

North Hill House

Fromefield, Frome, Somerset BA11 2HB

Inspection dates

7–9 March 2017

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
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders demonstrate a commitment and determination to provide high-quality education and residential care. They have a strong belief that all pupils can achieve and succeed.
- The school meets the independent school standards and national minimum standards for residential special schools.
- The staff work together effectively and are equally committed to the school's vision to provide high-quality education, care and support for every pupil.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in a range of subjects is good. Pupils make good progress, both in their academic and personal development.
- Students in the sixth form benefit from strong partnerships with local colleges. They study courses which ensure that they achieve their potential, including the most able.
- The quality of pupils' artwork is of a very high standard. This helps them build their self-esteem and confidence.
- The school's arrangements to keep pupils safe and ensure their welfare, health and safety are effective. Parents and pupils are positive about the work of the school.
- The therapy provision supports pupils to manage their behaviour and anxieties effectively. This helps them to learn successfully and achieve their potential.
- Pupils with a history of extremely challenging behaviour achieve well. Pupils trust their teachers and study accredited courses which fulfil their aspirations, needs and abilities.
- Some staff have not received the training they need to implement the school's behaviour management systems to good effect.
- Subject leaders are not involved in the school's improvement work sufficiently to impact on raising standards further.
- The school's curriculum offers a wide range of subjects. Leaders continue to improve their assessment systems and to check pupils' academic and personal development.
- Leaders' plans for improvement lack precise arrangements for checking that actions taken are making a difference to pupils' outcomes.
- Residential staff continue to develop their provision to improve the frequency of their supervision, facilitate staff handovers and respond appropriately and consistently to safeguarding concerns if and when they arise.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards'), the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management further by ensuring that:
 - plans to improve the school’s performance set out when and how leaders and governors check that actions taken are making a difference to the learning, achievement and progress of the pupils
 - subject leaders are involved in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further to continue to raise standards
 - staff receive the training and guidance they need to implement the school’s systems to manage pupils’ challenging behaviour with increased confidence.
- Ensure that all care staff receive regular, good-quality professional supervision that includes reflective discussions about their performance and practice and safeguarding issues. In addition, ensure that clear action points arising from the supervision are documented.
- Ensure that all care staff receive good ‘handover’ opportunities to communicate effectively between school and residential care.
- Continue to implement the actions currently underway to ensure that all designated safeguarding leads consistently respond to safeguarding concerns in line with the school’s procedures.
- Review the use of two-way radios and how and where medication is dispensed to pupils. Remove unnecessary signs and health and safety items from the residences.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Good
How well children and young people are protected in the residential provision	Good

- Leaders have ensured that the school meets all independent school standards and the national minimum standards for residential special schools. Leaders and governors continually reflect on their work to improve the performance of the school and frequently check that the standards continue to be met. Consequently, leaders know the school's strengths and areas for further improvement in great depth. Their self-evaluation is accurate.
- All leaders and staff are deeply committed to providing the very best education, care and support for each pupil. They strongly believe that their pupils can achieve and succeed in their chosen pathway, both during their time at the school and after leaving. This conviction demonstrates that staff have high aspirations for their pupils. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders have introduced systems to check frequently and record the progress that pupils make in a range of subjects. This enables staff to demonstrate the progress pupils make in their academic and personal development. However, there is further work to do to ensure that teachers fully understand and implement these systems. In addition, subject leaders are not yet fully involved in the school's improvement work. This means that they do not have enough impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school.
- Leaders and staff have high expectations for their pupils. They take great care to plan the most appropriate pathway for each pupil, centred on their abilities and interests. As a result, pupils take a range of examinations, including GCSEs and other recognised externally accredited courses. Outcomes are strong, especially for those who benefit from an education at the school for a longer period of time.
- Leaders check the quality of teaching and learning regularly. They provide support when standards fall below those which they expect. As a result, teaching is good and impacts positively on pupils' outcomes.
- The school places a high priority on teaching personal, social and health education to all pupils. This work supports pupils to develop respect and tolerance for others, including those of faiths and cultures different to their own. In addition, pupils learn about the dangers of taking drugs and the risks associated with using the internet and social media. They receive information to help them lead a healthy lifestyle, to support their mental health needs and to develop confidence and self-esteem.
- Pupils benefit from a well-planned and broad curriculum. During the inspection, the inspector observed pupils engaged in a range of subjects, including design and technology, information and communication technology and science. The school's work to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is threaded through the curriculum. For example, pupils' artwork is of a particularly high standard, encouraging

pupils to learn about artists from around the world. Older pupils discussed the current political landscape with maturity and understanding. This work supports pupils to develop respect and tolerance for the views of others and enables them to develop their personal interests.

- The school provides high-quality therapy to all pupils. This work successfully helps pupils to manage their anxieties, behaviour and personal worries and to deal with the significant challenges they face at school and in their lives.
- Leaders ensure that the school supports pupils' welfare, health and safety effectively. They provide ongoing training to ensure that all staff understand the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe. Leaders continually reflect and improve on this work to strengthen it further. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and trust their teachers to keep them safe. Most parents are positive about the work of the school.
- Leaders have detailed improvement plans in place. However, it is not clear when and how the school's planned actions will be monitored, and by whom, to check the difference they are making to pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders provide detailed and regular reports to parents and placing local authorities about pupils' academic and personal development. This particularly supports parents to be engaged in their children's education, especially when they live some distance away.
- The proprietor ensures that the school environment and residential provision are of a high quality and are well maintained and resourced. Displays around the school celebrate pupils' achievements, especially in art and photography. This builds their confidence and feeling of belonging at the school.
- Leaders and managers identify effectively the strengths and weaknesses of the residential provision. They learn from their monitoring and feedback and apply lessons learned to better safeguard residential pupils. They have responded appropriately to complaints.
- Scrutiny of the residential provision by the independent visitor is rigorous. The head of care and the residential management team respond effectively to this scrutiny in order to improve the quality of care provided to residential pupils.
- The residential provision is properly staffed and resourced to meet the needs of the pupils who stay there. The staff team is suitably trained and competent to deliver good-quality services to residential pupils.
- Regular staff are deployed well. As a result, residential pupils benefit from being cared for by familiar staff. Staff and residential pupils develop positive relationships and any conflicts between peers are safely managed.
- Care staff work well together across the school to address difficult and challenging issues. They develop a consistent and shared approach. Most staff report that they are well led and all feel supported by their colleagues. Some staff raised concerns about the lack of opportunity they have for receiving a good handover before they work in the residences. This is as a result of care staff covering vacancies in the school day.
- The quality of supervision for staff can be improved by including opportunities for reflective practice and safeguarding discussions, reviewing staff performance and agreeing action points at each meeting. Records provided to inspectors do not demonstrate that all staff receive regular good-quality supervision.

Governance

- Governance is strong. Governors continually check that they are meeting the independent school standards and national minimum standards for residential special schools. They strengthen and improve their policies and procedures effectively when they identify shortcomings. Risk assessments to ensure pupils' individual safety and staff recruitment procedures are of a high quality. This reflective and proactive approach ensures that pupils' welfare, health and safety are given a high priority to keep them safe and secure.
- Governors meet regularly with school leaders to check the school's performance and the quality of teaching. They have an in-depth understanding of pupils' outcomes and know where incidents of concern involving child protection have occurred. They follow up leaders' actions to check the safety and welfare of the pupils. However, governors recognise that subject leaders are not fully involved in continuing to improve the school. They have identified this as an area for further development.
- Governors manage tight financial resources carefully and ensure that the school premises and resources are well maintained. This supports pupils to learn and achieve well at North Hill House.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff receive regular training to recognise and act on signs of harm or risk. As a result, staff confirm that safeguarding is given a high priority.
- The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy on its website. This policy reflects the current guidance issued by the Department for Education. This includes training given to all staff to help them understand and implement up-to-date policies relating to 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (September 2016). In addition, staff have received training to implement the school's 'Prevent' duty. This is government advice to schools which enables staff to identify and challenge signs of extremism and radicalisation.
- Leaders' approach to delivering the training which staff need to carry out their roles and responsibilities is effective. However, some staff told inspectors that they do not feel confident in using the school's systems to deal with episodes of extremely challenging behaviour displayed by some pupils. Leaders recognise the need for further guidance and communication with staff to resolve this.
- Recruitment and vetting procedures for staff are strong. Thorough investigations take place when there are concerns about the practice of staff. Senior leaders ensure that the relevant safeguarding authorities are informed of any concerns about adults who are unsuitable to work with children or young people.
- There are no reported occasions of residential pupils going missing from the school. Individual risk assessments for pupils are comprehensive documents that contain useful information to help the staff who care for them. Residential pupils live in a safe environment where there is good help in place that reduces the risk of harm to themselves and others.
- Staff are clear about the procedures to follow when they are concerned about the safety of pupils. The majority of safeguarding concerns have been managed meticulously. However, on a small number of occasions since the previous inspection, there have been

inconsistencies in how some members of the designated team have responded to safeguarding concerns. These inconsistencies were identified and rectified by the senior team prior to this inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers use the information they collect about pupils' learning and progress to plan interesting and engaging lessons based on what pupils already know, understand and can do. As a result, pupils achieve good outcomes during their time at the school.
- Staff build strong relationships with pupils. They are deeply committed to helping their pupils achieve well. They 'go the extra mile' on a daily basis to provide high-quality teaching, care and support for each pupil. Parents value the school's work. Most parents confirm that their children make significant progress from their starting points.
- When pupils start at the school, staff assess their academic, social and communication needs. They set individual, aspirational learning targets and implement the support required with the therapy team to ensure that these are met. This shared approach supports pupils to achieve their potential. However, leaders confirm that they need to develop the staff use of assessment systems so that they are implemented consistently and effectively across the school.
- Teachers and therapists frequently check pupils' progress and implement new strategies to support pupils' learning. Some pupils take time to settle and, as a result, their progress is inconsistent, especially in the newly formed primary phase. However, during their time in the school, pupils' confidence builds, together with a sense of belonging. This contributes positively to the strong outcomes they achieve.
- Teachers plan work in a range of subjects to ensure that pupils develop key skills in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, pupils wrote extended essays to test their understanding of 'An Inspector Calls' in an English GCSE lesson. Pupils in history and geography lessons recorded their learning about the Holocaust, confirming a good understanding of this sensitive topic. Pupils build these skills over time and, as a result, they are well prepared to achieve strong outcomes in accredited examinations at an appropriate level.
- The most able pupils achieve their full potential at the school. Pupils spoke about their aspirations to achieve several GCSEs in a range of subjects. Work in pupils' books and teachers' assessments confirm that they are on track to meet their targets. Teachers' good subject knowledge contributes successfully to these good outcomes.
- Teachers ensure that pupils learn successfully in practical subjects such as art, photography and design and technology. Staff recognise pupils' potential and ensure that they are suitably challenged to achieve strong outcomes in these subjects.
- Pupils read often and with increasing fluency and understanding of the text. Staff carefully select the most appropriate approach to ensure that pupils learn to read successfully, particularly when they join the school in the primary phase. Pupils read with confidence to the inspector. The most able read with fluency, confidence and increasing comprehension. They are well prepared to meet the demands of the GCSE curriculum.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils say, 'the school is amazing and we like our teachers and teaching assistants.' This helps pupils to settle when they are new to the school and to manage their feelings of anxiety.
- Leaders have ensured that a comprehensive written health and safety policy is implemented effectively. Individual risk assessments set out the strategies staff need to use to manage pupils' behaviour. In addition, leaders have ensured that the site is safe and appropriately secure.
- Pupils receive information and guidance in understanding what to do if they feel bullied. The inspection team found that pupils use the school's procedures for reporting their concerns. Staff follow up these concerns quickly and effectively to ensure that pupils are safe and feel secure.
- Residential pupils report that they feel safe at school and in the residences. They can identify a trusted adult they can talk to about concerns or complaints. Young people are able to raise issues about potential bullying and they are confident that staff take the necessary action. There is an effective procedure for responding to concerns raised by pupils.
- Pupils' attendance is good. It is rigorously recorded and monitored. Pupils say that they like school and want to attend. A typical parental view was 'Children have nothing but understanding and help from this school. Pupils now have much more of a chance in life.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils who attend the school have challenging behaviour associated with their complex needs. Leaders are changing the culture of using physical restraint to ensure that it is used appropriately and as a last resort. Although all staff have received training, some staff continue to feel unsure of how best to manage the most challenging behaviour exhibited by some pupils. Nonetheless, incidents involving restraint are recorded in detail and their frequency is reducing.
- In lessons, pupils trust their teachers to deliver lessons which interest and motivate them to learn effectively. For example, where learning is particularly strong, there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere, such as in art and in GCSE groups. Teaching assistants support individual pupils well. They keep them focused on the task in hand, listening and acting on any concerns they have. This helps to prevent interruptions to pupils' learning.
- Staff record all incidents in detail, which helps to identify triggers and patterns of behaviour. The therapy team works closely with the teaching staff to reduce pupils' anxieties and to enable them to access their learning more effectively. This rigorous approach is supporting pupils to achieve their potential, both in their academic and personal development.
- In discussions, pupils recognise that some pupils present with significant needs and, at times, these pupils display challenging behaviour. However, they confirmed that, 'We feel safe and teachers keep us safe when incidents happen.'

- Pupils are well supervised when they move around the school between lessons and at break and lunchtimes. This helps to reduce pupils' anxieties and ensure that they feel secure and well cared for.
- Pupils take part in raising funds for charity and have contributed their artwork to a local exhibition in Frome. Opportunities to become involved in the school council and set up activities at breaktimes, such as football matches, support pupils effectively to develop independence and responsibility.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school at different times throughout the year. Most have experienced significant breakdown in their previous education placements and many have been out of education for long periods of time. This has contributed to pupils starting school with skills and knowledge which are typically well below average for their age. Their confidence and self-esteem are particularly low.
- Initially, pupils display extremely challenging and unsafe behaviour which is intensified by the complexity of their social and communication needs. This can impact adversely on their mental health. However, as pupils settle and receive the support they need from the teaching and care staff and the therapy team, they begin to make progress and achieve good outcomes from their low starting points. In addition, pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem develop as they receive the support they need to build their communication and social skills.
- A detailed evaluation of pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups, carried out during the inspection, confirms that pupils build their knowledge and skills over time. They learn to write for different purposes and audiences and apply their developing knowledge of spelling, grammar and punctuation to their work. In mathematics, pupils learn to calculate and build their confidence in applying their mathematical understanding to solve problems. As they move up through the school, outcomes significantly improve. This enables pupils to access courses appropriate to their ability and aspirations.
- The school's records and work in pupils' books confirm that nearly all pupils make good gains in their learning. As they settle at the school, progress from their starting points in a range of subjects accelerates and improves. This is the case for all groups of pupils. Pupils complete Year 11 having achieved BTEC national diploma qualifications and GCSEs in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and, more recently, employability skills. This ensures that all pupils go on to college to study courses appropriate to their abilities and needs.
- The most able pupils achieve strong outcomes in external examinations. Those who are capable sit a number of GCSEs and achieve the highest grades. As a result, they go on to college and then their chosen career pathway.
- Most pupils leave the school as confident readers, able to access text accurately and with increasingly well-developed comprehension skills. This supports them effectively to access the texts in assessment questions to achieve success in their examinations.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The school has developed strong partnerships with high-performing local colleges to ensure that students have access to a range of courses. As a result, they achieve strong outcomes and are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- The school and colleges work well together. Communication is strong. For example, leaders at North Hill House receive immediate notification if a student is absent. Attendance is well above the national average. Parents are very satisfied with the provision their children receive post-16.
- The sixth-form leader ensures that the school receives feedback from the college to inform them of students' progress towards meeting their academic and personal goals. For example, college leaders stated that students become increasingly independent and join in activities and social occasions at college. In addition, college leaders keep the school and students' parents fully informed about the progress students make to be ready for transition to adulthood.
- Leaders regularly review the service level agreement between the school and colleges. This ensures that students receive effective provision and colleges are held to account for delivering high-quality services. Students study courses such as entry-level qualifications in English and mathematics, as well as GCSEs and A-level courses. All students achieve well and make strong progress in their chosen subjects and courses, appropriate to their ability.
- The most able students are well prepared to gain places at university. They achieve this goal. The effective individual support they receive when studying at college contributes effectively to the success these students achieve.
- Pupils in Year 11 receive independent careers guidance in preparation for transition to the sixth form. This includes the opportunity for work experience at a local farm and a radio station in the town. This service continues into the sixth form to ensure that they receive support to help them with interviews, visits to open days at colleges and filling in university application forms. The sixth-form leader has plans in place to extend the careers support to benefit younger pupils in the school.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision

Good

- Residential pupils make good progress in their emotional and social development. They learn independence skills and build friendships. They enjoy positive experiences and enhance their life chances as a result of their residential experience at the school.
- The residential provision is well organised and run for the benefit of pupils. Staff ask residential pupils what they would like to do each evening and support them in their choices.
- Some older pupils reside in a family-style home in the local town. These pupils were exceptionally positive in the way they talked about their experiences in this home. They recognise the progress that they have made since coming to the school. As a result of the good support they receive from staff, students make good progress with their academic

development and become independent and responsible young people.

- Pupils who are preparing to leave the school are well supported. As well as completing their academics studies, residential pupils learn skills that will prepare them for adult life. They take part in an independence training programme, which involves staff supporting them to learn skills such as using public transport and shopping for themselves.
- The views and feelings of residential pupils are routinely sought. They receive good pastoral care and are engaged in regular tutorial meetings. Residential pupils chose some of the furniture and colour schemes when the premises were renovated 12 months ago.
- Parents' feedback is overwhelmingly positive about how living at the residential provision has helped their children to achieve at school. All of the parents who completed the school questionnaire feel that the care environment is 'comfortable and homely'.

Quality of care and support in the residential provision **Good**

- The residential accommodation is of a high quality. It is decorated and furnished to a high standard. Most residential pupils have an en-suite shower and toilet facilities. The living spaces are open, light, clean and well maintained. Each residential area is well equipped with a television, books, electronic games and board games.
- Staff and residential pupils have good relationships. Staff understand the pupils' needs and take time to listen to them. There are also external avenues of support available for residential pupils and an independent person who visits the residential provision every half term.
- The assessment and admission process is effective and tailored to meet residential pupils' individual needs. Pupils and their families receive good support before and during their admission to school. Residential pupils are well prepared for joining the residential provision. Residential pupils visit and have overnight stays before starting on a more permanent basis. As a result, transition is successful.
- Residential pupils enjoy a range of activities during the evenings, as well as being given time to relax and unwind after school. They are also supported to attend groups in the community, such as army cadets and horse riding
- The arrangements for managing medication are safe. Discussions took place during the inspection about improving the process further by asking the pupils where they would like to have their medication dispensed to them.
- Residential pupils have a good choice of nourishing meals. The food is varied and plentiful. The catering team provides individual preferences and specific dietary requirements for pupils. Residential pupils also have the option of cooking their own evening meals.
- Residential pupils' support plans are up to date, detailed and thorough. They meet their needs and are reviewed regularly. Cultural and diversity issues are positively addressed in these plans.
- Residential pupils are encouraged to keep in contact with their families and friends and have good facilities to do this. Friends are welcome back to the residential area. There is regular contact between staff and families, and positive feedback regarding the care and support provided.

- Staff are not assiduous enough in ensuring that their use of two-way radios is always professionally relevant and confidential. There is a risk that this could compromise a young person's privacy.
- Unnecessary signs and health and safety items were observed in the residences.
- The playground is uninspiring, although leaders have plans in place to improve this area.

School details

Unique reference number	131975
Social care unique reference number	SC033014
DfE registration number	933/6200
Inspection number	10026040

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

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	6
Number of part-time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	14
Proprietor	Priory Education and Children's Services Ltd
Chair	Sophie Garner
Principal	Swavek Nowakiewicz
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,598
Annual fees (boarders)	£103,305
Telephone number	01373 466 222
Website	www.priorygroup.com
Email address	admin@priorygroup.com

Date of previous inspection

26–28 November 2013

Information about this school

- North Hill House is owned by Priory Education and Children’s Services Ltd, a national organisation which manages a number of health, social care and education settings.
- The school opened in 1999 and is registered for 62 pupils aged six to 19 with autistic spectrum disorder and related disorders. There are significantly more boys than girls at the school. The school does not receive any pupil premium funding.
- All pupils attending the school have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The headteacher took up her post in April 2016.
- The school has a partnership agreement with Strode College and Wiltshire College to provide education for post-16 students. The school uses additional off-site locations for physical education.
- The school has residential provision on site for the majority of pupils. A small number of post-16 students reside in a home in the town.
- The previous integrated inspection of the school and residential provision was undertaken in November 2013 when the provision was found to be outstanding.
- The previous inspection of the residential provision was undertaken in February 2016 when the provision was judged to be good.
- The school successfully applied for a material change in August 2014 to accept pupils in key stage 1.

Information about this inspection

- The education inspector visited classrooms during the inspection to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment with the headteacher.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, in the residential provision in the evenings, at break and lunchtimes and during lessons. Inspectors talked with pupils and staff throughout the inspection.
- Meetings were held with the principal, the headteacher, other leaders, staff and the chair of the governing body. Inspectors met with parents and pupils to seek their views about the school and to hear pupils read. In addition, inspectors met with leaders responsible for welfare and boarding, and boarding staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, the school's plans for improvement and information about pupils' achievement. The education inspector also looked in detail at pupils' work in a range of subjects in all year groups during lessons and during a formal scrutiny of work.
- The lead inspector analysed 18 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and text message responses received from parents during the inspection. In addition, 51 responses to the staff questionnaire were analysed.

Inspection team

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