



The Priory School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123939
Local Authority Somerset
Inspection number 292834
Inspection date 6 December 2006
Reporting inspector Denise Morris

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Pickeridge Close
School category	Community special		Taunton
Age range of pupils	11–16		TA2 7HW
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	01823 275569
Number on roll (school)	58	Fax number	01823 275569
Appropriate authority	The local authority	Headteacher	Christopher Sweeney
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–16	6 December 2006	292834

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is the only secondary special school for boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties aged 11-16 in the county of Somerset. Many boys have very long journeys to get to school each day. The majority of pupils are educated in the main school and there is a small satellite class for those pupils who find attendance particularly difficult. Almost all pupils are White British. There is weekly boarding provision for up to 10 pupils. The school has experienced considerable change over the past two years since the appointment of the headteacher. There have been several staffing difficulties recently, which have not yet been resolved. The school is about to undergo a substantial building programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The overall effectiveness of the school, in line with the school's own judgment, is unsatisfactory. Standards, which are below average, should be higher and too few pupils achieve qualifications. Inadequate achievement is due to inadequate teaching, unsatisfactory behaviour and below expected levels of attendance. Teachers do not regularly assess how well pupils are doing and targets are not used well enough to drive up standards. The inconsistent use of new behaviour management systems means that pupils are often confused about what is acceptable, and unsatisfactory behaviour often disrupts learning. This results in unsatisfactory personal development and well-being. Care, guidance and support are unsatisfactory because of weak academic guidance, which means that pupils do not always know what they have to do to improve. One of the strengths of the school is the good provision for weekly boarders, which has a positive effect on their personal development and on relationships. The good range of extra-curricular activities which help to widen pupils' horizons, is a significant strength. The overall curriculum is satisfactory and includes several strengths. The school has worked hard to develop links with local providers so that work experience opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 4 are good. The school has also made good efforts to encourage pupils to live healthy lifestyles, and has achieved notable success in working with pupils to improve their snacks, and to reduce the levels of smoking. The good lunchtime clubs are well-attended and pupils generally enjoy them. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory although the headteacher has a clear vision for the future and a good sense of what needs to be done to move the school forward. Some good new systems have been devised to assess and monitor pupils' progress but these are not yet embedded in practice. Performance management and a system for monitoring teaching and learning are not in place and the monitoring of pupils achievements is also weak. Consequently self-evaluation is unsatisfactory. This lack of progress in key areas is because the headteacher is almost always confined to day-to-day management. The weight of the work falls on his shoulders and he has not been able to securely establish a suitable leadership team. Significant long-term absence by a senior staff member also contributes to this problem. Leaders are aware of the need to improve the way the school is led and managed. Governors are supportive of the headteacher; however, despite working hard to evaluate the schools' effectiveness there is a lack of understanding about how to embed the new procedures into daily practice. The local authority supports the school well and a clear package of improvements has been identified to take the school forward. Leaders and managers have devised an appropriate strategic plan to improve provision and raise standards, however not enough work has been done to implement it. Because of this, and the ongoing staffing issues, the school's capacity to improve is unsatisfactory. In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The boarding provision makes a good contribution to the personal and social development of the weekly boarders. Learning in subjects is not helped as much because targets in pupils' individual education plans are not precise enough to guide the work of staff in the residential setting. The last annual report by the Commission for Social Care Inspections (CSCI October 2006) identified good practice overall with only a few minor issues relating to the meeting of the national care standards. These are now being addressed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of all pupils by setting challenging targets and regularly assessing each pupil's progress.
- Improve the behaviour of pupils in all areas of the school by implementing the new behaviour management systems consistently so that pupils know what is expected of them.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils enjoy lessons and come to school more regularly.
- Improve the way the school is led and managed by sharing responsibilities more widely and implementing clear systems for monitoring the school's work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

All groups of pupils, including looked after pupils, do not achieve well enough because their attendance is unsatisfactory. In addition, their poor behaviour impacts on their ability to concentrate and stay on task. Pupils enter the school with often below average standards in most areas of learning. Their progress during their time at the school is unsatisfactory. This is partially because targets for improvement are not used consistently to help pupils improve their work. The lack of whole school assessment systems in which pupils' achievements are tracked and monitored as they move through the school means that pupils and staff often do not know how well they are doing. This in turn means that learning opportunities are not sufficiently matched to needs to enable pupils to make sufficient progress. Pupils achieve well in their work experience programmes. The recent introduction of the ASDAN Youth Awards programme is beginning to have a positive impact on the achievement of lower attaining pupils in particular.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

Pupils make unsatisfactory progress in developing their personal and social skills. They do not behave well enough in lessons or around the school and do not attend regularly enough to achieve their best standards. The vast majority do not enjoy school. In a

minority of lessons pupils show good attitudes to their work. On those occasions they enjoy working hard and doing their best. Too many have not fully accepted the rules and expectations for learning and this limits the progress they make, and often the progress of others in the lesson. Staff are vigilant and make every attempt to ensure that pupils are safe and secure while at school, but too often pupils ignore the rules. They will leave classes and even the school grounds and, although pupils say that they feel safe at school, through these actions, they limit the effectiveness of staff in ensuring their safety. Through the good efforts of staff, pupils have gained a good understanding of the need to live and eat healthily. Although, they do not always put this information into practice in some aspects of their lives, they are beginning to enjoy the 'healthy options' provided at lunchtime. The good work experience programme for Year 11 pupils helps them gain valuable direct experience of the attributes and personal skills required to mix successfully with others in the adult world, and their attitudes and enjoyment of work related activities are better than they are in school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is unsatisfactory. Pupils have an acute awareness of right and wrong, but too rarely think of how their actions affect others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teachers do not have a clear enough view of how well pupils achieve because of the lack of assessment procedures. As a result planning is unsatisfactory because there are insufficient data to set targets and address learning needs. Teachers know pupils well and want them to succeed but tasks are not always linked well enough to individual needs. Pupils do not know what they need to do to improve their work. These factors alone lead to unsatisfactory learning. In addition, management of pupils' behaviour is unsatisfactory, leading to some disruption to the learning of many pupils. New behaviour systems are in place, and pupils know these well. They say that 'it is in our interests to behave better', but because of inconsistent use of the systems the reality is that lessons typically become disrupted and arguments often break out. There are some strengths in the teaching, including good use of resources, particularly of information and communication technology (ICT), and some good support of individuals from teaching assistants. However, these more positive features do not have sufficient impact on learning due to the unsatisfactory features of the teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of accredited awards. Considerable development over this last term, which has included adding a modern foreign language and providing more opportunity to learn about religious education, geography and citizenship, has resulted in the curriculum broadly meeting national requirements. The curriculum is extended well by a good range of lunchtime clubs and the work experience

programme, which gives good opportunities to learn about the skills and requirements of work in industries such as agriculture and retailing. Taking part in the annual residential visits and the day visits to outdoor activity centres help pupils gain in self-confidence, become more independent and practise acting as members of a team. Links with other schools and colleges are very limited and add little to broadening pupils' learning experiences. However, the school's county-wide remit means that many pupils travel considerable distances to get to the school, and the colleges and schools closest to The Priory are not always those that they would naturally attend.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Child protection procedures are rigorous, although all staff are not trained well enough. Health and safety procedures and risk assessments are good. Although not always effective the school is using all the opportunities available to improve attendance. Provision to improve pupils' attitudes and behaviour is unsatisfactory. The use of the behaviour management system and procedures to improve pupils' emotional and behavioural difficulties are inconsistent, leading to a lack of understanding about what is acceptable. Pupils say that 'behaviour is not always good enough'. Assessment is developing in English and mathematics but the lack of precise assessment information on what pupils know and can do over all the subjects and the consequent absence of acceptable targets for learning means that planning does not always match well with pupils' learning needs. This affects guidance given to pupils, as staff are not able to adequately judge the progress made by different groups of pupils or to recognise the quality of their progress against any national data. Statutory requirements relating to statements of special educational needs are being met. Educational provision as it is outlined in pupils' statements is broadly met. Specialist additional provision for dealing with the complex mental health issues of some pupils is not being met well enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The headteacher has been in post for two years. In that time he has worked hard to successfully identify the key areas for improvement that this inspection has found. Despite this good work, the headteacher alone carries too much responsibility for change. The pace of improvement has been too slow because of difficulties such as the long-term absence of a key staff member. As a result of weaknesses in middle and senior leadership and management, the headteacher has undertaken day-to-day management duties rather than taking on his strategic role of driving improvement forward. This has led to many urgent and essential improvements either not taking place or not happening quickly enough. For example the new procedures for assessment and those for managing pupils' behaviour have not yet been consistently implemented. Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning has not yet begun and performance management of staff has not taken place. Inconsistencies in the quality of provision across the school have not been monitored or addressed.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4
The behaviour of learners	4
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	4
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4
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?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

- Thank you for your help during the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views. We found that your school has many good things to offer you. We were particularly impressed by the way you attend clubs. We also like the way that you are working with the school to lead healthy lifestyles, and particularly the efforts you are making to give up smoking. Provision in the boarding house is good, helping you to improve your social and personal skills. However, we do not think that some of you come to school often enough, or that some of you behave well enough in and around the school. We think you could achieve much better, and we are asking the school to do the following things:
 - to set more challenging targets so that you aim higher
 - to help you improve your behaviour in and around the school
 - to improve teaching so that you enjoy lessons and come to school more often
 - to make sure that leaders and managers put systems in place to improve the education that you receive. I hope that you will help the school to do these things. Thank you once again, and good luck for the future.