

Inspection of a good school: The Priory School

Bedford Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 2UR

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 October 2022

Outcome

The Priory School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an inclusive school where pupils, including students in the sixth form, are well supported to be successful. Pupils and students study a wide range of subjects and are prepared thoroughly for the next stage in their education.

Staff help pupils and students to reach their potential. There are positive and caring relationships between staff and pupils across the school. Parents and carers value how well staff support their child. Pupils listen carefully in lessons and concentrate on their work. They respond enthusiastically to teachers' questions.

Pupils and students are polite and friendly and engage with adults well. Pupils respect each other's differences. There are clear routines to deal with poor behaviour. Most pupils meet leaders' high expectations of how to behave. As a result, the school is calm and purposeful. Pupils know who to speak with if they are worried or upset. Pupils are confident that if bullying happens, staff will usually deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils are safe here.

Leaders make sure that all pupils can benefit from a wide range of enrichment experiences. Pupils can play music and sport as well as take part in activities that develop their leadership skills, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

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

Leaders have devised a broad curriculum designed to help pupils succeed. The curriculum is as ambitious as the national curriculum and features a wide range of different subjects. Leaders have strengthened the post-16 offer, as a result of working with other local schools in a sixth-form consortium.

In most subjects, leaders carefully consider what knowledge pupils and students in the sixth form should learn and how this knowledge builds over time. In a small number of

subjects, where the curriculum is not as well developed, leaders have firm plans in place to bring about improvement.

Leaders ensure that teachers receive high-quality professional development. This means that most teachers have strong subject knowledge and use strategies in lessons that help pupils to learn well. Teachers check effectively what knowledge pupils can remember and understand. Consequently, pupils and students in the sixth form progress well through the curriculum. In a small number of subjects, some teachers do not always use the school's approaches to support pupils' learning effectively. In these instances, pupils do not learn as well as they could.

Leaders want more pupils to study the full range of English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects. All pupils in key stage 3 benefit from learning languages. However, in the past, the number studying languages at key stage 4 has remained low. Leaders have taken effective action to make this a more attractive choice. As a result, the number of pupils opting to study a language and the EBacc is increasing.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Leaders accurately identify the needs of pupils with SEND and share this with teachers. Teachers adapt classroom strategies thoughtfully to support individuals and groups of pupils. Pupils with SEND make good progress.

Leaders identify any specific problems that pupils face with their reading. As a result, the weakest readers receive effective targeted support to help them improve their reading knowledge.

There are robust systems in place to manage misbehaviour. Leaders analyse behaviour trends and take appropriate and timely action before issues become serious. There is inconsistency, however, in how some teachers use these approaches. This means that behaviour in some lessons is not as good as it should be.

Behaviour out of lessons is mostly positive, calm and appropriate. A small number of pupils occasionally make inappropriate comments. Pupils are confident to call this out and know that their peers and adults will support them fully. This leads to the school being a welcoming community where pupils can be themselves.

Leaders prioritise pupils' personal development. The relationships and sex education and health education and citizenship curriculums are well planned and sensitively taught. Pupils learn about important issues, such as healthy relationships, mental well-being and drugs. Staff provide a range of enrichment trips, activities and clubs. Leaders have worked hard to rebuild this provision after the COVID-19 pandemic. A comprehensive programme of careers guidance helps pupils and students make the right choices about their next steps.

Senior leaders are open and transparent and know the school well. Governors are well informed. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Most parents are very positive about the standards of behaviour, safety and teaching.

Staff are loyal and committed to the school. Leaders support them well. The systems and processes used in the school do not add to staff workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a positive culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are highly vigilant and well trained to identify pupils who may be at risk of being harmed.

Safeguarding records are detailed and show that leaders take prompt and appropriate actions in response to concerns raised. They make timely referrals to a range of outside agencies, rigorously following these up if required to help pupils get the support they need.

Pupils understand risks, such as online abuse, sexual harassment and sexual violence, and learn how to avoid them. There is a culture of support where pupils are confident to talk about the issues they face. Pupils know who to report their worries to and are confident that staff will help them.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not always use the school's agreed approaches that are most helpful in supporting learning. In these instances, pupil learning is not as effective as it should be. Leaders should ensure that the chosen pedagogical approaches are applied consistently and well so that pupils make the best possible progress.
- There is some variation in how some teachers apply the school's behaviour systems and approaches. This means that some pupil behaviour is not always addressed consistently well. Leaders should ensure that there is consistency in how the school's behaviour systems and procedures are applied to eliminate the small amount of inappropriate or ill-considered behaviour.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2013.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	117499
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10211491
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1273
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	224
Appropriate authority	Local governing body
Chair of governing body	David McIntosh
Headteacher	Geraint Edwards
Website	www.priory.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 February 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Hitchin Sixth Form Consortium with two other local secondary schools.
- The requirements of the Baker Clause are met, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, the chair of governors and other members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, geography and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum 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.
- Inspectors looked at how effectively teachers used strategies to support pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors explored the school's safeguarding culture through viewing safeguarding records and procedures, meeting with a range of staff and talking to safeguarding leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils, including single-sex groups of pupils. They also observed behaviour in lessons and during break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors considered the 257 responses and 166 free-text responses made by parents to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered 119 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 1129 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

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