

Inspection of North Hill House

Fromefield, Frome, Somerset BA11 2HB

Inspection dates: 3–5 March 2020

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders, including governors, have not made sure that the independent school standards are met. Leaders at the school do not ensure that pupils are safe. Procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns are not secure enough. They do not take a firm, clear line about how mobile phones are to be used by pupils during the school day. The school attempts to provide flexible arrangements for pupils with high anxiety. However, too many pupils are absent from school for long periods without access to full-time education. Leaders do not do enough to assure themselves that pupils who are often absent from school are safe.

Too little is done to make sure that there are high expectations for every pupil. There are plans for each subject and assessment processes in place. But leaders have not designed or adapted the school's long-term curriculum plans well. Therefore, the aspirations and interests of pupils are often not met. Furthermore, pupils' individual learning plans are poor. They do not provide clear steps that show how the aims and outcomes described in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans will be met. This means that staff do not have the information they need to adapt learning well to meet pupils' needs.

Some pupils enjoy school, attend well and work hard in their lessons. Staff work patiently and with care to encourage pupils to try their best. Bullying incidents are taken seriously. However, although the school's behaviour policy sets out expectations and sanctions, some staff, parents, carers and pupils said that they do not think that leaders manage pupils' behaviour well enough.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

A series of changes to leaders and to governance has contributed to low expectations and weaknesses in the systems across the school. The leadership team has also been under extra pressure because of staff absences. New governors have recently started. They have a solid understanding of the weaknesses. However, they have not had time to make the improvements needed. Throughout this period, the proprietor has not carried out strong enough checks to make sure that minimum standards are maintained. The independent school standards to do with leadership and management are not met.

Leaders have not made sure that the curriculum as a whole prepares pupils well enough for their future lives. It is not designed well enough to prepare pupils well to live and work as independently as they can. Parents expressed concerns about the lack of clear transition between the primary and secondary phases. The weaknesses in the curriculum mean that some pupils do not engage in learning. Some have weak attitudes, and this leads to some disruptions to learning. The independent school standards related to the curriculum are not met.

The school's personal, social and health education includes themes about values and how to live safely and healthily. Pupils learn about tolerance and respect and about

other cultures. During 'Wonderful Wednesdays', pupils support local and national charities and visit local groups, including care homes. Careers guidance, impartial advice and visits to local colleges aim to help pupils make decisions about their next steps. However, the school has not communicated well to parents about its sixth-form provision. Some parents were unaware that the school no longer provides courses for sixth-form students. This hampers decisions about pupils' futures.

The complaints policy meets requirements. The admissions register and attendance procedures meet requirements. Parents receive an annual report about the progress that pupils are making.

The safety of the premises is managed well, as are staff recruitment procedures. The premises are maintained well. The school complies with the equality act. It provides a clean, pleasant place to learn and an outside space to play. First aid and fire procedures are appropriate. However, the culture of safeguarding is not strong enough. Leaders are not rigorous in ensuring that the reporting of concerns is timely and effective. They have not made sure that policies related to safeguarding are known, understood and applied. The independent school standards related to safeguarding are not met.

Staff have a strong empathy for, and an understanding of, pupils' needs. However, leaders have not ensured that pupils' individual learning plans help staff to adapt learning successfully so that pupils can thrive. For example, leaders do not make sure that pupils who need to catch up with reading have the extra support they need. Plans are not revisited often, and this means that the plans become irrelevant and not helpful. The standards related to adaptations made to the curriculum are not met.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders do not ensure that the procedures, policies and practices of safeguarding are secure. This has led to a weak culture of safeguarding. For example, there is a lack of clarity about pupils' use of mobile phones. Some parents and staff told us that they do not think that pupils are safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Too little is done to check that the systems in place to keep pupils safe are relentlessly applied. Leaders are not rigorous in ensuring that all the information about pupils is brought together so that appropriate decisions are made. Leaders need to urgently improve the arrangements, procedures and local policies related to safeguarding.
- Most pupils' individual learning plans do not provide precise strategies or targets to support pupils' progress in achieving their goals. The plans do not help staff to

make adaptations to the curriculum or learning environment. They do not help pupils, parents or staff to understand how best to achieve the desired outcomes as written in pupils' EHC plans. Leaders need to review these plans to ensure that they are relevant and achievable and that they address the key priorities from pupils' EHC plans. They also need to ensure that they are incorporated into pupils' everyday curriculum and that they are reviewed effectively.

- Staff plan lessons designed to meet pupils' interests and needs. However, too little consideration has been given to how well the curriculum is designed and sequenced so that pupils' long-term needs and aspirations are met. Leaders need to review how the curriculum will achieve the school's aims. They need to ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently relevant and ambitious so that it equips pupils to be as independent and employable as possible.
- The school is in the early stages of ensuring that reading systems are effective. Some pupils who need to catch up with their reading do not practise reading as much as they should. Leaders need to ensure that reading is properly prioritised across the school, especially for those pupils who need to catch up.
- In recent years, the number of pupils in the sixth form has reduced. The school does not now offer a full range of courses, and leaders are currently deciding about the future of the sixth form. Some parents are unsure about what the school intends to offer as their children move through the school. Leaders need to review the sixth-form arrangements and provide clear messages to parents about the school's organisation and offer.
- For some pupils who do not attend school well, not enough is done to ensure that they can access education. Some do not have clear plans that outline how they will move to a full-time education. In addition, leaders have not put in place checking systems to make sure that pupils are safe while not attending the school. Leaders need to improve the organisation of learning, plans for transition to education and safeguarding arrangements for those who do not attend school.
- Leaders are not sufficiently robust or rigorous in their checking of standards across the school. They do not ensure that the independent school standards are met. This has led to shortfalls in systems across the school. The proprietor needs to ensure that leaders have the skills and knowledge appropriate for their roles. They must also introduce a system so that they can assure themselves that the independent school standards are consistently met.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	131975
DfE registration number	933/6200
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10107534
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Priory Group
Chair	Joshua Fitzgerald
Headteacher	Sarah Acland
Annual fees (day pupils)	£78,000
Telephone number	01373 466222
Website	www.priorygroup.com
Email address	jackieswift@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	7–9 March 2017

Information about this school

- The previous standard inspection was in March 2017. At this time, the school was judged to be good.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- North Hill House is owned by Priory Education and Children's Services Ltd, a national organisation which manages a number of health, social care and education settings.
- The school opened in 1999 and is registered for 66 pupils with autism spectrum disorder and associated conditions. There are significantly more boys than girls at the school. All pupils have an EHC plan.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the headteacher and other senior leaders throughout the inspection. We also met with the area director and operations manager.
- We met with parents, spoke to parents on the telephone, took account of Parent View results and free texts and took the emails sent into Ofsted during the inspection into account.
- To look at the quality of education, we looked closely at reading, writing, art, mathematics and history. We visited lessons in these subjects, talked to curriculum leaders and looked at pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, we met with the school's safeguarding team. We talked to staff, parents and pupils. We scrutinised school documents related to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. We looked at the school's recruitment procedures.
- We observed at different times of the day including breaktimes. We looked at the schools plans for the curriculum and for personal development.

Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John White

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan;
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 8 Where section 87(1) of the 1989 Act [11] applies in relation to a school the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 8(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders while they are accommodated at the school; and
 - 8(b) such arrangements have regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools or, where applicable, the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools or the National Minimum Standards for Accommodation of Students under Eighteen by Further Education Colleges.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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