

Inspection of an outstanding school: Priory School

Mount Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 7BH

Inspection dates:

11 to 13 June 2024

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.

The head of school is Sharron White. This school is part of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Academy Trust (SENDAT) multi-academy trust. This means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lawrence Chapman, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sue Snowdon. There is also an executive headteacher, Graham Alcock, who is responsible for this school and several others.

What is it like to attend this school?

Priory School is a happy place. Pupils enjoy supportive friendships. Bullying and unkindness are rare. Pupils learn to understand and manage their emotional triggers. They flourish in the school's safe culture, including in the sixth form.

Pupils get the practical help they need. The school supports families with transport and pupils with hygiene. Pupils eat high-quality meals. Boarding teaches them independence. Pupils learn a lot of life skills, such as about money and the world of work. The school facilitates trips, ranging from nearby locations like local shops to distant places like Germany. Pupils benefit from the school's ambition to prepare them for life beyond school. In recent years, all have gone on to positive next steps in education or training.

Regular routines support purposeful behaviour. For instance, the daily 'meet and greet' readies pupils for school. They receive skilful support for their social and emotional needs. Consequently, pupils can focus on learning. They stay calm if a peer occasionally gets upset.

Pupils do well with their learning and take pride in their work. They get strong support for their needs. However, the curriculum they learn is not always as effectively planned or taught as it could be.

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

The school has put in place a curriculum that in most areas builds up pupils' knowledge incrementally. Where it is successful, the curriculum identifies the key knowledge that pupils should learn and revisit. In food technology, for example, teachers use previous learning as the building blocks pupils need to understand new content. Students in the sixth form develop the mathematical calculation skills they know from key stage 4. Mostly, pupils develop detailed knowledge. They produce high-quality work. However, in some areas, the curriculum is less well planned. In these cases, teachers do not know exactly what was taught in previous years. They, therefore, do not make the connections with prior learning as precisely as they could. This leads to pupils on occasion being less able to recall prior knowledge. As a result, these pupils do not achieve as well as they could over time.

Overall, teachers deliver the curriculum well. They model and explain learning clearly. This includes confident use of technology. In most cases, staff skilfully support pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school gives teachers precise and user-friendly information from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Staff apply and review this. For instance, teaching assistants work expertly with teachers to ensure each pupil gets bespoke support. This enables pupils to keep up with the learning. This includes those with complex needs. While this is the case, sometimes teachers use tasks that are not well pitched to pupils' levels of understanding. In these instances, some pupils finish the work quickly and get bored while staff are busy helping their peers.

Subject leadership is not as effective as it could be. Some subject leaders do not have a secure enough oversight of how their subject is taught in all year groups. This lessens the school's capacity to address any variability in teaching.

The reading curriculum is a strength. Pupils in the early stages of reading learn phonics successfully. Where they need extra support, this is regular and effective. Pupils read books they understand and enjoy. Teachers adeptly use texts to develop pupils' vocabulary. Most pupils show considerable pleasure in reading. Even where they do not, they understand its importance and do their best with it.

The school has a behaviour policy that is carefully matched to pupils' needs. This is based on understanding and pre-empting the causes of difficult behaviour and low attendance. The approach is thoroughly embedded in all aspects of provision, such as risk assessments. As a result, pupils' ability to regulate themselves rapidly improves. Attendance is high.

The curriculum for personal development is coherent. The school aims to develop 'the whole child' holistically. It does this very well. Pupils receive a well-considered careers education. The sixth form prepares students successfully for their next steps. Pupils learn about important areas of risk, such as drugs and alcohol. They value this learning and explain their own views well.

Trustees keep a close oversight of key areas of provision, such as safeguarding and behaviour. They know some aspects of the quality of education need focus. The trust

provides challenge, where needed, and supports the school well. Staff praise the collaborative ethos.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum does not, in all areas, identify precisely enough the most important knowledge that pupils need to learn. This means that teachers sometimes do not know clearly which areas to emphasise and revisit so that pupils remember the key content. The school needs to make sure that all areas of the curriculum are comprehensively planned.
- In a few cases, teaching is not well adapted to support pupils with different levels of prior knowledge and understanding. This means that some pupils finish tasks easily while others struggle. The school should make sure all teachers get the training and support they need to adapt the curriculum effectively for pupils' varying levels of understanding.
- In some areas, subject leadership is not embedded well enough. Where this is the case, subject leaders do not have the knowledge they need of their curriculum to ensure it is delivered as the school intends. The school needs to make sure subject leaders get the guidance and support they need to fulfil their roles effectively.

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 November 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	137433
Social care unique reference number	SC024610
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10323708
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	12
Number of boarders on roll	46
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sue Snowdon
CEO of the Trust	Lawrence Chapman
Headteacher	Sharron White
Website	www.sendat.academy/priory
Date of previous inspection	16 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is an all-through school. This means it is registered to take pupils from the ages of five to 19. However, there are currently no pupils in key stage 1.
- All pupils in the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for the following needs: specific learning difficulty; visual impairment; speech, language and communication; autism; social, emotional and mental health; multi-sensory impairment; physical disability; severe learning difficulty; profound and multiple learning difficulty.
- Suffolk local authority mostly commissions places. However, several other local authorities also commission places.

- The school is part of SENDAT. There are currently plans for SENDAT to merge with another local trust, the Eastern Education Group (EEG). SENDAT already works in partnership with schools and colleges in EEG. The aim is for the merger to be complete by September 2024.
- The school has boarding facilities with 23 beds, Monday to Thursday. At the time of the inspection, there were 46 pupils accessing these facilities. In most cases this is for one or two nights.
- The school operates on two other sites. A small number of pupils learn at Angel Hill College, which is at 24A Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP33 1UZ. There are two provisions for a small number of pupils at School Lane, Thurston, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP31 3RY. These are Priory Aspire, and Priory at Thurston. All pupils on the three sites are on the school roll.
- The school currently uses three unregistered alternative providers.
- 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 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.
- This school inspection was carried out at the same time as a social care inspection of the boarding provision.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, trust leaders, other school leaders, staff, and pupils. As part of evaluating governance and the support from the trust, the lead inspector met with the chair and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, including early reading; mathematics; humanities; and food technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with the leaders, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, met with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- As part of evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with leaders, governors, staff and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. They considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of policies and documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, and minutes of governor meetings.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the free-text comments submitted. They considered the responses to Ofsted's

questionnaire for staff. Inspectors held multiple conversations with pupils to gauge their views.

Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ashley Best-White

Ofsted Inspector

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