



Priory Special School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124901
Local Authority SUFFOLK
Inspection number 293134
Inspection dates 16–17 January 2007
Reporting inspector Ian Naylor

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Type of school | Special | School address | Mount Road |
| School category | Community special | | Bury St Edmunds |
| Age range of pupils | 9–16 | | Suffolk IP32 7BH |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01284 761934 |
| Number on roll (school) | 106 | Fax number | 01284 725878 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Mrs Lyn Searle |
| | | Headteacher | Mr Roger Mackenzie |
| Date of previous school inspection | 13 January 2003 | | |

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|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
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| 9–16 | 16–17 January 2007 | 293134 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Priory school caters for a wide range of pupils with complex needs in addition to their moderate learning difficulties. These include social, emotional and behaviour, sensory and/or physical, communication needs and autism. The school has residential accommodation for 24 pupils. 7 pupils are resident full-time from Monday to Friday and 29 part-time. The school draws from a wide area of Western Suffolk. 25% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Nearly half of all pupils are from disadvantaged family backgrounds and one in ten are looked after by the local authority, fostered or adopted. Boys outnumber girls by two to one. Less than 10% come from ethnic backgrounds other than British.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Priory School provides a good standard of education. This continues the good practice noted at the last inspection and represents good value for money. The promotion of the acting headteacher and acting deputy to permanent posts has resolved the uncertainty caused by the protracted departure of the previous headteacher. This has had an immediate stabilising effect on the school. Their combined knowledge and experience of the school's strengths and weaknesses are immense assets and the key to the school's future development. The new leadership is good. With the involvement and full support of committed governors and that of staff, the leadership has continued with all the school's best practices and begun to identify and address the few weaker areas. At the same time these two senior staff have maintained the calm and positive approach to learning in the school. Issues from the previous inspection have now been largely addressed.

The leadership has given support and impetus to the good and sometimes exceptional progress and achievement of pupils. Their monitoring and evaluation of teaching and good provision of in-service training have ensured that teaching is good. This, together with good relationships, effectively supports pupils' individual needs and provides relevant and challenging learning opportunities. Academic standards are low, reflecting these pupils' significant learning needs but, once in the school, they make rapid progress, especially in their personal development and social skills. Many pupils when they first arrive in school have very limited experiences of success in literacy or numeracy. They quickly learn to enjoy their learning and to make good relationships and build confidence in their own abilities. Consequently they make good progress in their basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Pupils say they feel safe in school and learn through personal social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship lessons how to combat any bullying and about social relationships. They have an awareness of the importance of healthy living and eating and take part enthusiastically in the many sporting and physical activities both in the school and in boarding. Pupils with behavioural difficulties learn to adjust their behaviour so that it is less of a barrier to their progress in learning. They are keen to help one another; for instance, older pupils regularly help younger ones with their reading. They also support their own and the wider community through fund raising events. Their behaviour is good and their attendance is satisfactory.

The curriculum is good and helps to promote both achievement and personal development through a comprehensive programme of activities that have a clear emphasis on developing social and life skills and on work related learning. The links the school has developed with other agencies are excellent. In Key Stage 4 pupils improve in their social skills and abilities so that they are able to tackle the challenges and responsibilities of the adult world. By the time they leave school they are suitably prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment.

The welfare and support provided by all staff, both in the school and the boarding houses, are excellent. Parents are glowing in their praise for the effectiveness of the

school, one parent, for example, asserting 'We could not wish for a better school'. They feel that they are kept well informed about their child's progress. The systems and procedures for assessing academic performance of pupils are satisfactory; they are wide ranging but insufficiently rigorous and will benefit from the plan to extend them by the use of an electronic data collecting program.

The quality of the school's overall self-evaluation processes is good and largely accurate. Governance is good as is the school's capacity for further improvement. However, subject leaders do not sufficiently check the quality of teaching, learning and of achievement through the direct observation of lessons to help raise the overall quality to an even higher level.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The boarding provision is well led and there is outstanding provision for pupils' welfare and guidance. Care and behaviour plans are well prepared and take good account of the views of pupils and parents. A wide range of excellent leisure and physical activities is provided each evening. The development of skills for independent living is given appropriate emphasis and these are effectively used to promote pupils' personal development. Pupils who board are taught how to keep themselves safe and to understand the importance of healthy eating and lifestyles. Pupils say they are very happy with the exciting variety of things that they get to do. Parents and carers are equally supportive. The few points for development outlined by the recent Commission for Social Care Inspection Report are currently being addressed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate the work begun on developing an electronic data system for tracking the academic performance of pupils.
- Increase the contribution of subject coordinators to the arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry in Year 5 is well below the national average because of the complexity of pupils' needs. Approximately two-thirds of targets relating to statements and individual education plan objectives were met in 2006, and most of the remainder showed measurable progress, with very few failing to show any progress at all. This is a good improvement on the position at the time of the last inspection. The great majority of pupils make good progress in their reading. There has been continued success at Key Stage 4 in GCSE Entry Level examinations in English, mathematics, science and physical education. Pupils also achieve well in City and Guilds vocational education awards with a gain of 50% in 2006 compared to 2003. All pupils have excellent success in work experience placements and this is reflected in reports from placement supervisors. Pupils with more complex learning needs make good progress

in the alternative courses in independence and social skills. The great majority of parents say they are very pleased with their child's progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects, are good. Their attendance is satisfactory. Pupils say they enjoy school very much. Their positive attitudes to learning and usually settled behaviour help greatly to ensure that they make good progress in their work. Most are attentive listeners and keen to participate actively in lessons. They get on well with adults and their classmates. They are developing a good understanding of how to lead healthy and safe lifestyles. They are supported well by clear guidance from adults and good attention to their physical and dietary needs. Pupils in Key Stage 4, for instance, help to run a 'healthy cafe' as an enterprise project. In such ways, pupils contribute well to the school community. Pupils value the school council as a way to present their views and to ensure that these are considered by the staff. For example, they are rightly proud of their recent efforts to secure new property lockers at a bargain price. The programme of vocational studies and work experience combines well with the good progress pupils make in their academic and social skills, thereby helping them to become suitably prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Throughout the school, pupils' individual education plans are reviewed regularly to identify successes and the next steps in learning. Pupils understand the targets set for them and use regular tutorial time to discuss their progress. Teachers plan interesting and challenging activities that are soundly matched to individual needs. The teachers generally work effectively with the team of teaching assistants. Lessons are underpinned by the good quality of relationships and good behaviour management that ensure a pleasant working atmosphere in classrooms. Teachers use a good range of assessment procedures to check pupils' academic and personal development in key skills. They are currently developing an electronic system for tracking progress which aims to provide a more consistent and rigorous way of establishing how each individual pupil is doing. This system is at too early a stage of development to judge its impact on improving pupils' progress further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets pupils' needs well. There are a wide range of stimulating and relevant activities provided both for day pupils and for boarders. These help to promote

pupils' basic literacy and numeracy. Social and life skills are well supported by lessons in both Citizenship and PSHE. There is, however, some undue duplication in the coverage offered by these two subjects across the school which has not been sufficiently addressed. Pupils with additional or specific needs are well supported through individual programmes and by group or one-to-one support from teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils who have particular behavioural or social difficulties, which can affect their attendance, are supported by part time placements and a structured return to fulltime schooling. There are many enriching activities which extend learning opportunities in and out of school. These include many visits and visitors, special events and residential trips. Pupils take part in national and local sports competitions. There is an extensive and successful programme of work related learning, including work experience and further education college link courses. The school is developing good business enterprise opportunities in areas such as conservation and recycling.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The outstanding quality of care, guidance and support is a significant strength of the school. Parents and pupils greatly value the high quality day-to-day pastoral care and supervision that is offered. Staff are vigilant in monitoring pupils' behaviour, attendance and overall personal development. They are increasingly involving pupils in assessing how well they are doing in their work. An example is the 'traffic light' system in Key Stage 2 where pupils choose a traffic light colour to communicate how well they have understood a lesson. The school makes excellent use of partnerships with health and social services and with the local authority in securing the support required for individual pupils according to need. Staff and governor training in child protection procedures is regular and thorough. The school has ensured that its vetting of adults who work in the school meets current requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership of the school provides good continuity of direction and has a clear sense of how to take the school forward. This is outlined very well in the school development plan which was the product of a wide consultation. There are good systems and processes for disseminating information across the various sections of the school and with the boarding provision, and there are regular meetings to share and value good practice. Although the role of subject coordinators has been improved since the last inspection, and they now have a more positive impact upon pupils' achievements, there is still a need for more rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. The new role of play-leaders has been successful in supporting good behaviour. Parents and pupils are fully involved in annual reviews. Parents are kept well informed through letters, emails, text messages and by the school web-site and in regular parent meetings. The school provides an effective and expanding

Outreach Service to local schools. Governors discharge their statutory and other duties well and play a key role in school development.

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|-----------------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | |
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| 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? | 1 |
| The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision | 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

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 4 |
| 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 | 1 |

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? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 |

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

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| 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 | 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, 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

18.01.2007

Dear Pupils,

Priory School, Mount Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP32 7BH

Thank you all for making Mrs Ranger and myself feel so welcome when we visited your school this week. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing about all the exciting things that you do at school. We agree with all the good things you told us about. You say that you enjoy your school and do not have any real worries. We feel that there is a very pleasant, calm and purposeful atmosphere in your school.

We think this is a good school and that you all work very hard and make good progress. You are quite rightly proud of what you achieve. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 do especially well in their course work. You have excellent success in your work experience placements.

We congratulate you all on your good behaviour and the friendly way that you treat and help one another. You know how to keep yourselves safe and do lots of exercise to keep fit.

You have good teachers and teaching assistants who give you lots of interesting work to do. They help you when you find things difficult. They look after you when you are not well or when you need extra support. Those of you who are boarders say you are very happy and enjoy the many great activities after school. You keep your bedrooms looking tidy!

You think your headteacher does a good job and we agree!

We have told the headteacher and staff that there are just two things that which we think could be improved. Teachers should complete the work they have begun using computers to check how well you are doing in your work. They also need to check how well teaching helps you to learn by watching one another teach.

With best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Ian Naylor Inspector.