

Priory School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101856
Local Authority	Croydon
Inspection number	323541
Inspection dates	27–28 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	61
Sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Heather Parker
Headteacher	Ms Jillian Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2006
School address	Tennison Road South Norwood London SE25 5RR
Telephone number	020 8653 8222
Fax number	020 8771 6761

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Priory School provides for students with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. All learners have statements of special educational need and the majority have difficulties with language and communication. Many have additional complex medical and other needs. Students come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds but the biggest groups are from White British, Asian and Black African heritages. Over half of the students, a proportion that is well above average, are eligible for free school meals. Boys significantly outnumber girls.

The school has been subject to some reorganisation this academic year. For the first time, Priory has a Year 7 class and the sixth form students are set to move to a new site in September. The school has gained Healthy School accreditation and the Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Priory is a good school. Students are happy to come to Priory and this is demonstrated by the many smiling faces as they greet staff at the start of the school day. The vast majority of parents and carers returning questionnaires echo this evaluation of the school's work, as do the staff. One parent noted, reflecting the views of many others, 'My child seems very happy as staff are helpful and understanding of any problems that arise'. Since the last inspection, Priory has sustained its good practice in providing for its students despite the increasingly complex needs of its intake and a high turnover of staff. Carefully targeted staff training that has involved all teachers and support assistants has been at the heart of this success.

Leadership and management are good at all levels and the school has a generally accurate evaluation of its strengths and areas for improvement. It has rightly identified, for example, that it provides outstanding personal care, guidance and support for its students. This, together with an excellent curriculum that is personalised, as far as resources and the environment allow, underpins the students' good progress. For example, staff make the best possible use of the grounds in good weather. Students experience camping and cooking over a camp fire, and this affords them opportunities to reinforce their abilities to work collaboratively - a major step for many. On the other hand, the school knows that it does not always ensure that classroom assistants are confident in contributing to the assessment of the students' learning on a daily basis. It also recognises that it does not fully record the overall picture of how well students across the school meet their targets.

Although standards are low, students of all ages and across all groups achieve well in relation to their starting points and considering the profound learning difficulties that many students have on entry to the school. They make great strides in their personal targets and, above all, in their communication skills. Those who can, gain genuine practical skills that support their daily living and work-based experiences. Students' personal development and well-being, including aspects of spiritual, moral, social, emotional and cultural development, are good. They respond very well to the praise and rewards they receive throughout the day. As a result of the calm and sensitive support from all adults in the classrooms and around the school, students are safe, often persevere well, and make progress towards their individual and challenging targets. They prepare well for the next stage of their lives and many make the best contributions they can to their small community.

Learning and teaching throughout the school are good. Teachers plan their lessons carefully to ensure the safety of all staff and students but also with a strong focus on the needs of the individual. Support staff are deployed effectively so that students receive good support and positive encouragement. Annual review procedures for individual students are excellent, with each student very well known by staff.

Governance is good and supports and challenges the school well. Governors have a real care for the future of Priory's students. Links with parents, external and support agencies are excellent. The school is an exceptionally good ambassador for its students, ensuring that their rights are protected and their needs met.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Post-16 learners make good progress because of their individually tailored programmes and the outstanding personal care, guidance and support they receive. The curriculum is particularly effective in preparing students for the next stage of education, living or training. Students are made fully aware that they are valued members of the community and grow in confidence in managing new settings and in communicating with an ever increasing range of adults. Each learner has a communications portfolio which, in interactions with others, enables them to explain strengths, likes and dislikes, as well as areas that will need support after school. A real strength of the curriculum is that it strives to find a range of activities that each learner can access with the minimum possible adult intervention. Individual and group sessions, community visits and whole-school enrichment days empower learners to use their communication skills as fully as possible.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all members of staff contribute effectively to checks on students' achievements within lessons.
- Refine the records on students' learning so that there is a readily available and overall picture of how well students across the school are doing towards meeting their challenging targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are well below average but the achievement of the students from all backgrounds is good. When students join Priory their starting points are very much lower than those typical for their ages. Many students face additional learning challenges because of complex medical conditions.

Students make good progress towards their personal, behavioural and social targets because of the individual attention they receive. These personal targets are not only challenging but are also well matched to build on students' previous learning and to allow them to succeed. As a result, students are well motivated to strive to make good progress in essential skills. Students make the fastest progress in their communication skills with some making giant strides, for example from signing to simple three-word sentences. By the time students move into post-16 groups, around three quarters gain some certification in modules on independent living skills, money, meal preparation and self-advocacy. The school's records of students' long-term progress indicate convincingly that it is effective in helping each individual to make good progress, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in their personal development because of very clear care plans. These enable them, with support, to eat healthily and to participate in a wide range of physical activities. Horse riding and swimming, for example, are clear favourites. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is mostly good although some can become a little frustrated due to communication difficulties. Generally, students respond well to interventions by adults, are able to listen to each other in assemblies and to applaud success or birthdays. Although students' attendance is below national figures for the age range, there is no unauthorised absence. Most

absences are because of students' medical needs. The overwhelming majority of the students will be dependent on other adults for the rest of their lives and only a very few will move into the world of work. Nevertheless, students prepare well for the next stage, be it college, residential care or a supported training environment. The progress students make in carrying out a range of in-house tasks, working with staff to support charities at home and overseas, and taking part in local work experience opportunities encourages a sense of responsibility. As a result, their social and moral development is good. Relationships between students from different cultural traditions are also good. They accept each other as they are and enjoy being together. For example, students were thrilled by the assembly presentations on a range of religious festivals.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Careful planning for the learning of each individual student enables students to make good progress, particularly in independence and in communication skills. Very purposeful collaborative working between teaching staff and other adults ensures that students are well supported in behaving well and in concentrating to the best of their ability. All staff use signing efficiently to aid communication with students. Information and communication technology resources are used well to illustrate ideas through pictorial representation. Staff are unfailingly courteous to students, model good teamwork and positive relationships. As a result, learners trust the adults around them and are willing to take risks with new and varied activities. A group of older students, for example, were very well engaged in menu planning in a food technology lesson. Teachers make regular checks of students' progress. Nevertheless, not all support staff are confident to contribute consistently to the in-depth daily recording of the small developmental steps that students make.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

A real strength of the curriculum is the way it plans to match the varied and complex needs of each student. Mixed age groups are matched to the strengths and talents of the students. The carefully planned personal and social education programme contributes well to students' personal development. Alongside the well-considered schemes for English, mathematics and science, students enjoy a range of enrichment activities, visits and themed events. Older students are helped to gain as much independence as possible through local work experience, through visits to shops and through excursions on public transport. Priority is given to new technologies so that all learners have excellent opportunities to learn a range of communication modes. There is a carefully managed and individualised programme to support learners in planning transitions to the next stage of education and living. The school is striving to liaise ever more fully to ensure that well-practised routines are transferred as far as possible to the next institutions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Arrangements for safeguarding students are exceptionally robust and risk assessments are in place for all students. Students' achievement and well-being are at the forefront of Priory's

mission to 'give every individual the best possible chance'. Personal guidance is outstanding as are links with parents and external support agencies. Speech therapists liaise closely with school staff so that individual learning plans, targets and frequent reviews support the students' social and communication skills particularly well. Pupils are taught as effectively as possible to stay safe and to manage their feelings.

Information on the individual's attainment and progress against baseline information is carefully managed, recorded centrally at regular intervals and used effectively to inform the annual reviews. This very good understanding of each student's progress, however, is not translated into a readily available whole-school picture of how successfully students meet the targets set for them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The impact of the good senior leadership and management at Priory is evident in the school's sustained success since the last inspection. The school has maintained good provision for individual students despite an ever widening range of complex needs and limited accommodation. The headteacher's high expectations are shared by staff at all levels because of the systematic approach to highly effective training and professional development, particularly for support staff. For example, the school has rightly identified that learning support assistants are not sufficiently involved in the recording of students' steps in learning. Accurate self-evaluation, careful planning for Priory's future development, particularly for the new post-16 provision, and excellent teamwork among all staff, demonstrate clearly that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

Governance is good and provides well-targeted support for the school in providing for its students' needs and for improvements to the learning environment. Governors also challenge the school successfully, especially when dealing with some students' difficult behavioural issues and ensuring the safety of both staff and students. Other than promoting community cohesion effectively within its own community and beyond, the school is limited in what it can do owing to the complex special needs of its students. Nevertheless, it evaluates the impact of its numerous community initiatives and partnerships on its students and their families and carers.

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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	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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

08 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Priory School, London, SE25 5RR

Thank you for welcoming me to Priory and allowing me to share your assembly, lessons and even your camp fire. I really enjoyed sharing time with you.

I decided that Priory is a good school because:

- you make good progress
- you and your parents are happy with the school
- the headteacher and all staff look after you really well
- teachers make sure that lessons improve your skills
- the school makes sure that you have lots of exciting things to do
- you are safe and you all seem to enjoy school!

Priory could be even better if:

- all adults were more involved in checking your learning in lessons
- there was an overall picture of how well all of you meet your targets.

Thank you all and I am sure you will go on working really well with the adults who do so much to help you.

Yours faithfully

Sheila Nolan

Lead Inspector