

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Miss Helen Porter  
Headteacher  
Priestley Smith School  
Perry Beeches Campus  
Beeches Road  
Great Barr  
Birmingham  
West Midlands  
B42 2PY

Dear Miss Porter

### **Short inspection of Priestley Smith School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 January 2019 with Lynda Mitchell, Ofsted Inspector, 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 outstanding in January 2015.

### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your exemplary leadership and succession planning, supported by strong governance, have guided the school through some significant changes in senior leadership in recent years. As a result, the school has remained stable and focused on providing first-class educational experiences tailored to the needs of each and every child in the school.

Priestley Smith School provides a warm, welcoming environment for everyone who sets foot in the school. There is a strong sense of 'team' and staff are proud to work at the school. They want to support and encourage pupils to be the best they can be. You lead by example, ensuring that everyone is focused on improving the school for the benefit of the pupils. Your school has recently gained the Rights Respecting School award and this epitomises the school's ethos and the relationships that exist between staff and pupils. As a result, pupils' behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is excellent. You and your staff recognise that pupils' needs are changing over time, and as a result, staff are receiving additional training to meet these needs, in areas such as basic sign language and autism spectrum disorder.

Parents and carers have made it clear, through their responses to both your own parent surveys and those submitted to Ofsted, that they are very happy with the

education and care their children receive. They are confident that you and your team keep their children safe and happy. Comments such as 'amazing support' and 'amazing progress' reflected the overwhelmingly positive responses expressed about the school. You and your staff have worked hard to improve parental engagement in the school and have had recent successes with your parents' day and parent workshops.

You have acted swiftly on the recommendation made at the last inspection to further refine your assessment system. Your assessment practice is well embedded and understood by all staff. It provides a comprehensive record of the progress and attainment of all pupils in a range of subjects, illustrating pupils' strong attainments, from entry-level qualifications through to A levels. You ensure that teachers set aspirational targets for pupils. At the same time, you are sensitive to individual pupils' needs and circumstances that may have an impact on their progress and achievement. Leaders' analysis of information over time has informed actions to improve the school, such as the additional focus on science and writing, with positive results. You recognise the recent variation in outcomes for mathematics. Your detailed information shows that pupils' individual circumstances had some effect on these, but more work needs to be done to ensure consistently strong progress in every key stage.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and her deputies approach all aspects of safeguarding with rigour. They ensure that staff follow the strong systems that are in place to keep pupils safe from harm. Pre-employment checks and induction processes for new staff are thorough. Staff have received basic and enhanced training based on a range of safeguarding themes, the most recent being honour-based violence and forced marriage. The DSL maintains strong links with the local authority, so that she is fully updated on all aspects of safeguarding policy and practice.

The safeguarding team ensures that any concerns about pupils are brought to its personal attention before being recorded as a note of concern. The DSL's introduction of the 'ongoing story', the school's own system to track early welfare concerns, has provided additional opportunities for staff to highlight any early signs of concern. As a result, the DSL and the team are able to act swiftly to provide their own early help to pupils and families before issues escalate further.

Leaders keep a close watch on pupils' attendance, especially that of pupils whose attendance is low. Staff make sure that pupils know what their attendance figure is on a weekly basis, and pupils are helped to understand that by making small changes, their attendance can improve quickly. Staff ensure that these improvements are both rewarded and celebrated via the attendance displays and celebration assemblies. Ultimately, the majority of pupils who are able to attend school regularly, do so.

Leaders have incorporated safeguarding fully into the personal, social and health education curriculum. Pupils talked confidently to inspectors about how they had

learned to keep themselves safe, both within the local community and on the internet.

## **Inspection findings**

- Leaders and governors make sure that the school does not stand still. As headteacher, you are highly reflective on the school's work, including areas that need further development or improvement, and staff and governors mirror your approach. This approach is particularly evident in the ongoing review and development of the curriculum. Owing to the changing cohorts of pupils who attend the school, leaders review and adapt the curriculum to make sure that it is suited to the pupils' needs. Leaders have already planned a full curriculum review day later this month. They want to make sure that the curriculum will continue to meet pupils' changing needs well and take account of the changing educational landscape.
- Governors are well informed about all aspects of the school's work. They visit the school regularly and, when it is necessary, they take the opportunity to challenge leaders and hold them to account. They have reflected on their own skills and qualities and completed a review of these, resulting in an action plan, which they are due to revisit this month. While governors have checked the quality and accessibility of the school's website, they have not ensured that all the information that the Department for Education (DfE) requires schools to publish is in place.
- Leaders, staff and governors are strong advocates for the pupils and are committed to enabling pupils to become as independent as possible. The school's habilitation team plays a vital role in further preparing pupils to be as self-sufficient as possible, both at home and in the local community. Their work is embedded in the curriculum, as is the integrated use of specialist equipment, enabling pupils to be as independent as they can be. Despite their severe visual impairments, several pupils now travel independently to and from school. They told inspectors how they have been supported to learn how to use local transport or navigate their way around other schools. One pupil summed up the feelings of the group of pupils the inspector spoke to, when he said, 'I will always need some support, but it will decrease because of how I've been helped.'
- Pupils' learning is enriched through a comprehensive package of additional activities built into the school day in which all pupils are able to participate. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about the residential and camping trips they can take part in, as well as the opportunities they have for horse riding and swimming. They enjoy clubs such as those for judo, dance, fitness, games and hobby Braille. Pupils are supported to establish their own clubs, such as the drumming club, which is pupil led.
- In the secondary and post-16 department, pupils are prepared well for their transition to the next stage of their education. The school has strong college links, and some pupils are supported to attend the local college to develop their independence further in a different setting. A small number of pupils follow A-level courses of their choice at a local secondary mainstream school, helping them to fulfil their aim of moving on to higher education. Pupils participate in

work experience from Year 10, progressing to a more bespoke offer in Year 13. As a result of the support and guidance they receive, pupils have aspirational targets for employment, including in medicine, music composition, teaching and computer science. They are able to articulate their next steps to help them work towards these goals. Leaders know, from research, that employment opportunities are currently limited for pupils with a visual impairment. With this in mind, they are in the early stages of developing internship and apprenticeship opportunities for the pupils.

- Leaders have seized the opportunity of working in close proximity to other schools on the campus to build meaningful relationships and provide pupils with learning opportunities alongside their mainstream peers. Leaders make sure, through visits and assembly presentations, that pupils from the mainstream schools are prepared well, so that they understand the difficulties that pupils with a visual impairment may have. Pupils of all ages are able to share breaktimes and lunchtimes with their mainstream peers, eating and playing alongside each other. Pupils in the primary department enjoy weekly visits from their mainstream junior school reading buddies. They spend time together developing a love of reading. Campus curriculum focus days, such as the recent 'science day', enable pupils from all schools to work together.
- The use of practical equipment to support pupils' mathematical learning and development is well established in the school. Pupils are confident in their use of apparatus. Inspectors saw pupils using specialist equipment confidently to record their work and support their learning. Pupils told inspectors that they value the range of technological equipment they are provided with to support their learning because of their visual impairments.
- Teachers make sure that lessons are planned well, and learning is well matched to pupils' abilities. In some classes, teachers cater for a wide range of abilities, but plan effective learning activities that take these into account. In a key stage 2 class, all the pupils were learning about units of measurement. Some were identifying the number of bricks needed as a way of calculating the mass of an object; others were using grams and kilograms and recording more complex calculations.
- Inspectors observed staff using effective questioning to support pupils in their learning, enabling pupils to explain their answers, not only to the staff, but also to their peers. Pupils were engaged in their learning and received an appropriate level of support.
- The work seen in pupils' books shows a good development of skills and understanding in mathematics. While there is some variation in the quality of mathematical work in pupils' books across the key stages, pupils are achieving strong outcomes in the subject overall.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the high standards of presentation and content of pupils' work in mathematics

are reflected consistently across all key stages

- the school's website meets the DfE's requirements for what a school should publish
- leaders' early work in developing appropriate employment and training opportunities for young people with a visual impairment continues.

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

Yours sincerely

Deb Jenkins  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We met with you, other members of the leadership team and the school staff. The lead inspector met with five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, the DSL and one of the deputy DSLs to discuss safeguarding. She also met with the local authority's school improvement representative.

We visited lessons in different year groups and key stages and looked at pupils' work in their books and on display around the school. Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. The lead inspector met with a group of pupils, some of whom were members of the school council.

We focused on several key lines of enquiry during our visit. These included: the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics; the suitability of the school's curriculum; the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance; and safeguarding.

We considered the small number of responses on Parent View, as well as the school's own parent survey. We looked at the 30 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. We looked at a range of school documentation and policies, including the school's own self-evaluation and improvement plan, assessment information, safeguarding information, minutes of meetings of the governing body and external reports. We also looked at the school's website and checked procedures and records of pre-employment checks.