

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 237 students on roll, 42 currently on role for the residential provision and 39 children were staying over the three days. Students can access the residential provision between Monday and Thursday each week. The residential accommodation is in two boarding houses on the school site.

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

Inspection dates: 30 September to 2 October 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 11 June 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

At this inspection, several children were spoken to about their experience. Children said that they are happy and excited about coming to board and enjoy spending time with their friends. Children appear happy, comfortable and safe during their stays.

Children enjoy a range of activities, staff take them out on local trips to parks, bowling, canoeing and meals out. Children enjoy more exhilarating group holidays, which tests them physically and mentally. Parents said that children are a lot more confident in the community because of these experiences.

Children choose their bedrooms and enjoy the brightly coloured decor in the residential houses. Children demonstrate pride and joy in their bedrooms. Some children share rooms with peers they consider to be their friends. However, the accommodation requires some updating. The school has applied for funding as part of the government Schools Rebuilding Programme.

Staff are caring and nurturing towards the children and demonstrate a therapeutic approach. Children are comfortable in the company of staff and look for reassurance and guidance. This support enhances their residential experience.

Staff demonstrate high levels of empathy and understanding of children and their families. They provide excellent levels of communication with families to keep them up to date with children's progress. They intervene and offer support and guidance to struggling families, using their knowledge and understanding of the child's individual needs.

Staff support children to be as independent as possible. Targets for children are achievable, and child led. Children demonstrate progress with tying laces, washing up, oral hygiene and making beds. For older children, staff support them to budget and pay for groceries. Leaders are working towards supporting children to open bank accounts and book online appointments.

Staff help children to overcome their fears. They have facilitated visits from dentists, local police liaison officers and fire fighters. These experiences have helped children to regain trust and replace past experiences with positive ones.

Staff recognise children's achievements. Children are issued with weekly awards and reward charts. Staff help children to celebrate one another's accomplishments during house meetings. This has helped children recognise other children's progress.

The joined-up approach between school staff and residential staff is exceptional. Staff speak to school staff daily. This information is shared electronically, and this reduces delays in sharing important details regarding children's experiences in school.

School staff help to support children by stepping in to support children in residential. Teaching staff make sure that children have familiar people around them to support them when needed. Children's attendance is higher because of the consistent support that they receive.

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

Staff use creative and innovative ways to keep children safe. Children are educated about online dangers during well-constructed tasks, answering true/false statements, quizzes and other activities as group. Parents say that this has helped children to keep safe online and in the community.

A parent who used to home-school their child said, '[Child] used to be a school refuser and now attends daily. [The child] is now increasing their residential time and is happy and safe.'

Children feel comfortable and safe opening up to staff about issues they are having at home. This has resulted in school leaders reaching out to parents to support them through difficult and challenging times. Staff support families by providing resources to help children understand safe relationships, look after their bodies, come to terms with loss and deal with their emotions.

All staff are trained in conflict management. Occasional incidents are well recorded. Highly effective oversight from school leaders ensures that measures are necessary and proportionate. Children are consulted after incidents, and leaders look at learning from practice.

Risk assessments are kept under review. Electronic monitoring is used to record incidents, track patterns and address issues with a network of professionals. Data is analysed and concerns are raised and explored during senior leadership meetings.

Children are helped to develop new skills to keep them safe. One parent said that their child had learned to ride a bike while boarding and their hand and eye coordination really improved as a result.

There have been no significant incidents since the last inspection. Children know how to raise concerns. Information is displayed in communal areas with photos and contact details for the independent listener and other independent bodies who visit the residential.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential manager is experienced and holds the relevant qualification. She has been in the role for three years and has spent time away from the provision on maternity leave. School leaders have gone above and beyond by doing sleep-in shifts, senior on-call duties and shifts to maintain consistency and stability for the children and staff.

Leaders are creative, innovative and responsive. Processes are in place for keeping pace with change, collating data, analysing information and discussing concerns with the wider trust to ensure high levels of monitoring. Feedback from independent visitors and listeners is consistently positive.

Recent changes in the school's organisational structure have resulted in greater oversight. Training is held centrally, and all staff are within timescale for their required diplomas and have completed their mandatory training. Staff are trained in trauma-informed practice, and their understanding is explored during regular team meetings.

There are mental health champions for staff. This means that leaders look out for staff as well as the children who access the provision.

Supervision sessions are held regularly and are effective. Staff are given space to speak openly about their feelings. School leaders provide support to help them leave their comfort zones. This has resulted in staff becoming highly competent at covering absence.

The governor for safeguarding and residential has a great understanding of the provision. The governor visits regularly and makes himself available to staff and children. The governor is proud of staff, who have increased responsibility and go above and beyond their roles to enhance children's experiences.

When there are concerns about the safety of children, leaders maintain excellent levels of communication with parents and carers. The family support practitioners are utilised to support children and their families. This means leaders have greater information about families to signpost the right support from outside agencies.

Leaders demonstrate ongoing dedication to supporting other provisions. Leaders attend forums with other school leaders to share best practice. This means others benefit from the wonderful plans and strategies that are worthy of dissemination.

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

Point for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that the plans proposed for the modernisation and refurbishment of the residential buildings are implemented in line with the agreed funding.

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: Ms Sharron White

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Inspectors

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