

Inspection of a good school: Priory School

Hermitage Road, Upper Norwood, London SE19 3QN

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 March 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good 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 next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Priory School is a school where pupils are well cared for. Some pupils are non-verbal, but this does not stop them from communicating their wishes and desires, or from interacting with their friends.

Pupils appreciate the care and support that staff give them. This helps them to feel safe and secure in school. They also appreciate the wider opportunities the school provides, such as horse riding, outdoor learning and swimming. These experiences enhance pupils' enjoyment of school.

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils. However, in some subjects, including English, lessons do not provide pupils with the best help or chance to learn.

Parents and carers agree that their children enjoy coming to school. They comment that the school is making a positive difference to their child's life.

Pupils behave well. Skilled staff support any pupil who struggles so they can get back to learning. Pupils are confident that adults will quickly sort out any concerns about unkind behaviour or bullying.

Pupils experience a wide range of therapies appropriate to their needs. Therapy is threaded through pupils' timetables and is integral to their educational success.

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

Many pupils in the school are not ready for the national curriculum and follow a specialist programme. Leaders have structured the curriculum into five pathways that have been designed to meet pupils' particular needs. These pathways provide suitable learning opportunities for pupils - for example, for pupils' sensory and communication needs. For those who can access a more formal approach, the provision for English requires development. The English curriculum is limited to books and stories that are aimed at much younger children. This means that pupils do not learn the knowledge, skills and vocabulary that they could.

Where the curriculum is most successful, work is matched to meet the varied needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The expectations that are set for their learning are appropriate. At times, however, teachers choose activities that do not match the subject content they intend to teach.

Some pupils are ready to start learning phonics. Leaders have not established a clear enough programme and timeframe for these pupils to learn their letter sounds. This hampers leaders' ability to identify any pupils who fall behind or who may need extra support.

Leaders have designed the curriculum with an emphasis on communication. Many pupils have difficulties communicating. Leaders and staff use a range of communication systems that support pupils' development very effectively.

In most subjects, teachers and support staff use assessment to ensure pupils achieve well. Staff check that pupils are working towards their education, health and care (EHC) plan targets and use this information to inform the SEND annual review process.

Staff use positive approaches to manage pupils' behaviour. They know that all pupils' behaviour conveys a message, and they interpret it well. Some pupils need extra help with their behaviour. Any concerning behaviour is dealt with and does not impact on the learning of others.

Pupils' personal development is a large part of school life. This aspect of the curriculum is carefully planned. Leaders provide an extensive range of activities that help to develop pupils' understanding of the wider world. Pupils take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Pupils attend a variety of work experience placements that are tailored to their individual interests and needs. These include working in the local coffee shop and florist. This helps pupils to gain experiences in their community. It encourages them to think about future careers. However, there is no careers education programme in place. This means that pupils do not have the support they need when making decisions about their next steps in education, employment and/or training.

Leaders are mindful of staff workload and take this into account when they are making decisions.

Recent appointments to the governing body will help them to be better equipped to carry out their statutory duties. This includes challenging leaders more robustly about, for example, the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. All staff are well informed about the signs of abuse. Staff use systems for recording and reporting concerns effectively. This enables leaders to identify pupils who might be at risk. Leaders work with a range of outside agencies to ensure pupils and families get the help they need.

The curriculum helps pupils to develop healthy relationships and to stay safe, including when using the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that the teaching of early reading has a clear enough programme for the most able pupils to learn their letter sounds. Consequently, pupils are not benefiting from a programme that ensures they learn at pace and are spotted quickly if they fall behind. Leaders need to ensure that staff are trained effectively to deliver a systematic phonics programme to this group of pupils.
- For those pupils who can access more formal learning, the English curriculum is not sufficiently well planned and sequenced. This means that pupils do not develop the knowledge and skills that they should. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is set out clearly and is well sequenced, introducing pupils to a wide range of resources and literature as they develop.
- Leaders have no plan in place to help pupils become ready for education, employment or training. This means that pupils are not sufficiently well prepared for their next steps, and they do not receive independent careers advice and guidance. Leaders should ensure they comply with guidance and have a careers plan and policy in place.
- Governors have not monitored leaders' work closely enough. Consequently, they have not identified some of the school's weaknesses, notably in relation to the curriculum and the statutory elements of their role. Governors should challenge the work of leaders more robustly.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 good in November 2013.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	101856
Local authority	Croydon
Inspection number	10255526
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
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	139
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	52
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Susan Powell
Headteacher	Julie Evans
Website	www.priorycroydon.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	31 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with severe learning disabilities, many of whom have autism spectrum disorder.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to the headteacher and other senior leaders.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, communication and personal development. 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. Other subjects were also considered as part of this inspection.
- Inspectors spoke to staff, parents and pupils regarding safeguarding arrangements. Inspectors scrutinised training records of staff, as well as the single central record.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils, and they observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff about safeguarding, behaviour and their workload. Inspectors also looked at the responses from staff and parents to Ofsted's surveys, including Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors spoke to those with responsibility for governance.

Inspection team

Francis Gonzalez, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Lucy Bruce

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