

Unsted Park School

Munstead Heath Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1UW

Inspection dates

30 April to 2 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, ably supported by his deputies, is working very effectively to bring about improvements to the school. Together, they share a determination that every pupil should receive the best possible school experience.
- The well-planned curriculum supports pupils' academic and personal development well. Pupils benefit strongly from a broad range of lessons and therapies that meet their individual needs.
- Pupils of all abilities make good progress and achieve well in a range of subjects, including in the sixth form. They gain useful qualifications and are provided with helpful careers advice and work experience. Consequently, they are well prepared for their next stages.
- Positive and warm professional relationships between staff and pupils help pupils to feel safe in school. Consequently, pupils attend school regularly and make good progress in their learning and development.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective. New staff are inducted successfully so that they know how systems work and are alert to pupils' needs. Adults communicate very effectively with each other to keep pupils safe and well cared for.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare is at the heart of the school's work. Adults know each pupil well. They support pupils effectively in raising their self-awareness and self-confidence. Pupils recognise this and are proud of the progress they make.
- Leaders have successfully addressed a dip in how effectively pupils' behaviour is managed. New systems are working increasingly well to minimise incidents of disruption and maintain a typically calm and positive ethos around the school.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, including in the sixth form. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge well to develop pupils' own knowledge and understanding.
- Leaders' plans to improve further the quality of the curriculum through developing the role of middle leaders and to raise expectations at key stage 2 and in reading and writing are well planned.
- Most parents praise the school. However, some continue to feel that methods of communication between the school and home need improving.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen further the quality of the curriculum by:
 - developing the role of middle leaders, especially in English, mathematics and at key stage 2
 - raising expectations of what some pupils can achieve when reading and writing
 - ensuring that curriculum planning and resources in key stage 2 are of similarly high quality to that evident in the rest of the school.
- Embed the improvements to the management of pupils' behaviour so that incidents of poor behaviour and bullying reduce even further and a higher proportion of pupils attend lessons.
- Sustain the drive to improve communication with parents.
- Ensure that the administration of safeguarding reflects the strong practice evident throughout the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since his appointment in September 2018, the headteacher has quickly gained the trust of staff and pupils. Working closely with senior leaders and those responsible for governance, he demonstrates a strong determination to secure the best possible outcomes for pupils, both academically and personally.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the school. They have put in place a range of well-thought-through strategies to improve aspects of the school, including its ethos, the quality of teaching and the curriculum, and how pupils' behaviour is managed. These are having a notably positive impact. Staff have clear curriculum plans in place which have raised the quality of teaching and of the curriculum. Staff praise the leadership for promoting an inclusive culture in the school. Pupils told the inspector that the school is much calmer than it used to be.
- Since the last inspection, there has been some turbulence in staffing, and there is currently a high proportion of staff who have joined the school in the last two years. Leaders are sharply aware of the potential detrimental effect that seeing unfamiliar adults could have on pupils with special needs, particularly those with significant levels of anxiety. They therefore ensure that all staff receive a thorough induction and ongoing regular professional development which is sharply focused on pupils' specific needs, behaviour management and how best to teach each pupil. This ensures that pupils receive a consistent approach to meeting their needs. Pupils told the inspector that current staff work together well as a team.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school. Pupils study a range of academic and practical subjects which are tailored to pupils' individual needs, aspirations and abilities very well. Careful consideration is given to how to help pupils cope with the challenges they face because of their autism and associated needs. Targeted therapies play an important part in the curriculum and support pupils' sensory and speech and language needs superbly. Leaders have increased the range of academic and vocational courses and awards that pupils can study. Better use of the extensive school grounds further supports pupils' learning and development. For example, pupils can learn forestry and horticulture skills, as well as taking part in a range of physical education activities and competitive sports. Consequently, pupils develop very well. By the time they leave the school, they secure and sustain placements in further or higher education, employment or training.
- Leaders have provided staff with useful professional development and guidance which has improved their approach to planning an inclusive curriculum. Leaders conduct a thorough programme of monitoring the curriculum and teaching to ensure that pupils receive a consistently good quality of education. As a result, the quality of teaching remains good and pupils continue to achieve strong outcomes by the time they leave the school. However, work to improve the quality of the curriculum at key stage 2 is not as well developed as in the rest of the school. The headteacher has accurately identified the need to appoint some middle leaders to add to the leadership team's capacity to further improve the quality of the

curriculum.

- The curriculum is supported by a strong programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and extra-curricular activities which help pupils to prepare well for life in modern Britain. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted through visits to local and national places of interest, including art galleries, science museums and nature parks. Several pupils are taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. They spoke warmly of the confidence and enjoyment they gained from their recent successful camping expedition.
- Most parents praise the school, with several noting the transformations they see in how well their children develop over time. However, some parents expressed concern about how well the school communicates with parents. Since his appointment, the headteacher has worked hard to improve methods of communication. He has acted quickly on views expressed at the parent forums he has introduced, for example by improving the accessibility of the school's website. Termly comprehensive progress reports, along with a weekly email from tutors, provide parents with information about how well their children are progressing. Regular detailed newsletters celebrate the school's work and explain the school's ethos and approach to supporting pupils who have autism. They include useful tips for parents on how to help their children during holiday times. Such efforts are going some way to build parents' confidence in the school. The school's plans to further improve communication methods are thought through well.

Governance

- The director of operations of Priory Education Services, the company that owns the school, provides very effective support for the headteacher and holds him to account through frequent, rigorous meetings and discussions. Additional and thorough support and challenge are provided through other mechanisms within the company, including from the regional quality and operations teams.
- Those responsible for governance know the school very well. They visit the school regularly, checking carefully on the quality of the school's work. They are all sharply focused on improving pupils' outcomes and managing pupils' needs well. Leaders keep a sharp focus on the requirements of the independent school standards to ensure that they are met.
- Leaders carry out rigorous appointment checks to ensure that they employ staff who will suit the needs of the school and its pupils. Suitable arrangements for the management of staff performance and appraisal are established for all staff.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's safeguarding policy is up-to-date with the latest government guidance in keeping children safe and is published on the school's website.
- There is a strong and inclusive culture of safeguarding in the school. All staff are extensively trained in safeguarding and child protection. They know how to recognise the signs that might indicate a pupil needs additional help. This includes

in peer-on-peer abuse, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

- Staff know how to report any concerns they may have, and the extensive and detailed records kept by leaders show that they do so. Since the last inspection, leaders have increased the opportunities for staff to share collectively any concerns or useful information they have about a pupil so that all are up-to-date with the most recent and relevant information about pupils.
- The designated safeguarding lead and his deputies understand the individual needs of pupils very well. Where necessary, they liaise promptly with additional agencies to provide the most effective support for pupils. Leaders keep detailed records of pupils' specific care and safeguarding needs and their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They are in the process of streamlining and unifying this information under one system so that their administrative processes reflect the strength of their safeguarding practice.
- Leaders check carefully the suitability of staff to work in the school. All necessary checks are complete before staff commence working with pupils. A rigorous induction programme ensures that staff are familiar with the latest government guidance on safeguarding and the particular needs of the pupils in the school.
- Very thorough health and safety procedures protect pupils. Appropriate checks are made to ensure that the site is safe and that any improvements needed are acted on quickly. Fire checks and drills are regular. Staff carry out risk assessments for activities in school and during trips and visits. They consider the specific needs of pupils as part of these processes to ensure that pupils are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The school has a secure framework for assessment. Pupils have personal targets that cover their social, emotional, mental health and academic learning needs. Teachers and teaching assistants use these to adapt the teaching, therapies and support they provide for each pupil and evaluate the progress pupils make. Teachers have high expectations for what pupils can achieve. Rightly, these expectations have recently increased for pupils at key stage 2 so that they can make better progress across a range of subjects, including history and geography.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge, coupled with a calm and consistent approach, is helping pupils to achieve both academically and personally. Teachers provide pupils with detailed feedback about their learning, which helps them to make strong progress in a range of subjects.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' learning are high. Teachers judge well the methods they use to help pupils learn. Short, sharp tasks help pupils to maintain their concentration and to recognise when they are being successful. Teachers typically use questioning well to help pupils express their thinking and move their understanding on. Praise is used effectively to give pupils confidence in trying harder work.
- The trusting professional relationships developed between pupils and staff support pupils' achievements well. Teachers and teaching assistants provide highly effective support for pupils. Adults are adept at identifying how and when to intervene to

reduce a pupil's anxiety or refocus them on their learning. This ensures that most lessons progress without disruption, and that a clear focus on learning is maintained. Older pupils spoke enthusiastically about how such support has helped them to manage their behaviour and reduce their anxiety over time.

- Since the last inspection, teachers have improved pupils' technical reading and writing skills across the curriculum. For example, younger pupils are helped to develop the grip and strength they need to write. The profile of reading is increasing with a newly refurbished library. Most pupils write accurately, using the right forms of grammar and sentence construction to suit the work they are doing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They know that any adult in the school will listen and help if they are concerned or upset. Many pupils spoke with pride about the positive experiences they have had at the school, emphasising strongly that their experience at Unsted Park is much better than at their previous schools.
- The thoughtfully planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme helps pupils' personal development. Leaders adapt the programme as needed to respond to topical and local issues. They help pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including online and in their community. For example, 'travel training' helps older pupils develop the resilience they need to travel independently. All pupils spoken to knew not to share personal information online.
- Leaders have introduced improved systems to help staff support pupils' social and emotional development. Staff agree with pupils the areas they will work on to manage better the challenges pupils face because of their needs. Adults use pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans and their in-depth knowledge of each pupil to ensure that targets are well matched to pupils' needs. Staff are adept at knowing which strategies to use to help pupils to progress.
- Leaders have started to monitor and track the different facets of pupils' personal development over time. Further refinements of the system are underway to ensure it is more accurate. However, the system already captures the very small steps that some pupils take, and demonstrates the positive impact the school has in helping pupils to manage their SEND over time.
- The curriculum supports pupils' emotional and physical well-being increasingly effectively. The increased use of outdoor learning along with a wide range of targeted therapies contributes strongly to the positive atmosphere around the school. Pupils participate in a variety of individual and team sporting activities such as playing tennis and running. They are proud of recent sporting successes when competing with local schools.
- Typically, pupils are kind to each other. However, the nature of some pupils' needs means that they do not always understand how to interact with each other socially or how to build a friendship. This can sometimes lead to unkind behaviour and pupils feeling that they are being bullied. There is a strong anti-bullying ethos in the

school. Adults' constant efforts to foster a positive atmosphere and to help pupils understand how to interact with each other is helping to reduce bullying and the perception of bullying over time. Crucially, adults are helping pupils to understand that 'banter' can be upsetting.

- Leaders are quick to communicate with the relevant local authority and with parents if they identify that pupils' EHC plans need to be adapted to meet pupils' needs better.
- Pupils who attend local colleges for part of their study are well supported. Leaders check carefully that placements are well matched to pupils' interests and skills and that they are making a positive difference to pupils' development. Pupils achieve well in these placements, both academically and in developing further their social skills.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils typically behave well throughout the day, so lessons are orderly and productive. Adults are skilful in supporting pupils to maintain their attention on their work. They use their expert understanding of pupils to judge wisely when to allow pupils to increase or decrease their level of participation. Over time, pupils are supported well to develop strategies to improve their self-discipline and to refocus themselves on learning. As a result, pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and most experience substantial successes, both academically and personally. Pupils respect and value adults' commitment to helping them to thrive.
- Some pupils struggle to stay calm and focused during their time in school. This is especially the case when they are new to the school, or when issues in their personal lives are worrying them. This can result in pupils displaying disruptive behaviour. When this happens, adults react quickly to help pupils and bring them back on track.
- Leaders have successfully introduced a new behaviour management system to address a previous decline in how well staff were managing some situations. All staff receive training which helps them quickly and calmly to de-escalate incidents when they happen. The strategies they use have been working increasingly well over the last year, so that serious incidents are much reduced and exclusion is used rarely. Pupils told the inspector that the school is a much calmer place than it was two years ago.
- Pupils attend exceptionally well. Figures are well above national averages. This is a very large measure of success, considering pupils' particular contexts and histories. Pupils who feel unable to attend particular lessons or therapies are helped to explore the reasons for this and so reduce their anxiety. Leaders have reduced the proportion of pupils who miss lessons and therapies but, rightly, aim to minimise this further.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils arrive at different points in their school career, and at different times of year. Most have missed significant amounts of schooling for a variety of reasons. Pupils' prior experiences of school have often been negative. Consequently, leaders prioritise securing pupils' personal, social and emotional progress as well as their academic success. Staff are skilled at meeting pupils' different needs and in helping them to settle when they join the school.
- All pupils who attend the school have a diagnosis of autism, and several have associated disorders. All pupils have individual learning plans which staff, parents and pupils contribute to. Leaders' ongoing assessments of pupils' academic, social, emotional and mental health needs enable them to plan learning and therapies to fill gaps and enable accelerated progress.
- Leaders carefully track the progress each pupil makes across subjects. Their aspiration is that pupils should make at least similar progress to other pupils nationally. This ambition is not always realised, due to some very low starting points and depending on the gaps in pupils' prior learning and their particular SEND. However, some pupils make exceptional progress, and the vast majority of pupils sustain positive and meaningful placements when they leave. Several pupils go on to achieve success at college and at university, for example in art, medicine and business.
- Pupils typically make strong progress from their particular starting points across a range of areas. Since the previous inspection, leaders have broadened the variety of subjects that pupils can study, including by using outdoor spaces for learning more regularly. Pupils achieve a good range of qualifications and accreditations, including A levels, GCSEs, entry-level qualifications and functional skills passes.
- Staff consider carefully when a pupil is ready to take qualifications, and the type of qualification most appropriate to allow each pupil to be successful. For example, some pupils take GCSEs earlier than is typical for their age, while others benefit from taking qualifications over a number of years. Pupils who need to are given the opportunity to retake exams. Pupils appreciate this flexible approach because it minimises their anxiety and increases their confidence.
- Leaders' tracking of pupils' personal, social and emotional development enables them to demonstrate that pupils make good progress over time in these aspects of their development. Older pupils told the inspector that the school has greatly helped them to manage their anxieties and remain much calmer in school than they used to.
- Pupils' outcomes in mathematics and science are a strength throughout each key stage. Pupils also achieve strong outcomes in humanities and in practical subjects such as food technology and art. Many pupils make strong progress in English, with recent improvements to the technical aspects of writing evident throughout the school. Leaders accept that some pupils are capable of being challenged to develop more stamina in reading and writing so that they can write in more detail and read longer and more challenging texts.

- Leaders have, rightly, recently increased their focus on ensuring that pupils at key stage 2 make improved progress across a range of subjects in the curriculum, in particular humanities.

Sixth form provision

Good

- Since the last inspection, leaders have maintained the strengths of the sixth form, and improved on them further. Students follow tailored and appropriate 16 to 19 study programmes which support their different abilities and aspirations well. All students continue to study English and mathematics until they have gained a qualification at a level appropriate to their needs.
- There is a broader range of qualifications on offer in the sixth form than at the time of the last inspection. Students can choose to study A levels in academic subjects such as history and physics, and vocational qualifications, for example in food technology and horticulture. There is also the option to study functional-skills qualifications in English and mathematics. For lower-attaining pupils in particular, achieving such recognised qualifications has increased the range of courses they can choose to study when they leave the school.
- Teaching in the sixth form is strong. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to good effect. This helps students to make good progress in a variety of subjects and at levels of challenge which are well matched to students' different abilities. Students rightly trust teachers and teaching assistants to support them in maximising their progress.
- The school has strong links with local colleges and sixth forms, which increases further the choice of courses that students can study. Students say that such alternative provision helps their transition on to their next stage of education, both because they follow subjects which match their aspirations and because they gain in confidence from learning in a mainstream provision.
- Students feel listened to. For example, they have contributed to improving the use of space in the sixth form, including a quieter study area and improved facilities to make hot drinks and snacks. Students welcome the increased freedoms of the sixth form, which help to prepare them well for their next stages. For example, they are supported to use their personal study time wisely and effectively.
- Students experience a range of non-qualification activities which add significant value to their time in the sixth form. For example, leaders have improved the quality of work experience that students undertake. Last year, all students were offered work-experience placements in areas of interest, with nearly all students taking them up. Students spoke warmly of their time on these placements, especially in the confidence they gained through communicating with people outside of the school environment.
- Leaders are effective in helping students who leave the school to secure and sustain destinations which match their abilities and interests, including at college and university. Students receive impartial careers advice, listen to the experiences of a range of visiting speakers, and are supported in making their applications and preparing for interviews. Consequently, last year all students sustained a place at

further or higher education institutions when they left the school.

School details

Unique reference number	135419
DfE registration number	936/6592
Inspection number	10076613

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 category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 20
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	68
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	21
Number of part-time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	13
Proprietor	Priory education services limited
Chair	Gabrielle O'Meara
Headteacher	Daniel Goldstraw
Annual fees (day pupils)	£68,000
Annual fees (boarders)	£121,000
Telephone number	01483 892 061
Website	www.priorychildrensservices.co.uk/unsted-park-school
Email address	unstedparkschool@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 May 2016

Information about this school

- Unsted Park is a residential special school, part of the Priory Group, offering full-time education to male and female pupils between the ages of seven and 20. The school is registered for 80 pupils. Currently, 13 pupils stay in residential provision Monday to Friday during term time.
- The school caters for young people with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder and associated disorders, such as anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and pathological demand avoidance. All pupils have SEND and usually have an EHC plan. Most pupils are placed and funded at the school by a local authority.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been considerable turbulence in leadership, including the restructure of the senior leadership team and the retirement of some leaders. Several teachers and teaching assistants have left the school. Vacant posts have filled with new staff. The current headteacher has been in post since September 2018. Since the previous inspection, several new leaders have been appointed, including a mix of existing and new staff. These include both deputy headteachers, the special educational needs coordinator, the leader of the sixth form and the head of care, who is responsible for the residential provision.
- The education provision of the school was last judged at a full integrated inspection on 10 to 12 May 2016. Since then, the school has been subject to further inspections of its residential provision, including a full inspection in December 2017, a monitoring visit in June 2018 and a further full inspection in November 2018.
- Leaders currently use Farnborough College of Technology and Brooklands College to provide alternative provision to two students to broaden the range of courses those students study.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in 14 lessons and therapy sessions. All observations were carried out with members of the senior leadership team. Pupils' behaviour was observed in and around the school, and during lessons.
- During the inspection, the inspector spoke to a variety of people to gather their views on the school. This included pupils, teachers, teaching assistants, therapists, school leaders, and leaders responsible for the governance of the school.
- The inspector analysed school documentation, including minutes of meetings held by those responsible for school governance, the school self-evaluation and development plans, teachers' curriculum planning, and tracking information about pupils' achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures were scrutinised. Records linked to work with other agencies were reviewed, as well as those relating to how the school responds to complaints. A range of documentation relating to the independent school standards was examined.
- The inspector considered the 15 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 29 staff responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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