

Inspection of The Priory Federation of Academies Trust

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 December 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

The Priory Federation of Academies Trust began delivering levy-funded apprenticeships on a direct contract in 2017 to provide sustainable training for its own employees in the Lincolnshire area. Leaders have recently started to work with other employers to provide apprenticeship training. At the time of the inspection, 57 apprentices were studying level 3 apprenticeships in first-line manager, teaching assistant, business administration, human resources (HR) support or IT solutions technician, and a further 10 were studying level 2 early years practitioner or property maintenance operative apprenticeships. Apprentices attend training at The Keyworth Centre in Lincoln.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Tutors and mentors encourage apprentices to believe in themselves. Apprentices receive good support and encouragement to complete improvement projects early in their studies. This helps them to apply what they learn and builds their confidence quickly. Apprentices go on to complete a wide range of projects that often save money and staff time at work.

Younger apprentices receive good support to help them manage the transition to an adult work environment. They learn essential personal, communication and social skills. As a result, apprentices are confident at work. Their behaviours and attitudes are positive and they attend their studies well.

Apprentices have useful discussions that help them to learn more about the importance of respect for different opinions and beliefs. They use the outcomes of their own self-awareness assessment to consider how they need to work with others. They competently discuss views and opinions that differ from their own.

Most apprentices work in schools and have a very high level of understanding of safeguarding. They are clear about how to raise any concerns about the children with whom they work. Apprentices feel safe and know whom to contact if they have any concerns for themselves or a peer.

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

Leaders establish the apprenticeships they offer through effective consultation with their own trust, local schools and employers. The teaching assistant curriculum is tightly aligned with local and regional needs because of the difficulty in recruiting staff in the area.

Leaders and tutors select and order the curriculum well to ensure that apprentices develop a wide range of new skills, knowledge and behaviours that prepare them for work. For example, business administration apprentices learn business fundamentals first. This introduces them to finance, HR and marketing, and reflects the range of roles they undertake. Owing to the pandemic, teaching assistants are taught trauma-informed practice first. This equips apprentices with core skills to support children affected by COVID-19 early in their roles.

Tutors are skilled at explaining difficult topics or ideas to apprentices. They break down broad concepts into manageable chunks for them. For example, business administration apprentices learn the various parts of financial processing, including payroll, purchasing, budgets and accounts. They progress to understand the impact of these areas on financial management.

Tutors are well qualified and experienced in their subject area. They apply their subject expertise well during online and in-person learning sessions. Apprentices

rightly value the extensive range of workplace examples that tutors use. This helps broaden their understanding of their roles and the sectors in which they work.

Business administration tutors provide helpful and developmental feedback on apprentices' written work. As a result, apprentices improve their work to a high standard. However, for teaching assistant apprentices, tutor feedback does not always help them to understand the grade they are working at or what they need to do to gain a higher mark.

Apprentices attend six-weekly progress reviews with their manager. Tutors and mentors use these reviews to hold professional discussions with apprentices and to check that they understand what they learn. Managers know the progress their apprentices make. They agree meaningful opportunities for apprentices to practise what they learn as part of their on- and off-the-job training. For example, business administration apprentices attend HR surgeries when this is not an area that forms part of their job role.

Tutors prepare business administration apprentices well for their final assessments and most achieve distinction grades. Teaching assistant apprentices are yet to undertake any final assessments. Tutors start the process of preparing teaching assistants for these assessments too late in the programme. As a result, a few apprentices are less clear about how to achieve the grades available to them.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is ambitious, including for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Tutors and mentors have effective processes to identify the additional needs of apprentices. They help apprentices to overcome these with a range of strategies and specialist support. Apprentices have access to a wide range of useful support services, including counselling and HR clinics.

Apprentices attend beneficial coffee morning sessions during their monthly training days. Mentors focus on pertinent topics, such as mental health or current affairs. However, these sessions support a wide age range of apprentices and are not always targeted to the needs of younger apprentices. As a result, a few younger apprentices are not always clear about the specific risks they may encounter.

Apprentices have at least three advice and guidance sessions a year. At these sessions, they have useful conversations about their career and next steps with their mentor or the independent careers guidance lead. Most apprentices are clear about the opportunities available to them once they have completed their course.

Leaders have a sensible calendar of activities for quality assurance and quality improvement. This includes observations, audits of work and surveys. They discuss the outcomes in weekly team meetings. Leaders quickly take appropriate actions to address any areas for improvement and monitor the completion of these closely. Staff have access to an extensive range of useful personal, occupational and pedagogical training.

Leaders, working with trustees, have a framework in place that provides an appropriate level of oversight of the apprenticeships. Trustees receive assurance through a subcommittee and local governance board structure. The local governance board meets quarterly to receive detailed reports on the quality of apprentices' experiences and training. The board uses this information well to challenge leaders to improve where necessary.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders understand their roles and responsibilities for safeguarding. Policies are detailed and relevant to apprentices. Leaders follow safer recruitment practices. All appropriate pre-employment checks are undertaken. Staff receive useful in-year training on topical safeguarding themes. This helps to raise staff awareness of areas of concern they should look out for with apprentices.

Where safeguarding concerns are raised, action is taken quickly, detailed notes are kept and appropriate support is put in place for apprentices who need it. Leaders have extensive links with support agencies, which they use to provide apprentices with access to support, such as the use of food banks or housing assistance.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Tutors should provide more precise feedback to teaching assistant apprentices, so that they understand how to improve their work and the grade they are working towards.
- Tutors should start to prepare teaching assistant apprentices for their final assessments earlier in their studies, so that apprentices understand the grades they can achieve.
- Leaders should sharpen the focus of the personal development curriculum for young people to ensure that they all understand the age- and locality-specific risks they may face.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1278671
Address	The Keyworth Centre Skellingthorpe Road Lincoln LN6 0EP
Contact number	01522 882800
Website	www.prioryapprenticeships.co.uk
CEO	Ian Jones
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of apprenticeships, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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