

Priory School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114598
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	289987
Inspection date	13 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline White HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	1157
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Harpley
Headteacher	Martyn Ofield
Date of previous school inspection	10 September 2001
School address	Mountfield Road Lewes BN7 2XD
Telephone number	01273 476231
Fax number	01273 486922

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This large school has achieved specialist status in performing arts, languages and science. The social and economic circumstances of families are mixed. Most students are of White British heritage and a very small minority speak a language other than English as their first language. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Of these, the number with a statement of special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school because it is well led and provides students with good standards of education, guidance and care. The school is rigorous in evaluating its own performance and judges itself to be good, a view endorsed by the inspection team.

Students make good progress from their broadly average starting points to achieve high standards at the end of Year 11. They enjoy and benefit from the rich range of opportunities available to them. The outstanding curriculum meets the diverse needs of students and is flexible in accommodating their choices. However, the school is ambitious for its young people. The strong commitment to raising achievement drives its plans to personalise learning even further. The school's three subject specialisms in performing arts, languages and science combine the development of creativity, cultural awareness and analytical skills to add powerfully to students' experiences. The wide range of extra activities also helps students to explore their potential.

Students are encouraged to express opinions about their school and be aware of the contribution they make to its improvement. Most have a positive attitude to learning and make the most of the opportunities to air their views through the house and school councils. Supportive relationships are an important factor in students' enjoyment of school and their good personal development. Most parents have a high regard for the school. One commented, 'The school encourages students to utilise their youthful energy, productivity and creativity to the full'.

Teaching is good overall and sometimes outstanding. The systems for monitoring teaching and learning are robust and challenge teachers to keep on improving. Generally, learning is carefully evaluated. If students are in danger of not meeting the targets set for them, staff intervene with personalised support to get them back on track. Learning managers are increasingly effective in leading this work. The school rightly recognises the need to further develop the skill of assessing students' learning in lessons and accelerating their progress by timely clarification of what individual students need to do next.

Leadership and management are good overall but strongest at senior level. The headteacher provides very good leadership. He is well supported by the effective and hard-working senior leadership team. Together with governors, they give clear direction to the work of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend teachers' and teaching assistants' expertise in evaluating and building on students' progress in lessons.
- Maximise students' engagement with learning by personalising their experiences even further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good and standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and 4 are above average.

In Years 10 and 11 students make good progress. In 2006, the school broadly met its challenging targets in national tests and GCSE examinations. The number of students achieving five higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, was well above average at 61%.

Whilst standards are above average, staffing difficulties have impacted on students' progress in English in Years 7 to 9. The school is working effectively and with urgency to ensure that students achieve as well in this subject as they do in mathematics and science.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress, as do students from ethnic minority backgrounds and those learning English as an additional language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school encourages students to develop into sensible and thoughtful young people who enjoy learning. Attendance is broadly average and behaviour is good. Most students are considerate and respectful towards others. However, a few parents and students express concern about the behaviour of a very small minority of students in some lessons. Students feel safe and are confident that bullying will be sorted out if reported. In this respect, the work of the 'Bully Busters' peer support is valued.

Students are fully aware of the importance of diet and exercise in leading healthy lives, and many particularly enjoy the good range of extra-curricular sports activities. Students take responsibility seriously and teachers readily listen to their opinions in the school and house councils, and over the appointment of new staff. Students have a good understanding of the skills they will need in the world of work, and the school is seeking to extend their awareness of enterprise skills through all subjects. Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. The impact of performing arts status and visual arts provision on developing students' self-confidence and cultural awareness is outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

As a result of good teaching, most students make good progress in their lessons. Where practice is at its best, teachers and teaching assistants are skilled at engaging and motivating students who, as a result, behave well and are confident and enthusiastic learners. Lessons are well organised and conducted at a lively pace. The skilful use of questioning deepens students' understanding. Relationships add powerfully to learning because they are based on mutual trust and give students the confidence to make mistakes and to learn from them. Learning objectives are clear and students understand the purpose of their work. They are actively encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, and develop useful skills in assessing their own work. Whilst students' progress is systematically assessed and tracked over time, not all teachers and teaching assistants are as skilled at evaluating and maximising learning in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is imaginatively planned and outstanding in its breadth and quality. In Years 7 to 9, there are exceptional opportunities for students to study Latin, classics and a range of performing arts options. The well-considered programme of personal, social and health education and effective use of tutor time enable students to develop life skills in a coordinated and progressive way. In Years 10 and 11, the school has developed a range of courses that provides

excellent opportunities for students. For example, there are GCSE courses in photography, music technology and Greek, and AS courses in film studies, philosophy and English literature. In addition, an extensive range of vocational courses is provided in conjunction with local colleges. The wide variety of activities both in and out of school enriches students' experience further.

The needs and aptitudes of students are very diverse. Some do not find it easy to engage with learning. The school is very aware of this. The excellent curriculum is testament to their commitment to making learning meaningful and exciting for all students. They are intent on building on this strength by personalising the curriculum even further to boost the motivation of some students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All students benefit from the school's good care and guidance. They know that adults care about them and are committed to ensuring they fulfil their potential. The recent management restructuring has resulted in a more coherent approach to the support of both personal and academic development. Vulnerable students are particularly well supported and the school's commitment to inclusion is strong. Comprehensive and effective links with outside agencies support a number of students at risk. Students' personal and academic development is carefully tracked and students are confident about the levels they are working at and what they are aiming for.

There is guidance for parents about communication with the school including a 'who to contact and how guide' in students' diaries. Most parents feel the school is approachable and believe communication has improved considerably over time; a few think it is hampered by overly complicated procedures.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's clear vision of success for the school ensures there is a shared sense of direction and a determined commitment to continuous improvement. The school has made good progress since its last inspection because senior leaders play a very effective role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. Rigorous monitoring systems link well to the improvement planning process to ensure the right priorities are identified. The professional development of staff supports continuous improvement and maintains a sharp focus on raising standards.

The school was radically restructured in September 2006. The benefits of these changes are already becoming apparent in the rising achievement of students and the school's good capacity for further improvement. Understandably, some staff appointed to new roles within the structure are still establishing themselves and have yet to realise their full potential.

Governors are well informed and dedicated. They provide a good balance of support and challenge to the school and take an active part in improvement planning.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

Dear Students,

Inspection of Priory School, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2XD

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your openness and cooperation. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection. Your parents or carers will have a copy of the full report should you wish to read it.

Yours is a good and improving school; some aspects of its work are excellent. Senior leadership is strong and focused on ensuring that everyone can achieve their best. Most of you are making good progress and achieve high standards in national tests and examinations. The care, guidance and support staff provide for you are good.

You understand the importance of making a positive contribution to your school and the wider community. We were pleased to see how well you are developing as reliable and thoughtful young people. Most of you take responsibility seriously. You express your views about things clearly and confidently. A few of you are worried about the impact a very small number of students may have because they do not behave as well as the rest of you. A few parents share this concern too. Staff have worked successfully to provide an excellent curriculum for you and have plans to make it even better. A wide range of courses and extra activities are available to you, with some exceptional opportunities for all ages. The breadth of the curriculum helps you to develop as well-rounded, outgoing young people.

Staff and governors are ambitious for you. They want you to aim high and have clear plans for bringing about further improvement. We agree with their commitment to personalising the curriculum even further. We also want them to become more expert in assessing and building on your progress in lessons

We are confident that your school will continue to improve. You have an important role to play in this by continuing to work hard and achieving your best and we wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline White Her Majesty's Inspector