

Priory School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115443
Local Authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	326196
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Carolyn Evans
Headteacher	Miss Jackie Shanks
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2007
School address	Burr Hill Chase Prittlewell Southend-on-sea Essex SS2 6PE
Telephone number	01702 347490
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

Priory School provides for up to 45 students who have behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. There are 40 students on roll, the majority in Years 10 and 11. All students are boys and there have been no girls on roll for some years. The vast majority are White British. Students join the school at any time during their secondary school years. All have statements of their special educational needs and most have a history of previous poor school attendance and other behaviours that had had a negative impact on learning. Their attainment on entry is low. Many are known to multi agencies, such as the youth offending services and drugs and alcohol team. The school has gained several awards in the last two years, such as the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the Eco Schools Silver Award. The previous headteacher retired in December 2008, and the school is currently led by a new acting headteacher, who is the substantive deputy headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school has effectively addressed the key issues raised in the last inspection, and its curriculum, care, guidance and support and leadership and management are all now good. Students' personal development and well-being is satisfactory. They continue to achieve well in English, and now also achieve well in mathematics. Achievement in other subjects is satisfactory overall, and standards attained, though varied, are broadly average.

There have been changes to the senior leadership team in recent months. The new senior staff team undertook an honest self-review and set a clear strategic direction for school improvement. This process is currently underway again, strengthened by wider consultation with the school's stakeholders. The effectiveness of governance remains satisfactory because of difficulties in recruiting and members' varied input, but the school has implemented effective strategies to help governors fulfil their duties. On the basis of the school's improvement to date and future plans, its capacity for further improvement is good.

A number of initiatives have been implemented over the past year, and particularly during last term, after consultation with students and parents. As a result, aspects of the curriculum have been re-modelled to be more interesting and relevant to the students' needs. There are many more opportunities for accredited learning, and the school has begun to extend accreditation to younger age groups in order to increase students' successes and reduce the rate of absence. Outstanding use is made of external providers to enhance and support the school's educational provision. Additionally, this ensures that the small group of students who are educated off-site have a full-time, carefully monitored, personalised educational programme that suits their specific needs. The curriculum is increasingly focused on supporting students' personal development through subject areas such as social skills, and also through school-wide initiatives. However, although new systems and practices are in place, there has been insufficient time for most of them to have had maximum impact on students' achievements.

The school's pupil support team works tirelessly with students and their parents and carers to provide effective personal support and guidance. The school has outstanding partnerships with external agencies to this end. Teams of relevant professionals are formed to work with students and families in need, for example over matters of behaviour and substance misuse.

Despite the improved quality of provision, however, there are some factors that are having a negative impact on students' achievement and personal development and reduce the overall effectiveness of the school. Attendance remains a significant factor: too many students are persistently absent which prevents them making as much progress as they could. There are many reasons for this, but difficult social circumstances and the fact that students have to make their own way to school from homes that are often far out of the locality are major factors. Furthermore, while most students' behaviour and attitude to work and each other is good, and sometimes outstanding, a small number occasionally choose to bully others and disrupt lessons.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There is usually a 'feel good' factor in lessons, due to excellent relationships and students' willingness to work and enjoy what they are doing. However, the use of assessment information to inform teaching and learning is under-developed. Too often there is insufficient clarity about what students are expected to learn and how they know they have been successful. Students' progress and levels of attainment are carefully tracked and recorded but this information is not always used to shape teaching and learning during lessons or to inform sharp target setting for individuals' learning.

Consequently, some targets for whole school improvement are not underpinned by reliable data and are not sufficiently helpful in the school improvement process.

What the school should do to improve further

- Work with the local authority to improve attendance.
- Improve lesson planning so that there is a focus on what individuals are expected to learn, and a clear means of assessing whether they have been successful.
- Improve the clarity and use of target setting in all aspects of the school's work.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' standards are broadly average. On entry, attainment is usually lower than expected due to the negative effect students' patchy attendance and poor behaviour have had on learning. Achievement is satisfactory and improving. Those students that attend regularly and behave well generally make good progress; a number are attaining levels expected for their age. However, the attainment and progress of too many students is affected by inconsistent attendance and some weaknesses in teachers' planning. Nevertheless, achievement is particularly good in English where nearly half the students make more progress than that expected of their mainstream peers. Achievement in mathematics is good and has improved steadily since the last inspection, but students' progress in most other subjects is satisfactory. Students in Years 10 and 11, and increasingly at an earlier age, gain various accredited awards in academic and vocational subjects, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Most students make satisfactory progress towards the targets set for them in their individual learning plans, but this is not always easy to determine because targets are often not written precisely enough.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, which is a considerable improvement from when they start at the school. The longer students attend, the more they gain confidence, improve self-esteem, and enjoy learning. Most students respond well to the supportive ethos and the numerous initiatives to improve their personal development and life chances. For example, incidents of bullying usually decrease to zero over time as students realise the impact of their actions on others. Students generally understand the strong messages promoted by the school, such as accepting diversity and society's rules, and making safe and healthy life-style choices but they do not always choose to put their knowledge into practice. Their ability to contribute to the community and prepare for their future lives, however, improves well. The students make good progress in key literacy, numeracy and work-related skills. They learn to work collaboratively and participate in a number of decision-making and consultation processes in the school. Behaviour is satisfactory. It is often good or outstanding, as relationships between staff and students, and usually between the students themselves, are very good. Exclusions have reduced markedly over the past year. Occasionally, though, a small number of students can be deliberately disruptive, which has a negative impact on others' learning and the usually calm atmosphere of the school. Despite the school's strenuous efforts there is too much persistent non-attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Some aspects of teaching have improved since the last inspection. Behaviour is generally very well managed and lessons are underpinned by outstanding relationships between staff and students. This means that in most lessons, students are happy, respectful, and have very positive attitudes to their work. The students very much enjoy challenges and novel approaches, such as a competition to complete mathematical calculations, or an investigation to test the effectiveness of different indigestion remedies. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed to support learning and individuals' behaviour. However, the impact of this good practice is limited by insufficient focus on learning. Learning objectives set for lessons are often vague, with no real way of assessing whether the students have learned what was intended. Lesson plans are sometimes bypassed, and students are given other unrelated activities to carry out. As a result, students' learning in most lessons is only satisfactory, although their application, behaviour and enjoyment are often good or better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is a strong and exciting feature of the school. It has improved considerably in the last two years. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range, of visits, visitors and workshops, including residential trips. There is an increasing focus on initiatives to support students' personal development. For example, drama is widely used and social skills lessons have been introduced for Year 7 and 8 students. Several initiatives are underway to support the development of leadership skills, including sports leadership and various opportunities for peer mentoring. The school has invented a curriculum area of its own (EGO) which combines geography and ecology, which students enjoy. It also supports the school's Eco-School status. The format of teaching modern foreign languages has completely changed and is now much more appealing to students. Extensive use is made of external providers including colleges, the YMCA and Southend United football club to extend learning. The school is continually adding to its range of accredited courses to cater for the students' diverse interests, provide them with better future opportunities and keep them engaged with school. The curriculum provides an extensive range of suitable activities to help staff plan individualised programmes of work for each student that build up their skills, knowledge and understanding systematically. However, it is not yet fully used to this end.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school puts considerable effort into this aspect of its work and some elements are outstanding. All requirements for safeguarding, child protection and health and safety are met by robust, well implemented and monitored systems and practices. The curriculum, and the pastoral, sanctions and reward systems combine to support students' personal development effectively. Priory has outstanding partnerships with many external agencies. These are initiated, led and supported by the school's own highly effective pupil support team. The school has put numerous strategies into place to reduce absence although these are having a limited effect, largely due to external circumstances. Nevertheless, it continues to try and improve the situation. Staff set a number of targets for students to achieve each term. Those reflecting their personal

development are generally appropriate. However, this is not the case with some of the academic targets, and reviews show that too many are not met. This is often because they are not written well enough in the first place, and success is difficult to determine. Additionally, even when targets are sharp and clear, there is insufficient carry-through into lessons for students to know what they need to achieve and for staff to focus their efforts on what needs to be learned next. Consequently, this aspect of academic guidance is a weakness, although support and guidance for the next steps in students' educational or working lives is good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Although the leadership of the school is not substantive, a strong, effective senior leadership team of long-standing staff has been established. This is driving forward school improvement and creating an establishment in which learning at all levels is valued and encouraged. Middle management has been strengthened by the strategic appointment of new staff and high level management training. Many promising new initiatives have been implemented but have not been operational long enough to be evaluated for their impact on students' achievements. The school is widening its partnerships and offering its own expertise in order to benefit both the Priory students and other establishments. For example, it gives training in behaviour management to other schools and offers in-school and outreach sessions to Year 6 pupils who are due to join Priory, or are in danger of exclusion from their own schools. School self-evaluation is honest, and this year's process is considerably improved by wider consultation with all stakeholders. The school sets itself various targets to help raise standards, but these are not always securely based on reliable performance data. Consequently, targets are not always sufficiently helpful in raising standards. The school's managers have already put some measures into place to strengthen the collection of reliable performance data. Priory tackles equality of opportunity robustly. It understands the importance of its role in promoting cohesion in the local, wider and global communities, for example by supporting community partnerships, implementing the 'Kick Racism Out' red card scheme, and gaining the foundation level International Schools award.

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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?	3
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	4
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 learners' needs?	3
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?	2

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	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

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

1 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Priory School, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 6PE

Thank you for making me welcome when I visited your school earlier this week. I came to the school to see how it was working and how well you were all doing, and this letter sets out some of my findings.

Overall, the school provides a satisfactory standard of education and care, although a lot of its work is good. The school is improving all the time due to good leadership and management. The staff work very hard to help you make a success of your lives, and I am pleased to say that most of you respond well and learn to manage your behaviour much more successfully than previously. In my meeting with a few of you, you told me that the school has helped you to completely change your attitude to learning. This is very good news! The school gives you an interesting range of things to do, and I can see from coming into your lessons that most of you enjoy learning. Your relationships with staff are usually really good which helps you learn. I am impressed by the progress you make in English and mathematics; this will help you with your future educational and employment opportunities.

There are a few aspects that you could improve, though, and the first of these is your attendance. Too many of you do not attend regularly enough, and this interferes with your learning and progress. There are also a few of you who choose to wind others up by bullying and being disruptive. This has a negative effect on others' learning and well-being, which really isn't fair.

I have identified three main things that the school could improve, to help you achieve better. These are to:

- improve your attendance
- be clearer about what you are expected to learn in lessons, and how you will know that you have been successful
- set clearer targets to help improve the school.

I wish you all the best for your futures.

Yours sincerely

Judith Charlesworth

Lead inspector