

Inspection report

Priory School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 921/6041

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 11 - 14 September 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Priory School is a small Christian school catering for children aged from 3 to 16 years. It has grown in size since its move to new accommodation in 2005. The school is non-selective and has 25 pupils with special educational needs (SEN), including two who have statements of SEN. The vast majority of pupils are white and 21 are from ethnic minorities.

The school occupies an attractive site set in 1.33 acres with 3 play areas, a tennis court and a swimming pool, overlooking the sea in Shanklin on the Isle of Wight. There are 11 classes in the school which range in size from 6 to 16 pupils.

The school is owned by the headteacher and her mother, who started the school and was formerly the headteacher. Its aims are to provide a happy, secure and supportive learning environment in relation to pupils' academic needs as well as their social, moral, cultural and ethical development. It promotes pupils' self-motivation, self-discipline, and self-esteem.

Summary of main findings

Priory School fulfils its aim of providing a supportive environment to nurture its pupils. The small size of school, with one class in each year, is used to good effect to raise pupils' esteem and self-confidence. It is a happy school, where new pupils settle quickly and good behaviour is promoted.

The curriculum is reasonably broad and balanced, with a strong emphasis on the core subjects, supplemented by arts subjects. Design and technology (DT) is not taught in the secondary stage and provision for careers guidance is limited. The teaching is sound with good features, particularly the individual support to pupils in lessons, which enables them to make progress and do well in examinations for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).

What the school does well:

- its provision for performing and creative arts is good;
- its supportive ethos helps pupils to make progress;
- it obtains good results at GCSE; and
- it helps pupils to behave well.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

- improve provision for careers guidance and work experience;
- ensure that the designated child protection officer and all staff receive appropriate training to comply with current guidance; and
- ensure that the admission and attendance registers are kept according to current regulations.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school offers a reasonably broad and balanced curriculum, which enables pupils to make progress. There is a strong emphasis on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, supplemented by good provision in the performing and creative arts. Information and communication technology (ICT) is taught in all years, but the provision for DT is more limited. French is taught to pupils from Year 1 and Spanish is offered for older pupils. History, geography and religious education are taught in all years. Pupils also do physical education, which includes swimming for the younger ones. They are taught in mixed ability groups for all subjects.

For the youngest pupils, the teaching is based on the national guidance linked to the Foundation Stage. In Key Stages 1 and 2, the curriculum is mainly based on the National Curriculum, supplemented by materials from the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy. Some subjects, including ballet and ICT are taught by specialist staff from reception.

In Key Stages 3 and 4, the curriculum is broad and includes all the major subjects, except DT, though there is ICT. Pupils have a reasonable choice over what they study in Key Stage 4; currently 15 subjects are offered. The curriculum meets the needs of its pupils throughout the school, although some pupils in Key Stage 4 study a relatively narrow range of subjects, with too much private study time.

Currently, there are no discrete lessons for personal, social and health education (PSHE) or citizenship; however, there are plans to have an occasional day devoted to these areas. Elements of health education are included in other subjects, such as science. A lesson in careers was included for Year 10 and 11 pupils last year but has now been omitted; a careers day is planned later in the term, including advice from the local Connexions service. However, careers guidance is relatively limited, with no formal opportunities for work experience, which is initiated by some pupils individually.

There is detailed information on the curriculum taught in each year and an outline is also provided to parents. There are detailed schemes of work for each subject, indicating the content to be covered.

The school offers a sound range of extra-curricular provision. It is reasonably balanced, including sports, drama and music; there is a good participation rate. Pupils have a number of opportunities for trips and there are school productions.

The curriculum caters appropriately for pupils with learning difficulties and for those with a statement of SEN. Teachers plan the activities to enable pupils to learn, taking account of individual needs and providing extra lessons for specific support.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching in the school is satisfactory and has some good features. An outstanding lesson was seen in drama where pupils co-operated well together to enhance their skills in key aspects. Two thirds of the lessons seen were good and only one was inadequate. Teachers know their pupils well and enable them to make satisfactory progress. There are mutually supportive relationships in the school.

In the classes for younger pupils, lessons are generally planned and taught in a manner which interests pupils. Teachers plan a range of practical activities which enable the pupils to work towards the early learning goals of the Foundation Stage. In the most effective lessons the activities were closely matched to the learning needs of the pupils. Teachers give good individual support; since the classes are small there are no teaching assistants.

Older pupils are usually taught by specialist teachers. Some teachers have good subject expertise and use their knowledge to good effect in their lessons. A number of teachers use a three-part lesson structure. They give careful explanations and offer good individual support to help pupils develop their knowledge. The work is sometimes matched to the differing needs of pupils but occasionally pupils' prior attainment is not taken into account, as happened in a lesson in mathematics, where a rather ill-defined task was set. Occasionally work is set to challenge pupils, as occurred in a lesson on drama: good progress was observed with pupils developing skills and understanding of freeze-frames and tableaux in a co-operative atmosphere.

The management structure is developing and there is informal monitoring of teaching. Some teachers have undertaken recent relevant training, for example on courses relating to examination syllabuses. There are some new resources but there are also areas where resources, though adequate overall, are limited in quantity and quality; in a few lessons the lack of suitable resources had a detrimental effect on pupils' learning.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and work diligently. They show interest in the work and make steady progress. Pupils' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires and in informal discussions confirm that they are happy in the school, and value the teaching. A few pupils expressed a concern about access to computers and availability of the internet, which is being addressed.

There are records of pupils' achievements, but these were not always available in classrooms to new teachers to help them plan lessons. A scrutiny of pupils' work books revealed that they are marked regularly, but too rarely with targets for improvement. The work in pupils' books was at an appropriate level.

Younger pupils are assessed using the Foundation Stage profile. Pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 take informal national tests and the results are shared with parents. The main external assessment is by examination for GCSE. Pupils in Year 11 achieved well in the last two years, with about four fifths achieving at least five higher grades, including English and mathematics.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply in full with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *improve provision for careers guidance and work experience (paragraph 1(2)(g)).*

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school makes good provision for the moral and social development of the pupils, and sound provision for their spiritual and cultural development. It is a small, caring, 'family' community where each individual is valued and respected for their personal qualities. Pupils report that they are happy at the school, as some Year 6 pupils said: *'we have lots of friends at this school.'*

Pupils are encouraged to develop their self-knowledge and self-confidence during their time at the school. They are encouraged to take part in school productions, for example in the summer term's production of *'A Midsummer Madness'* which included pupils of all ages in the drama, dancing and singing. This participation helps increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. Older pupils take on some roles of responsibility as prefects, helping out with tasks such as settling the younger pupils in the morning, but such opportunities are relatively few at present. Pupils are made aware of others less fortunate than themselves and raise money for charity projects.

The school is a well-ordered community, where pupils understand the simple school rules. They know the difference between right and wrong. They are encouraged to act responsibly even at a young age, for example changing their own shoes for playtime. Pupils behave well both in class and around the school. Relationships are good at all levels and pupils and staff respect each other and treat one another kindly.

Pupils go on a variety of visits to places of interest, both locally and on the mainland. This enables them to gain a sound understanding of public institutions and services; however, there is no systematic teaching of citizenship or PSHE in the senior school. Visitors are encouraged, such as the policeman who visited during the inspection, allowing the younger pupils to explore the inside of his police car and to set out road directions after a road accident.

Regular assemblies enable the pupils to meet to consider and reflect on different values and practices. However, the cramped conditions, with pupils sitting on the floor are not conducive to collective worship and spiritual reflection. Dedicated lessons help pupils to gain an understanding of Christianity and other religions. There is limited planned provision to help pupils develop an understanding of cultural diversity, though their cultural development is enhanced through music, drama, and art. The school participates actively in local festivals on the Isle of Wight, where the choir has achieved considerable success.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good. There is a range of policies in place, which include anti-bullying, child protection and health and safety of pupils on visits outside the school. These are effectively implemented. The headteacher is the named child protection officer but has not yet attended up-to-date training in line with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance. The school has reacted promptly to this omission by arranging for two teachers to attend an appropriate course later this term. The behaviour policy emphasises a positive approach to managing pupils' behaviour and they behave well in and around the school. The school has made good provision to ensure fire safety with regular documented fire drills; fire appliances are all checked annually and a fire risk assessment has been carried out. Two staff are trained in First Aid and accidents are recorded. Pupils are well supervised at all times. The admission and attendance registers are not kept according to current regulations. Details are missing in the admissions register and attendance registers are not marked consistently with regard to absences and lateness. The school fulfils its duties in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that the designated child protection officer and all staff receive appropriate training to comply with current guidance (paragraph 3(2)(b)); and*
- *ensure that the admission and attendance registers are kept according to current regulations (paragraph 3(9)).*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

Teachers are generally qualified for the post they hold and the majority have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) for their suitability to work with children. However, there have been some recent changes of staff at the school. There are six teachers who have recently been appointed, who have been cleared against List 99, but final clearances have yet to be received from the CRB. There are appropriate staff appointment procedures in place.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises used by the school are satisfactory. A large, detached manor house has been adapted for use as a school. There is a range of classrooms, some of which are quite small and were cramped for some of the larger classes of senior pupils. This impedes the free flow of both the teacher and the pupils and restricts opportunities for investigative learning. There are specialist rooms for music, ICT, art and science, but there is no library. The art room has no running water and the science room only has bottled gas. Most of the classrooms are decorated with examples of pupils' work, celebrating their achievement. The building is generally well maintained and decorated.

The school is fortunate in having an extensive area at the rear of the building with grassed play areas, a fenced tennis court and a fenced swimming pool which is currently out of use but it is hoped can be refurbished in the near future. There is no hard surface play area but the school hopes to rectify this shortly and at the moment pupils change into suitable outdoor footwear. There are areas which need maintenance, such as the flight of steps with some broken edge tiles. The play area for the younger pupils is not regularly used as an additional outdoor classroom area since it is not fenced and gated at the top of the steep steps.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The prospectus presents a clear picture of the school, articulating its aims and describing the curriculum in broad terms. Parents are made aware of all the policies either via the prospectus or through the regular and informative newsletter.

The parents' association is active in fund-raising and promotes close relationships between the school and the local community. The school provides three reports a year on pupils' progress, though some do not include grades for efforts and attainment and there are no national comparators. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires a fifth of the parents said that they do not feel well informed about their children's progress. However, there is an annual meeting for parents to discuss their children's progress and at other times as necessary. The responses in the parental questionnaire were generally positive, with three fifths strongly agreeing that their children like the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has a brief but appropriate written policy for handling complaints, which is

available upon request. Parents are encouraged to raise any matters of concern, as part of the school's 'open door' policy. An informal approach is suggested so that action can be taken quickly. There are procedures for a more formal approach, including a panel hearing with an impartial person, though this has not been needed to date.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

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| Name of school: | Priory School |
| DfES Number: | 921/6041 |
| Type of school: | Christian |
| Status: | Independent |
| Age range of pupils: | 3 - 16 years |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils): | Boys: 69 Girls: 59 Total: 128 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils): | Boys: 3 Girls: 0 Total: 3 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need: | Boys: 1 Girls: 1 Total: 2 |
| Annual fees (day pupils): | £1,950 - £4,290 |
| Address of school: | Alverstone Manor Luccombe Road Shanklin Isle of Wight PO37 6RR |
| Telephone number: | 01983 861222 |
| Fax number: | 01983 861222 |
| Email address: | serge@wight365.net |
| Headteacher: | Mrs E K D'Costa |
| Proprietor: | Mrs E K D'Costa and Mrs E J Goldthorpe |
| Reporting Inspector: | Mr R Kapadia HMI |
| Date of inspection: | 11 - 14 September 2006 |

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