

Priory Academy

Britain Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 4JA

Inspection dates

13–14 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have an aspirational vision for the school and are determined to ensure that all pupils excel. Leaders and teachers have developed a culture in which pupils expect and want to be challenged.
- The skilful work of teachers and leaders has ensured that the expansion of the school to include key stage 4 has had a positive impact on pupils’ achievements throughout the key stages.
- Teaching is good. Teachers use a range of techniques to ensure that lessons are engaging and productive.
- Pupils’ behaviour is exemplary. In and out of lessons, pupils demonstrate highly positive attitudes and are consistently kind and polite.
- High-quality advice and guidance challenges low aspirations and ensures that pupils know the next steps to take through and beyond school.
- Leaders have created a school where fundamental British values are at the heart of pupils’ daily experience.
- Most pupils make good progress across the curriculum and across the key stages because teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve.
- Not enough is done to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as highly as others. Strategies for their success are not embedded in the day-to-day practice of teachers.
- Additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not having a consistently positive impact on their progress.
- Governors do not challenge senior leaders with sufficient rigour.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that governors rigorously hold leaders to account.
- Improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils by:
 - identifying the support pupils need to overcome any barriers they face to learning
 - ensuring that leaders monitor the impact of the pupil premium funding to make sure that support is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Improve outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities by making sure they receive the support they need to make good progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have undertaken an ambitious expansion of the school in order to secure a good education for pupils in their care from Year 5 through to key stage 4. Throughout this expansion, they have considered carefully the impact of their decisions and sought high-quality support to ensure that pupils thrive. Most pupils make good progress from Year 5 to Year 11.
- The headteacher has a strong and clear vision which is highly aspirational and filters through the school. As a result, the school's values around compassion, ambition, understanding and respect are always evident. Pupils are well prepared to actively and positively engage in the world around them. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is assured.
- Because leaders and teachers have high expectations, so do pupils. This has led to a culture where pupils work hard and embrace challenge.
- Solid principles underpin the broad and balanced curriculum. For example, Latin is taught because leaders believe that this encourages a high-achieving culture. Pupils' timetables are adjusted to maximise their chances of success and pupils are encouraged to follow programmes of study suited to their abilities. Any decisions leaders take about curriculum design stem from the vision of the school and the needs of the pupils.
- Extra-curricular activities are wide ranging and aim to broaden pupils' horizons and raise their aspirations. Leaders aim to ensure that all pupils participate in at least one trip each year, and many participate in more.
- Parents, staff and pupils speak highly of the quality and effectiveness of leadership. They recognise how much leaders have done to improve and develop the school.
- Senior and middle leaders demonstrate a clear capacity to implement and sustain improvements in the school. For example, they have taken positive action to learn from external expertise in the teaching and assessment of pupils at key stage 4. This means that leaders are confident in teachers' assessments and the good progress pupils are making.
- The school makes appropriate use of the primary physical education and sport premium to train staff and increase their teaching expertise so standards are raised. Its use has led to a small increase in pupils' participation in fencing and basketball.
- Leaders use the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding effectively to support pupils who did less well at key stage 2. As a result, most pupils make at least expected progress, and some make more, in literacy and numeracy during Year 7.
- Leaders' targeted actions are improving the outcomes of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Reading and writing programmes have been used to improve pupils' skills well. Pupils who previously struggled with reading now read for pleasure, while others who are developing their skills value the support they receive. Writing has similarly improved for pupils who did less well last year. However, additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is

not having as much impact as it should across the school because these pupils do not get the support that they need in all lessons. These pupils do not make as much progress as others.

- The targeted actions of leaders have worked well for some disadvantaged pupils, resulting in improved attendance and better outcomes. However, leaders have not used pupil premium funding effectively to sufficiently diminish the difference between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in all lessons.

Governance of the school

- Governance is provided by the governing board, which is also the trust board. Governors are committed to the school and are rightly proud of the school. They are pleased with the effectiveness of its leadership.
- Governors rely too much on the information they are given by leaders. They do not question the actions taken closely enough to ensure that they have sufficient impact in addressing the school's priorities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders are robust in monitoring and following up concerns about pupils' well-being. They maintain effective records and revisit concerns to ensure that actions are taken to support pupils. Leaders are rigorous in pursuing effective support for pupils. They welcome advice and guidance and routinely discuss matters of concern with the local authority. This ensures that appropriate safeguarding measures are put in place.
- All staff at the school have received basic training in safeguarding and in the government's 'Prevent' duty programme. The ongoing training programme goes beyond this to ensure that staff have the skills to support pupils in areas such as anxiety and depression.
- Pupils feel safe and are taught how to keep themselves safe online. Parents also feel that pupils are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Across the school, teachers use their questioning skills well to probe pupils' understanding. There is an expectation that pupils will attempt to answer questions even when they are unsure. This helps to develop, consolidate and deepen pupils' understanding.
- Teachers plan lessons well for the stage of education of the classes they teach. Activities in lessons are often underpinned by excellent resources which help pupils to swiftly develop their skills and understanding.
- Teachers have benefited from good-quality support and training. This has helped them to develop strong expertise in their subject areas. As a result, they are now better able to assess pupils' work accurately.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. In many lessons, the good relationships

between staff and pupils make a valuable contribution to the progress pupils make. Pupils respond positively to the good teaching they receive and take pride in their work.

- Additional support is working well where pupils are falling behind. This is particularly evident in reading and writing, where, as a result of this, the skills of pupils have demonstrably improved.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not always get the support they need to make good progress. Consequently, some pupils do not make as much progress as other pupils.
- Teachers do not routinely use their knowledge of disadvantaged pupils to identify and overcome the particular barriers to learning they face. While some disadvantaged pupils are well supported to make good progress, others need more specific teaching and do not always receive this.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils feel very well supported by the school. They speak highly of the care they receive as they join and move through the school, regardless of which year group they join.
- The junior leadership team, made up of pupils in the school, is valued and listened to. Pupils say they appreciate the opportunity they have to influence the direction of the school.
- Teachers and leaders provide excellent guidance to pupils as they move through the school. Careers guidance is tailored to the needs of individual pupils. Pupils are supported in areas such as curriculum vitae writing and interview techniques, and all pupils undertake two weeks' work experience. The first cohort of Year 11 pupils all have plans in place for what they will do next in their education, employment or training. Pupils have a good understanding of the education and work opportunities available to them.
- Leaders are ambitious for pupils. They make sure that pupils do not settle for second best choices, and that pupils are aware of what they can achieve.
- The school's values are part of the day-to-day language of pupils. They are shared and promoted by all members of the school community and have real meaning. When asked about the inspection week's value of 'kindness', one pupil explained that this is the most important value because 'it underpins all other values'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Both in and out of lessons, pupils' behaviour is excellent. They move calmly and purposefully around the site and greet visitors politely and with courtesy.
- Leaders and teachers consistently celebrate the good work of pupils. Pupils know they

are well taught and this encourages them to want to do well. Pupils have highly positive attitudes to learning across the school.

- Teachers consistently embed high standards in form time, celebrating homework and commending good behaviour. Pupils make effective use of this time with activities such as reading or completing extra work.
- The school's points-based behaviour system is highly effective. There has been a significant decrease in poor behaviour, and this is very clearly appreciated by pupils. One pupil commented that 'We all behave really well in lessons because we want that point.' Disruptive behaviour is extremely rare.
- Pupils feel that bullying is almost non-existent, and say there is no discriminatory behaviour. They are fully aware of who to talk to if they have a problem and have confidence in staff to help. Pupils say they feel safe.
- Persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils has previously been high. In 2016, it was significantly above average. Leaders have recognised this and their actions have led to a considerable reduction in the amount of school time missed by these pupils since September 2016.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- For the past few years, most pupils at key stage 2 have reached high levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. In reading and in mathematics, pupils made good progress from key stage 1. In 2015, in writing, pupils made less progress than their peers nationally.
- Key stage 2 outcomes in reading and mathematics were not as strong in 2016 as they have been in previous years. However, standards in writing showed a marked improvement from 2015 because pupils made progress in line with their peers nationally.
- Steps taken to improve reading and mathematics since the dip in 2016 have been successful. Assessment information and the work in pupils' books indicate the attainment of pupils currently in Years 5 and 6 has returned to the previously high levels.
- In 2016, the most able pupils did not make as much progress at key stage 2 as other pupils. This was particularly true of the most able disadvantaged pupils. Work across all key stages and a wide range of subjects is now suitably difficult for pupils of all abilities. The most able pupils are now progressing more rapidly.
- Leaders have put in place secure systems to ensure that their assessments of pupils' attainment are accurate. They have worked with other schools and the Chiltern Learning Trust to develop their understanding of key stage 4 requirements, as well as employing teachers with the right expertise. Therefore, teachers have been able to accurately assess the progress pupils are making and to pitch their teaching at the right level. This has contributed to the good progress most pupils make.
- Pupils begin Year 7 with above average attainment. Across key stages 3 and 4, they go on to produce work of a high standard in a wide range of subjects. This leads to them making good progress across the curriculum and to them maintaining high levels of

attainment for their age group.

- Leaders have identified and begun to address the progress of groups of pupils who did less well in previous years. Where specific support has been put in place, they have had clear impact on small groups of pupils. Across the curriculum, in the reducing number of instances where targeted support is not in place, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make less progress than other pupils nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils, particularly the most able disadvantaged pupils, do not do as well as other pupils because the barriers to their learning are not well understood across the school.

School details

Unique reference number	138181
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10036248

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

Type of school	Other secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	668
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Crossley
Headteacher	Mahnaz Smith
Telephone number	01582 661158
Website	www.prioryacademy.co.uk/
Email address	adminoffice@prioryacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	25–26 April 2013

Information about this school

- Priory Academy is an extended secondary with classes for pupils from Year 5 to Year 11. The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Since its previous inspection, Priory Academy has expanded its provision to include key stage 4.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about its accessibility plan for disabled pupils on its website.

- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about its accessibility plan for disabled pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 42 lessons, sometimes accompanied by the school's senior leaders, to observe pupils' learning and progress. They also reviewed the work of a range of pupils in their books and listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, two members of the school's governing body, the school's improvement partner and teachers.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in groups and individually across different age groups.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary, minutes of governing body meetings and spending plans. They also looked at the school's behaviour and attendance records and its performance information.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's single central record of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors considered 119 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 39 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Andy Hemmings, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gwyneth Gibson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Helen Bailey	Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Barr	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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