

2 November 2018

Mr Lawrence Chapman
Headteacher
Priory School
Mount Road
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP32 7BH

Dear Mr Chapman

Short inspection of Priory School

Following my visit to the school on 16 October 2018 with Helen Jones, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in November 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your calm and quiet determination to improve the school further is evident and you put the needs of the pupils at the centre of all decisions. Since the last inspection you have strengthened your leadership teams in line with the school's priorities. Senior and middle leaders relish their roles and responsibilities. They share your commitment to ensuring that pupils build their academic skills while at the same time developing their confidence and independence, so that they can go on to lead fulfilling lives. The considerable contribution made by these leaders and your staff teams has enabled you to maintain the outstanding quality of education provided by the school.

Pupils are very happy at The Priory. They feel safe and secure in the stimulating learning environment that you have created for them; they respond very well to the wide range of strategies that you employ to ensure their success. Pupils are polite, friendly and eager to talk about their learning. Parents are also extremely complimentary about the school. They value the high-quality support and advice that they receive from the staff; they could not praise them highly enough for their dedication, flexibility and commitment that ensures that their children's individual needs are met

Leaders have a very accurate view of the school's effectiveness. You have built on the many strengths identified in the last inspection and have successfully addressed the area for improvement. You have revised the curriculum and the range of subjects that pupils study. In doing so you have ensured that the activities pupils participate in are relevant and meaningful; the curriculum enables pupils to achieve their individual goals and aspirations. You have also improved systems for assessing pupils' progress. Consequently, staff plan lessons, experiences and support that meet pupils' needs closely and ensure that they experience high levels of success.

The partnerships that you have formed with other schools and business providers are highly effective. Your outreach service, which is commissioned by the local authority, is very well regarded by mainstream schools, as are the 'Special School Experience' days that you host for a range of other professionals.

The Priory is the only school in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Academy Trust (SENDAT) multi-academy trust. Trustees and members of the local governing body play a significant role in setting the strategic direction of the school; they use their high levels of skill, knowledge and understanding very effectively to hold leaders to close account. They provide you with excellent support and challenge because they know what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve further. Trustees and governors ensure that Priory School continues to provide an outstanding quality of education for its pupils.

The number of pupils who attend the school has increased significantly since the last inspection and you now cater for pupils from the age of five. Some staff raised concerns about the increased complexity of the needs of some of the pupils who now attend the school. You have successfully begun to address this issue, but you recognise that this work needs to be embedded and further developed.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding leader is very effectively supported by the deputies; they attend a wide range of training events and meetings and keep up to date with the latest safeguarding guidance. All staff are fully trained and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities; they are alert to any signs that a pupil may be at risk. School records show that staff are vigilant and report any concerns promptly. Leaders have recently introduced a new recording system which has strengthened the already thorough approach to record-keeping.

Pupils are safe and very well cared for. They said that there is some bullying at the school but that incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils also said that they are taught how to keep themselves safe, for example when they are cooking, taking part in outdoor activities and using the internet. The wide variety of out-of-class activities undertaken, both on and off site, are all very well supported by suitable risk assessments.

The safeguarding director makes regular visits to the school and ensures that policies and procedures are adhered to and that all statutory responsibilities are met.

Inspection findings

- You are developing new curriculum pathways in order to further enhance the wide range of tailored activities and experiences on offer to pupils. Currently, most of the pupils are able to follow a high-quality subject-based curriculum. You have also made adaptations to the curriculum for your cohort of pupils who have more significant learning difficulties; the activities that they undertake are now more relevant and meaningful.
- You continue to ensure that teaching and learning is highly effective. Teachers have very strong subject knowledge, which they use to set challenging work. This helps the most able pupils to develop high-level skills such as the analysis and evaluation of complex and conflicting information. It also supports pupils to make very good progress in the development of the skills, qualities and dispositions that they need to be successful and resilient learners.
- You ensure that there is a strong focus on the use of assessment information across the school. Leaders scrutinise pupils' performance closely and ensure that their learning plans and personal targets are appropriate and challenging. Pupils' work is checked both by teachers across the school and with teachers from other special schools to ensure that judgements are accurate and consistent. As a result, all pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points and without exception older pupils move on to education, employment and training when they leave school.
- Pupils' education, health and care needs are very carefully assessed. Leaders check that the outcomes agreed at review meetings are translated into clear targets that staff use to plan the curriculum for each pupil. Consequently, pupils are able to talk about their targets and what they need to do to improve.
- Transition into the school is very well planned and managed. Pupils settle quickly into the routines of the school day and rapidly grow in self-esteem and confidence. The extensive work experience programme is carefully staged so that pupils develop their communication and employability skills while strengthening their social and emotional skills. Arrangements for pupils' next steps after The Priory are very effective. Pupils succeed because they and their families are supported well to make informed and appropriate choices.
- Attendance is very closely monitored and has risen; it is now in line with the national average. Any absences are very rigorously followed up and pupils understand the importance of attending regularly.
- Leaders and governors have very clear strategies for the use of any additional funding that the school receives. As a result, the sport premium has been used well to extend the range of activities that pupils can participate in. Year 7 catch-up funding has also been used effectively to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The pupil premium funding has helped to ensure that

disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with pupils with similar starting points nationally.

- The Priory provides a very positive and purposeful learning environment for its pupils. Classrooms are bright and stimulating and pupils display very positive attitudes towards learning. Their behaviour in and around school is excellent because their personal development and welfare is given the highest priority by all those working at the school.
- The relationships between staff and pupils are a real strength of the school. The high levels of enthusiasm and commitment exhibited by all staff ensures that every child is challenged, motivated and engaged in their learning. Pupils are encouraged consistently to do their very best.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further enhance staff training to ensure that it reflects pupils' increasingly complex needs.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lynda Walker
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My team inspector and I held meetings with you and your deputy, your education management team, your designated leader for safeguarding, the community paediatrician, and members of your board of directors. I also spoke to your school improvement partner and a number of parents by telephone. I met with some representatives of the school council. Together with senior leaders, we visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and talked to pupils informally about their school experiences. We also scrutinised school documents, including the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, safeguarding records, policies and procedures. We also reviewed behaviour and attendance records, information about pupils' outcomes and subject action plans. The views of the 10 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were reviewed alongside the school's own parent and pupil surveys. Responses from the 30 respondents to the online staff survey were also considered.