

School inspection report

14 to 16 November 2023

Priory School

Sir Harry Street
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2UR

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Summary of inspection findings

1. School leaders and governors carry out their responsibilities effectively. They promote the wellbeing of pupils and ensure the school meets the Standards. They have successfully created a school culture that reflects the school's Catholic heritage and meets its aims.
2. Leaders have carried out a self-evaluation process in order to identify and address areas for improvement. However, in the senior school, some of this planning is not clear about the steps needed to bring about the desired outcomes. Leaders in the prep school use their oversight to create a clearer and more effective plan.
3. Leaders ensure that the curriculum covers all required areas of learning and pupils make good progress overall. Appropriate support is provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those with education or health care (EHC) plans enabling them to progress in line with their peers.
4. There is suitable support for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), which helps them to improve their fluency and understanding. Leaders have recently increased the level of support they provide in this area, so that these pupils now make consistently good progress.
5. Leaders have developed new systems to assess pupils' progress and attainment. This data is used well in the prep school, but it is not always used as effectively in the senior school to inform teaching and achieve the best outcomes for pupils.
6. Pupils generally feel supported in their learning by their teachers and learning support staff. Prep school pupils are engaged, eager learners. In the senior school, pupils are sometimes not as engaged in their learning and their progress is less consistent because the tasks set by teachers are not as well matched to their needs and abilities.
7. Children in Reception make good progress in their learning and development relative to their starting points and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
8. Leaders have established effective pastoral structures across the school, centred on year group tutoring. As a result, pupils know there are adults they can approach for advice or support. Pupils generally treat each other with respect and know that discrimination or bullying in any form is unacceptable.
9. Leaders take appropriate actions in response to identified risks, for example in ensuring the security of the school site. The school is a safe environment with action taken to minimise any health and safety risks. Premises and accommodation are well maintained and there are regular checks to reduce the risk of fire.
10. The school has a programme for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) which prepares pupils for life as adults in modern Britain. There is age-appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE). Pupils are typically respectful towards each other. A few pupils do not fully understand that certain attitudes are unacceptable in healthy relationships between genders. Such incidents are rare and leaders deal with them swiftly and appropriately.

11. The school has a suitable careers programme which prepares pupils for their next stage of education and later life. Leaders recognise it could inform pupils about a wider range of options, and plan to improve its scope. Pupils understand their responsibilities to the environment and the wider community, so that there is a shared commitment to service and charitable fund raising.
12. Safeguarding procedures are effective and reflect the latest guidance. Staff are well trained in safeguarding and understand their responsibilities.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance, are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that development planning in the senior school clearly identifies how areas for development will be addressed
- make more effective use of the data collected on pupils' performance in the senior school to inform teachers' planning and ensure pupils make consistent progress
- ensure that all teaching is well matched to the abilities and interest of pupils, so they engage fully in their learning
- ensure that all pupils fully understand the importance of developing and maintaining healthy and respectful relationships
- provide information and support on a wider range of options as part of the careers education programme to allow pupils to make fully informed choices about their future pathways.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. School leaders and governors have successfully created a school culture that reflects its Catholic heritage and meets its aims. Governors have a wide range of skills. They know the school well, understand their responsibilities for pupils' wellbeing and are alert to actual and potential risks. For instance, governors' oversight identified a need to improve the implementation of the behavioural and pastoral care policies. However, governors do not always challenge leaders on the rigour with which new policies are implemented or their evaluation of areas for development.
14. School leaders and governors have created a plan which identifies areas for development. It sets out the criteria by which leaders will know they have succeeded in making improvements. However, it does not always indicate specific actions to be taken to achieve the vision. Leaders and governors do not demonstrate a clear understanding of what needs to be done to bring their aspirations into reality and to improve outcomes for pupils, particularly in the senior school.
15. Leaders within the prep school have an effective oversight of teaching and learning, and clear process to provide support for teachers and pupils. As a result, pupils make good progress. In the senior school, leaders do not always identify and address inconsistencies in teaching and learning. As a result, pupils' progress, whilst good overall, is not as consistent.
16. Leaders understand the requirements of equalities legislation and have a suitable accessibility plan in place with budgeted improvements planned over three years. Leaders are committed to providing equality of opportunity for all pupils. They ensure there are equal opportunities for both sexes.
17. Leaders manage risk effectively. Risks related to the school site and potential hazards are mitigated, and arrangements for trips and outings include suitable risk assessment procedures. The school site is safe, with secured access to buildings. All health and safety measures are given careful attention. The school buildings are well maintained, and teaching facilities are well resourced.
18. Leaders have ensured that all necessary information is available to parents either directly on the school's website or by request. The complaints policy meets requirements and it is carefully followed by leaders when dealing with any concerns.
19. Governors and school leaders at all levels are highly conscious of their safeguarding responsibilities, including for the oversight of the monitoring and filtering of internet usage in the school. They are well trained and committed to ensuring that any concerns are acted upon swiftly and effectively and local agencies are involved, as necessary.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. Leaders have established a curriculum which takes account of the needs, ages and aptitudes of the pupils. Leaders match it to the interests of pupils, for example by constructing a sixth-form curriculum which allows pupils to choose from an extensive range of subject choices in line with their aspirations.
22. Pupils through the school demonstrate effective mathematical skills and a secure understanding of scientific concepts. Pupils' literacy skills also develop well. Leaders increased focus on improving pupils' information and communication technology has enhanced pupils' confidence in their use of applications. Pupils' physical skills develop well and they achieve success in many different teams and individual sports. Pupils' creativity finds expression in their drama and design technology work.
23. Leaders have created a new framework to assess pupils' progress. This is used effectively within the prep school, helping to ensure that teaching builds on previous learning so that pupils make good progress from their starting points. Regular pupil progress meetings between leaders and class teachers use data to inform planning.
24. Leaders within the senior school collect and analyse data for older pupils and pupils make good progress overall. The analysis may result in the provision of additional support, such as individual pupils meeting with a senior teacher to set targets. The data is not always used to help teachers plan their lessons. In such cases, pupils' progress is less consistent.
25. Pupils who have SEND receive appropriate support. Teaching is generally planned to meet their needs, and they are supported by specialist staff where required. As a result, they make good progress.
26. Leaders had identified that EAL pupils would benefit from additional support with this aspect of their learning. This is now provided and, as a result, these pupils make good progress with their understanding and use of English.
27. Children in Reception make good progress supported by staff's understanding of each child's level of development, individual needs and interests. They plan activities with care and build on the numeracy and literacy foundations they develop during their time in the Nursery. Most reach a good level of development.
28. Pupils in the prep school make good progress. At the end of Year 6, some gain entry to selective senior schools, or gain other awards. Results at GCSE and A level show that most pupils attain results in line with or above the predictions based on their starting points.
29. In the prep school, leaders are successful in providing high-quality teaching. Teachers show secure subject knowledge and close awareness of their pupils' needs, adapting material to provide suitable challenge and support. Lessons are well planned, with effective questioning and a variety of strategies to engage pupils' interest. As a result, pupils are eager learners. They have the confidence to risk making mistakes and they pay close attention to their teachers' feedback on how to improve.

30. In the senior school, most teachers have secure subject knowledge and generally plan their lessons well. In a few cases, tasks are not adapted appropriately to match the interests and ability of the pupils. In such cases, pupils are not as engaged, and their progress is less consistent.
31. Leaders provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities catering for pupils' different interests. In the senior school there is dedicated time each week for enrichment activities, which ensures all pupils can develop their own interests and skills, for example in taking full responsibility for producing a school newspaper. Prep school pupils also enjoy taking on new interests and learning new skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

- 32. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

33. Leaders are successful in promoting a positive atmosphere in the school. The curriculum ensures pupils have an understanding and respect for the different faiths represented in the school community. Teaching emphasises the many common factors these faiths share.
34. Leaders have created effective pastoral structures based on year group tutoring and clear behavioural expectations. These support pupils' wellbeing and encourage pupils to grow in self-esteem and self-confidence. Prep pupils show considerate manners and confidence. They showed considerable self-assurance when rehearsing a short play for their forthcoming assembly, eagerly contributing suggestions for the final dance sequence. Senior pupils generally relate well to each other. Most are self-confident and have a secure understanding of their abilities.
35. Pupils understand the importance of physical activity to a healthy lifestyle. Regular physical education lessons and sporting opportunities in the extra-curricular programme help to support the pupils' physical and mental wellbeing. The school has consistent success in a range of sports, especially in football, with some pupils invited to join professional football academies.
36. There is a suitable PSHE programme running across the school. This provides pupils with clear guidance on matters of good relationships and healthy lifestyles. Leaders encourage pupils to be alert to their mental health and have increased the counselling provision in the school. As a result, pupils are well supported. There is an appropriate RSE policy. Leaders have taken steps to support pupils in the senior school with topics such as sexuality and sexual health which are part of the programme, and this has led to greater understanding in these areas.
37. Children in the early years demonstrate kindness in their dealings with each other. Leaders successfully develop their confidence and independence. The setting is well maintained and children feel secure.
38. Leaders restructured the behavioural policy as this school year began and behaviour overall has improved as a result. Infringements are managed in line with the policy. Behaviour of pupils is usually positive. Bullying is uncommon and when there is unacceptable behaviour or discriminatory language leaders respond effectively.
39. Effective measures are in place to ensure health and safety. The premises are well maintained and staff are appropriately trained. Potential risks related to fire safety are identified and action taken as needed. This extends to ensuring that the specific physical and emotional needs of individual pupils are considered and met. Suitable numbers of trained staff provide first aid to pupils.
40. Pupils are well supervised on site and during visits out of school. Attendance and admission registers are kept properly, and any issues are followed up promptly. The school makes the appropriate reports when pupils leave the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

41. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

42. Leaders have put in place a curriculum that provides the required coverage of human, social, democratic and economic issues, so that pupils are aware of the forces that have shaped the modern world. There is open and balanced discussion of challenging issues such as current political divisions and conflicts. Pupils are alert to the importance of issues such as religious tolerance and democracy; they understand the role of Parliament and the importance of respect for the law in a civilised society. Their education ensures they are well prepared to play a part in life in modern British society.
43. Leaders create a generally harmonious respectful atmosphere within the school community supported by the creation of a diversity and inclusion group and other curricular opportunities in the senior school. There are occasional curricular opportunities to celebrate the rich contributions made by British and other cultures to modern Britain.
44. Pupils understand the importance of mutual respect and the unacceptability of negative attitudes to differences between people, including based on their gender. As a result, examples of inappropriate language or behaviour are rare. A few male pupils have expressed unacceptable views, indicating a lack of respect and understanding of healthy relationships. Leaders take prompt action to deal with any incidents.
45. Children in the early years are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Leaders ensure they learn to respect and care for one another. Children enjoy the diversity of their community and celebrating each other's cultural events.
46. The PSHE programme includes appropriate careers education. Careers guidance includes topics such as financial awareness and presentation skills. Further support comes through conversations with staff, visits to careers fairs and individual support for sixth-form pupils in completing applications to university. Pupils can seek advice from staff. Work experience opportunities and visits to the school by employers have not yet been re-established following the pandemic. Leaders have identified a need to present pupils with information on a wider range of possible options, so they have greater awareness of possible pathways after they leave the school.
47. School leaders are successful in encouraging pupils to be alert to environmental and global issues, and this is reflected in pupils' commitment to charitable endeavours. In discussions on climate change pupils showed awareness of the moral rights and wrongs of international responses to this issue. They are aware that some choices may have an economic impact.
48. Senior school pupils involved in an Eco club work to promote environmental action within the school such as in recycling of plastics. Prep pupils choose their own charities to support. These have included a children's hospice and the Samaritans. Senior school pupils support local and national charities, for example organising and running a coffee morning for a cancer care charity or supporting the work of a local religious order. In doing so they develop their financial skills.
49. Pupils accept and enjoy responsibility to contribute to the school community, through involvement in the prep school council and senior school parliament. In these ways they can see that their views are listened to and acted upon. For example, the school has added trousers to the uniform list for

girls. In this way, pupils learn that they can have a positive impact on others' lives, as well as developing confidence in their leadership and organisational skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

51. Leaders gives high priority to safeguarding and procedures are effective. The safeguarding policy reflects the most recent guidance. Staff are well trained when they join the school. Their training includes procedures, internet safety and the danger of extremism. There are appropriate numbers of staff trained as safeguarding leads. There is regular safeguarding update training for staff, including a section in the weekly staff bulletins.
52. Governors exercise a well-informed oversight of safeguarding. They are trained appropriately, including in their responsibilities for monitoring the usage and filtering of the school's internet. The designated safeguarding governor meets regularly with the school's safeguarding lead. Regular reports are made to the governing body on safeguarding matters within the school. Leaders and governors ensure that recruitment processes are thorough.
53. There is effective liaison between those leaders responsible for safeguarding in the different section of the school. Staff are alert to concerns and swift to report them to the safeguarding leads. This includes any low-level concerns arising within the school. The school is careful to follow its policies and makes swift contact with the appropriate agencies, including the police as necessary, when safeguarding concerns arise. Records are kept electronically and access to them is appropriately restricted to ensure confidentiality. Should a pupil transfer to another school, safeguarding records are passed on within the required timeframe.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 54. All the relevant Standards are met.**

The quality of the early years foundation stage in the registered early years provision

Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision

55. The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is good.
56. Leaders and managers plan to ensure the curriculum meets the needs, interests and developmental stages of each child in the setting. Children who have SEND are well supported. Staff are aware of the various needs of the children and plan activities which engage and support their learning.
57. All children make good progress in their learning and development relative to their starting points and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Children who have EAL make good progress in their use and understanding of English.
58. Children display high levels of personal and emotional security, consistently demonstrating that they feel happy. When they leave their main carer, or when a routine changes, children adapt confidently showing that they feel safe and secure.
59. All requirements for children's safeguarding and welfare are fully met and are monitored regularly by leaders and managers. Staff understand their shared responsibility for protecting children, who feel safe and cared for as a result.
60. Leaders and managers have a secure knowledge of the early years learning requirements. There is evidence of leadership and management's commitment to continuous improvement through informal self-evaluation and a vision for future developments.

Quality of education

61. The quality of education is good.
62. The broad and well-balanced curriculum meets the statutory requirements for early years. It provides a wide range of experiences for every child in the setting.
63. Curriculum planning is based on the staff's understanding of each child's level of development, individual needs and interests, enabling them to have a good start to their education. Regular monitoring of the curriculum and the evaluation of the activities provided result in all children receiving a high level of support for their learning needs.
64. The knowledge displayed by staff of how babies and young children learn and develop ensures that the content, sequencing and progression in the areas of learning are secure. They have consistently high expectations for the children in their care.
65. Staff readily engage with children during routine activities and take every opportunity to develop language and social skills. Children hear and repeat words and phrases modelled and spoken to them and therefore increase their vocabulary. Children listen to stories, nursery rhymes and songs promoted by enthusiastic staff. Staff make use of the opportunities when playing with the children to introduce mathematical language by counting and talking to them about size.

66. Regular assessments ensure that each child's progress is carefully monitored, and their needs are met effectively.
67. Positive feedback is given to the children through praise and encouragement, which helps them to acquire the skills and attitudes to learn effectively. The stimulating experiences that the children receive provide them with a solid foundation for their future learning. All children are from the earliest age well prepared for the next stage in their education.
68. The many opportunities available to the children through a wide range of co-curricular activities, enables them to develop their knowledge and skills, which helps them to learn effectively.

Behaviour and attitudes

69. Behaviour and attitudes are good.
70. Children show great enjoyment in their learning. Accessible high-quality resources offer children opportunities to explore and make choices. They move around the rooms with confidence.
71. Open ended activities encourage and foster exploration and investigation, enabling children to demonstrate the characteristics of effective learning, confidence and independence. However, opportunities for children to build on their learning and skills through the additional learning resources available in the outdoor area are less regular.
72. Children are active learners who are highly motivated to join in a range of activities. Older children demonstrate high levels of independence when following instructions to programme digital robots, and younger children demonstrate concentration and perseverance when selecting the correct pieces that fit together to complete a puzzle.
73. The setting has procedures in place for behaviour management. Children were observed demonstrating calm and caring behaviour towards each other. They respond well to gentle reminders from staff about how to share things and how to play co-operatively. When in the forest area children demonstrated an understanding of the need for rules and how to follow them to keep themselves safe.
74. The setting has a highly effective partnership with parents, which successfully encourages regular attendance and establishes secure routines and good habits for future learning.

Personal development

75. The personal development of children is good.
76. The relationships that children have with the adults around them are built on strong, secure attachments. Children form positive relationships with key people and demonstrate high levels of wellbeing as a result. They are very settled and happy throughout the day and have warm and trusting relationships with all staff.
77. The curriculum promotes the development of their character and provides opportunities for children to develop confidence, resilience and independence through child-initiated activities, supported when necessary, by sensitive and knowledgeable staff.

78. Children are encouraged to take risks in various activities both indoors and outdoors, such as older children balancing on beams in the playground area. Children are learning to manage risks, such as younger children holding onto the rail when walking up and the down steps to access the wider school grounds.
79. A healthy lifestyle programme, for which the setting has achieved an award, supports children to have a healthy diet and understand the need for physical exercise. Older children can articulate why this is important. A healthy diet is provided each day. Children are provided with freshly cooked food, drinking water and fruit. Staff ensure that food preferences and allergy needs are catered for appropriately.
80. Hygiene practices, which are followed by everyone, ensure that the personal needs of the children at this age are met appropriately. Older children wash their hands independently and younger children are supported to do so through related activities and handwashing songs.
81. Well-established routines and procedures enable children to feel safe and secure emotionally and physically. The children are well cared for and make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development within an environment where they are valued as individuals.
82. All staff give high priority to safeguarding and are aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding, welfare and learning and development.
83. Staff are effective in preparing children for life in modern Britain by enabling them to make decisions, such as choosing a book to read and deciding which activity to explore. As they are encouraged to share and take turns, children learn to respect and care for one another. The diversity of the community is valued and cultural events are celebrated. All children are offered the same experiences. British values of fairness, respect and kindness towards each other underpin the setting.

Leadership and management

84. Leadership and management are good.
85. Effective direction from the leadership team results in an enthusiastic and able team of staff who share a vision to provide high-quality education and care where children feel safe, are happy and are making progress. They monitor the standards of care and curriculum to ensure that high standards are maintained, and they have high expectations of what all children can achieve.
86. Staff are qualified and fully supported by leaders and managers. They benefit from regular supervision meetings and appraisals, which allow staff to discuss issues including their own wellbeing and development. Professional development is strong with training provided for all compulsory requirements. In addition, leaders identify other training needs through evaluation and supervision meetings. This impacts positively on outcomes for the children.
87. Leaders know the children very well and respond quickly to the needs of all children. Children are well supported internally, and the setting can access specialist help from outside agencies when required. Systems are in place to ensure that every child's needs are met.

88. The setting has effective links with parents who understand that the setting follows the early years framework and they are aware through the online platform what their child is learning during their time at school.
89. Governors are generally well informed about the practice and standards of the setting. However, they were not aware of some regulatory responsibilities of governors and senior leaders. A procedural omission relating to a notification of a change of leadership was rectified during the inspection.
90. The recommendations from the previous inspection are met.

Safeguarding

91. Safeguarding is effective.
92. High priority is given to safeguarding and the implementation of all health and safety policies to keep children safe.

Recommended next steps

- Leaders should provide more regular access to the wide range of additional learning opportunities within the outdoor setting.
- Governors and senior leaders should strengthen their awareness of early years framework requirements relating to the management of the early years.

The extent to which the school meets the requirements of the early years foundation stage

93. The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006.

School details

School	Priory School
Department for Education number	330/6002
Registered early years number	EY289773
Registered charity number	518009
Address	Sir Harry's Road Edgbaston Birmingham B15 2UR
Telephone number	01214 404103
Email address	enquiries@prioryschool.net
Website	www.prioryschool.net
Proprietor	Priory School Edgbaston Trustees Ltd
Chair	Ms Heather Somerfield
Headteacher	Mr Jonathan Cramb
Age range	0 to 18
Number of pupils	399
Number of children in the early years registered setting	101
Date of previous inspection	6 July 2022

Information about the school

94. Priory School is a co-educational day school. It has three sections: an early years department for children aged 0 to 4, a prep school for pupils aged 5 to 11 and a senior school for those aged 11 to 18. All are located on the same site in Edgbaston, close to the centre of Birmingham. The school welcomes pupils of all faiths and none.
95. The early years provision has its own dedicated classrooms and outdoor areas within the prep school building.
96. The registered early years component of this inspection included children from birth to 4 years old and was inspected separately.
97. The school has identified twelve pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
98. English is an additional language for 49 pupils.
99. The school states that its aims are to provide a caring, family-oriented community with values drawn from its Catholic heritage. It sets out to value all pupils for their own unique talents and abilities, to develop their potential by encouraging initiative, self-discipline and responsibility, along with an awareness of environmental and global issues.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 November 2023

100. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

101. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to the facilities for the youngest children
- scrutiny of pupils' work with pupils and staff
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

102. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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