

Inspection of an outstanding school: Priory Woods School

Tothill Avenue, Netherfields, Middlesbrough TS3 0RH

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 September 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Priory Woods School is a happy, caring school where pupils flourish and feel safe. All pupils who attend the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff understand the needs of each pupil. They support pupils' needs exceptionally well.

The aim of leaders, which is to ensure that the school 'is a special place to learn', spreads through all that the school offers. Staff provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to develop their individual talents and skills so that they can be 'the best they can be'. Pupils thrive due to the impressive range of activities, including creative arts, residential visits and enterprise opportunities.

Pupils behave well most of the time. When pupils demonstrate more challenging behaviour, staff manage this well. Bullying is rare. Pupils are confident to talk to staff if they have any worries or concerns.

Parents and carers who made their views known during the inspection are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent reflected the views of many when saying, 'Priory Woods School is truly a wonderful environment that enriches the lives of not only the children who attend the school, but the parents as well.'

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

The school is ambitious for the pupils. There are four curriculum pathways: formal, semi-formal, informal and post-16. Teachers use assessment effectively to ensure that pupils make progress from their different starting points.

Pupils have a wide range of SEND. Leaders gather high levels of information on pupils before they join the school. This information is used well to develop personalised plans for

each pupil. The curriculum for some pupils integrates effectively the development of pupils' communication and language skills with therapeutic and sensory support.

In some subjects, the school has not identified the most important knowledge and concepts that pupils will learn, including the order in which this knowledge is taught. Teachers ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to revisit what they have previously been taught. However, sometimes teaching does not build on what pupils already know.

The school has more recently prioritised the teaching of reading. Many pupils are at the early stages of reading. Staff have received training in the school's phonics programme. Pupils who are learning to read attend regular phonics sessions. However, the books that pupils learn to read are not consistently matched to the sounds that they know. Some pupils are not making as much progress in phonics as they should. The school acknowledges that there is further work to do to embed the school's phonics programme.

Pupils benefit from an exceptional range of enrichment activities. Sixth-form students participate in work experience in the school's on-site café, 'Café 16'. This helps sixth-form students to develop skills in independent living and preparation for adulthood. Pupils enjoy contributing to music and drama performances and events in the local community. Pupils' talents and skills are nurtured. For instance, during the inspection, an inspector watched pupils perform a musical piece composed by a pupil. Pupils have recently collaborated with the local council on a pupil voice project. This culminated in pupils presenting to other young people from the local area.

Pupils enjoy school. There are positive relationships between pupils and staff. This is evident in lessons and around the school. Inspectors observed many pupils smiling as they walked around the school. During an outdoor assembly that focused on the development of pupils' communication, language and cooperation skills, pupils and staff were dancing and singing together.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They support pupils to behave well. In early years, staff have created a caring and inclusive learning environment. Children enjoy listening to familiar stories, rhymes and songs that are appropriate to their stage of development. Staff reinforce expectations of children's behaviour, including taking turns and being kind to each other.

Staff are happy and proud to work at the school. They feel well supported in managing pupils' behaviour. Many staff told inspectors that leaders ensure that their workload and well-being are always considered. Staff who are new to teaching are supported well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The books that pupils learn to read are not consistently well matched to the sounds that they know or their reading ability. This means that some pupils are not making as much progress in reading as they should. The school should ensure that all books are well matched to pupils' reading ability and that there are opportunities for pupils to read these books at home to build up their fluency.
- In some subjects, particularly in the formal and semi-formal curriculum, the school has not considered the essential knowledge that pupils need to know and the order in which this knowledge is taught. This means that sometimes, teaching does not build on what pupils have previously been taught. The school should ensure that the most important knowledge in each subject is identified, as well as the order in which this will be taught.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 outstanding in March 2014.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and

pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	131425
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	10290125
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	199
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jennifer Dalby
Headteacher	Emma Fox
Website	www.priorywoods.middlesbrough.sch.uk
Date(s) of previous inspection	26 April 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Most pupils who attend the school are from Middlesbrough. A small number of pupils are from other local authorities.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties, profound learning difficulties and autism.
- The school is on a site shared with another secondary school.
- A new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.

- At the time of the inspection, not all children in early years were attending the school as there is a phased transition at the start of the new academic year for children in early years.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors visited lessons, talked to pupils about their work, looked at samples of pupils' work and held discussions about the curriculum. The lead inspector also visited lessons and discussed the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff, early career teachers, the headteacher and deputy headteacher, and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors talked to some parents at the end of the school day.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and deputy chair of the school's governing body.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors also considered the views of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Michele Costello, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

David Penny

Ofsted Inspector

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