

Priestnall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106133
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	309039
Inspection date	29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Alan Brine 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	
School	1270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Young
Headteacher	Mrs Jo Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2004
School address	Priestnall Road Heaton Mersey Stockport Cheshire SK4 3HP
Telephone number	0161 432 7727
Fax number	0161 442 7605

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the patterns of pupils' underachievement and the actions being taken to eliminate these in a number of subject areas
- the provision to support positive behaviour and enrich students' understanding of cultural diversity
- the quality of the Key Stage 4 curriculum and the plans to review its effectiveness
- the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning strategies.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. The inspectors agreed with the school's own judgements about students' personal development and well-being, the quality of teaching and learning, and the provision for care, guidance and support.

Description of the school

Priestnall is an 11-16 mixed comprehensive school and a designated centre for students with physical disabilities. It has a higher than average number of students, although the number on roll is dropping slightly year on year as part of a planned programme agreed with the local authority. Students come from a mixed catchment area and the pattern of attainment on entry is slightly above average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average but is rising. The percentage drawn from minority ethnic communities is broadly average, as are the numbers for whom English is a second language. A broadly average proportion of students have statements of special educational needs, but the percentage with special educational needs is below average. The school received a national Artsmark Silver Award in 2006. Through its participation in the Comenius programme and the 'connecting classrooms project', it benefits from a number of international links. The school was re-designated as a Gold standard Healthy School in 2007 and is currently seeking specialist status as a sports college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Priestnall is a good school with good capacity for further improvement. It is popular with parents who rightly consider their children receive a good education and are safe and well cared for. Students enjoy coming to school and feel they are well taught.

Leadership and management of the school are good. Under the vigorous and visionary leadership of the new headteacher, a very thorough and incisive analysis has been undertaken of the current strengths and areas for development of the school. The headteacher, working closely with the senior leadership team, has established a clear strategic vision for the future built around its existing strengths and designed to address key areas requiring improvement.

In the immediate term, the school is prioritising the need to address some key areas of underachievement in the performance of some students. Results in examinations and tests are above and, in some cases, well above the national average. Achievement at Key Stage 3 is generally good. There is some underachievement in specific subjects and by specific groups of students particularly at Key Stage 4. In some subjects, for example mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and art, achievement is particularly good. However, the progress of some students at Key Stage 4 in English and some aspects of design and technology is less effective. There is underachievement by some lower attaining boys overall at Key Stage 4. The school has taken action to address this by making some staff changes, reviewing the courses on offer, and establishing a more coordinated system for tracking and supporting pupils' progress. While it is too early to judge the impact of these initiatives on test and examination results there has been some improvement in the progress students are making in subjects where underachievement was prevalent.

For the longer term, the headteacher and senior leadership team have taken action to develop a more strategic approach to school improvement. A good start has been made in drawing together the various threads of development activity across the school and establishing an ambitious school development plan. This is built in part around the current bid for specialist sports college status which has a strong focus on raising attainment. The school intends to ensure that priorities and their resource implications are clearly identified and embraced by all members of the school community. These initiatives take forward a number of important improvements in the leadership and management of the school instigated under the previous headteacher, including the restructuring and extension of the school leadership team. A key recent success has been the improved coordination of a range of imaginative strategies to improve teaching and learning. These strategies are beginning to prove very effective in, for example, encouraging greater cross-subject working.

The school has a number of important strengths. It has a very good reputation in the local area. The provision to secure the broad personal development of students is good and reflected, for example, in its healthy school status and good attendance figures. Much of the teaching and learning are good, as is the quality of care and support provided for students. This quality of care is reflected in the positive transition arrangements which exist with feeder primary schools and the effective integration of students with physical disabilities into the life of the school. The school benefits from a team of effective middle managers which routinely implements the clear systems for monitoring and reviewing the quality of provision. Priestnall is a well organised and harmonious school and this is reflected in, for example, the way it deals with the constraints of its crowded accommodation.

There are a number of factors which the school has prioritised as requiring improvement. Instability in the staffing of a few subjects is impacting negatively on students' progress, although the school is working creatively to manage these issues. It has recognised that the current Key Stage 4 curriculum is too narrow and has begun a review to ensure it is revised to meet the needs of all students more effectively. Behaviour of a small proportion of students, particularly boys, is having a disruptive influence in some lessons, particularly where teaching is less effective. This is an issue of concern to some parents who also felt the opportunities they have to become involved in the life of the school are too limited.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the vision of the headteacher for improvement is implemented and embedded at all levels of the school.
- Improve the quality of the Key Stage 4 curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all students more effectively.
- Improve the behaviour of a small minority of students, usually boys, who can be disruptive.

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Annex A

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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
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

Inspection of Priestnall School, Stockport, SK4 3HP

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking with many of you. We also read carefully the questionnaires completed by your parents. These were very helpful to us.

We think Priestnall is a good and improving school. It rightly deserves the positive reputation it has in the local area. Most of the teaching is good and, as a result, you make good progress in many lessons and subjects. The care and support provided for you by the school is good. The staff are developing the arrangements for helping to track the progress you make and to help you if you are not achieving as well as you should. We particularly liked the way those of you who have a physical disability are able to play a positive role in the life of the school. We were also pleased with the level of your attendance at school and hope you can keep this up.

We think your new headteacher, who is very well supported by her staff, is having a very positive impact on the life of the school. She is looking very carefully at all aspects of school life to make sure the good things get better and the things that need improving are dealt with quickly.

The school knows that in some subjects you could do better and it is taking action to improve things where necessary. We think the school is right to think about the different courses they offer you at Key Stage 4. They want to make sure they suit the needs of all the students. The school accommodation is quite crowded but we were pleased that most of you make a real effort to ensure movement around the school is orderly. However, we were less impressed by a minority of students who let others down by behaving inappropriately in some lessons. We have asked the school to try to deal with this and you can help here. We have also asked the school to try to get parents more involved in the life of the school and you can help by encouraging them to do so.

Thank you again for welcoming us to your school. We wish you well in the future.