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Mr Smith
Headteacher
Priory School
Mountfield Road
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of Priory School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2018 with Sue Bzikot and Mark Roessler, Ofsted Inspectors, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your principled and aspirational leadership embeds a culture of strong pastoral care and high academic standards. You are determined to provide high-quality education for all pupils regardless of their ability or circumstances. You balance effectively your pursuit of excellence with the well-being of staff and pupils. Therefore, staff at the school respect and trust you and the leadership team. Morale is high at your inclusive school, and everyone shares your determination to provide the best for every pupil. There is a stimulating and challenging ethos in the school which enables pupils to make strong progress and achieve well. However, you and your leadership team are not complacent, and you are implementing innovative plans to help pupils achieve even greater success.

Pupils continue to behave well at the school. They are courteous and respectful towards each other and their teachers. In lessons, we saw pupils working hard and making confident articulate contributions to discussions. Pupils are proud of their school. They told inspectors that they enjoy school and appreciate the wide range of well-attended clubs and activities on offer. Most pupils attend very regularly, and leaders are tenacious in supporting the few pupils whose attendance needs to improve. One group of pupils said, 'Teachers are supportive and enthusiastic', and in another meeting, pupils told us that 'This school is inclusive, and it is OK to be different.'

Leaders use meticulous systems to assess and track pupils' progress regularly. This ensures that any pupil at risk of falling behind is quickly spotted. A wide range of effective additional help is then provided to help pupils who need to catch up. However, your focus goes beyond ensuring that pupils leave with good examination results. Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their mental health, has a high priority and is well provided for at your school.

Since the last inspection, leaders have developed effective systems to monitor the quality of teaching closely and check how well it contributes to strong progress. As a result, leaders know the many strengths of the school, including the strong progress made by all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in English, mathematics and science. You also know where you can make further improvement, such as helping pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable make faster progress.

Governors provide strong challenge and support to you and other leaders. They visit the school regularly and analyse pupils' achievement thoroughly. As a result, they are able to evaluate effectively your plans for school improvement. For example, they monitor carefully the effect of the curriculum on pupils' progress, including the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Governors take a professional and reflective approach to their roles. They regularly attend relevant and up-to-date training. Governors understand well the current financial challenges and they are working effectively with you to ensure that the school continues to thrive. Parents and carers speak highly of the school, and most parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to another parent.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and the leadership team ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and meet statutory requirements. Records are detailed, up to date and of a high quality. Before appointing staff, leaders rigorously carry out all the required employment checks. All staff and governors are trained effectively on how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism.

A dedicated and highly skilled team of staff works with determination and sensitivity alongside pupils, parents and external agencies to support pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. All staff closely monitor their welfare.

Pupils appreciate the concern that staff members have for their welfare and well-being. Pupils told inspectors that staff are approachable, saying that they know an adult they can turn to if they have concerns. Parents who responded to the online survey overwhelmingly agreed that their children feel safe and well cared for at the school.

The curriculum prepares pupils well for managing their own safety. A carefully

structured programme of activities in lessons, tutor time and assemblies supports pupils' personal development effectively. The pupils that inspectors spoke to have a good understanding of staying safe online.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I and my colleagues focused on the following lines of enquiry: how well the curriculum meets the needs and abilities of all pupils; how effectively leaders have responded to the last inspection by improving the progress of middle-attaining pupils, particularly in mathematics; and the extent to which the progress of all disadvantaged pupils is improving.
- Leaders and governors are committed to providing an innovative curriculum supported by an extensive enrichment programme. After a period of research and consultation, leaders have implemented a curriculum designed to challenge the large proportion of high-attaining pupils at the school, while also providing effective support for lower-attaining pupils. The school was part of a national trial in student grouping in mathematics and English led by Kings College, London, which has supported the curriculum design.
- At key stage 3, pupils study a wide range of subjects, which includes three modern foreign languages and classics. Leaders strongly promote an interest in the creative arts, technology and physical education through both the curriculum and the additional enrichment activities. Leaders' current assessments, and work that inspectors saw in pupils' books, show that pupils make strong progress in a wide range of subjects. Pupils told inspectors that the advice they are given before they make GCSE subject choices is very helpful.
- In September 2017, leaders introduced a more challenging curriculum for pupils at key stage 4. Pupils are encouraged to take a broad range of subjects at GCSE, so they will not be limited in their choice of courses or training in the future. In the current Year 10, most pupils now choose to study a humanity and a modern foreign language at GCSE. High-attaining pupils mainly take separate sciences. Leaders and governors recognise it is too early to fully evaluate these changes. However, teachers' current assessments and other reliable evidence show that pupils are making rapid progress. Inspectors noted that pupils are working hard in lessons and appear to be enjoying their key stage 4 courses.
- Pupils who arrive at the school with low levels of attainment or poor literacy skills follow a foundation curriculum with additional English and mathematics lessons in Year 7 to accelerate their progress. As a result of this support, low-attaining pupils are better prepared for their studies at key stages 3 and 4. Teachers' records and other reliable evidence show that these pupils make rapid progress, particularly with reading. Pupils who find academic subjects difficult can study fewer GCSE subjects and attend vocational college courses for one day a week. They also have extra help with their English and mathematics. Leaders' current assessments, and work that inspectors saw in pupils' books, show that these pupils make rapid progress.

- Leaders have strengthened the quality of teaching in mathematics since the last inspection. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics has improved significantly and is now strong. This improvement is also seen across all subjects for middle-attaining pupils, who now make rapid progress overall.
- Leaders support most of the disadvantaged pupils effectively. You have ensured that disadvantaged pupils make progress in English, mathematics and science that is equivalent to other pupils nationally. You are now rightly focusing on improving their progress in other subjects. There are a few disadvantaged pupils, whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, who are well supported in their personal development but still do not attend regularly. Your tenacious efforts to improve their attendance and their academic progress are yet to be realised.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to strengthen the support given to the small group of pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, so that their achievement and attendance improve
- recent changes to the curriculum are accelerating pupils' progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Anne Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, leaders, governors and staff, and spoke to groups of pupils, both formally and informally. We visited lessons to observe pupils' learning, accompanied by senior leaders, and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. I and my colleagues observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and as they left school. We considered documents about safeguarding, attendance, current pupils' progress and governors' work. The views expressed in a pupil questionnaire, a staff survey, one letter from a parent, one phone call from a parent and 166 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, were also considered.