

The Priory CofE Voluntary Aided School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125281
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	293249
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Maria Dawes HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	793
6th form	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janet Hockley
Headteacher	Mr Andre Sohatski
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2001
School address	West Bank Dorking RH4 3DG
Telephone number	01306 887337
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Priory Church of England Voluntary Aided School is a smaller than average comprehensive school serving the town of Dorking and the surrounding area.

Students come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds and there is relatively high mobility both in and out of the school. The majority of students are of White British background. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly higher than 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: 3

This is a satisfactory school, with good features, providing a caring environment and a sound education for its students. Students enjoy being at school and many appreciate the small and close community that they work in. 'This is a really friendly community!', 'all the teachers know you by name' and 'everyone knows and supports each other' were three of many such comments from students. A strength of the school is the students' good personal development and well-being that is nurtured by the good pastoral care given by the staff of the school. The students' enjoyment of learning is good. They feel safe in school and make a very good contribution to both the school and wider community, in particular through their enthusiasm to raise money for charities such as Comic Relief.

Teaching is satisfactory overall and ensures that most students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make satisfactory progress. However, there is too much variability in the quality of teaching within and between subjects and not enough is yet good or better. Lessons do not always take sufficient account of students' different needs. Students behave well and arrive at lessons prepared and ready to learn. A small minority of students and parents express concern about disruption to learning in some classes. Students know their targets in most subjects and appreciate the regular monitoring of their progress by their tutors. However, some teachers do not give them sufficient guidance on how they might improve their work in order to achieve further progress.

Standards are broadly average and, given their starting points, students' achievement is satisfactory. There is some variation from year to year and between subjects particularly at GCSE. The percentage of students achieving 5 or more good passes at GCSE fell in 2006 and was below average.

The curriculum is good in many aspects and provision is developing to meet the needs of all students particularly in Key Stage 4. However changes in the vocational curriculum have not yet had an opportunity to impact on outcomes. Students appreciate the wide variety of activities and extended opportunities offered by the school. The school works well in partnership with other schools and agencies to promote students' well-being.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and his leadership team firmly believe that 'Every child does matter' and this is shared by staff throughout the school. Many parents concur with this and a striking number of parents wrote to express how happy their children are at The Priory. One parent wrote 'The school have encouraged him greatly; not just academically but in all aspects and he now dislikes the holidays and throws himself into school life!' Senior leaders generally have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development, although they have been over-generous in their judgements of the quality of teaching and learning and the degree to which teachers' planning takes sufficient account of students' different needs. The effectiveness of managers at all levels in bringing about improvement is not consistent. Action plans do not focus clearly enough on enhancing student outcomes. Staff turbulence including the recent prolonged absence of the headteacher has added extra pressure on the senior leadership team. Governors are well informed and are supportive. The issues for improvement identified by the last inspection have been successfully addressed and there is a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education. Since the last inspection good improvement has been made and student numbers have increased substantially over the past three years as a balance of vocational and academic courses has been introduced. Teaching is satisfactory. Students appreciate the small sizes of the classes and feel that relationships with staff are very good. Although teaching A-level courses through video conferencing increases the range of subjects available, students are less happy about the structure and teacher input of these courses. Students' progress is sound and standards in external examinations, although below average, are improving.

Students' learning is underpinned by good personal development. They enjoy their sixth form experience and appreciate the good enrichment programme on offer. Students enthusiastically organise charity events such as a rag week and appreciate opportunities to help younger pupils in the school. The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The recently introduced personal tutorial time, is working well, helping students to focus on their progress and likely examination success. Teachers take students' views seriously and provide additional pastoral and academic support when needed.

The new head of sixth form has set clear and appropriate direction for the sixth form which is bringing about substantial changes although it is too early to judge their impact. Monitoring systems are not yet embedded and inconsistencies in the quality of provision have not, as yet, been resolved.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the amount of good or better teaching in order to raise the achievement of all students.
- Ensure all managers have a consistent and shared approach to rigorous self-evaluation and action planning in order to bring about improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students start the school with standards that are slightly below average. They make satisfactory progress through their first three years and results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 are in line with the national average. In 2006, students made better progress in mathematics than in English where in particular a significant minority of more able students did not make the expected progress.

The percentage of students attaining five or more good GCSE grades fluctuates from year to year and in 2006 was significantly below the national average. This represents satisfactory progress for most students although there was a minority who underachieved. There are significant differences between department results which are linked to the quality of teaching and learning that the students received in those subjects. In particular a large proportion of students attained the higher grades in modern foreign languages and geography.

In lessons, most students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and from ethnic minorities, make at least satisfactory progress. The school expects to meet its academic targets this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well being of the learners is good. Students like coming to school and appreciate its caring ethos. Staff and students enjoy mutually respectful relationships with each other. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. In addition to religious education which is studied by all students, local priests visit the school regularly to take assemblies and recently, over one hundred Year 7 students attended a retreat in a local church. Many students take part in the wide range of cultural activities on offer such as language exchange visits and visits to the theatre. Students make a good contribution to their own community and to the wider community and many students participate in charitable fundraising such as Make Poverty History. They appreciate opportunities to take on responsibilities within the school. There is an active school council and the students take the opportunity to respond to surveys.

Students enjoy learning and attendance is good. They arrive punctually for lessons and try to do their best completing the learning task they are given. Behaviour of students around the school and in lessons is good. They move sensibly and safely, particularly in some of the narrow corridors, and respond well in potentially hazardous situations, such as design and technology. Students support the school in its actions to minimize bullying. The majority feel safe in school but student surveys indicate that there is a need to continue to develop strategies that enhance students' sense of well being. Students understand the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and are happy to use the school catering facilities which encourage healthy eating. A short course GCSE in PE is compulsory for all pupils and there is a good uptake for the full course. The school satisfactorily prepares students for the world of work and further study.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, but it is inconsistent. There is much good practice within the school but it is not shared well.

There are good relationships between the students and the teachers and the students come to lessons ready to learn. Lessons are typically planned with a good variety of activities. However, these are not always matched well enough to the needs of all the students, with some finding the work too easy and others finding it too hard. This means, at times, some students become bored and do not focus on their work. The best lessons fully engage all students. In an excellent but challenging German lesson the teacher skilfully used a variety of visual and aural activities that had all students enthusiastically taking part and learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they ask well chosen questions to challenge the students and make them think. Teachers usually explain to the students what they should be achieving by end of the lessons. However sometimes this is not made clear enough and the students have difficulty in understanding exactly what it is they should be able to do. Teaching assistants work well with students who have learning difficulties and disabilities to help them to understand the work. The marking of students' books with formative comments on how they can improve is

inconsistent. There is also inconsistency in the extent to which learning is checked within the lessons and it is not always focused on the original learning outcomes. Some teachers, however, check learning well and involve the students in the process. One middle manager quoted his students as saying, and;quot;Not peer assessment again!and;quot;

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. The school regularly reviews the curriculum and it meets the needs of individual students well, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. In Years 10 and 11, the choice of subjects has increased since the last inspection and now includes vocational choices both in school and at a local college. The vocational choices are being closely monitored and evaluated with a view to further development. Provision for ICT has improved since the last inspection. Literacy and numeracy are addressed well across the curriculum, with specialist support within lessons. There is also additional one-to-one support for the less able. The school works well in partnership with outside agencies to prepare students for their future. A wide range of extracurricular and enrichment activities are on offer, including sports, drama and a whole school walk. These have high levels of participation and are appreciated by the students. This extended curriculum adds significantly to the students' enjoyment of school and contributes well to their good personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The provision for care, guidance and support is good. Students appreciate the regular monitoring of their progress. Targets set with tutors are checked by relevant subject staff to ensure they are achieved. However target levels and grades are only available in the full reports hindering the ease with which the students and their parents are able to monitor progress. Good information and support is provided to help students settle into school and at the transition stages at the end of Year 9 and 11.

The school has effective links with external agencies to support vulnerable students. Use of solution focussed work has assisted many students raise their self-esteem and keep them actively engaged in their education. The school is currently introducing a 'restorative justice' programme which has the potential to enhance the support given to students in their efforts to resolve disputes and take responsibility for their behaviour. These initiatives have yet to have an impact on reducing the relatively large number of pupils who are excluded from school.

The school ensures that all adults who have contact with students are checked as to their suitability and appropriate checks are made. Arrangements for child protection are secure and appropriate training is maintained by at least four staff. Procedures for ensuring students' safety are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior leadership team is effective and shares a vision for the school in which the students are at the centre of all the work that they do. They have succeeded in creating a climate where students feel cared for and secure.

The school accurately identifies the areas that it needs to improve. Systems for monitoring and evaluating performance are in place. However, lesson monitoring is not focused sharply enough on learning, and information from evaluations does not always inform development planning. Thus actions do not always have a positive impact on student outcomes. The school has identified the need to improve the achievement of all students. However recent staff turbulence and difficulty in recruiting appropriately qualified staff has hindered its progress.

Middle managers vary in both their experience and their understanding of what needs to be done and, as a result, the good progress made by some subject areas is not replicated across the whole school. Recent additions to the senior team and a new structure for middle management are helping to strengthen aspects of the school's improvement work, in particular the monitoring of individual student's academic progress. However staff have not been in post long enough for there to have been a clear impact of their work. Governors are supportive of the school. They have a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are actively involved in helping the school to improve.

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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	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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2
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	3	3
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	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?	2	2
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 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?	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	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I am writing on behalf of the other inspectors and myself to thank you for the help you gave us when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you and listening to what you had to say about your school. We hope that you take the time to look at the full report but we thought you would like a summary of our findings.

We think The Priory is a satisfactory school. It has areas that are good and the potential to become better.

It is clear that you enjoy coming to school and we agree with you that a real strength of your school is the caring and friendly community that you work and socialise in. Because the school is small you feel that you all know each other and the staff make plenty of time to treat you individually, giving you good support and guidance. We agree and we were particularly impressed by the number of you and the number of your parents that took the time to tell us this. The curriculum you are offered is broad and there is a wide range of other opportunities, from extra-curricular clubs to exciting trips, to extend your learning.

We saw much good teaching but we found that some was not yet as good as it might be and some of you are not achieving as well as you might. We have asked the school to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is more consistent across the school in order to raise the academic standards. You can help by asking for clear guidance about how to improve in particular subjects and by aspiring and working for the best results that you can get. We have also asked your school leaders to develop the ways that they monitor and evaluate the performance of all aspects of the school in order to plan for and make further improvements.

Your headteacher and teachers are committed to getting things right for you and we are sure you will continue to support them in this. Thank you again for helping us with our work and making our visit to your school so enjoyable.

Yours sincerely

Maria Dawes (HMI)