

Inspection of a good school: Priory Academy

Priory Academy, Britain Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 4JA

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 April 2023

Outcome

Priory Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive in the positive environment of this school. They enjoy good relationships with each other and staff. Because the school's values are clear and well communicated, pupils know how to conduct themselves. They live up to leaders' high expectations. In lessons and during social times, they show 'care and kindness' and often bring the best out of each other.

Pupils are safe at school. They value the work put into achieving the 'bully-free form' award. Bullying is not common. When it does happen, staff deal with the situation quickly and effectively so that it stops and does not continue. Pupils feel confident that they have adults they can speak to if concerns arise. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe at school, home and in the community.

Pupils take responsibility for themselves and others. They make many positive contributions to the work of the school. For example, pupils capably take up positions as anti-bullying 'ambassadors', house captains and as members of the junior leadership team and the eco committee.

Pupils are proud of their achievements at school. They take learning seriously and approach tricky topics with determination.

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

Leaders have created an ambitious curriculum. The majority of pupils were entered for the English Baccalaureate. Leaders have organised the curriculum well and provide teachers with the guidance they need to teach the curriculum effectively.

Teachers deliver the curriculum in a sensible order so that pupils build their knowledge over time. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to review what they have previously studied. This ensures that pupils remember what has been taught. Teachers routinely check what pupils know and understand. Teachers provide effective support so

that pupils do not fall behind, and they give useful feedback to pupils, supporting them to improve and deepen their learning.

Reading has a high profile at the school. Leaders ensure that pupils read high-quality books that match their reading abilities. For pupils who find reading difficult, leaders have effective support measures in place. The weakest readers learn what they need to read more fluently.

Leaders accurately identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Generally, leaders provide guidance for teachers about how best to support each of these pupils' needs. Teachers use this advice consistently. For some pupils, however, leaders' support is not sufficiently precise in order to help teachers design appropriate learning activities. When this happens, teachers do not provide the targeted support pupils need to overcome the specific challenges they face. This leads to some pupils with SEND not learning aspects of the curriculum as well as they could.

Teachers manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. Disruption to lessons is uncommon. Pupils understand the school's behaviour management system and most routinely behave well. There is a very small minority of pupils who find regulating their behaviour difficult. Leaders' approach to supporting these pupils to avoid suspension is partially successful. Some of these pupils learn how to manage their behaviour effectively but others do not. As a result, suspensions have increased over twelve months.

Leaders have planned a range of opportunities in the curriculum to enrich pupils' personal development. These contribute towards helping to prepare pupils to live harmoniously among people with differing beliefs and lifestyles. Leaders prepare pupils well for adult life with high-quality guidance and information about the many careers pupils could pursue. Leaders ensure that pupils have opportunities to engage with providers of post-16 education and training and have contact with a range of potential employers.

Staff are positive about the quality of leadership at the school. They appreciate leaders' efforts to ensure reasonable workload for teachers.

The trust and governors evaluate the school's effectiveness and constantly look for ways to improve the school. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and work well together to hold leaders accountable for the quality of the school. Leaders use the expertise and capacity from the trust effectively in order to make necessary improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders train staff well so that they know the signs of potential harm and what to do if concerns arise. Staff are vigilant and act swiftly and appropriately when pupils appear at risk of harm. Leaders work well with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need.

Leaders ensure that the necessary background checks are undertaken to determine the suitability of adults working at the school. The record of these checks is well maintained.

The content of the curriculum effectively teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, for example when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not routinely provide detailed guidance and training about the specific needs for pupils with SEND. As a result, teachers do not know, so do not provide, what these pupils need to overcome the specific challenges they face. Leaders must ensure that teachers have the exact information and training they need about how to support pupils with SEND so they achieve well.
- Leaders' support for pupils who find regulating their behaviour challenging is not effective for some pupils. This means that these pupils behave in ways that result in suspensions from school. Leaders must put in place effective measures to support pupils with challenging behaviour that enable them to learn well in school.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2017.

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	138181
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10255163
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	776
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Sidders
Headteacher	Ian Bailey
Website	www.prioryacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	13 and 14 June 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The new headteacher joined the school in September 2022.
- The school uses one registered and one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school runs before- and after-school provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- 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 held discussions with the chief executive officers, trust leaders, the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils.
- Inspectors held discussion with representatives from the alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors held discussions with leaders, teachers and support staff. Inspectors also considered the school's safeguarding policy, child protection records, minutes of the governing body and the board of trustees and the school's register of background checks to ensure that adults at the school are suitable to work with children.
- Inspectors considered the views of 88 parents who took part in Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered the views of the 104 pupils and 32 staff who took part in online surveys.

Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ann Bowen-Breslin

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023