

# 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 five and 18 from Suffolk and neighbouring authorities. The school provides a 24-hour curriculum to support cognitive, social and independence skill programmes. The school has 184 pupils on roll, 46 of whom board. A maximum of 23 children access the residential provision each weekday night. The residential accommodation is in two boarding houses on the school site.

The last inspection of the residential provision took place in May 2018.

**Inspection dates:** 3 to 5 April 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 22 May 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

This outstanding residential provision is central to the school's efforts to improve outcomes for children. Families highly value the input that their children receive and the impact that it has on their lives. Parents said that the residential provision has given their children new and exciting opportunities.

Children make excellent progress socially, emotionally and academically because the residential provision is stimulating. Targeted and focused activities are carefully planned and overseen to help children to learn how to share, negotiate and compromise. The quality of the activities and the attention to detail mean that children make significant progress in their interactions with other children, which is the aim of the residential experience. Parents said that these friendships are important because their children develop resilience and learn how to compromise.

Research-informed practice underpins outstanding transition work. A transitions worker spends time with children at their mainstream school before the children commence a transition week at this school. Children experience high-quality interactions before their move takes place. Their anxieties are reduced, and parents are able to contribute fully to the transition planning. This makes a daunting process run seamlessly and enables children to settle quickly.

School attendance for residential children is excellent. The head of care supports children at school when needed. This helps reintegration to the classroom for children who are struggling to manage their lessons. Effective and timely personal education plans help staff to understand children's targets and their potential. Residential staff are therefore able to provide children with focused and individualised help with their reading and spelling. Parents said that this is having a positive impact on their children's learning.

Children learn valuable independence skills. Parents said that their children have been able to transfer their independence skills to the family home. A parent said, '[My child] has learned to make her bed. On Mother's Day, she made me a cup of tea and toast. I didn't think that she could do this. It was amazing.'

Children participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's (DofE) award scheme. They spoke excitedly about their trip to Wales as part of the residential activity. Some older children are working towards the gold award. This excellent achievement is enabled by the staff. As part of her DofE programme, an ex-residential child volunteers once a week at the school. This is very positive for the child concerned and gives the younger children a positive role model.

The staff have an excellent understanding of children's health and medical needs. Older children are encouraged to understand what medication they take and why. This knowledge helps them to manage their health needs as they get older. The children's dignity and privacy during the administration of medication is central to the process.

**How well children and young people are helped and protected:  
outstanding**

Safeguarding children is a high priority at the school and in the residential provision. Families, professionals and staff said that children are safe. Children said that they feel safe because the staff look after and help them. A parent said, 'I know that my child is safe because the staff know her.'

Managers have implemented a highly effective monitoring system that enables them to track children's progress, identify patterns and trends and make links to triggers of behaviour at school and in the residential provision. The monitoring takes account of links between medication administration and specific behaviours, and highlights concerns to staff. Staff use this knowledge to work with parents and medical professionals to review medication. School and residential staff continuously access this system and update plans and strategies as incidents happen. Consequently, risks are identified immediately and mitigating actions are implemented.

Structured routines, familiar staff and comprehensive information-sharing and handovers between school staff and residential staff mean that all staff understand children's presenting and changing needs.

Managers and staff cultivate an ethos of open and honest discussion about bullying behaviours and the impact that they have on other children. Staff skilfully implement and maintain boundaries and structure, which help children to understand expectations. Highly effective behaviour management is underpinned by children's positive relationships with staff. Staff take a creative and restorative approach to help children understand the consequences of, learn from and manage unwanted behaviours. Consequently, there have been no restraints since the last inspection and children do not go missing. Children learn how to regulate their behaviour and use techniques to calm themselves. Parents and professionals attribute this to the residential provision.

Residential and academic staff benefit from joint training in safeguarding vulnerable children. This joint training promotes a shared understanding across the staff teams of the children's vulnerabilities and how to respond to concerns. Training has included the 'Prevent' duty and understanding child exploitation and gangs and county lines.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

Senior managers provide highly effective and efficient leadership. Staff have high expectations of, and aspirations for, the children. Children feel valued by the staff and consequently have high aspirations for themselves.

The leadership team's comprehensive review and analysis of feedback and outcomes for the children, present and past, are regularly used to develop and shape the service.

Leaders and managers work with other schools to share good practice. The head of care monitors the quality of care at another residential special school as part of a mutual agreement. This helps to stimulate discussion and practice development. The head of care and the headteacher contribute to the local safeguarding board. The head of care contributed to interviews at another school, sharing her knowledge. Reciprocal information-sharing and observation of practice help to drive improvement and bring in fresh ideas that benefit the children and staff.

Children's individual progress is exceptional. The newly implemented monitoring system has increased the staff team's knowledge of children's progress and has enabled staff to provide targeted and individualised help when children need it.

Staff communicate exceptionally well with parents. Parents and professionals were extremely complimentary about the value of the residential provision and its contribution to children's personal, social and academic development. A parent said, 'I can contact staff any time. They always have time to listen. I have even contacted them when I have had an issue with my child at home. They gave me support that helped to defuse the situation.'

The chair of governors and the safeguarding governor undertake regular monitoring checks. They consult with the children as part of the process. The governors produce detailed and comprehensive reports that contribute to driving improvement.

Staff receive high-quality supervision and detailed records of their supervision sessions. Staff said that they find supervisions supportive. All staff have up-to-date appraisals that are reviewed throughout the year. Leaders and managers value the staff and invest in their professional development.

## **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:** Lawrence Chapman

**Type of school:** residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01284 761 934

**Email address:** office@priory.suffolk.sch.uk

## **Inspectors**

Trish Palmer: social care inspector (lead)

Cathy Russell: social care inspector



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