

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

This is a co-educational residential special academy for students with complex/moderate learning difficulties. It caters for students aged between five and 18 years from Suffolk and neighbouring authorities. The school provides a 24-hour curriculum to support cognitive, social and independence skills programmes. The school has 203 students on roll. A maximum of 23 children access the residential provision between Monday and Thursday each week. The residential accommodation is in two boarding houses on the school site.

The residential manager has been in post since April 2022 and is suitably qualified and experienced.

The inspector only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 September 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 12 September 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are happy spending time staying in the residential provision. Children arrive with enthusiasm and excitement and are greeted warmly by staff, who know them very well. Children are relaxed with staff and continually engage with them.

Children are making progress with developing skills for independence and steps towards adulthood. Staff devise clear targets that help children to achieve this. These targets are created collaboratively with children and their parents so that children can work on their targets at home. Parents spoken with all said that they have been delighted and often surprised at the level of progress that their children have made.

Staff are trained in the school's stated model of therapeutic care delivery. Staff are conscious of the challenges that children with a learning disability may have faced. Staff are particularly sensitive to the adverse experiences that some children may have had. Staff are kind and caring towards the children, who have built trusting relationships with them. A social worker said that this trust has been essential recently when supporting a child to start boarding after a change in family circumstances. Staff provided understanding and reassurance about maintaining contact with family and friends, which helped the child to overcome a high level of anxiety.

Communication between the residential and education teams is effective so that children work on joined-up targets for development across the waking day. Parents all said that the communication with the manager and staff is very good and provides them with welcome reassurance. Some parents said that this reassurance helped them to overcome their own anxieties and be more ambitious for their child's development.

Children's health needs are monitored closely. Staff know the details of any long-term conditions well. Staff quickly identify if a child is not their usual self, which could indicate illness or low mood. This is important for children who may struggle to express themselves.

Children keep busy and active with a range of activities in the residential area and the local and wider community. The manager has worked hard to expand the range of activities and has found creative ways for children to be part of the community. This includes children joining a new local theatre group, climbing wall activities and going for coffee with friends.

The manager has considered in detail the sleeping arrangements for children who share bedrooms. Children's moves to residence are planned in detail and are at a pace that suits the child. This means that children settle in quickly and successfully. Children said that they are happy with their room buddies and the spaces that they

have. The manager has worked hard to make the aging building a welcoming and stimulating environment for children to stay in.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Staff are well trained and competent in keeping children safe. The oversight of any incidents of bullying or inappropriate behaviour is managed well. Any allegations of abuse or concerns are responded to without delay.

Staff with safeguarding responsibilities challenge external professionals when they believe that further actions to protect children are required. All parents said that they believe that their children are safe when staying in residence.

There have been no incidents of children going missing from the school. The use of restrictive physical interventions is very low. Staff are consistent with boundaries and expectations of positive behaviour and respect towards others. Children have three independent listeners with whom they can raise any concerns, as well as an independent visitor.

Recruitment processes are very strong and include four different interviews, one of which is carried out by children, to ensure that staff are safe and suitable to work with children. Staff understand the additional vulnerabilities of children with a learning disability or who need personal care. Staff are vigilant to the signs that could indicate that a child needs to be safeguarded.

Improvements have been made to the oversight of the management of the premises and maintenance issues, including fire safety. However, this is still not sufficient. Staff had not identified a damaged door, which prevented it from closing automatically to reduce the risk of the spread of fire. The door had also been propped open using a fire extinguisher. This was rectified during the inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is very well regarded by her staff team, external professionals, children and their families. She is seen as being committed to children and focused on enhancing their lives and steps towards adulthood. Staff said that the manager is a role model with a can-do attitude to solving problems.

The residential department has a member of the school's governing body linked to them. However, regular visits by at least one governor to the residential provision have not been arranged as required by the national minimum standards.

Visits to the residential provision by an independent person take place as required and are of suitable scrutiny. The independent person speaks to staff, parents and children to gain their views. They provide a detailed report of their findings. However, the headteacher and governing body have not completed a review of the quality of

the welfare provision for residential pupils. This review is a requirement of the national minimum standards and must be recorded in writing each year.

Staff have extensive training both online and at staff development days. New staff are quickly enrolled on a level 3 diploma course in residential childcare. Staff have regular supervision sessions and request additional support if needed. Annual appraisals set targets for staff to aspire to. Staff said that the induction period at the commencement of employment is thorough and builds their confidence.

The manager and senior leadership team know children well and have a regular presence in the residential areas. They spend time with children at mealtimes and during activities. This enables leaders and managers to monitor staff practice as well as children's well-being and achievements.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard for residential special schools:

- The residential provision is a standing or regular item at the governing body meetings to ensure that children's experiences and the quality of provision are systematically kept under review. At least one governor should have responsibility for the oversight of residential provision but responsibility for the quality of provision lies with the governing body as a whole. At least one governor should also be expected to visit the residential provision on a regular basis. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 2.2)

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that fire doors are maintained in full working order and remain free from obstruction at all times.
- School leaders and the governing body should ensure that a review of the quality of the residential provision is carried out and recorded in writing once a year as stated in the national minimum standards.

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

Head of School: Sharron White

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Jamie Cousins, Social Care Inspector

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