

Mark College



Parent / Carer Information

January 2019

Information for Parents / Carers

Introduction

Mark College is a specialist day school registered for 60 children and young people who have specific learning difficulties or needs associated with a diagnosis on the autistic spectrum and are aged between 7 and 19 years.

Our inclusive approach means we are able to support young people with a wide range of needs, from those who are high attaining in their ability to others, who have more barriers to accessing the curriculum in a conventional manner. We accept that young people who are referred to us may have previously experienced a 'cycle of failure' and our aim is to have a transformational impact on their lives by them experiencing a 'culture of success.' We aim to support all young people to achieve successful outcomes so that they can progress to experience fulfilling and rewarding lives.

We warmly welcome our students into our community, which is underpinned by a culture of outstanding relationships, nurture and unconditional high regard.

Our young people have access to a wide range of educational activities and experiences outside of the classroom. We are aiming to utilise our extensive grounds to give opportunities to develop skills in horticulture, animal care and forest school activities. Away from our site, we are building a range of partnerships in the community which allow our students to access activities such as horse riding, swimming, work experience and a range of outdoor pursuits.

We are proud to offer a range of on-site therapy for our students. We have a therapy team, which we plan to grow and strengthen in line with the school's ambition to offer the very best support to the young people we support. Being part of the Priory Group, with its extensive network of mental health professionals, we are able to arrange access to other types of specialist therapy, as required.

We take pride in the environment we can offer. The school is located in a beautiful, quiet, rural location in Somerset in a manor house, which has a range of outbuildings and extensive grounds.

Mission Statement

'To deliver specialist educational, vocational, therapeutic and care services for young people who have specific learning difficulties, needs that are associated with a diagnosis on the autistic spectrum, and who have moderate learning difficulties and associated complex needs. Together we seek to inspire, enable, develop and support young people to realise, pursue and achieve their full potential on their lifelong learning journey.'

School Aims

Mark College aims to:

- Ensure that each young person is safe and feels safe.
- Have a positive and transformational impact on the lives of each young person and their families.
- Bring an end to the 'cycle of failure' that many of our young people have experienced prior to attending our school; ensuring they experience our 'culture of success.'
- Work in partnership with each child and young person, their families and/or carers and their wider multi professional team to create a consistent package of education and support.
- Offer a high level of flexibility so that each package is bespoke and meets individual need.
- Offer specialist teaching and therapeutic services within a fully integrated and multi-disciplinary staff team that leads to excellent outcomes for all.
- To provide the specialist resources and interventions that each young person requires to be successful.
- Prepare each of our students for a rewarding and fulfilling adult life; working on the factors that could limit their progress towards meeting this aim.
- To support our young people to recognise the broad range of beliefs and differences within our society within a spiritual, social, cultural and moral context; always with a view of supporting the development of fundamental British values.
- To provide opportunities for young people in our care to make informed choices which enhance the quality of their lives.
- To work collaboratively with parents/carers/advocates and placing authorities to ensure that the highest standard of service is provided at all times.

Methodology

These aims will be achieved through:

- A robust governance structure that offers effective support and challenge to the school and its leadership team.
- A strong and dedicated leadership team made up of experienced, trained and specialist professionals.
- A focus on ensuring the school offers the best possible provision for children and young people with autism.
- An emphasis on ensuring the highest levels of quality and safety are maintained throughout the school.
- Highly specialist teachers, therapists and support staff, who are well trained, experienced and knowledgeable about supporting children and young people who have specific learning difficulties and needs that are associated with a diagnosis on the autistic spectrum.
- Access to a range of in-house therapy services.
- A clear emphasis on ongoing training and development for staff at the school that ensures their practice remains current; leaving them able to offer excellent support to our children and young people.
- Access to a calming and nurturing environment and extensive inside and outside space.
- A thoughtful and careful approach to positive behaviour management, with a high emphasis on the school understanding triggers and meeting underlying needs.
- A calm and nurturing approach, with an emphasis on the principles of 'unconditional high regard' and the development and maintenance of outstanding trusting relationships, where children and young people are listened to and understood.
- A carefully planned, phased curriculum structure that offers both the challenge and support that enables our children and young people to succeed and progress.
- A post 16, sixth form provision that allows our young people to further develop their skills by applying and generalising them in a mainstream setting.

Physical Description of school

Mark College is registered and approved with the Department for Education and caters for up to 60 children and young people aged 7-19 with needs associated with a diagnosis on the autistic spectrum, specific learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and associated complex needs.

We take pride in the environment we can offer. The school is located in a beautiful, quiet, rural location in Somerset, within a manor house, which has a range of outbuildings and extensive grounds.

The school is easily accessible to those within a large geographical area, being only 10 minutes off junction 22 of the M5.

Outcomes for our Children and Young People

The school has changed significantly recently but it has maintained a firm focus upon the importance of supporting our young people to reach their potential.

For example, in 2017/18, students at the school achieved:

- 98% of pupils achieved a GCSE in English, Maths and Science
- 94% of all GCSEs entered passed
- 100% pass rate COPE Level 2
- 100% pass rate ICT Level 2
- 69% of predicted grades achieved or better

The school recently introduced systems to more effectively track social and emotional progress through the use of THRIVE.

Our ambition for our students means that we aspire for the highest quality destinations. This is tracked routinely and we are proud of the onward destinations our students transition onto.

Strategies to maximise, evaluate and record outcomes are ongoing and the school often trials innovative new techniques to ensure we demonstrate the highest possible levels of ambition.

Our curriculum

We are proud to offer high quality, bespoke curriculum packages that meet individual need. When a new student starts at Mark College, a brand new curriculum pathway will be moulded to them. We do not expect them to fit into what already exists. Highly specialised teachers, therapists and support staff work together closely to create a seamless, integrated approach.

As part of the process of forming these packages, we take care to look at the whole child and ensure that we consider any factors that could limit or prevent access to our ultimate lifelong goal - a happy and fulfilling adult life.

We endeavour to ensure that progress is made in all areas. For our students to prepare for their adult lives, they must develop the skills that could be obstacles to their success. For example, if our learners wish to access further education or employment, they will need to make academic progress AND develop the broader skills to successfully access that new environment.

Our curriculum model has three stages, represented by the steps our learners make on their lifelong learning journeys.



Transition Curriculum (Tier 1)

Students who join our school have often faced highly significant challenges prior to admission and may be experiencing a cycle of failure. We develop a tailored transition curriculum for each new student so that they can quickly feel our 'culture of success.' This process prioritises splitting down the transition into attainable stepping-stones with outcomes of reducing anxiety, raising confidence and developing strong, trusting relationships. The greatest of care is taken to track progress, with transition targets being regularly reviewed.

Developing Skills Curriculum (Tier 2)

As pupils settle at Mark College, they become familiar with the routines and are ready for a slight increase in the learning challenge. At this point the students may be able to join a group and follow a primary model of teaching (Falcons). This is a move towards greater structure in lessons and increased adult-led learning.

As pupils engage more readily within this learning culture, there is an introduction to achievable elements of the National Curriculum. Pupils are given opportunities for paired and group work, and are encouraged to access activities within the wider community. They may be ready to move into the Kites where there will be an increase in subject specific teaching.

Accredited Learning Curriculum (Tier 3)

As pupils progress through our school, we want to ensure that all our learners, are offered the maximum opportunities for success, and for many this is via the national system of accreditation.

At Mark College, we offer GCSEs, AQA Unit Awards, Functional Skills, BTECs, Duke of Edinburgh Awards and Independence Awards via ASDAN. The learning journey that all of our pupils undertake ensures that, with careful support, they are all able to achieve accreditation. This, for many, will be the stepping-stone to an FE college course.

Whatever the award, or pathway, we celebrate all achievements within our school, and do not lose sight of the amazing journey of change that we have undertaken with each one of our unique young people.

As a school from September 2018, we will be using Thrive to measure the social emotional development of our students. This will allow us to celebrate those more intimate successes that can often be difficult to measure. The Thrive approach draws on the recent developments within neuroscience, attachment theory and child development to support how we can in a powerful way work with children to optimise their social and emotional development.

Sixth Form Provision

Attending Mark College's sixth form marks a very significant step for many of our students, who are re-entering a mainstream learning environment for the first time in many years, often with very significant levels of anxiety.

The school has developed a sharp focus upon continuing provision for learning in English and maths and have been flexible in their approach. This has been successful. For example, offering 1:1 intervention teaching English and Maths at Mark College to ensure our students can gain a 4 at GCSE or complete functional skills at an appropriate level.

Developing independent learning skills is a strength of our sixth form provision. For example, one student develops his own social interaction and anxiety by supporting younger students in the school in Maths lessons .

When independent learning time is allowed for, care is taken to balance the safeguarding risk assessment and the lifelong benefits of increased independence. This often includes specific teaching on age appropriate risk themes, such as smoking, alcohol, drugs and relationships. This leads to improved levels of safety for these vulnerable learners, as they enter adulthood.

Senior leaders from Mark College have developed strong relationships with our partner colleges and ensure that the quality is good or better through careful monitoring and intervention. Our Service Level Agreements have a focus upon the quality of teaching and safeguarding and there are regular quality review meetings, where SLT members visit each college to discuss issues of progress, quality and safeguarding. This means that senior leaders have an accurate view of the progress each individual is making. Strode College, our main partner in providing provision to our sixth form, recently gained an outstanding judgement from Ofsted in September 2014.

Behaviour, Safety and Safeguarding

The school has created an Engagement (behaviour) management culture based on meeting individual needs in a focussed way. Mark College is a highly inclusive environment that will only use fixed term exclusions as a very last resort. At Mark College we believe that behaviour is communication and that challenging behaviour often indicates an unmet need – we will be looking to address the needs behind the behaviour rather than reacting to it. We are aiming to provide an environment that our students feel safe, are engaged and want to be here leading to high level of attendance.

School premises are well cared for and student damage is rare. Students are engaged in learning and respond well to staff. Lessons proceed without interruption. Systems are in place to deal with any bullying effectively.

Incidents are recorded and monitored carefully and shared with the wider governance structure of the school to allow for external challenge and support. The amount of physical intervention used is low for a school of this type.

The safety of the school is a high priority. The school has employed an experienced Support Services Manager to audit and bring improvement to this area of our practice, meaning that risk assessment is robust and effective and students are safe and feel safe.

Safeguarding is given a very high priority indeed. The Head Teacher is a trained DSL but is also supported by a colleague who has a role focussed solely on safeguarding.

All staff complete online and face-to-face safeguarding training both as part of their induction and of their ongoing training. Where safeguarding concerns have been raised, actions have been both prompt and effective. There are examples where the impact of this prompt and effective action has been significant in reducing levels of risk both online, at school and in the home.

Safeguarding themes are well understood in the school. We are particularly mindful of issues around children missing from education, gang culture, SEN and fabricated illnesses, CSE and FGM. As a result, children who would otherwise be vulnerable to such issues have, via the school's PSHE programme, and targeted 1:1 support, raised awareness and increased levels of safety.

We maintain British values and recruit and monitor closely for signs of racial and other discrimination, along with attempts of any member of our community to become involved with radicalisation. This means that the school has safeguards in place to protect the British values that it holds.

Special Educational Needs

Mark College is part of the Priory Education Services schools and is a specialist educational setting where the children and young people attending are almost always in possession of an SEN Statement or a Education, Health and Care Plan which has been agreed by families and all agencies involved.

The SEN Code of Practice (2015) states that Education, Health and Care Plans / statement of educational needs are integrated support plans for children and young people with SEN from 0 to 25 years of age. They are focussed on achieving outcomes and helping children and young people make a positive transition to adulthood, including into paid employment and independent living.

Mark College is committed to working in partnership with education, health and care professionals to enable students to achieve their academic potential and successful transition into adulthood.

Mark College makes provision for a range of special educational needs across within the school setting including autism, communication and language difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties. Our students often have compounding complex needs and these can include additional needs such as sensory impairment or mental health needs.

Mark College believes that:

- (a) All students have the right to access a wide range of learning experiences that reflect their needs, abilities and interests
- (b) The learning opportunities and experiences provided for students should allow them to be successful in achieving understanding and skills
- (c) All students have a right to access a suitable programme of learning
- (d) The views of students about their education and the views of parents (or carers) about the education their children receive should be sought and taken into account
- (e) Each student has the right to be valued for their culture, religion and their different style of learning
- (f) All students should be educated in an environment and atmosphere that supports their learning and provides them with safe and stimulating opportunities and experiences.

Leadership and Management

Senior leaders have a clear vision for the school, which is based on high levels of ambition for each and every student. They place a high emphasis upon achieving long term goals to ensure that every student grows into an adult who is happy and fulfilled, who can live as independently as possible and is as 'work ready' for employment in modern Britain. To this end, they ensure the school focuses upon a wide range of factors within each student's life to ensure that all obstacles are overcome. Rigorous monitoring of targets and outcomes via the schools systems ensure that senior leaders are able to ensure that all pupils make good and outstanding progress, not just academically, but as all round confident, self-assured young people.

Leaders ensure that students make strong progress from their respective starting points and that they 'close the gap' on their mainstream peers. This is true for all of the groups within the school, including the most disadvantaged. Children who are looked after are scrutinised even more carefully to ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes.

Where progress is not made or is at a slower rate than it should be, leaders intervene quickly and effectively to ensure that no child 'slips through the net.' Senior leaders have implemented an academic intervention plan to ensure that data in each core area is analysed and clear targets are set. These are reviewed with teachers termly. Our therapy team is strong and getting stronger with more therapeutic interventions being available to our young people and a more cohesive therapeutic model being evident in the school.

School leaders have created a strong and accurate self-evaluation and have a relentless, uncompromising focus on school improvement. Judgements are based on reliable data; analysis and scrutiny is rigorous. Self-evaluation demonstrates that senior leaders have a strong sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and there is evidence that plans to drive improvement are both swift and effective, especially with regard to teaching, learning and assessment.

Training / professional development is rigorous and specific to the school. Staff are positive about their role in supporting the lives of the students who attend and are proud to work at the school.

Senior leaders ensure that all independent school standards are fully met and have responded swiftly and effectively to the changes to these. The school continues to promote the PREVENT agenda and its focus on advocating for fundamental British values has been a strength. The school prepares pupils positively for life in modern Britain and promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and for those without faith. This is embedded through PSHE lessons and a variety of theme days throughout the academic year.

Student voice is highly valued by leaders. The school council has been reconvened and all pupils are given the opportunity to contribute, either by speaking directly or through the use of their communication aid. They also may access support from an adult assistant who acts as their advocate. The school council is highly effective and has played a critical role in bringing positive new ideas to fruition.

Our three tier curriculum structure, launched by senior leaders in September 2018 has moved the school forward significantly. This allows pupils to engage in learning at their starting point and provides a

secure, yet challenging environment for them to begin their learning journey. This unique curriculum structure allows the most disaffected pupils to re-engage with the learning process.

The curriculum is broad and allows all students to make progress. Off site and extra-curricular activities are used very well to further learning and heighten aspiration. Leaders have recognised an area for development in leadership of literacy across the curriculum and have intervened accordingly, which has had a positive impact upon the progress students make.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and fit for purpose. When required, the school has dealt with safeguarding concerns and has had its practice praised by the other agencies with whom it works. Staff are well trained and there is strength and depth to the level of safeguarding knowledge amongst senior staff. The school vigilance and raised awareness with regard of the PREVENT agenda ensures that it is careful to ensure it is protected from efforts to infiltrate its governance and leadership structures with religious or cultural extremism; it has had to respond to a PREVENT concern and did so effectively. There is a culture of vigilance and students feel like their voice is heard. Prejudice is not tolerated at any level as a result of the very high levels of supervision and support offered to students at all times.

Admissions Criteria

Mark College is registered to work with children and young people aged 10-19 years with specific learning difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and moderate learning difficulties and associated complex needs. We are open to referrals from both local authorities and private fee paying parents.

Prior to placement at Mark College all young people and their parents/ carers have the opportunity to come to the school for a visit. They may spend time in the classroom and also meet students and staff. Visits from commissioning officers are also strongly encouraged.

In some cases the young person may not be able to attend the school for an assessment and, in these cases, a member of staff will visit the young person and ensure the procedure occurs off site.

Our referrals co-ordinator oversees all visits, collates information from parents and the young person's current or most recent placements. This information will be audited by the Senior Leadership Team with input from the wider staff team, as required.

All referrals are considered carefully to ensure that once a place is offered, it is done on the basis of a strong understanding of the needs of the young person, their families/carers and their multi-professional team. Mark College will work closely with all stakeholders to ensure that there is agreement around the needs and outcomes in each case.

We strongly believe that some individuals will always struggle to 'fit in' to existing structures and will only thrive when their provision is tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. We warmly welcome our students into our community, which is underpinned by a culture of nurture and unconditional high regard. This approach underpins our admissions process.

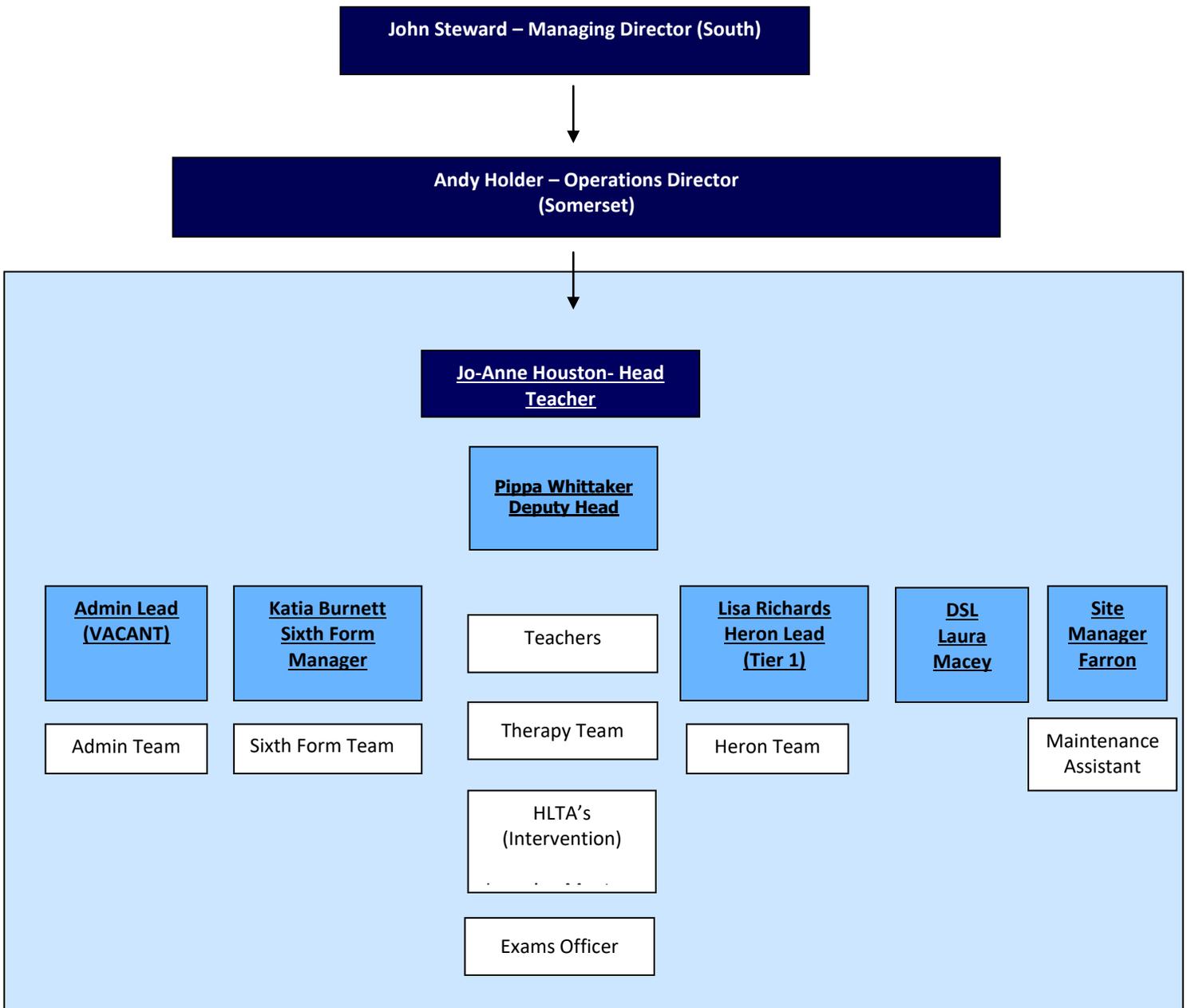
The Staff Team

Mark College has a highly specialised team, including:

- Specialist Teachers
- A growing therapy team
- Art Therapist / Counsellor
- Thrive Trainer/practitioner
- Educational Psychologist
- Higher Level Teaching Assistants
- Teaching Assistants / Learning Mentors
- A range of support staff, including administrators, catering assistants, gardeners, maintenance staff and housekeepers.

Where needed, we also have access to additional adults to support our packages, such as qualified swimming teachers and instructors qualified to oversee horse riding (always with due regard for the appropriate safeguarding procedures).

Mark College – Organisational Structure – January 2019



Staffing

- Senior Leadership Team

All members of the Senior Leadership Team are qualified in their respective fields of education and care.

- Academic Staff

There are six full time Teachers at Mark College providing access across the curriculum for all students. All six Teachers hold qualified teacher status.

- Learning Support Staff

There is a significant learning support team. Three of the team hold higher qualifications to reflect their senior status within the team.

- Therapists - at Mark College, we have recently changed our desired therapy structure and are awaiting for this team to grow.

- Administration, Support Services and Ancillary Staff

The Administration, Support Services and Ancillary staff work across the whole school, providing administrative, catering and facilities support across all areas.

Copies of all certificates for staff qualifications are held on each individual's HR file at our HR office in Frome.

Copies of certificates for relevant qualifications, HPC or equivalent membership and indemnity insurance documents are also held for the consultant professionals in their individual files at our HR office in Frome.

How we ensure quality & consistency of Education

The consistency, quality and safety of our children and young people within our care is underpinned through detailed policies and delivered through procedures; we strive to maintain and improve the school through regular self-assessment and additional inspections from external consultant and agencies.

a) Inspections and Governance Visits

The school is subject to announced and unannounced inspections from Ofsted to ensure the standards relevant to residential special schools are being met.

In addition, the school is inspected termly under Standard 20 of the RSS NMS. These inspections focus upon:

- checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of reasonable force, risk assessments, and individual care plans for children;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded;
- assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and
- opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitor (in private if they wish).

The school is inspected by a number of Priory specialists who concentrate on specific areas, including health and safety, financial management, maintenance, food preparation and hygiene.

The school has a comprehensive system of governance, which includes weekly, monthly and annual processes, which ensure the school receives sufficient external support and challenge.

Priory Education Services also has a highly experienced quality team, overseen by a Quality Director that undertakes audits of the provision regularly.

b) Training

The range of staff training is extensive and commences from the point the staff member is appointed. Staff access training in a variety of ways, including in-house workshops, full training days with both internal and external specialists and via the award-winning on-line training facility offered by Priory Central Services, Foundations for Growth.

There is a very detailed induction that supports staff throughout their six working month's probationary period. This consists of ongoing, regular and progressive training combined with specialist training.

c) Health and Safety

Health and Safety is paramount and is considered one of the highest priorities in school. All staff and managers are required to undertake detailed risk assessments for all aspects of working within a safe environment and ensuring safety for the students in our care.

This is underpinned by Health and Safety training that takes place from the point of appointment. This training occurs in booklet form, via specific policies, in group workshops and on-line.

d) Staff appointments

All staff are appointed after detailed documentation has been scrutinised. All staff have enhanced clearance from the Disclosure & Barring Service which is renewed every three years. Original documents and qualifications are scrutinised and checked. Three written references are taken up and scrutinised and verbal contact is then made with the referee to ask further questions against the reference they have provided.

All employment gaps are discussed and accounted for and medical questionnaires and assessments are undertaken.

The senior leadership team (and additional key personnel) have completed the NCSL certificated on-line training in Safer Recruitment.

e) Procedures and policies

All procedures are documented and regularly updated. Policies underpin these procedures; these are reviewed regularly by Priory Education Services. The procedures and policies are numerous and help ensure the quality and consistency of working safely with children is maintained in our school.

The key legislative policies are given to staff as part of the induction process and are available to parents on request.

f) Parent partnerships

We consider partnerships with parents and carers as vital to facilitate effective progress for children and young people in our care.

Children and young people are have a key adult (normally their class teacher) and those who are residential also have a pastoral tutor / key worker, who is responsible for working directly with them on welfare related issues. Parents/carers are regularly updated regarding their child's learning progress. In addition we work closely with placing authorities reporting progress in written form twice yearly.

g) Educational provision

Educational quality is assured through employing high quality practitioners. Mark College will be able to offer a varied curriculum where pupils can access a range of learning opportunities that are accredited.

We can also offer a variety of subjects at GCSE, functional skills, maths, English, science and ICT and a selection of external accreditations.

h) Contingency & Crisis planning

The crisis management policy outlines the procedures that must be followed in the event of a crisis or unexpected or emergency event that threatens the operational functioning of the school, this includes severe weather events, building based crises and health related crises. This is available on request along with all other Mark College local procedures.

Complaints Procedure – Parents/Professionals and Bodies working outside of the school

In mainstream school under the regulations of the Education Act No 2 and the Education Act 1988, parents have the right to make representation to the school, the Governing Body, the Local Authority and ultimately the Secretary of State where they feel that a school is not meeting the requirements of the Act with particular regard to:

- a) The National Curriculum
- b) Religious Education and Collective Worship
- c) Approved qualifications
- d) Exemption from the National Curriculum
- e) Changing policies
- f) Provision of information to parents
- g) Exclusion from school.

Mark College as an Independent School would adopt a similar procedure. The Secretary of State expects that all concerns expressed by parents and others about the school curriculum and related matters will continue to be considered and as far as possible dealt with in an informal discussion with teachers and SLT in the first instance.

At all stages the complainant will receive written reports of all decisions, the reasons for them and any proposed action as a result of them. With specific reference to exclusions (Education Act 1986) parents have a right to make representation about any exclusion to the schools' regional manager.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. Complaints can be made verbally to key staff within the school, by e-mail or in writing on both an informal and formal basis.

Timescales for the process are:

- o Acknowledgement that the complaint has been received (within 48 hours)
- o Indication of how we propose to deal with the matter
- o An estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response. This must be done within 20 days.
- o Information regarding any initial enquiries that have been made.

Once the issue has been fully investigated you will receive a contact from the school, either in writing or in person so that the findings can be shared. In the event that an investigation has not been concluded to the satisfaction of the parent then a formal complaint can follow. In the event that all internal complaints (relating to care and welfare) procedures have been fully exhausted both within the school and through the governing body and Priory Education Services, parents who may wish to seek additional advice, may wish to contact:

OFSTED, National Business Unit, Royal Exchange Building, St Ann's Square, Manchester, M2 7LA

Key Contacts

School Details

Mark College
Blackford Road
Highbridge
Somerset
TA9 4NP

01278 641 632

markcollege@porygroup.com

Head Teacher – Jo-Anne Houston
Deputy Head Teacher – Pippa Whittaker
Admissions / Referrals Co-ordinator – Judith Blackwell

Within the Frome Cluster, the Governance role is led by Operations Director Andy Holder, who can be contacted via: Andyholder@porygroup.com or at

Munstead Heath
Godalming
Surrey
GU7 1UW
T: 01483 892061

Proprietor Details

Priory Education Services Ltd

Simon Coles
Munstead Heath
Godalming
Surrey
GU7 1UW
Telephone: 01483 892 061

Head Office Details

Priory Group
80 Hammersmith Road
London
W14 8UD
T: 0845 2774679