

# 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 students who have complex/moderate learning difficulties. It caters for students aged between five and 18 from Suffolk and neighbouring authorities. The school provides a 24-hour curriculum to support cognitive, social and independence skills programmes. The school has 184 students 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 April 2019.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

### Inspection dates: 5 to 7 May 2021

**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:** 3 April 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points at this school because of their shared experiences and as a direct result of staying in a stimulating and learning-oriented residential provision. A parent said that for their child the opportunity to stay with their friends is invaluable.

The staff are attuned to the children's individual needs. This has reinforced children's sense of belonging. They have built strong and trusting relationships with the dedicated and stable staff team.

The children flourish and make good progress in their education. The whole staff team uses an approach that improves attitudes to learning by helping children to experience success. Leaders and managers extensively review and analyse children's education achievements. As a result, they can demonstrate the positive impact that the residential provision has on children's education and their social and emotional development.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the residential provision closed several times. To support the school to stay open, residential staff worked alongside school staff. This enhanced the relationships between the two departments and maintained the staff's relationships with the children.

Staff work with parents to include them in the school's model of care. Consequently, children experience a consistent approach between their family homes and school. Targets are set using information from children's education, health and care plans as well as from conversations with education staff, residential staff, parents and the child. During the pandemic, when the residential provision was closed, parents sent photos to the school of their children working towards their residential targets at home. The residential staff displayed these photos on the 'lockdown board'. The children were very proud to show the display board during the inspection. Excellent work with parents meant that the impact on children of not staying at the residential provision was reduced.

The staff are dynamic and forward-thinking in their approach to supporting the children. Children benefit from a wide range of professional expertise at school and from within the academy trust. Excellent sharing of knowledge between professionals, education and residential staff makes effective use of staff's skills, knowledge and experience.

The staff celebrate children's achievements. The staff use merits to help incentivise the children and a positive reward is given during the day in school and in the residential provision. Special Head of Care stickers are given to students who have exceeded all expectations. During the inspection, a child received a star of the week

certificate, which he showed off with great pride. Children feel valued and that their efforts are rewarded.

The children contribute to how the residential provision is run. The staff capture children's voices in daily meetings, key-work sessions, at the student council meetings and through the independent visitor. Children said that the staff listen to them and act on their ideas and feelings.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, children have been unable to participate in activities in the community. Staff have been creative in providing opportunities that continue to give children new experiences and develop their social interactions.

The staff help children to prepare for the future. Children develop social and independence skills which increase their confidence and self-esteem in preparation for leaving the school.

The staff enable excellent transitions in and out of the residential provision. Since the last inspection, the admissions and review team has been expanded. During the pandemic, admissions into the school and residential provision have been managed differently. The process has included virtual tours and meetings with parents. A parent said that although they would have preferred to visit the school, the staff have managed the admission of her child well and the communication was excellent.

Mealtimes are a sociable and learning experience. The role of catering manager in the academy trust has been created since the last inspection. The children are encouraged to eat a well-balanced and healthy diet and contribute to choosing menus.

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

Safeguarding children is a high priority in the school and residential provision. The children say that they feel safe at the school because they can talk to staff and the staff help them. Safeguarding is underpinned by regular and updated safeguarding training across the school. The staff recognise and report any concerns. The school's safeguarding team works in conjunction with the local authority's safeguarding team and the director of safeguarding for the academy trust.

Since the last inspection, managers have implemented a sophisticated risk assessment process. The assessments provide clarity and consider all aspects of the children's lives. The expectation that class teachers and residential staff are responsible for updating these means that all staff are fully invested in safeguarding the children.

Exemplary monitoring and routine checks ensure that the physical environment is in excellent condition. During the pandemic, residential staff redecorated the houses and bedrooms, which are bright, welcoming and child-friendly.

The management of behaviour that challenges staff is extremely good. Staff record any concerns and individualised interventions are put in place. The staff follow risk assessments and support plans. Children who struggle to manage their behaviour and learn in a classroom environment have individual behavioural support sessions. These help the children to look at the impact of their behaviours on others and give them strategies to reduce unwanted behaviours.

Restraint is not used as a form of behaviour management. Staff use non-physical guides and encourage children to be self-aware of their behaviours and make the right choices.

The communication between education and residential staff is highly effective. The staff have been very COVID-19-aware, adapting their communication to reduce face-to-face meetings and using other communication means instead to share concerns and children's achievements.

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

Exceptional leaders and managers demonstrate their continued commitment to giving children the best possible experiences. Senior managers provide highly effective and efficient leadership. All staff have high expectations of, and aspirations for, the children.

Leaders and managers have developed a new monitoring system to demonstrate the positive impact that the residential provision has had on children's progress in their social, emotional and educational development. Leaders and managers continually develop their practice, which is informed by current research. They work in conjunction with other schools across the academy trust to share and develop good practice.

Staff said that they feel valued and listened to by the senior leadership team. Supervisions are of a high quality and staff find them supportive. Staff appraisals are reviewed throughout the year to ensure that professional development is ongoing, current and relevant. The residential staff take part in trauma-based approach training alongside education staff. This supports the school as a whole in working in the same way to meet children's needs.

The staff communicate with parents and external professionals well. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have kept in regular contact with children and families via telephone calls or doorstep visits. Parents said that staff are approachable and non-judgemental, which helps parents and carers to feel comfortable to discuss any concerns.

The academy trust's directors and governors are highly active in the school. They have an excellent understanding of the progress that children make and whether they are safe.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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:** Mick Truman

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Trish Palmer, Social Care Inspector

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