

Inspection of Prism Independent School

Walker Drive, Girdlington, Bradford BD8 9ES

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Prism Independent School is a caring school. Staff want to work here, and they believe in helping the pupils to be successful. Pupils are loyal to the school. They value what staff do to help them.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe at school. They do not think that bullying is a problem, and inspectors agree that this is the case. Leaders keep a close eye on what is going on in school between pupils and act quickly to step in should it be needed.

Pupils can, and do, behave well a lot of the time. However, their behaviour is often challenging and disruptive. Restraint, though, is not used. Staff are adept at managing such situations, to a large extent because they have spent valuable time in building relationships with pupils. One of the ways they do this is by cooking lunch together and eating together.

Leaders have high expectations of helping pupils settle into school and becoming re-engaged in education. Although expectations of pupils' 'social' development are high, expectations of what pupils could achieve in their subject studies are not high enough. The curriculum is narrow. There are weaknesses in some matters of leaders' management of health and safety.

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

Leaders are ambitious for what pupils could achieve socially and emotionally. However, they are not ambitious enough for what pupils could achieve in the subject curriculum and for the qualifications they could attain. As a school which takes full-time pupils from Year 7 to Year 11, the curriculum is narrow. Subject programmes of study are largely built around awarding body specifications. These are 'bolted on' as pupils progress through the years. As a result, there is no planning for gradually and coherently building up subject knowledge and skills across the years that most pupils are at the school.

Teachers' subject knowledge is variable. This is related to staff qualifications and experience, and to training. As a result, teaching is variable in its effectiveness. Some pupils become distracted and opt out of the learning because some teaching cannot gain and hold their attention. The use of assessment is variable. Staff have an inconsistent understanding of its use, as both an on-entry baseline tool, and as a means of assessing pupils' ability in the subject curriculum.

Leaders have identified that pupils' reading is a priority. A creditable start has been made to address weaknesses in pupils' reading, with committed staff who have started to re-engage reluctant and weak readers. The library is an attractive space, with new books. Staff have identified that often pupils' reading ability when joining the school is at the level of Reception class children. Currently, though, no staff are

trained in a systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) programme. Consequently, pupils' reading will not materially improve despite the best efforts of staff. Leaders know this and staff training in a Department for Education (DfE)-validated SSP programme is planned.

Pupils' standards of behaviour are mixed. While acknowledging that the school takes pupils who all exhibit challenging behaviour at times, leaders and staff do not routinely and consistently voice their high expectations and do not consistently communicate to pupils that high standards of behaviour, within the context of the school, are expected. It is notable that during the inspection, staff and pupils commented on how well behaved the pupils were being. This suggests a loyalty towards, and affection for, their school. It also suggests that pupils are capable of making choices about some of their behaviours.

Pupils' attendance is poor, to some degree worsened by the effects of the pandemic. Leaders are striving to improve it and, in some cases, need better support from families to do so.

Relationships are a strength of the school. This is founded on the quality of the personal development curriculum and the persistence and patience of staff. Pupils appreciate the work that the school does for them. They recognise that staff are approachable and that there is always someone on hand to lend an ear in times of crisis for them. Pupils are taught about the world around them and their community, often by drawing on the direct life experience of staff. Careers education is a strength, with The Farm used to good effect as springboard for consideration of job opportunities and future career pathways.

Leadership of the school is principled and is committed to improving the life chances of pupils. Leaders are working hard, supported by the proprietor, to improve the standard of facilities. For example, a new media suite has recently been opened and the school is part-way through redecoration.

However, there are weaknesses in leaders' consistency in meeting health and safety requirements. Although leaders ensure that the fire alarm and extinguishers are routinely professionally checked, there is no current fire risk assessment for the premises. Leaders were able to demonstrate that a fire risk assessment visit by an appropriate fire professional was due to take place shortly following the inspection. There are several omissions in the admissions register, relating to the precision of information recorded. Although risk assessments exist for the activities undertaken by pupils, these are not consistently followed by staff. While the standard of premises generally meets requirements, there is some exposed plumbing pipework and cabling to a light socket which could pose a risk. Staff are loyal to the school but express some frustration with the responsiveness of leaders to carrying out aspects of site maintenance.

The proprietor and 'members' for governance understand that there is work to do to ensure that they carry out their responsibilities for consistently meeting the

independent school standards. They are determined to understand, learn and improve.

The school is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and with meeting responsibilities for educating pupils about relationships, sex and health.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders with specific responsibility for safeguarding have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They, and staff, are alert to when pupils may need extra support and they act appropriately in liaising with relevant external agencies such as the local authority's children's services. Leaders have a sound awareness of the particular local safeguarding risks facing their pupils, and have ensured that staff are trained in these matters.

At the point of the inspection, new internet firewall software was being installed on school computers and IT equipment.

The school's safeguarding policy meets government requirements, and is published on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders' curriculum is narrow and unambitious for pupils who attend the school for extended periods of time. This is because it consists of a limited range of awarding body specifications and because these do not build cumulatively over time in a sequenced way. Leaders should press ahead with their plans to broaden the curriculum to a wider range of subjects, and should think through how to ensure that subject knowledge and skills build up gradually and coherently during the period pupils are at the school.
- Leaders have started to address pupils' weak reading skills. Presently, this does not include a phonics-based approach. Leaders should ensure that they train staff in a validated SSP programme and match it with the requisite resources so that the pupils with very weak reading skills are fully supported from the earliest opportunity.
- Expectations of pupils' behaviour are not consistently articulated and the behaviour policy is not as effective as it could be in managing pupils' behaviour. As a result, pupils' behaviour is often challenging. However, during the inspection, pupils' conduct was reportedly better. Leaders should explore the reasons why this is the case so that the conduct seen during the inspection is the norm not the exception.
- The rate of pupil attendance is low. The pandemic has worsened some pupils' attendance, at times condoned by parents. Leaders are striving to improve this

situation. They should continue to work with families and the local authority to secure improved pupil attendance.

- There are numerous weaknesses in leaders' oversight of, and effectiveness in addressing, matters relating to health and safety. As a consequence, there are several unmet independent school standards. Leaders should take action to ensure that the identified weaknesses are addressed as a matter of urgency and that systems are established to prevent such an inconsistent picture developing in the first place.

How can I feed back my views?

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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	137785
DfE registration number	380/6001
Local authority	Bradford
Inspection number	10210600
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	32
Number of part-time pupils	2
Proprietor	Prism Youth Project
Chair	Rachel Court
Headteacher	Katie Corfield
Annual fees (day pupils)	£75 to £95 per day
Telephone number	01274 487633
Website	www.prismindependentschool.co.uk
Email address	info@prismyouthproject.org
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 March 2019

Information about this school

- Prism Independent School operates on two sites, a short walk away from each other: the main site, known as 'The Club', and 'The Farm'. Courses in construction and land-based studies/animal care are held at The Farm.
- About two thirds of pupils are single registered at the school. The remaining pupils are dual registered with their mainstream school, and attend for a fixed period of time. Currently, pupils are aged between 12 and 16.
- All of the pupils who are single registered are placed at the school by local authorities. In almost all cases, this is Bradford local authority.
- All single registered pupils have an education, health or care plan for social, emotional and mental health, and behaviour, needs.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- At the direction of the DfE, this inspection was brought forward due to a complaint.
- The school received a progress monitoring inspection in December 2019 to report on leaders' actions in addressing the unmet standards from the inspection of 5 to 7 March 2019.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, business manager and deputy headteacher. Inspectors met with the chair of the proprietor body, and held a remote meeting with several 'members' for governance.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, construction and land-based studies/animal care. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate safeguarding arrangements, inspectors checked the school's processes for the safe recruitment of staff, reviewed the school's systems for

acting on safeguarding concerns, talked to a range of staff about safeguarding matters and met with groups of pupils.

- An inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of Bradford local authority's virtual schools team, and with a leader from one of the mainstream schools which commissions alternative provision places from the school.
- Inspectors took into account the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff, and Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents.

Inspection team

Steve Shaw, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Garry Stout

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

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.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises and accommodation at schools

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

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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