staff team is sufficient to meet the needs of the children and young people in the residential provision, it was briefly affected by staff sickness. The head of care and headteacher approached this dilemma resourcefully. They asked for volunteers from the teaching staff to provide short-term, temporary cover until new staff joined the residential team. The response was overwhelming to the point where many staff had to be turned away. This arrangement had the added advantage that children and young people were being looked after by staff with whom they were already familiar. Managers provided an induction pack for support staff who were covering for staff absences. Because of this exceptional response, a potentially difficult period was managed with minimal impact on the children and young people.



The management team reviews the quality of the residential service using a balance of specific data about individual children and young people and feedback from parents and professionals. Individual residential targets are reviewed termly. Managers attend meetings about the children and young people with their families and other professionals. Feedback about partnership working is exceptional. One senior health consultant said, 'School staff will accompany families to medical appointments. They never give up and always try to offer something. Families appreciate this and see everyone working in a holistic way for their child.'

External visitors, including school governors, visit the residential provision regularly to provide an extra layer of scrutiny. On occasion, they have identified shortfalls in the service which have been reported to the senior management team and governors. The managers respond robustly and immediately. The management team is proud of what they have achieved but do not take this for granted. This reflects a persistent drive for improvement.

The head of care reviews the national minimum standards to check the school's compliance. However, the reviews are not formally recorded and the information is in different areas. Although the practice meets the standards, there is room for improvement. A more formalised and comprehensive record would give a more robust overview and a clearer picture of actions required to remain compliant.

## What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceed the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137433
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC024610
<b>DfE registration number</b>	935/700

This inspection was carried out under the Children and young people Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

<b>Type of school</b>	Residential special school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	34
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	8 to 18
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lawrence Chapman
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	01/12/2015
<b>Telephone number</b>	01284 761934
<b>Email address</b>	office@priory.suffolk.sch.uk

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