



The Priory School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 101659
LEA Bromley LEA
Inspection number 286141
Inspection dates 10 May 2006 to 11 May 2006
Reporting inspector Stephen Long

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Tintagel Road
School category	Foundation		Orpington
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		BR5 4LG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01689 819 219
Number on roll	1376	Fax number	01689 600 842
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Bob Evans
Date of previous inspection	5 February 2001	Headteacher	Mr Nick Ware

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	10 May 2006 - 11 May 2006	286141

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Priory School is larger than average and offers extended provision beyond the normal school day. It works in partnership with a number of other local and national organisations including: three schools as part of a federation; with other local 14-19 providers as part of a collaborative group and with an 'excellence cluster' of schools. It is affiliated to the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and has been awarded specialist status for sport and business education from September of this year. The proportion of the students eligible for a free school meal is above average. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities and with statements of special educational need is very high. The school houses a unit for students with specific learning difficulties. The majority of students are White-British, with a small number who speak English as an additional language. A small number of students join or leave the school other than at the normal time. Staff turnover has been high.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The inspection confirms the school's view that its overall effectiveness is satisfactory and improving. The school provides a valuable resource for the local community and has productive and growing relationships with its external partners.

Students make the expected progress at the school. Their overall attainment on entry is below average with standards remaining below average by the time they leave. Following a declining trend for the previous three years, standards improved significantly at GCSE level last year and in the national tests taken in Year 9. However there is marked variability between standards in different subjects. Appropriate steps are taken to support more able students.

The students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory and the school cares well for them. Most behave well, enjoy school and learn to lead healthy lives. However, attendance, although improving, is too low. The students make a satisfactory contribution to the school community. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and sometimes good or outstanding. Nevertheless, teachers do not consistently use data about students' attainment to plan appropriate teaching. While the students have targets for improvement, they are not always clear about what they mean, however, monitoring of students' progress is satisfactory and those in danger of underachieving are identified[r1]. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum with some good features. It makes good use of its extended status to enrich the students' experiences, especially in sport, but does not provide fully for citizenship in Years 10 and 11.

The headteacher and his leadership colleagues are aware of the school's main strengths and weaknesses. They offer sound capacity for improvement but need to measure more systematically the impact of their initiatives on the students' performance. Success in tackling the weaknesses identified in the last inspection has been varied. School improvement has been good in the last year but was too slow up to that point, meaning that reasonable overall progress has been made over time. Most parents are positive about the school but a significant minority are concerned about the students' behaviour. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school accurately evaluates the overall effectiveness of the sixth form as satisfactory. The vast majority of students complete their courses and make adequate progress although it is uneven across different subjects. They enjoy their education, are well cared for and make a positive contribution to the school. Teaching, learning and the curriculum are satisfactory although the requirement to provide religious education is not met. The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory, with strengths in monitoring and supporting the progress of individuals but weaknesses in strategic planning.

What the school should do to improve further

- raise standards so that students achieve consistently well across all subjects
- continue to improve attendance
- improve some aspects of teaching by making better use of assessment data to plan lessons which meet the needs of all students
- enable students to understand more clearly what they need to do to improve
- ensure statutory requirements are met for citizenship in Years 10 and 11 and religious education in the sixth form
- measure more accurately the effectiveness of initiatives on the students' achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' achievement is satisfactory although the standards attained are below average overall. When students join in Year 7, their standards are broadly below the national average. Standards reached by the end of Year 9 have improved over the past four years although they vary between different subjects. Standards are average in English but below average in mathematics and science.

At GCSE, the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE grades, while remaining below average, increased significantly in 2005 and reversed the declining trend of the previous three years. Current standards are broadly in line with those seen last year but vary widely between subjects.

Students entering the sixth form have below average attainment. They make satisfactory progress but standards in examinations are below those seen nationally for both boys and girls. While there are strong performances in some subjects, for example in English, as with the younger students, progress is uneven and students do less well in areas such as textiles, biology and French.

The majority of students reach appropriate targets. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those in the special unit, make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Most students enjoy school and behave well, both in and out of lessons. They report that incidents of bad behaviour are infrequent and those which do occur are dealt with effectively. Attendance is well below the national average but improving.

The students appreciate the importance of safe and healthy living; many are eager to join in the wide range of sporting activities offered by the school. Most value the healthy food options in the school canteen. While the student council works

enthusiastically to represent students' views, overall, the wider student body in Years 7 to 11 makes a satisfactory contribution to their community. Students in the sixth form respond well to the many opportunities to develop the workplace skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being. Such skills are less well developed but satisfactory in the main school. Sixth form students enjoy school and have a positive attitude to their studies. They play an active role in the life of the school and make a valuable contribution to the organisation of sporting activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory but includes some good and outstanding practice. In the best lessons teachers plan to meet the needs of students of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. They select resources, teaching styles and tasks that motivate students well and they manage behaviour effectively. Searching questions are used to encourage students to think and enquire. In these lessons, students have clear targets to achieve, guidance on how to reach them and teachers are vigilant in assessing the progress made. The strong lessons are supported by effective homework which reinforces or extends learning.

The weaker teaching shares a number of features: lesson plans are not informed by the data available on students' attainment levels; the students are insufficiently involved in discussion at the start of lessons, resulting in a lack of clarity over the purpose of the learning and although most students know their numerical targets, too few understand what they mean or how they relate to the criteria against which they will be assessed. Teachers' marking gives sound guidance for improvement but students' involvement in setting their own targets is limited and the targets they set for themselves are often too vague to be helpful to them.

Provision for the students with learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory overall and good in small group sessions such as those in the unit.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with some good features and is reviewed regularly. Good attempts are made to match pupils' needs through teaching them in ability groups. While this arrangement meets their needs reasonably well, it does not always enable curriculum content to match students' attainment. This, allied to shortcomings in matching work with students' prior attainment in some lesson planning, leads to unevenness in the achievement of some students. Provision for the students' personal development is sound overall, although the monitoring to ensure needs are met is not always explicit or coherent enough. However, the school provides a good range of activities in some areas; for example in helping students stay healthy, effective use is made of the school's sports facilities.

The range of extra-curricular activities is good. Careers education and guidance are satisfactory overall. Arrangements for work experience are good for students on vocational courses but satisfactory for others. There is a good choice of academic subjects and vocational courses in the sixth form although few students choose to study vocational subjects. The provision for citizenship in Key Stage 4, and for religious education as a general requirement for sixth form students, does not fully meet statutory requirements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Provision for care guidance and support is good, especially the pastoral care provided for students. Their behaviour is suitably monitored and procedures for reducing exclusions, improving attendance and tackling poor behaviour are good. The school takes good steps to communicate with parents and carers concerning their children's progress and to collect their views. Inspection evidence confirms the school's view that a significant minority of parents remain concerned over behaviour at the school.

The arrangements for child protection are very well managed. Care for the students is significantly strengthened through links with external agencies, facilitated by the extended school. For example, support for vulnerable students is well organized and there are good arrangements for their transition into Year 7. Transition into the sixth form is organised appropriately although some students are accepted on courses with limited chances of success. Arrangements for students' health and safety are secure. Monitoring of students' academic progress is satisfactory so that students who are in danger of underachieving are identified. The support provided for these students in Years 9 and 11 is strengthened by allocating senior staff as student advisers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with some areas of strength. The headteacher is committed to the school and to working in partnership with the community and other organisations to raise its profile. He has effectively restructured the senior and middle leadership teams to focus well on improving attainment. Progress in the last two years has been strong; reversing a period when too little was achieved. The school has made satisfactory overall progress on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, demonstrating satisfactory capacity to go further and support all students in meeting challenging targets. Most leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and all are held to account, although the capacity of middle managers to raise standards further, while developing, is varied.

Through competent monitoring and evaluation, the school has a satisfactory awareness of its strengths and weaknesses and what to do to make improvements. However, the planning of initiatives, and the evaluation of their impact, is not linked sufficiently to measuring the performance of the students. The governors support the school well,

gathering a reasonable range of evidence to monitor its provision and challenge its leaders over progress.

Recent investment in information and communication technology, required as part of the school's work with federation partners, has improved the learning environment but placed pressure on its finances. Planning to cope with this, and a projected reduction in student numbers, is sound and the school offers satisfactory value for money. Although there have been difficulties in managing continuity in staffing, recent key appointments have been effectively supported with appropriate induction and professional development procedures.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	4	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Students

Thank you very much for taking part in your school's inspection. A large number of you took the time to speak to us both in and out of lessons and in meetings. This was much appreciated and enabled us to understand what you think about the school. This letter gives a summary of the main report which I would recommend you read.

We believe your school to be satisfactory but with the potential to improve. The school offers you valuable opportunities, for example, as an 'extended school' it is open for longer each day than other schools. You are taught by a capable group of teachers who, together with the headteacher are committed to your success and have many ideas about how to move the school forward. You have access to a broad range of subjects to study. The majority of you told us you enjoy attending the school and feel safe. Many of you explained how much you value the sports facilities and welcome the forthcoming specialist status. In lessons you make the expected progress in your learning. Most of you behave well both in and out of lessons. However, a number of you miss too many school days and some of your parents or carers are concerned about behaviour. Students in the sixth form make a good contribution to the school as a whole, for example through helping to run events.

We have asked the school to focus its improvement from now in some key areas. These all affect and involve you directly because they are about your progress. You can help with these by: working hard in all your subjects and trying to make the same progress in the subjects you find hardest as those where success comes more easily; attending school as often as possible and getting more involved in setting your own targets for your work so you have a better idea of how to improve and know how much progress you are making. We enjoyed being in your school and wish you every success in the future.

Thank you again for your help with the inspection.

Stephen Long

Her Majesty's Inspector