

Inspection of Priory School

Hermitage Road, Upper Norwood, London SE19 3QN

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 July 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has its core values of respect, courage, happiness, ambition and pride at the heart of everything that it does. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are happy here.

The school has thought carefully about what it wants pupils to learn. The curriculum is designed to be ambitious for all pupils. Leaders and staff sensitively devise and adapt appropriate curriculum pathways that meet pupils' specific needs and enable them to achieve positive outcomes.

Behaviour is a real strength of the school. Pupils support each other kindly, inside and outside of lessons. They know that they are working together to achieve success. Relationships between staff and pupils are also very positive. The school works well to ensure that pupils and their families know the importance of coming to school every day. Attendance is high and pupils are kept safe.

Promoting each pupil's personal development is a key thread that runs through the whole school. Leaders want to prepare pupils for their future life in the wider world. This aim is realised well. For example, pupils learn how to prepare meals in their cookery lessons. They also enjoy, and are proud of what they achieve through, their work experience placements.

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

Leaders have carefully designed a curriculum to meet the diverse needs of their pupils. They are ambitious in supporting pupils to prepare for their adult lives.

The school places the utmost importance on supporting pupils to develop their communication and reading skills. Staff use a range of strategies to develop pupils' confidence and skills. In addition, the school has recently introduced a new phonics programme to further develop the school's early reading curriculum. Teachers receive training to make sure that they can successfully deliver the programme. Assessments are used effectively to identify where pupils need further support and to make any necessary adaptations to pupils' learning. Overall, the school's actions to strengthen the curriculum for phonics are having a positive impact on how well pupils learn to read. Nevertheless, some of the developments to support pupils to become enthusiastic and confident readers are not securely embedded.

Across the school, from Year 7 through to the sixth form, the school aims for pupils to develop a rich appreciation and understanding of their subjects. The sixth-form curriculum prepares students for their next steps. To build on this work, leaders have introduced a 'three journeys' approach, which intends to make sure that students get the most aspirational curriculum possible. The school is currently refining this approach. Some aspects are not fully embedded. This means that there are instances where students' outcomes do not consistently match the school's increased ambition for learning in the sixth form.

The school uses assessment to check that the curriculum is having the intended impact on how well pupils learn. These assessments allow teachers to identify when further support is needed and help them to put successful adaptations in place.

Pupils' needs are carefully identified when they join the school. This enables appropriate learning plans to be put in place to support their development. From Years 7 to 11, the five different learning pathways are planned and taught in a way that supports pupils' learning effectively. For each pathway, the core themes for learning have been carefully identified, and these are complemented by tailored approaches, such as circle time and sensory work. All of this helps to promote pupils' well-being and wider development, including their preparation for life after school.

Behaviour is a strength of the school. The school uses a range of effective strategies to help pupils to feel calm and manage any anxieties. This means that pupils can focus without disruption on their learning. During their time at the school, the support and care provided help pupils to grow in independence and lead to fewer incidents in which pupils become dysregulated and overwhelmed. In lessons, pupils care for and support each other. This, too, contributes to purposeful classrooms that foster pupils' learning.

Leaders know that pupils' attendance at school is both critical to their learning and their safeguarding. They work closely and sensitively with parents and carers and external partners to promote high attendance. For example, they work with transport companies to ensure that buses and taxis arrive each day and on time for pupils. The school's effective approaches have led to a significant improvement in attendance over the last two years.

Leaders place much emphasis on the personal development provision, and how important this is for getting pupils ready for their future lives. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They are also helped to develop an awareness and appreciation of different cultures and religions. Through the student council, they take on leadership responsibilities and have the opportunity to shape the life of the school, including what food is served. They also take part in educational visits, and some pupils complete The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The well-developed careers programme also contributes to pupils' readiness for their next steps in education, training or the world of work.

Staff appreciate the support that they receive for their well-being. They feel listened to by leaders.

The governing body has focused on developing its expertise since the last inspection. It provides effective support for the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While pupils are well supported overall in the development of their reading, some aspects of the school's work are not, at present, fully established. This means pupils are not developing their confidence in and enthusiasm for reading as well as they could be. The school should continue to work on embedding its new approach to phonics to maximise how well it supports pupils to get better at reading.
- New approaches to the curriculum in the sixth form are not fully established. While students' outcomes are positive overall, there are times when the curriculum is not supporting them to achieve as highly as they could. The school should provide training for staff so that the new curriculum is consistently well implemented and, in turn, strengthen students' outcomes.

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	101856
Local authority	Croydon
Inspection number	10323299
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	136
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Susan Powell
Headteacher	Julie Evans
Website	www.priorycroydon.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 and 29 March 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities, many of whom have autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher and members of the school leadership team. They also met with the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English and communication, mathematics and personal, social and health education. 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.
- The inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The inspectors spoke to pupils during lesson visits. The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. The inspectors also spoke to staff about behaviour in the school and about their workload.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for parents, pupils and staff. The inspectors also met with groups of parents.

Inspection team

Luke Stubbles, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Joanna Tarrant

Ofsted Inspector

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