

The Priory School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123562
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	327939
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Michelle Parker HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	811
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Hodges
Headteacher	Mrs C Garbett
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 October 2005
School address	Longden Road Shrewsbury Shropshire SY3 9EE
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 19 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence, including the data and tracking system used to monitor the students' progress, the work students were doing in their books and the questionnaires completed by 250 parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- is safeguarding sufficiently rigorous?
- the progress of groups of learners, especially girls and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the quality of teaching in relation to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- leadership and management of teaching in relation to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- community cohesion and cultural development.

Information about the school

The Priory School is an oversubscribed, mixed comprehensive school. It is also a specialist Business and Enterprise College and has Leading Edge status. The school serves a relatively prosperous area and less than 5% of students are entitled to free school meals. There is a higher than average number of students with statements of special educational needs and the school premises are fully accessible to disabled students. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. Very few students are from minority ethnic groups. Attainment on entry is consistently above the national average. The school is an active member of Shrewsbury Partnership in Education and Training (SPET) Federation.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is a very warm and friendly school. It is outstanding because everyone subscribes to the school's motto of the 'pursuit of excellence' in all they do. Attainment is significantly above average. Students' achievement is good and for some it is exemplary, partly because the school sets challenging targets. It ensures that all students are effectively supported to achieve them. Teaching is demanding and behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the school. Pupils are mature and caring. Teachers have identified very high attaining students and additional lessons and different challenges are provided for them. These challenges stimulate and interest them. Students enjoy school and consequently their attendance is very high. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully included in all the school does and make good progress. Students are provided with detailed feedback, especially orally and through outstanding marking in most subjects, though the lack of consistency in marking in a few subjects hinders students' understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. Good practice in assessment was illustrated in one lesson where students were using clear criteria to evaluate each other's work and provide feedback on how to develop and improve their work.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school continually reviews the ambitious targets it sets itself. The underpinning ethos of the school has ensured that it has effectively tackled the key issues from the last inspection. For example, the school has worked successfully to develop middle leaders through 'distributive leadership'. Staff take ownership of initiatives and research and develop them, allowing them to make an impact on the school's development. Senior leaders have a very detailed and accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to identify swiftly any underachievement and reduce barriers to progress. As a result the school has outstanding capacity for improvement. The careful monitoring by the senior leadership team is not yet sufficiently embedded as part of the practice of all subject leaders.

Students have a good understanding of Britain's multicultural society. This is helped by strong partnerships led by the school, as part of its Leading Edge role, with local and regional schools. The school uses its Business and Enterprise status to good effect in promoting an enterprise culture among students. The transition arrangements on entry to the school are valued by parents and students and contribute to a smooth start to school life. Many parents commented on how well

their children were prepared for life at The Priory. Students get off to a flying start in Year 7. Parents and students value this and the work of the school but a small number would like to have better communication between school and home.

Safeguarding checks, including those on visitors, are rigorous and are implemented meticulously by the school. Risk assessments are in place and consequently the students feel safe. They know they are cared for. One student said it felt like being part of one big family where everyone gets on well. Students are confident that any bullying is dealt with promptly.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop monitoring by ensuring that all subject leaders are confident in sharing the school's outstanding practice, especially in marking, to guarantee the school's continuing pursuit of excellence.
- Ensure that the school listens effectively to all groups of parents and carers and reflect their views.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

Inclusion is a high priority for the school. Strong and well-established systems ensure that all students, but particularly the vulnerable, are given the support they need. The emphasis of this support is on making good academic progress, so that looked after children, for example, do well. Underachievement, wherever it occurs, is identified swiftly, the causes are pin-pointed and intervention follows from a range of sources. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because they are well supported by staff. Teaching assistants know them particularly well and ensure their needs are met in the classroom. Students who have physical disabilities play a full part in the life of the school and the school is well equipped to meet their varying needs. Staff show a high level of care and sensitivity in working with them and their parents.

Students know about healthy options, but the food selected by most at breaks and lunchtimes and that brought from home does not always reflect this. There is a wide range of physical activities available, both in lesson time and extra curricular, which enable students to follow healthy lifestyles.

Students are aware of avoiding unnecessary risks and feel safe in school all the time. They have a clear understanding of how to conduct themselves safely and show concern for others, especially younger students. Questionnaires revealed that parents and carers agree strongly that the school keeps students safe. Students are confident that there are adults or older students they can turn to if they have problems. As a result, any problems are sorted out quickly.

The school takes a very active role in its local and wider community. This is

enhanced by charity events, productions and other projects, as part of the enterprise and innovation curriculum. Many students, particularly in Year 11, take on additional responsibilities, helping in subjects and areas around the school, and supporting younger students. The year and school councils are very active in sounding opinions and taking decisions, including meetings with the governors about the school mission statement.

Excellent behaviour in school creates an extremely positive learning environment where students can progress in their work without distractions.

Attendance is consistently high for all groups of students. Punctuality is outstanding. This underlines the enjoyment of the students and the success of the school in establishing a positive ethos.

The school uses its specialisms in business, enterprise and innovation effectively to enable the students to gain extensive knowledge and skills useful to them in their future careers. This is also the view of those parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire. Work experience in Year 10, which is followed up in lessons, gives students an excellent knowledge and understanding of the world of work. The thorough grounding in basic skills, together with business education and other relevant experiences, prepares all students well for the next phase of their life.

Students have helped establish a series of 'life lessons' which link religion and philosophy and allow an opportunity to debate 'big issues'. Students discuss with interest a wide range of spiritual and moral issues in their 'life lessons' and in the religion and philosophy classes. This provides a coherent programme to address students' needs and prepares them well for making sensible and healthy decisions. Following a one-year trial, this is now established across the school. In these lessons, students explore and are challenged to consider deeper meanings when they act out fables and discuss hidden meanings.

Students are enthusiastically involved in artistic, sporting and cultural opportunities both during and after school. Many of these are run by students. They enjoy the special challenges given to them by their headteacher, such as 'The Priory Green Day', when the students, led by the head girl and boy have to reduce the number of school car users on one day. The whole school community thrives on such challenges.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

Teaching is outstanding. It is underpinned by effective planning that takes full account of different students' needs. Students listen very carefully to their teachers. Teachers manage behaviour very well. Students respond well to the respect shown them and lessons flow without interruption because of the high quality teaching and outstanding behaviour.

Lessons are interesting and varied and the school ensures that students' views on how they learn best inform how they are taught. Year 11 students, for example, explained that in revision lessons, they wanted to have lectures from which they could make their own notes. The school has developed its own demanding criteria for what contributes to outstanding lessons. This is based upon thorough consultation with subject staff and students. Teachers work hard to make the context of lessons interesting and relevant, especially for boys. A statistics module in mathematics was enthusiastically tackled by students because work was based on MP3 players. Excellent teachers' subject knowledge is applied consistently to challenge and inspire students and ensure they make exceptional progress. Students respond well to this.

Information on the prior learning of students and their understanding and capabilities are used to plan effectively. Every teacher has an up-to-date picture of each student's performance so that lessons are carefully matched to needs. Accurate, regular and systematic assessment also ensures students know what the school expects of them and how well they are doing in nearly all aspects of their work. Dialogue between teachers and support staff is of a consistently high quality and is instrumental in maintaining students' exceptional learning and progress. At times, marking in some subjects, such as science, is not clear enough to ensure that students know what they need to do to improve. However, marking is outstanding in many other subjects.

Good and imaginative use is made of resources, including new technologies to maximise learning. This ensures high levels of concentration and motivation.

The curriculum is outstanding; it is planned well to respond to the needs of different groups and individuals within the school. As a result there are opportunities for students of all abilities to take part in a range of examination courses which are well matched to their needs. The school has worked collaboratively with a wide range of external providers to enhance the opportunities offered. The school reviews its curriculum regularly and takes into account the feedback from students. Following

this, plans are in place to further broaden the range of choices offered at Key Stage 4.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. There are rigorous systems in place to support the achievement of all students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The energetic and clear leadership of the headteacher is seen in all aspects of the school. The work of the senior leadership team is highly effective. The vision for sharing leadership throughout the school encourages and supports leaders at all levels, including students.

The school's pursuit of excellence ensures that discrimination and inequalities are vigorously tackled and there are high aspirations for all students. Inclusion work is assiduous, ensuring that exclusions from school are reduced. Personalised and careful support ensures that all students make at least good progress and any variation between students is reducing. Safeguarding procedures are robust.

Governance is good because governors use their professional expertise to effectively challenge the school and act as critical friends. They are fully conversant with the school's priorities and understand its strengths and weaknesses.

Relationships with parents and carers are good. A small number of parents expressed some concerns about the level of the school's communication with them. The school is aware of this and understands that it needs to strengthen this area.

Partnerships with other providers and organisations are a real strength of the school, which is very proactive in seeking out opportunities to extend and develop the experiences for its students. In particular, it is the hub of the Shrewsbury Partnership in Education and Training federation. This, together with the school's Leading Edge work, ensures students have a breadth of experiences and access to a range of qualifications.

Community cohesion is good. The school plays a very active role in developing strong links with the local and wider community and in supporting parents and others. It is striving to develop more international links in order to better prepare students for the world in which they live.

Value for money is outstanding because of the diligence and rigour with which the

business manager and the deputy business manager oversee the school's budget. They ensure the school is able to continually improve its resources for learning and thus the outstanding outcomes for students. They are constantly innovating with a view to spending monies more effectively. This ensures that resources are closely aligned to learning needs and enables the school to improve its facilities, including the building of the new sports hall.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents are very satisfied with the school's work. Parents overwhelmingly think that the school keeps their children safe and the school is well led and managed. A small minority of parents feel that the school could improve the quality of its communication with some parents over some issues. The school is mindful of this and is addressing these concerns.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007–8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007–8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007–8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007–8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

12 February 2009



Dear Students

Inspection of The Priory School, Shrewsbury, SY3 9EE

Thank you for the warm and friendly way you behaved towards us during the inspection. We were very impressed by your mature and caring attitudes; your exceptional high levels of attendance and punctuality to lessons; and your involvement in your education and the life of the school and community.

We agree with you that you are part of an outstanding school. The leadership of your headteacher is outstanding. She has a highly effective team working with her and sharing her vision. All staff care about you and work hard to ensure you have the best education. We were impressed that everyone was part of the school's pursuit of excellence.

The school ensures that you have an outstanding preparation for your next stage in life. The standards you attain are high. You achieve so well because the school helps you to develop effective study skills through imaginative and challenging lessons. This prepares you well for your future economic well-being. The school takes its partnership with you seriously and seeks your views on a wide range of issues that affect you, from how to redesign the toilets to what makes an outstanding lesson. It encourages you to be healthy and although you understand this, not everyone chooses the healthiest options available at breaks and lunchtimes. You tell us that you take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, feel safe, and study a wide range of subjects.

The school carefully monitors your academic targets to ensure they are both challenging and met. However, this needs to be more consistent across all subjects. Feedback from teachers is good and most of you are clear about what you need to do to improve. Although it is generally good, marking does not always make this clear enough.

Your parents and carers are happy with your school and are confident that you are safe and enjoy it. A small number of parents did not feel the school listened to them effectively in all matters. We have asked the school to listen more carefully and they have plans to do so.

Finally, we wish you continued success in all you do.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

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