

Priory School

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 from Suffolk and neighbouring authorities. The school provides a 24-hour curriculum to support cognitive, social and independence skills programmes.

At the time of this inspection, the school had 206 students on roll, of whom 46 were accessing the residential provision. A maximum of 23 students can access the residential provision each day 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.

This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the school.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 June 2024

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 last inspection: 19 September 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

During this inspection, 42 children were staying in residence over the course of three days. The inspector spoke to six members of the student council and spent time with children in both boarding houses over two evenings. This included individual discussions with seven children and participation in group activities and daily routines. Children greatly enjoy their residential time. They said that this time has enabled them to make friends, have fun and build their independence skills. Children gave positive feedback about spending time with the staff.

Children are supported by motivated residential staff who understand their individual needs. The care and support provided results in children making great progress with their social and independence skills. This progress adds significant value to the children's overall school experience.

Staff from the residential provision work closely with school staff to provide a unified approach to children's learning outcomes. This includes children having dedicated time in residence to read and improve their literacy. Children who stay in residence have improved their school attendance compared to children who do not stay in residence.

Children participate in a wide range of activities that enrich their school day. These include canoeing, swimming, indoor climbing and cycling. There is a good range of recreational arts and crafts resources that meet children's interests. Important occasions such as children's birthdays are celebrated. The varied range of opportunities provided improves children's social confidence and well-being.

Children make notable progress with their independence and self-care skills. Staff help the children to develop these skills through tailored plans. Individualised approaches are matched to children's developmental stages so that the children make progress that is significant for them. Parents said that the progress children make has made a positive and, in some cases, lasting difference to their family lives. Well-planned and personalised life-skills work continues to be a strength of the residential staff.

Children's health needs are monitored closely and well understood by staff. Children learn about healthy lifestyles and are encouraged to be as independent as possible when taking their medication. Children try different foods, which are prepared freshly on site.

School leaders and managers have appropriate maintenance plans to ensure that residence remains in a good decorative condition. This has included the purchase of new furnishings in living areas. There are plans to repurpose the central courtyard to make this area a more welcoming and stimulating space. Children are involved in this planning.

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

Staff are nurturing and committed to safeguarding children. Interactions between children and staff are respectful. Some children share bedrooms and learn important social skills. School leaders and managers ensure that effective planning takes place. This helps to ensure that children are compatible with each other and that they feel welcome, safe and at ease during their stays.

Staff understand children's additional learning needs and vulnerabilities. School leaders and managers ensure that good-quality and up-to-date risk assessments are in place. This provides effective guidance to staff and ensures that they are well informed to respond to risks.

There is a positive safeguarding culture in residence and in the wider school. Staff receive additional training in line with statutory guidance. Designated safeguarding leads ensure that any child protection concerns are responded to promptly. This has included tenaciously challenging other safeguarding professionals when necessary to advocate for children's welfare.

School leaders and managers ensure that recruitment and selection procedures for staff continue to be strong. Appropriate checks link with a four-stage interview process. Children are involved and contribute to the staff selection process. This ensures that only the most suitable candidates, who match children's values and preferences, are appointed.

Children's behaviour in residence is very good. Staff respond to any behavioural challenges appropriately and follow well-devised proactive strategies. Staff have a good awareness of potential triggers and are confident in de-escalation techniques. There have been two instances of physical restraint in residence since the last inspection. These were necessary and proportionate. School leaders and managers have effective systems to monitor these incidents and identify any learning.

School leaders and managers maintain appropriate health and safety arrangements to ensure children's safety. Suitable fire prevention equipment is in place and checked as required. The staff and children are familiar with fire safety procedures and regularly practise drills.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The residential manager is experienced and qualified. She provides confident leadership alongside other school leaders. She has an in-depth understanding of children's needs and is regarded well by children, staff, parents and external professionals.

A small and cohesive residential staff team provides a consistent approach to children's care. Daily staff meetings are thorough and give staff clear direction to

support children's goals. Staff are energised and show enthusiasm and pride in children's achievements. Their close-knit working provides children with the stability they need to have enjoyable experiences.

School leaders have improved their oversight of the residential provision. A designated governor now visits residence and compiles a report of their findings, which considers children's views. A team of independent visitors provide good-quality external monitoring. These systems assist in scrutinising practice. Any recommendations made are swiftly responded to by school leaders.

Staff receive appropriate supervision sessions and annual appraisals. They feel well supported by the residential manager.

School leaders and managers ensure that suitable induction processes support new staff. Staff access a wide range of training to equip them to meet children's individual needs. However, several staff are not trained in the use of physical intervention and practical first aid. Currently, only one staff member and the residential manager are up to date with training in these areas. This results in a reliance on the senior staff on site should immediate responses be necessary. Additionally, some staff training could be monitored more effectively to establish when some training for staff needs to be updated.

School leaders and managers have ensured that the review of the quality of the residential provision has been completed. However, this lacks evaluation and depth in relation to the wider effectiveness of practice and support provided in line with the school's intended aims.

School leaders have ensured that all national minimum standards have been met. Two points for improvement have been made at this inspection.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that staff training plans are systematically monitored, and ensure that appropriately trained staff can respond swiftly in an emergency situation.
- School leaders should improve the depth of evaluation contained in the annual review of the residential provision.

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

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Sharron White

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Inspector

Mark Anderton, Social Care Inspector

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