

The Priory CofE Voluntary Aided School

West Bank, Dorking, Surrey RH4 3DG

Inspection dates

12–13 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have established an ethos of high aspirations and raised expectations of what pupils can achieve. Their actions are leading to improvements in teaching, pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance.
- New appointments have strengthened leadership and ensure that there is strong capacity for further improvement. Middle leaders are making an increasingly effective contribution to raising standards.
- Pupils make good progress in most subject areas as a result of the good teaching they receive. Teaching in previously weaker areas, such as science, is improving, although it does not yet match the best teaching found elsewhere in the school.
- Leaders make careful checks on the quality of teaching and on the progress that pupils make. They hold teachers to account for pupils' progress and intervene promptly to support any pupils who may be underachieving.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) currently in the school is improving. Leaders and teachers now pay more attention to these pupils' needs.
- Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and courteous to one another and to staff.
- The curriculum and wider provision promote pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well.
- Safeguarding and child protection procedures are well thought through and effective. Pupils feel safe and have a good understanding of how to protect themselves from risk.
- Governors carry out their duties diligently and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They provide effective challenge to leaders.
- The small sixth form provides well for students. Students in the sixth form make good progress because the curriculum meets their needs. However, the most able students do not always achieve the higher grades of which they are capable.
- Although teaching and learning is good overall, a small amount of teaching does not focus enough on high expectations or challenge for all pupils, or adhere to the school's feedback policy.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND do not attend school as regularly as others.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching, so that all practice is as effective as the best in the school by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - plan lessons which challenge and motivate pupils
 - use the assessment policy well to provide helpful feedback to pupils.
- Ensure that all middle leaders are effective in raising standards of teaching in their areas.
- Ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND make the progress they are capable of by the time they leave school.
- Continue to improve rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, so that their attendance is in line with national averages.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have responded well and taken appropriate actions to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous short inspection in February 2018. Leaders' drive to improve the quality of teaching is having an impact, leading to all pupils, including those with SEND or who are disadvantaged, making better progress in most areas of the school. However, leaders and governors recognise there is still some way to go before their ambitious vision for the school is fully realised.
- The headteacher provides principled and determined leadership. She has raised expectations of staff and instilled a stronger sense of professionalism. Crucially, she is prepared to take a long-term view to ensure that improvements are embedded and sustained, rather than just applying quick fixes. Leaders accept that, in the past, too much priority was placed on out-of-class interventions and the use of low-value qualifications to boost Year 11 examination results. Leaders now focus relentlessly on ensuring that pupils benefit from high-quality teaching and learning.
- Senior leadership has been strengthened, ensuring much greater accountability and consistency of approach. Leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well, evaluating them accurately and honestly. Improvement priorities are carefully considered and thought through. For example, the programme to improve teachers' effectiveness is sustained and carefully targeted around specific identified priorities. Senior leaders now have very good capacity to drive further improvement.
- Middle leaders are increasingly effective. They monitor the work of the teams they lead increasingly well and welcome the opportunity to develop the curriculum and teaching strategies. Middle leaders are held to account appropriately, and supported well by senior staff. In a small number of cases where middle leaders are less effective, senior leaders rightly take a more active role to ensure that standards of teaching do not slip.
- The vast majority of staff support and welcome the increased expectations that have been introduced. Relationships are very positive and staff morale is high. Staff particularly welcome the opportunity to work together and share ideas about teaching. All staff now receive regular training to extend and broaden their teaching skills. Leaders ensure that staff have regular chances to share good practice and participate in other training.
- Leaders make regular checks, both on the quality of teaching and on the progress that pupils make. They have increased their scrutiny of subject areas where pupils are not making enough progress, like mathematics and computer science, and ensure that leaders are clear about what is expected of them. Teachers' performance targets are clearly linked to improving progress for pupils.
- Leaders have improved the way they use additional funding to raise rates of progress for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. For example, the strategy to improve these pupils' basic literacy skills, including their handwriting, in key stage 3 is having a positive impact. Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND in the lower years are performing in line with the targets they have been set. However, additional support has not yet led to improvements in published outcomes for these pupils.

- Leaders make effective use of funding for pupils in Year 7 who need additional support in English and mathematics, monitoring the impact of the support very thoroughly. As a result, pupils in the lower years who have fallen behind in English and mathematics are beginning to catch up with their peers.
- Pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum, which is enhanced by well-planned spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision. Christian values are well promoted, and pupils regularly discuss topical local and national issues. Pupils also benefit from many after-school clubs and activities, as well as the school's strong commitment to the performing arts and practical subjects, such as design technology.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has been reorganised since the appointment of the current headteacher. Governors' roles and responsibilities have been reorganised and there are clear lines of accountability. Governors have considerable expertise and a wide range of skills, which they use well to support the school.
- Governors take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. All governors receive regular training and demonstrate a good understanding of local issues, for example the risks posed by 'county-lines' gangs. Governors have developed rigorous systems to check that school staff have attended and understood the training they have received.
- Governors are provided with detailed information about the school's performance. They make regular visits to check the quality of teaching and learning, and the progress that pupils are making. Consequently, they are well informed about the strengths and areas for improvement in the school, and provide increasing challenge to school leaders.
- Governors are well aware that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND have not made good progress in the past. They now have better information to challenge leaders and demonstrate a good understanding of the actions that leaders are taking. However, they have not yet evaluated the impact of the pupil premium fund with enough rigour to satisfy themselves that it is being used effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Leaders work closely and effectively with parents and a wide range of agencies to keep children safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders make sure that recruitment procedures are robust. They complete the required checks on all staff and keep careful records. Staff receive thorough child protection training which is updated and checked regularly, including through weekly reminders in the staff bulletin. They know what signs to look for and what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's well-being.
- The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has completed the appropriate high-level training needed for the role. Processes within the school for identifying pupils who may be at risk of harm are highly effective. Weekly meetings are held between school staff and external agencies to monitor high-risk pupils.

- School staff sometimes have to work even harder to ensure that pupils are kept safe, for example when they experience a slow response from the relevant local services. The DSL challenges forcefully any decisions by social services that she believes to be wrong and she is tenacious in following up all referrals.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know about online safety and they have been taught how to protect themselves from cyber bullying or online grooming. Pupils trust their teachers and say that there is someone they can talk to if they are worried about themselves or a friend.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers typically have good subject knowledge and plan well-structured lessons which provide appropriate challenge to different groups of pupils. Clear routines and strong relationships have been established between staff and pupils, and lessons are usually well managed and purposeful as a result. This allows pupils to progress well in the majority of lessons. They learn particularly well when teachers' expertise and enjoyment of their subjects infuse lessons.
- There are many strengths in the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in English, history, design technology, drama and the creative arts. In these subjects particularly, teachers' high expectations and clear explanations make very clear to pupils what is expected of them. Pupils are challenged to think hard and enjoy the opportunity to use their initiative and work collaboratively. For example, in design technology, Year 10 pupils were observed being very focused when using computer software to improve their table designs following feedback from their peers.
- In the best mathematics teaching, pupils take advantage of opportunities to develop reasoning skills and deepen their mathematical thinking. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils realised there were different ways they could solve a 'beach huts' problem and thought carefully about the best strategy to use. Teachers are thoughtful in checking and developing pupils' understanding, swiftly intervening to correct misconceptions, in line with school policies.
- Teaching in science has improved since the previous inspection, although it is not yet of the standard seen in the strongest subjects. Likewise, there is some variation in the standards of mathematics teaching. In some lessons in these subjects pupils do not make good progress when teachers' expectations are too low, the work provided lacks challenge, and pupils are sometimes unclear about what they are learning and need to do.
- Year 11 pupils, rightly, feel confident that they are being very well prepared for their GCSE examinations, saying how much they appreciate the extra sessions that teachers deliver. Lessons in all subjects have a good focus on key aspects of the syllabus, the wording of exam questions, and regular opportunities for the reinforcement of subject knowledge.
- Pupils typically receive helpful feedback about their learning, in line with the school's policy. Leaders of the different subject areas are making good use of the freedom to develop their own assessment and feedback policies. As a result, in many subjects, pupils are now receiving more immediate feedback which they use to improve their

work. In most cases, pupils clearly understand what they must do to improve their work, and act upon this feedback. However, a few teachers do not follow the policy well, and pupils get irregular and less helpful feedback.

- Reading is promoted well throughout the school. Pupils have opportunities to read every day in lessons and during tutor time. Almost all of the pupils seen during the inspection had an age-appropriate reading book which they were interested in and could discuss.
- Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire felt that they received valuable information about their children's progress. A clear majority of parents believe that their children are taught well and make good progress. However, a few expressed their concerns about a variation in teaching standards.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff care a great deal about pupils' personal development and emotional well-being. Consequently, relationships between pupils and staff are very strong. Pupils appreciate the introduction of the confidential online referral system which they use to report any concerns. Pupils who had used this service told inspectors that staff responded immediately and effectively. Pupils told inspectors that the promotion of mental health is a high priority in the school. A group of girls who spoke to inspectors described how the 'be me' group had given them more confidence.
- The school's well-developed programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is making a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils show a very good understanding of how the school's core values impact on their own lives. Staff encourage pupils to be respectful of others and to challenge stereotypes actively. For example, a group led by the school chaplain has been important in promoting the acceptance of people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- Pupils reported to inspectors that bullying is rare, and dealt with quickly when it does occur. Parents agree, and expressed very few concerns in the online survey.
- Leaders place great emphasis on ensuring that pupils are well prepared for the next steps in their education. There is a coordinated programme of careers information and guidance in all key stages. Pupils report that they feel well supported when making choices about their next steps.
- Leaders closely monitor the progress of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision. The pupils are all attending regularly and on track to complete successfully the GCSE and vocational courses they are studying.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.

- The school provides a calm and orderly environment for learning. Pupils conduct themselves well and move around the school in an orderly fashion. They are smart, polite and courteous. Inspectors were highly impressed by the way pupils cooperated during the very wet breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Behaviour in lessons and assemblies is typically good. Pupils get down to work quickly, and generally have positive attitudes to their learning. The 'ready to learn' agreement is understood, consistently followed and has resulted in a reduction in low-level disruption. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour has improved since the introduction of the policy, although disruption does still occur in some lessons where teachers have lower expectations.
- Pupils' absence rates, which increased in 2017/18, have improved this year as a result of a more methodical and rigorous approach to dealing with intermittent absence. Current attendance is now back in line with national figures. Punctuality to lessons is good. Staff feel that the removal of the morning tutor period has resulted in a prompter and more purposeful start to the day.
- The persistent absence of some pupils continues to be a challenge. Staff work very closely with vulnerable pupils and their families, and their actions are having a positive effect on some. While improving overall, the persistent absence rates among disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND remain stubbornly high. Absence rates are also high for a small number of pupils who join the school from other schools on managed moves.
- There have been no permanent exclusions for the last two years. Fixed-term exclusions rose in 2016/17 as the new headteacher brought in a firmer approach to misbehaviour, but declined last year and are maintaining an improving trend.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils currently in the school make good progress across a range of subjects. In English, pupils' ability to read, select and infer information develops well over time as a result of structured teaching. Progress is also strong in other subjects, notably history, religious studies, design technology and the creative arts. In science, a clearer focus on the distinct areas of physics, chemistry and biology is helping pupils develop their understanding of key concepts.
- In mathematics, pupils' progress is not as strong in key stage 4 because pupils are not exposed to enough challenging problems which develop their reasoning skills. However, pupils' fluency in basic mental arithmetic is improving as a result of recently introduced initiatives.
- Year 11 pupils have recently completed mock examinations, which indicate that pupils are making better progress in most subjects than seen in previous years. Inspectors scrutinised a large number of exam papers and agree with leaders that, at this stage, more pupils are on track to meet their ambitious performance targets. The difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others in Year 11 is also less than seen in previous years, although a gap remains.
- Published outcomes for 2018 show that pupils, including those in all the prior-ability groups, made broadly average progress, both overall and in each of the main areas of

the curriculum. Improvements were evident both for middle-ability pupils and in science. Progress in mathematics dipped to below the national average because high-ability pupils did less well than the previous year.

- Leaders are keenly aware that in previous years the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been too slow. Leaders have taken account of research evidence to place a sharper focus on improving the quality of teaching that these pupils receive. Leaders' own assessment information, and work in pupils' books, demonstrates that disadvantaged pupils are now beginning to catch up with other pupils.
- The special educational needs coordinator has identified accurately the pupils who need support. She has provided teachers with high-quality information about each pupil's barriers to learning with appropriate advice on how to overcome these barriers. Teaching assistants are well trained in providing specific support, and provide effective help to pupils in class. Consequently, most current pupils with SEND, in particular those in the lower years, are making similar rates of progress to all pupils.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education. They are well informed about options available to them, including opportunities for apprenticeships. Nearly all pupils move on to further education, work-based training or employment by the time they leave school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The number of students currently in the sixth form is comparatively low and their prior attainment is below that seen nationally. While this presents challenges to leaders and teachers, students value the highly personalised approach provided by the small class sizes and individual mentoring. Applications for entry this year are up significantly on last year as a result of leaders' renewed efforts to make the sixth form attractive for students.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is a strength of the sixth form. Teachers have high expectations and know the students very well. Consequently, work is very well matched to students' needs and they receive very timely and helpful feedback and support. Disadvantaged students, particularly, benefit from this close attention and make very good progress, both in A-level and vocational courses.
- In 2018, A-level results showed improvement from the previous year but remained below the national average. Assessment information for current students shows an improving trend, with students making strong progress in all subjects except mathematics and politics.
- Students who needed to retake GCSE English and mathematics qualifications were more successful last year than others nationally. In mathematics, students on average made three quarters of a grade more progress than others nationally.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the PSHE programme. It provides students with a wide range of opportunities to contribute to the school and the local community, for example through organising the school's annual charities week. The students who spoke to inspectors had a strong awareness of their place in society and how they can be good citizens.

- Safeguarding is effective and promoted well in the sixth form. The PSHE programme ensures that students are well informed about relevant issues such as online safety and safe driving, and the progress and welfare of vulnerable students are monitored closely by the pastoral team, including the DSL. Students who spoke to inspectors were keen to emphasise that they feel safe, well supported and have a strong sense of belonging.
- Careers information and guidance are effective. All students receive independent careers advice and take part in a work-experience programme. Leaders track students' destinations carefully, and students are guided well to make appropriate choices about their options when they leave the sixth form. All students are supported with making university applications. Apprenticeship opportunities are promoted regularly and all students who choose this route are provided with additional support. As a result, almost all students who left the sixth form last year secured a university place or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	125281
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10081816

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	740
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stuart Murray
Headteacher	Rachel Gibb
Telephone number	01306 887 337
Website	http://thepriorycofe.com/
Email address	enquiries@priorycofe.com
Date of previous inspection	13–14 November 2014

Information about this school

- The Priory CofE Voluntary Aided School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, with small numbers of pupils from a very wide range of groups. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are learning English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average.

- A small number of pupils in key stage 4 attend alternative provisions at Reigate Valley College, East Surrey College and the LINK Dorking.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects in different year groups, including in the sixth form. Many observations were undertaken jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors met with pupils to listen to their views, both formally and informally.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders and representatives from the governing body. Inspectors also had telephone conversations with a local authority representative, the school improvement partner (appointed by the diocese) and the headteacher of an alternative provision.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation that included: information about pupils' attainment and progress; the school's improvement plan; minutes of meetings of the governing body; and records relating to teaching and learning, pupils' attendance and behaviour, and safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaks, lunchtimes, in lessons, assembly, during registration periods and at the beginning and end of the school day. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons, and looked at samples of their books and Year 11 mock-examination papers, jointly with leaders.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed by parents in the 122 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as comments received via Ofsted's free-text service. Inspectors also took into account the 60 responses to a questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Mark Bagust, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Emma Phillips	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Foster	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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