

Inspection of The Old Priory School

Priory Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT11 9PG

Inspection dates:

29 November to 1 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils attending The Old Priory School are welcomed into a safe and nurturing environment. All pupils face significant social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Despite bringing negative experiences of seriously disrupted education in the past, pupils settle quickly and attend well.

Social and emotional development is afforded high priority. All staff at the school demonstrate profound commitment to re-establishing pupils' faith in adults and in the possibility of a positive future. Gradually, pupils respond to the care and support on offer and, over time, staff and pupils form strong bonds. Pupils learn to manage their behaviour more successfully, take an increasingly active part in learning and strive to live up to the expectations that leaders and staff set. All pupils say that they feel safe in school, and that they trust adults to support them with any worries.

Pupils feel a sense of achievement and pride. They are proud when efforts are recognised with awards of team points and vouchers. Of a just-constructed brick wall, one pupil told the inspector: 'This is the best thing I have ever done, literally the best thing.'

Despite these strengths, leaders' plans for the subjects taught, including who by and how, have not been considered carefully enough. In particular, not enough is done to ensure that pupils read confidently, widely and with enjoyment.

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

A culture of positivity and possibility pervades the school. Pupils' histories, and special educational needs and/or disabilities, are known and understood in forensic detail. Extensive records are meticulously kept and updated. Vital information is helpfully summarised onto a pupil passport. In this way, all staff can readily identify the best strategies to support an individual to manage their dysregulated behaviour and to participate in learning.

Pupils' behaviour can be challenging. Poor language, exiting lessons and damaging resources are frequent. However, staff are highly trained and are experts in managing these occurrences. The school is organised in such a way that there is always someone on hand and a safe place to go to in moments of crisis. Staff respond to different behaviours calmly and swiftly. When a strategy does not work, staff readily find an alternative approach. Pupils learn that staff will help them, no matter what, and that fresh starts are not limited. As a result of consistent and positive support, through the school's 'Empowerment' approach, pupils are enabled to improve their behaviour. Pupils often show a willingness to apologise for transgressions with words or a hug.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is unwavering. Leaders know clearly that diverse life experiences, an open mind and resilience are helpful factors in building cultural capital for the future. The school's citizenship curriculum,

thought-provoking assemblies, a house system, school council, clubs and outings all contribute towards developing pupils' confidence and character. Carefully constructed, effective careers education is a focus from Year 7 onwards. However, it is some of the simplest activities that have greatest impact. For example, when ready, older pupils are trusted with unsupervised breaks off the school site. This experience of independence and responsibility is appreciated by pupils and provides practical experience of responsible citizenship. In such ways, pupils are prepared well for their next steps in education, employment and adult life.

Leaders have ensured that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and that independent school standards continue to be met. A representative of the proprietor body meets routinely with the headteacher to oversee and evaluate the work of the school. While aspects of the school's work are highly considered and effective, the academic and vocational curriculums are of inconsistent quality. Those in teaching positions are not always well enough skilled or qualified. Some possess expert knowledge of the subject they are teaching, but this is not always the case. Certain curriculum plans, such as in science, are carefully considered. Essential scientific content is identified. Learning is thoughtfully sequenced, and assessment used effectively to confirm what pupils know, understand and should learn next.

In some foundation subjects, plans are particularly weak. In these cases, plans relate to activities to be undertaken and not to what is to be learned by doing them. In other cases, such as English at key stage 4, the curriculum is a qualification syllabus, without wider consideration of what else or more pupils should learn. In addition, some staff who teach classes lack expertise in how to teach and this further impedes pupils' learning.

Leaders know that pupils who join The Old Priory School are frequently behind with their reading. However, a culture of reading is not established and there is no system for pupils to catch up. Staff have very recently commenced training in phonics, but this is at the earliest stages of implementation. Leaders recognise that pupils do not hear or read a range of literature and have identified this as a priority.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff possess expert knowledge of safeguarding. The designated safeguarding leads are highly trained, as is the whole staff team. There is a strong culture of vigilance, including identifying diverse risks and planning mitigating actions. Leaders work collaboratively with other agencies as a matter of course.

Leaders are appropriately trained in safe recruitment. Safeguarding features routinely in interviews as well as in the induction process. References are always taken up and verified.

Pupils are taught how to identify risks and stay safe through the breadth of the curriculum. This learning plays a significant part in pupils' personal development and in preparing them for safe futures.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Staff supporting those at an early stage of learning to read do not have sufficient expertise in the teaching of phonics. More widely, staff do not have the expertise they need to promote pupils' engagement with, and love of, reading. This means that pupils' independent access to the wider curriculum is hindered. It also means that pupils miss out on the experience of reading and hearing whole books. Opportunities for pupils' wider learning and gaining of cultural capital are missed. Senior leaders should ensure that staff receive appropriate training in supporting those at an early stage of reading, and in how to develop and promote a culture of reading within the school effectively.
- The school's curriculum is of inconsistent quality. In some subjects, leaders have not identified the knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn precisely enough. Too much consideration is given to the activity and not the learning. This means that, in these subjects, the significant gaps in knowledge that pupils arrive with are not addressed, and pupils are not equipped to successfully learn and acquire new knowledge. Leaders need to further refine the curriculum, to ensure that key knowledge to be learned is precisely identified and planned for.
- Opportunities for staff training have typically focused on safeguarding, behaviour and pupils' personal development. Consequently, some staff are not sufficiently expert in the subjects or topics that they teach, or in effective teaching approaches. These factors limit pupils' learning. Senior leaders must ensure that staff who teach acquire sufficient subject knowledge. In addition, leaders must ensure that staff are adequately trained in teaching methods, in order that they support pupils' learning effectively.

How can I feed back my views?

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School details

Unique reference number	131422
DfE registration number	886/6076
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10243535
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Ethelbert Children's Services
Chair	Gordon Shaw
Headteacher	Julie Bartlett
Annual fees (day pupils)	£33,800 to £39,000
Telephone number	01843 599322
Website	https://www.ethelbertonline.co.uk/
Email address	julie.bayley@ethelbert.net
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 June 2018

Information about this school

- Pupils are placed at The Old Priory School as a result of their complex emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Most have experienced significant disruption to their previous education. Almost all pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in June 2018 when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- The Old Priory School is owned and run by Ethelbert Children's Services.
- An additional site at Park Lane is used to provide vocational education and training.
- There are currently 24 pupils on roll.
- The school does not operate a sixth form.
- The school currently uses one registered alternative education provider.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- The inspector discussed the school's work during the COVID-19 pandemic with leaders. The information and evidence have been taken into account in the overall evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher/special educational needs coordinator and the chair of the proprietor body.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science and vocational studies. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at curriculum plans, sampling pupils' work and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about learning in these subjects. The inspector also spoke to leaders about the quality of education provided in other subjects.
- The inspector toured the school's premises and accommodation. She checked a wide range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. She reviewed the school's website and other records relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff linked to the independent school standards.
- The inspector gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload.

- The inspector met with groups of staff and talked informally to pupils as well as staff throughout the inspection.
- The inspector additionally considered the views of staff submitted through the Ofsted staff survey.

Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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