

Inspection of Rugeley School

Blithbury Road, Blithbury, Rugeley, Staffordshire WS15 3JQ

Inspection dates: 15–17 October 2019

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Since the last inspection, leaders and governors have improved the school. They make sure that all pupils get the education they deserve. Staff get the balance of education and care for the pupils just right. Pupils are happy and safe because staff supervise and support them well. Bullying is rare. Staff have very high expectations and encourage pupils to become more independent and resilient. Staff know that pupils focus on activities for different lengths of time because of pupils' varying special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff understand that pupils may choose to behave in a certain way because they are trying to let people know how they feel. Staff understand and cater for these needs well.

Everyone works hard as a team, making sure that pupils get the help they need to improve their communication and their behaviour. Staff take the time to get to the bottom of what pupils are trying to tell them. Many pupils have experienced difficulties and disruption in previous schools. Some pupils told us that when they joined this school it was the first time that they felt they had been listened to properly.

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

Leaders want the curriculum to be the best it can be. They are working with staff to make some changes to it to make it even better matched to pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils get a variety of experiences in different subjects.

The delivery of several curriculum subjects has been planned well so that different elements of the subject are taught in a sensible order. This helps pupils to learn more and remember more over time. There are real strengths in subjects such as early reading, mathematics and physical education (PE). Teachers plan activities that help pupils to deepen their knowledge and practise skills. Pupils then begin to apply what they have learned in different situations.

Leaders know that pupils who join the school will need to extend their reading skills further. They also realise that some current topics, such as 'the Romans', may not be relevant to some pupils, such as those who follow a sensory-based curriculum.

Careful account is taken of pupils' differing needs. Staff work well with health therapists to create personalised communication plans for pupils. As a result, pupils' language and communication skills are developing well. Pupils are helped to communicate in different ways, including using sign language, symbols and communication aids. These strategies also help pupils to develop their spoken language. Staff frequently share books with pupils. They encourage pupils to respond to pictures and remember familiar characters. Pupils who can read talk confidently about books they enjoy but say that they would like more books to choose from in school. They have some books in their classroom but would like a library area. Leaders are now developing a plan to help the small number of more able readers who have recently joined the school.

Staff make sure that pupils are regularly reminded of the school's mantra: 'be safe, be respectful and be ready to learn'. Staff build strong relationships with the pupils, creating a climate of trust and understanding. Staff receive high-quality behaviour training. This helps them to support pupils to manage their own behaviour better. Some pupils can choose to work in smaller rooms should they feel anxious.

Over time, the number of incidents and physical interventions at the school have halved. This is because of the high-quality support that pupils receive to help them take control of their own behaviour. Detailed personal behaviour plans help staff to make sure that pupils get the right support at the right time. Over time, pupils take more responsibility for their behaviour, learning to make good choices. Leaders reflect carefully on any incidents. They use this information to work with staff to refine pupils' behaviour plans so that pupils can be even better supported.

The really good use of the 'now and next' boards helps pupils understand and anticipate their next activity. They also help pupils better manage their behaviour because pupils know what is happening next. Pupils benefit from frequent sensory breaks, tailored to their needs and interests. These may include cycling, playing the piano or walking around the building for a short time. These breaks ensure that pupils are ready to return to their classrooms to learn.

Attendance is improving. Pupils who were poor attenders at other schools are now attending school full time. This is due to the effective strategies in place to support pupils to attend regularly. Leaders have not excluded any pupils from the school.

Staff provide well for pupils' personal development. They teach pupils how to become more tolerant of others, including respecting each other's personal space and feelings. Staff help pupils to become as independent as possible. Trips and visits give pupils a variety of experiences in the local community. During the inspection, pupils enjoyed the 'Heart Start' activities. They learned how to cope in an emergency and give first aid. They practised how to speak to the emergency services, recalling their names and addresses clearly.

Students in the post-16 provision enjoy a well-planned education that builds on what they have learned previously. Teachers focus on building students' independence and improving their life skills. They continue to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills, weaving them into courses like horticulture. All students benefit from weekly work experience and enjoy tasks such as bicycle maintenance, whistle making and litter picking. Students benefit from impartial careers guidance, helping them to make choices about their next steps. They enjoy taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Proprietors and governors know the school well. They have high expectations for everyone. They frequently challenge and hold leaders to account for their actions. Consequently, the school has improved considerably. All the independent school standards continue to be met in a consistent way. A suitable accessibility plan is in place. Senior leaders know that some curriculum leaders need additional training because they are new to their role. For example, they have not received training in

how to make checks on how well their subjects are being taught. Senior leaders currently hold this responsibility.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has an up-to-date safeguarding policy, published on its website. It takes account of the most recent advice given by the government.

Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding. This is because leaders ensure that staff have a detailed induction to the school. They also receive frequent safeguarding updates. Staff know that they have a responsibility to be the 'eyes and ears' of the most vulnerable pupils. They complete individual risk assessments for pupils, visits and activities. They can then respond to any potential risks effectively. If staff have any safeguarding worries, they can also use the whistleblowing helpline. The proprietary body takes any concerns seriously. It investigates and identifies any lessons learned for the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The early reading curriculum is well planned. However, the needs of pupils who are now joining the school are changing. Leaders should ensure that the reading curriculum is refined to meet the needs of this very small group of most-able readers.
- Leaders recognise that some curriculum topics are less relevant for those pupils following a sensory curriculum, and have begun to review their curriculum offer. Leaders should continue to refine their curriculum and ensure that topics chosen are relevant to pupils' needs and abilities.
- Most curriculum leaders are either new to their role or have limited experience as a leader. Senior leaders should make sure that curriculum leaders are given the training and support necessary to further develop their expertise. Curriculum leaders should then be able to ensure that their subject area is of the highest quality and assure themselves that it is being delivered effectively.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	132735
DfE registration number	860/6024
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10103983
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	46
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Priory Education Services Ltd
Chair	Kath Bridon
Headteacher	Lisa Price
Annual fees (day pupils)	£98,903 to £115,387
Telephone number	01889 504400
Website	www.priorygroup.com
Email address	rugeleyschool@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	10–12 October 2017

Information about this school

- The school is approved for the education of pupils from the age of five years, but at the time of the inspection there were no pupils under the age of seven years. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for pupils who have an autism spectrum disorder or associated conditions. Pupils have complex needs and some display challenging behaviours.
- The school does not use any alternative provision. However, a small number of post-16 students attend Strathmore College to follow vocational courses. They are accompanied by school staff at all times.

Information about this inspection

We 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.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, assistant headteachers and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with the managing director of the proprietary group, the chair of governors and the quality assurance adviser. Inspectors spoke to therapy representatives.
- Inspectors considered reading, mathematics, language and communication and PE in more depth. They met with curriculum leaders and teachers, and looked at schemes of work, planning and pupils' work. They visited a sample of other lessons.
- Inspectors looked at a range of safeguarding documentation, including the pre-recruitment checks leaders make on staff, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance records. They looked at a selection of pupils' files in detail.
- The lead inspector met with some pupils from the school council. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils informally during the inspection and met with a small number of parents. Inspectors considered the six free-text responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey. Inspectors considered the 33 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Claire Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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