

Mark College

1 November 2017

Blackford Road, Mark, Highbridge, Somerset TA9 4NP

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(2), 2(2)(e), 2(2)(e)(i), 2(2)(e)(ii), 2(2)(e)(iii)

- The previous standard inspection reported that the school had not ensured that pupils receiving secondary education had access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance presented in an impartial manner to enable them to make informed choices and to fulfil their potential.
- Leaders have made clear progress in providing careers guidance to pupils since the standard inspection. They have ensured that pupils receive careers guidance from an experienced adviser who has current and up-to-date information. Pupils in key stages 4 and 5 have access to this guidance. In discussions, pupils welcome this guidance. As a result, they have a good understanding of the qualifications and the routes they need to take to enable them to achieve their aspirations.
- Leaders have ensured that the standard in this paragraph is now met.

Paragraphs 3, 3(a), 3(c), 3(d), 3(g), 3(h)

- The previous standard inspection reported that teaching at the school did not enable pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability. The inspection found that teaching did not involve well-planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time. In addition, the school did not have a framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly. Teaching did not utilise effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly.
- Leaders have introduced a framework and systems to carefully assess and track pupils' learning and achievement. On arrival, staff assess what pupils know, can do and understand. They use this information to set targets to measure pupils' academic development and to plan work which meets their needs, ages and aptitudes more accurately. As a result, the opportunities are now in place for pupils to make stronger progress.
- Leaders have ensured that teachers receive training and supervision to develop the quality of their teaching practice. For example, lesson observations undertaken provide clear guidance for teachers, closely linked to the teaching standards. There is an increased focus on the achievement of pupils lesson by lesson and day by day.

- Nonetheless, leaders confirm that there is further work to be completed to ensure that teachers' planning and use of assessment information are of a consistently high standard to allow pupils to make the best possible progress.
- The work in pupils' books confirms that most pupils are making progress from their starting points across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. However, systems to track pupils' progress are new and it is too early to evaluate the impact fully.
- Leaders have ensured that the standards in these paragraphs are now met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7, 7(a), 7(b), 8, 8(a), 8(b)

- The previous standard inspection reported that the arrangements to safeguard pupils were insufficient. In particular, the inspection found that the leadership and management of safeguarding were not effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy takes account of the most recent government guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' September 2016. Staff have received safeguarding training to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to take the action required should they have any concerns about the safety of a pupil. Induction procedures ensure that new staff are given appropriate training to carry out their roles and responsibilities in the school. However, leaders do not ensure that all staff understand and implement the school's policies consistently. The safeguarding policy is reviewed annually and is easily accessible on the school's website. Scrutiny of staff files and the school's recruitment procedures confirms that this work meet requirements.
- Leaders clearly understand the need to protect pupils from all potential risks. However, leaders have not ensured that staff understand and implement the school's policies consistently so that they understand exactly what is expected of them. As a result, leaders cannot be confident that staff take the necessary actions needed to follow up concerns that arise and resolve pupils' concerns when required, to ensure that pupils are kept safe.
- Site security has been strengthened by the new fencing and barriers which are now in place. However, some parts of the school are not well lit.
- Leaders have strengthened their approach to the recording of concerns and incidents. Records are more detailed and carefully track incidents. Those incidents which involve restraint are reducing. However, the quality of debriefings which take place following restraint incidents is variable. The standards in paragraph 7 are not met.
- Leaders have not ensured that the national minimum standards which were not met at the previous inspection are now met. The social care inspection, which took place at the same time as the progress monitoring inspection, found that the residential provision is inadequate. The standards in paragraph 8 are not met.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 14, 15, 16(a), 16(b)

- The previous inspection reported that the proprietor had not ensured that the school complied with relevant health and safety laws to include the implementation of a written health and safety policy, compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, the appropriate deployment of staff to properly supervise pupils and the effective

implementation of a written risk assessment policy. In addition, the proprietor had not ensured that an admissions and attendance register was maintained to meet regulations.

- Leaders have ensured that the health and safety policy is in place, is fit for purpose and is adhered to by staff and pupils.
- A review of fire evacuation procedures has been undertaken internally and by the county fire service. All recommendations have been actioned, which include ensuring that fire doors are kept closed and that there is clear signage of escape routes. Fire evacuation procedures are in place and fire drills are undertaken and evaluated by leaders. This ensures that staff and pupils are confident in the action to take in the event of a fire.
- Leaders have strengthened their procedures for carrying out maintenance checks. Documentation shows clear records of actions taken, which include lighting, fire and water checks.
- Procedures are in place to improve supervision at break and lunchtimes during the school day.
- Leaders ensure that attendance registers are accurately completed and maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. The school is currently transferring to an electronic format which they are confident will further strengthen attendance procedures. Similarly, the admissions register now complies with the 2006 regulations.
- Written risk assessments are in place for activities, including off-site visits, and individual pupils. They are monitored by leaders to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. In addition, individual pupil passports offer useful information for staff. This enables them to provide appropriate personalised support and guidance to pupils in their learning and social development. However, staff shortages reduce the range of activities that are available to pupils on occasions.
- Leaders have ensured that the standards in these paragraphs are now met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2), 18(2)(e), 18(2)(f), 18(3)

Paragraphs 19(2), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa), 19(2)(a)(i)(bb), 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(2)(e), 19(3)

Paragraphs 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(iii), 21(3)(iv), 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(5), 21(5)(a), 21(5)(a)(i), 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(b), 21(5)(c)

- These standards were not met at the previous standard inspection because the proprietor had not ensured the suitability of members of staff at the school, including those who were living, or had lived, overseas. In addition, checks had not been carried out before a person's appointment. The proprietor had not ensured that members of staff offered for supply at the school by an employment business had received the appropriate checks required. The proprietor did not keep a register which showed that all of the required and relevant information is recorded.
- Safer recruitment practice has been strengthened. Senior leaders have undertaken safer recruitment training to ensure that they have the required skills and understanding to carry out the appropriate checks.

- The single central record has been audited by senior leaders. It is maintained by the newly appointed school business manager and is complete. All checks required to ensure that the single central record meets statutory requirements are carried out. Personnel files viewed during the inspection have been checked and cross-referenced against the single central record to ensure that all required information is included. Leaders understand the need for regular checking to ensure pupils' safety. However, they have not completed recruitment checks on past references for staff. The need for this action was identified at the previous inspection.
- The standards 19(2) and 19(2)(e) in paragraph 19 are not met by the school.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 28(1), 28(1)(d)

- The previous inspection reported that arrangements to check the temperature of water were insufficient.
- Leaders have carried out an internal audit of hot taps. All taps are now appropriately labelled. Evidence of monthly checks is clearly recorded by the site managers and monitored by the named lead professional person. This ensures that the temperature of hot water does not pose a potential hazard to pupils.
- Leaders have ensured that the standard in this paragraph is now met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)

- The standard relating to the quality of leadership and management was not met at the last standard inspection as the proprietor and leaders had not ensured that all of the independent school standards were met consistently.
- The proprietor has restructured the leadership team and has recruited experienced senior leaders. This has strengthened the leadership of the school to ensure that the actions taken to tackle unmet standards are implemented effectively. Records kept of leadership meetings reflect the increased and improved rigour in the challenge they bring to improve the quality and care of education for pupils. Current leaders demonstrate resolve and determination. However, this inspection has identified standards which continue to be unmet.
- The standards in this part are not met by the school.

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

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at this inspection

- The proprietor must ensure that arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Paragraphs 7, 7(a) and 7(b).
- The proprietor must ensure that arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders while they are accommodated at the school have regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools. Paragraphs 8, 8(a) and 8(b).
- The proprietor must ensure that, in the case of supply staff who care for, train, supervise or are in charge of boarders, the proprietor checks that the relevant parts of standards 14 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, or where applicable, standard 14 of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools, are complied with. Paragraphs 19(2) and 19(2)(e).
- The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:
 - demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles so that the independent school standards are met consistently
 - fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently
 - actively promote the well-being of pupils as defined within the meaning of section 10(2) of the Children Act 2004. Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)).

School details

Unique reference number	123933
Social care unique reference number	SC033024
DfE registration number	933/6185
Inspection number	10040156

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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	10 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	23
Proprietor	Priory Education Services Ltd
Chair	Clive Coombs
Principal	Chris Sweeney
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,543–£65,543
Telephone number	01278 641 632
Website	www.priorychildrensservices.co.uk/find-a-location/mark-college-somerset
Email address	markcollege@priorygroup.com
Date of previous standard inspection	17–19 January 2017

Information about this school

- Mark College is owned and operated by Priory Education and Children's Services Ltd, a national organisation which manages a number of health, social care and educational settings.
- The school was registered in 1986 to provide education for up to 88 young people. It is a

38-week specialist day and residential special school for boys and girls aged 10 to 19 who have specific learning difficulties. These include language disorders, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and dysgraphia and/or autistic spectrum disorder and related disorders.

- The college has three purpose-built boarding houses located together in the centre of the site. There is a flat that is used to promote semi-independent living for older young people.
- The school does not use alternative providers. However, with adult support, post-16 students can access two local further education colleges, Strode and Weston, which provide a wide range of courses in a mainstream setting.
- When the previous integrated inspection of the school and residential provision was undertaken, it was judged to be inadequate.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- The inspection was the first progress monitoring inspection undertaken since the previous standard inspection and was carried out with no notice for one day. At the same time, a full social care inspection of the residential special school took place over three days. Both teams were on-site together on day one.
- After the previous inspection, which found the school's overall effectiveness to be inadequate, the school was required to produce an action plan explaining how it would meet the independent school standards that were unmet at this inspection. This action plan, evaluated on 20 June 2017, was found to be acceptable.
- Prior to the inspection, the lead inspector scrutinised a range of documentation, including that provided by the registration authority for independent schools. This included the previous inspection report and the school's response to the unmet standards set out in their action plan, relating to parts 1, 3, 4, 5 and 8. In addition, the lead inspector reviewed the school's policies and other information available on its website.
- During the inspection, the inspector met with members of the school's leadership team and held discussions with pupils. The lead inspector also met with members of the Priory Group senior central team to discuss the effectiveness of actions taken since the previous standard inspection. In addition, the inspector visited classes with a senior leader to view learning and to look at pupils' work.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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