

The Priory School

Address: Bedford Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 2UR

Unique reference number (URN): 117499

Inspection report: 15 September 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	● ●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders have designed a comprehensive personal development programme, of which they are proud. This encompasses school values, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education, which is coupled with a wealth of enrichment and pupil leadership opportunities.

The PSHE programme is constructed around the school's core values of responsibility, respect and resilience, which are carefully woven into the curriculum from Year 7 to Year 13. Pupils learn about important topics such as personal safety and healthy relationships. They speak knowledgeably about how to keep themselves safe online and demonstrate a mature understanding of the impact of misogyny and discrimination. Pupils understand the fundamental British values of democracy and the rule of law and can give examples of how these are implemented in school. They understand why it is important to show respect for everyone.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities, including clubs and trips. Leaders check who attends and encourage everyone to take part. The school has identified a range of experiences that it wants pupils to have by the time they leave school. Leaders monitor participation carefully and take effective action to remove barriers that may prevent pupils from taking part. Older pupils enjoy positions of responsibility and leadership. Sixth-form pupils are proud of sessions they have delivered on the subject of mental health and wellbeing to local primary school children. Sport and music leaders enjoy organising and leading events for their younger peers. Many use the skills they have learned to give back by helping others.

There is a broad and relevant careers offer. Pupils receive advice and guidance, including contact with employers and education providers. Pupils appreciate the wealth of information they receive on career options. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage in education or employment.

Post-16 provision

Strong standard ●

Leaders are ambitious for their sixth-form students. The curriculum offer is broad and attracts many students to join from other local schools. Students develop their capacity to work and learn independently right from the start of Year 12.

The sixth-form curriculum is well taught. Students are supported to produce work of a high quality. As a result, they achieve well, with above-average outcomes for academic subjects. Students with barriers to learning achieve well. This is because teachers adapt the curriculum and ensure they are the first to receive support during lessons. Completion rates are also high.

Students in the sixth form are positive about their experience. They are proud to be members of the sixth-form community. They have regular involvement with the local community, raise money for charity and work with younger peers. They are keen to develop

their role within the school. Sixth-form student leaders value meeting time with school leaders. They feel their voice is heard.

Students receive careers advice, including help with university applications, apprenticeships and access to employment. This is supported by university visits and opportunities to engage with local employers. They are well prepared for their next steps beyond school.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Typically, pupils achieve well. Their results in national tests are in line with their peers nationally. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make appropriate progress from their starting points. This is because pupils are generally well taught. They try hard in lessons and produce work to the best of their ability. In subjects where teaching is more variable in quality, achievement and results are not as high. Leaders are addressing this.

Across many subjects, pupils draw on the skills and knowledge they have acquired previously to support their current learning. Pupils' books demonstrate that they make progress from their starting points. Leaders place emphasis on securing foundational knowledge. High-quality interventions support pupils who need additional help. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training when they leave.

Students in the sixth form achieve well across academic and vocational subjects.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have high expectations for attendance. They have ensured that good attendance is a priority and a shared responsibility across the school. Although most pupils attend well, there are some who struggle. In response, leaders have introduced new systems and routines to target support for individuals and groups. Attendance data is analysed effectively. Staff adopt a team-based approach, working closely with pupils and their families to help remove barriers and improve attendance.

Over the past year, leaders have raised expectations of behaviour. The school bell has led to improved punctuality to lessons, as pupils move purposefully between classrooms without adults' direction. Misdemeanours are swiftly dealt with through the new daily report card system. The majority of pupils respond positively to this system. Those who consistently make good behaviour choices are rewarded. The school focuses on preventing poor behaviour rather than reacting to it. Pupils appreciate the help they receive to conduct themselves well. Bullying is rare. Where it occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Discrimination and intolerance of any type are not accepted. This can be attributed to the supportive culture in the school. The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum helps pupils to understand the need to be kind and supportive to each other.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders ensure the curriculum is well constructed. Pupils' books demonstrate that information is taught in a logical order so that learning builds over time. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They identify the most important knowledge that pupils need. Teachers regularly review pupils' books and give helpful feedback.

Pupils enjoy their lessons and agree that teachers help them to do their best. Teachers follow the school's expectations of teaching. They regularly check that pupils understand the concepts they are learning. Where this is done well, teachers use this information to either provide more support or to move on more quickly to deepen pupils' knowledge. In these classes, pupils demonstrate secure understanding and complete high-quality work. However, this is not the case in every lesson. Some teachers' checks do not identify gaps or errors effectively. Leaders are aware and are taking steps to reduce this variability.

Pupils are attentive in lessons and participate well. Learning is free of disruption. Expectations of pupils are high. Teachers use the information they have to adapt lesson activities so that pupils, including those with barriers to learning, can complete the tasks. As a result, pupils make progress in their learning. The school prioritises reading.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are understood and met at this inclusive school. Needs are identified quickly and accurately. Additional interventions are put in place where needed. This includes activities for pupils and their families, too.

Parents and pupils contribute to the formation of support strategies. Teachers use these to adapt activities so that pupils can complete the tasks set. This work is in the early stages and is developing further to ensure that pupils receive the precise learning support that they need in every lesson.

The school runs an on-site specialist resource provision. It is an inviting area where pupils receive high-quality, small-group teaching. Counselling, mental health and academic support are available. As a result of the support they receive, vulnerable pupils make progress.

Staff keep close oversight of pupils who are, or have previously been, known to social care. They work in partnership with families and outside agencies to ensure that pupils are safe.

Leaders have identified the barriers that disadvantaged pupils face. They use additional funding effectively so that disadvantaged pupils are supported and can fully participate in school experiences.

The school makes use of alternative provision for some pupils where it is in their best interests.

The headteacher took up post a year ago. He and his team of leaders are ambitious for pupils and staff, and are passionate in their creation of a high-performing environment where everyone can thrive. Inevitably, some changes have been made over the past year. Decisions on what needs to be done are driven by what is in the best interests of pupils. Change has been managed in a measured way, building on the already-established strengths and with a view to not overburdening staff. Staff feel well supported and listened to by the new headteacher. They like working here and they are positive about the school's future.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have prioritised what needs to be done and are specifically focused on reducing the variability in teaching and improving pupils' attendance. This is being done through research-based methods. Teachers in the early stages of their careers appreciate the support they receive. They and their more experienced colleagues feel a strong sense of belonging.

Staff have access to a range of training and development courses. They appreciate these and feel supported. Leaders are addressing the variability in teaching through the training offered.

Governors are skilled and knowledgeable. They know the school well and hold the headteacher and leaders to account for the decisions they make. Governors have completed extensive training. They provide effective support and challenge to ensure that leaders prioritise and improve the right areas of the school.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are proud of this caring school, where their safety and wellbeing are a priority. They thrive through the many opportunities on offer. Pupils like coming to school and attend well. Relationships with staff are strong. If a problem arises, pupils know whom to report their concerns to. Bullying is rare, but if an incident does occur, pupils are confident that it will be quickly dealt with and resolved. As a result, pupils feel safe.

There are high expectations of behaviour. Movement around the school site is calm and purposeful. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are also calm. In lessons, everyone can learn without disruption.

Pupils enjoy and value their lessons. They find most lessons interesting and engaging. Teachers use a variety of methods to regularly check that everyone understands and remembers what they are learning. Pupils who need additional support are quickly identified and given the help they need to complete the same tasks as their peers. Books demonstrate that pupils, including those with barriers to their learning, make progress through the curriculum. Pupils acquire the knowledge and skills they need for their next steps.

Pupils greatly enjoy the extra-curricular opportunities on offer to them and see this as a strength of the school. While younger pupils enthuse about the range of activities they

attend, older pupils relish the opportunity to lead. Sixth-form students speak proudly of their work with pupils at local primary schools. Sports and music leaders enjoy organising and leading events for their younger peers. The school's personal development programme is carefully constructed around its values. This includes learning about the world of work. Pupils have a secure understanding of topics such as healthy relationships and online safety. Difference is celebrated here. This means that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to reduce the variability in the quality of teaching through the further embedding of the school's expectations for lessons.
 - Leaders should continue the work to improve attendance, in particular the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
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About this inspection

The co-chairs of the board of governors in this school are Gill Carpenter and Bob Harris.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This inspection took place on 15 and 16 September 2026.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and senior and middle leaders during the inspection. Conversations were also held with members of the governing body, including the co-chairs.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school includes a specially resourced provision with 20 places for pupils with a diagnosis of autism.

The school currently makes use of a number of alternative provisions, all of which are registered.

Headteacher: Matt Blayney

Lead inspector:

Cathy Barr, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Alexandra Jane Burton, Ofsted Inspector

Jason Howard, Ofsted Inspector

Michael Skelly, Ofsted Inspector

Sharon Pritchard, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from [different sources](#). More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

 The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 15 September 2026

School and pupil context**Total pupils**

1,221

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,063

School capacity

1,300

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

27.75%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 30.4%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

5.57%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.53%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

18.10%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational needs support at the school.

National average: 14.0%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English indices of deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	49.2%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	43.5%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	44.4%	45.3%	Close to average

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	48.5	46.1	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	46.5	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	48.1	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.05	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.07	-0.03	Close to average
2021/22 (final)	0.00	-0.03	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	16.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	18.4%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	25.7%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	36.2	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	35.5	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	35.2	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.44	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.50	-0.57	Close to average
2021/22 (final)	-0.28	-0.55	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	16.7%	53.1%	-36.5 pp
2023/24 (final)	18.4%	53.1%	-34.7 pp
2022/23 (final)	25.7%	52.4%	-26.7 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	36.2	50.4	-14.2

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	35.5	50.0	-14.5
2022/23 (final)	35.2	50.3	-15.2

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.44	0.16	-0.61
2022/23 (final)	-0.50	0.17	-0.67
2021/22 (final)	-0.28	0.15	-0.43

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (revised)	93%	92%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	95%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	96%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	36.52	35.00	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	32.55	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	35.97	34.16	Close to average

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	0.1	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	8.7%	8.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	8.0%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	7.2%	9.0%	Below

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	19.4%	23.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	19.8%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	18.1%	26.5%	Below

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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