

Priory School

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

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Priory School is a co-educational residential special academy for pupils who have complex/moderate learning difficulties. It caters for pupils aged between 5 and 18 years from Suffolk and neighbouring authorities. The school provides a 24-hour curriculum to support cognitive, social and independence skill programmes. The school has 154 pupils on roll, 34 of whom board. A maximum of 23 children access the residential provision each weekday night. The residential accommodation is located in two boarding houses on the school site.

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 October 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 27 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- The children make good educational progress.
- Attending the residential provision supports the children's development of friendships through social interaction.
- Children are provided with opportunities to try new activities.
- The children say that they are happy at the residential provision.
- Comments from parents and professionals are positive.
- The children's self-esteem and confidence grows because of the support that they receive.
- A small and highly committed staff group works hard to provide the best quality of care.
- Supervision and appraisal focus the staff on meeting the children's needs.
- The management and administration of medication is strong.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- On one occasion, the school did not adhere to the processes to ensure that a child's welfare was immediately safeguarded.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard for residential special schools:

- The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (National minimum standard 11.1)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are making good progress because of their residential experience. The residential staff have developed considerable skills and knowledge, which enable them to support all aspects of the children's development. Regularly reviewed care and placement plans guide the staff in caring for the children effectively and meeting their individual needs. The staff are warm and genuinely nurturing. This benefits the children considerably.

The conscientious and highly skilled work of the residential staff improves the children's outcomes significantly. The children have the space to relax and be themselves, sharing experiences with their friends and enjoying one another's company. For many of these children, this is one of very few opportunities to maintain these important relationships. The staff ensure that the mix of children attending the provision at any time maximises the opportunities for these friendships to grow.

The small, highly committed team of residential staff works closely with education colleagues at the school as part of a multi-disciplinary team. The children have made progress towards their education targets because they access the 24-hour curriculum. The children enjoyed the experience of going on an outdoor pursuit holiday, supported by the staff. They took part in activities which challenged them both physically and educationally. A child with a life-limiting condition attended this trip. This child took part in canoeing and river rafting, which, considering their illness, is extraordinary. Participating in these experiences boosted the child's self-esteem and helped to develop some independent living skills. A particular strength of the provision is the consistent approach of the staff to stretch the children's skills and to provide them with opportunities that they would not ordinarily access.

Children are treated with dignity and respect. One child has been supported to develop their eating skills. This means that they no longer require a high level of medical input. The child has made remarkable progress in their self-help and self-caring skills.

The staff take great care to listen to the children's views and act on them whenever possible. There are daily meetings with the children, during which the staff actively listen to the children's suggestions. The children express their preferences about the daily activities that they would like to do. They choose the menu for the healthy evening meals. Parents say that children's diets are more varied because of the support that they receive.

The staff support the children to learn independent living skills, including stripping their beds. Some of the children are learning to cook, and all take part in cleaning and tidying routines. These tasks help the children to acquire valuable life skills. One parent, through written feedback, described the development of their child's skills as 'amazing'.

The residential provision is homely. There is a planned programme of refurbishment of furnishings, fixtures and bathrooms to improve the provision further.

Observation of the interaction between the children and staff showed a warm and caring approach that supports the development of positive relationships. The children spoke warmly about the care staff. Each child could name a staff member whom they can trust to talk to. Regular key work takes place to strengthen these relationships further and focus on achievable goals. One child said, '[I] love coming to residential. Spending time with my friends.' Another child said, 'I could not attend Scouts unless I came here.'

The provider has a well-defined process to monitor the administration of medication. This minimises any hazards and prevents potential errors.

Leaders and managers failed to take appropriate action when dealing with a safeguarding incident, although this was not directly related to residential provision. They failed to follow the guidance in Keeping Children Safe in Education, September 2016. As a result, a vulnerable child did not receive the response that they should have. Although this was an isolated incident, the experience for this child was not good enough. This shortfall has had a significant impact on the outcome of this inspection.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

With reference to the above safeguarding incident, the managers and senior staff failed to respond appropriately regarding concerns about the conduct of one member of staff. They did not follow the school's policy and procedure to manage the safeguarding incident. The managers and senior staff failed to follow the guidance set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education, September 2016. Since this incident occurred, the managers and senior staff have developed a stronger link with the designated officer, and have reviewed and improved the processes required to keep these most vulnerable children safe.

The staff work well together to identify any risks for the children and share the risk assessments so that all of the residential staff are working with the most up-to-date information. Despite one concern that related to a member of staff, the children feel safe. They have strong relationships with the residential staff, which mean that they have trusted adults with whom they can talk.

Residential staff use incentives to encourage positive behaviour. This has meant that children have reached their targets for good behaviour and reduced incidents of unwanted behaviour, which means that the provision is calm. The staff work proactively to minimise anti-social behaviour or bullying. Staff closely monitor the children's behaviour and take action quickly to prevent escalation leading to mistreatment of one another. The staff ensure that children's achievements are celebrated with 'star of the week'. The staff place pictures of the recipient on the walls and this information is shared with the wider school.

Trained staff have physically intervened on one occasion to prevent a child from hurting themselves or others. The managers and senior staff have reviewed the records of the incident to ensure that the action taken was proportionate and in line with the guidance.

Children do not go missing from this provision. The staff are acutely aware of the risks in the community for these children, and ensure that the children are appropriately monitored and supervised. As a result, the risk of child sexual exploitation is minimised.

The residential staff work alongside the education staff to prevent unsafe use of social media. The school takes internet safety seriously. The staff support the children to understand how to stay safe online. This information is shared with parents. There has been some innovative work with external providers. This has included developing pictorial guides on internet safety for those who require this help.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

A committed headteacher effectively leads the provision. He drives the service to improve the outcomes for each child who boards. The headteacher has the support of the staff, senior managers and the school governors. He has recognised the shortfall in safeguarding and took decisive action to improve processes to minimise the likelihood of future occurrences.

An experienced head of care provides regular supervision and appraisal. She helps staff to focus on prioritising meeting the children's needs. The leaders and managers have high expectations of the service, and they encourage all staff to maintain this aspiration. Consequently, the staff provide an extremely good standard of care. The residential staff receive induction and ongoing training, including relevant level 3 qualifications. The staff have the knowledge and understanding that they need to work with the children effectively.

The quality of relationships internally and externally is good. The headteacher challenges any shortfalls he becomes aware of in the services that are provided to the children from partner agencies. There is good working together across the whole school. As a result, the residential provision contributes fully to a 24-hour curriculum that builds the children's confidence and self-esteem. Feedback from external professionals is positive. These professionals identify the improvements that the children make as a result of the good-quality care.

The head of care uses the timely reports from the independent visitor to ensure that any shortfalls identified are remedied quickly. The leaders and senior staff use effective systems to monitor and review the progress that the children make. Care plans and risk analyses are routinely updated. This ensures that children are receiving the best possible all-round support in all areas of their development.

The staff are proactive in promoting the children's understanding of each other.

Children undertake work on fundamental British values and tolerance. Daily group meetings ensure that the staff are able to raise any concerns and take action to prevent unwanted behaviours escalating.

The residential provision receives positive feedback from parents. This feedback is collated following reviews and through open and honest discussions with the children's families. Comments from family members include:

- 'The staff have been very supportive and open.'
- 'I have no concerns about my child coming [to the residential provision]. The staff are amazing.'
- 'He [child] loves to go. He talks to his friends, and the staff encourage him to go to Scouts. He was very isolated, but boarding helps to prevent that.'
- 'It is her [the child's] favourite part of the week.'

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC024610

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Lawrence Chapman

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Inspector

Michael Mulvaney, social care inspector (lead)



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