



# Prendergast School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 100750  
**Local Authority** Lewisham  
**Inspection number** 285875  
**Inspection date** 6 March 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Sheila Nolan

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Hilly Fields
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Adelaide Avenue
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		London SE4 1LE
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls	<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8690 3710
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	771	<b>Fax number</b>	020 8690 3155
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	187		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Margaret Riddell
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss E Pienaar
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 March 2003		

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	6 March 2007	285875

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

Prendergast School, a specialist Language and Music College, enjoys a high level of ethnic diversity. Applications to Year 7 are mainly from local families and far exceed the available places. The school is governed by an independent body of trustees but also has historic links with the Worshipful Company of Leathersellers. The school benefits from stable senior leadership.

The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is similar to national figures but the percentage of students who have learning difficulties or disabilities is a little lower than average. More students than expected nationally have a home language other than English but the overwhelming majority are fluent speakers. The school occupies two sites on either side of a main road.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Prendergast is an exceptional specialist language and music college that provides its students with an outstanding quality of education.

The majority of parents are strongly supportive of the school's aspirations for its students to develop as 'confident, ambitious, and articulate young women.' Almost a hundred per cent of parents attend school meetings on students' progress. This close partnership with families combined with the outstanding leadership and management at Prendergast underpins its exceptional effectiveness. 'The school is even better than we thought it would be,' noted a group of new parents.

A real strength of the school is the very good teamwork that pervades all aspects of school life. Students of all ages and staff at all levels work co-operatively to sustain success and move the school forward under the very able guidance of the headteacher and governors. Self-evaluation is rigorous and 'nothing less than the best will do.' High standards and outstanding achievement have been maintained over several years in the main school. Sixth form students make excellent progress gaining above average examination grades. Those students with learning difficulties and disabilities also achieve very well and thrive in the school's inclusive ethos. Students' personal development is exceptional because of the outstanding care, guidance and support provided for them. Especially notable is the rigorous regular checking of their personal and academic progress and the immediate interventions established to address any falling off in performance.

Teaching and learning have developed well since the last inspection and are now consistently at least good and often outstanding. The good curriculum matches the needs of most students well although the school acknowledges that there is scope to broaden the range of vocational courses. Specialist status as a language and music college is strengthening the school's already very good links with community partners and enriching further the extensive out-of-hours activities. Close to half of all students now learn to play a musical instrument. Italian, Japanese, Mandarin and ancient Greek are also available as extension activities. The bi-annual European music and language visits are very popular.

Students are proud of their school, appear happy and enthusiastic, and feel secure. They respond well to the care needed to keep safe when negotiating the split site. There is not, however, always enough adult supervision of the road crossing at the change of lessons. Students are keen to stay healthy, participate in sports, and have their say on many aspects of school life through the school council. Many students make a difference to others through service in the school and wider community. They support international projects, for example, in Africa, cancer charities at home, and help local nursery schools and senior citizens. Very effective personal and social education, coupled with high levels of basic skills, prepares students extremely well for their future economic well-being.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

The quality of provision in the sixth form is outstanding. The school has sustained a steady rise in examination results over several years. Standards are above average and students achieve exceptionally well. In the majority of subject areas they meet or exceed their targets. The strong emphasis on tutorial support, students' self-evaluation and relentless tracking of progress underpins post-16 success. Students are highly appreciative of teachers' enthusiasm for and knowledge of their subjects as well as of the challenge to extend their understanding of work, sometimes through independent activities. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding.

Most Year 11 students who move on to the sixth form, remain to complete their courses, and progress to higher education. They have access to a broad academic curriculum that matches their needs and aspirations well. Specialist music status has enabled the school to augment its vocational offer with music technology. Students are looked after exceptionally well and their personal development is excellent. The very supportive sixth-form community enables students to develop confidence and responsibility. Working relationships are very good and students gladly give of their time to assist younger students. Participation is high in the wide range of enrichment opportunities, including the 'aim higher' excursion to the University of East Anglia.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that the road crossing between sites is supervised by adults at the change of lessons.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Standards are high in the main school and above average in the sixth form. Students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve outstandingly well from an overall just above average starting point.

Prendergast School has sustained and improved further the already good results at the last inspection. Following a steady rise over several years, test results at the end of Year 9 peaked in 2005. Similar very high standards were reached last year with the percentage of students gaining the highest available levels in English and science being double that attained nationally. Mathematics also maintained its good record with two thirds of the students making far greater gains than those expected nationally.

The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A\* to C grades is consistently well above average. In 2006, the school exceeded its very challenging target so that four out of five students gained at least five higher examination grades. For close to three quarters of this year group, these results included both English and mathematics, far higher than national figures. The school's in-depth analysis indicates that there is no significant difference in the attainment of students from differing ethnic

backgrounds. Students achieved particularly well in English, French and Spanish, and in art and music, reflecting the school's specialist language and music status.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding as is their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. Relationships throughout the school community are harmonious with students showing a sensitive awareness of customs and cultures other than their own. Students enjoy school and are proud of their good attendance record. They behave well, show strikingly positive attitudes to learning and adopt a very mature, confident approach to the journey between sites. They report feeling safe and secure. Students are clearly pleased with the support they receive and are confident that there is always someone to turn to if need arises.

A high level of responsibility is expected of the students. They respond well through trying to eat healthily and through participating in the wide variety of physical activities open to them. They make good use of the services of the school nurse who also encourages the lunchtime walking club. The well-established school council, thoroughly representative of all groups within the school, provides a ready forum for students to air views and make recommendations. They are rightly satisfied at the school's response to their environmental concerns and appreciate the improvements made by a cleaner on-site throughout the school day.

Most are keen to be involved in the school's stimulating out-of-hours opportunities, many of which reflect the specialist music and languages status. Students take fundraising events very seriously and help raise considerable sums of money for good causes, both at home and abroad. Younger students find welcome mentors and role models in sixth formers who are learning partners for some year groups. This supports not only their learning but enables some to make better informed option choices and to consider actively their future economic well-being. Students consider they are well prepared for their futures and comment positively on their careers programme that includes a successful focus on self-evaluation. As a result, the overwhelming majority of students aspire to continue with education and training when they leave school.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Teaching and learning are consistently good and often outstanding. Since the last inspection, the school has worked tirelessly to improve teaching even further because 'at Prendergast, good is not good enough'. Clear guidance, regular monitoring linked

to training, and accurate judgements on the quality of classroom practice are central to the school's very good progress.

Warm working relationships are reflected in a positive learning environment throughout the school. Students respond well to carefully paced, challenging tasks and activities in lessons. In a successful English lesson, for example, teaching made good use of visualisation to stimulate students' oral responses in distinguishing fact from opinion. Active involvement in a range of activities to check their understanding added to students' enjoyment. A Year 12 geography lesson promoted fast learning because of meticulous planning, the very good use of information and communication technology, and well- managed paired activities.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum is good. In Years 7 to 9, there is a carefully managed emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The school invests heavily in equipping all students effectively with basic skills to enable them to access a full examination curriculum in later years. Able students have excellent opportunities to extend their academic options with GCSE astronomy taught at the Greenwich Observatory, for example, or with classical as well as modern foreign languages. Other subject areas such as art and physical education offer both full and short courses so that students can broaden their experiences. Work-related learning through a local college benefits a small number of students. Personal, health, social and citizenship education is excellent as are the stimulating enrichment activities and out-of-hours learning. The school recognizes, nevertheless, that there is scope to extend vocational pathways for older students and to provide a drama option for Years 10 and 11.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Care, guidance and support are outstanding throughout the school. Students are extremely positive about the effective pastoral system that contributes to the 'family-like' community in the school. Arrangements for promoting students' health and safety are well thought- out. While supervision around the site and throughout the day is generally robust, the road crossing is not always supervised sufficiently by adults at lesson changes. The school works very well with a wide range of external agencies to promote the welfare of all students. Careers advice is excellent and students receive clear guidance on the opportunities available to them for the next stage of education and working life.

Systematic whole-school procedures check regularly, and sometimes forensically, on students' academic progress. A range of intervention strategies, both at departmental and school level, is in place to tackle any underachievement. These checks on students' progress account for much of their success in learning.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 1

#### Grade for sixth form: 1

The impact of the headteacher's inspirational leadership and outstanding management is evident in the school's sustained success since the last inspection and in its determination to become even better. The headteacher is very well supported by an exceptionally effective senior team in guiding, monitoring and evaluating the many aspects of the school's work. The languages and music specialism, under an able director, has made exceptional progress since designation. The expanding sixth form is going from strength to strength under stable and dedicated leadership. The school has clearly demonstrated its strong capacity to continue to improve.

There is an exceptional sense of teamwork across the school. This is reflected in the consistent and committed way managers at all levels work toward the school's aim to promote the schools motto of 'Trouthe, Honour, Freedom and Curteisye'. The school is proud of its efforts to maintain its inclusive ethos. This is seen in the very good progress made by all groups of students. Governance is excellent and, through regular meetings and fact-finding visits, governors ably challenge and support the school. They strike a happy balance between holding the school to account and not unduly disturbing its smooth, efficient running.

A strong culture of self-evaluation pervades all areas of the school. At senior level it is particularly incisive. Areas perceived as less than good are examined meticulously to determine how best they can improve. Some subject teaching, for example, that was previously no better than satisfactory, was analysed carefully and supported consistently to become good. Teachers appreciate the school's positive professional ethos as well as the talented support staff who also benefit from well-planned training.

The views of parents and students are sought regularly, are much valued and used to inform worthwhile changes. The curriculum, for example, now includes Latin in the options, Spanish in Year 7, and expanded information and communication technology, as the result of parental and students' requests.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	1	1
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	1

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

After my visit to Prendergast, I would like to share my findings with you. Thank you for your very friendly welcome and for sharing your ideas and opinions with me. A special thanks to those of you who gave up lunch time to meet with me. I am delighted that you enjoy school so much and take advantage of the many opportunities it provides, especially in languages and music. I am equally pleased that you co-operate well with each other and your teachers, both in class and around the site. You attend regularly, know about healthy eating and are proud of your success in learning. Many of you are making a difference to others through excellent contributions to the school, local and international communities. I heard that you get good experience of working life and enterprise skills and that very helpful advice on the next stages of education helps you make sensible choices.

You told me that your teachers are very committed to helping you to do your best and that you think your school 'really cares about you'. I agree with you that your school is outstanding and that you have a really exceptional staff and headteacher. Governors are very active in ensuring your school maintains its high standards. Much has been done to make teaching even better than at the last inspection. As a result you make excellent progress in all year groups. I also agree that in the sixth form you are superbly prepared for higher education. Teachers also recognise that it is important for some of you to have more vocational pathways and that you would like a drama option in Years 10 and 11. Your school is very concerned for your safety but one thing could be better. I have asked the staff to increase the level of adult supervision at the road crossing between lessons.

I am confident that you will continue to work well with your teachers so that each of you can make the best possible progress.

I wish you all the very best for your future success.

Sheila Nolan Lead inspector