

Preston School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123891
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328014
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	932
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Oliver Wilson-Chalon
Headteacher	Tony Bloxham
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2006
School address	Monks Dale Yeovil BA21 3JD
Telephone number	01935 471131
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Preston School is a popular specialist business and enterprise school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportions of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational needs are both low when compared with other schools. The proportion of students who are learning English as an additional language is low but steadily increasing as more Polish families settle into the area. The school had an Ofsted survey inspection to evaluate the impact of the Secondary National Strategy on English in July 2007.

There is an independent nursery on the school site which also provides after-school and holiday provision. This provision was not inspected.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which has made significant improvements in a short time. The highly effective and inspirational headteacher, well supported by the senior leadership team, have made major changes to the curriculum, academic guidance and the quality of teaching, which are all good. This means students make good progress and are reaching standards which are above average. The school has improved since the previous inspection and demonstrates a good capacity to improve further.

Students enjoy school because they say they are very well supported by staff and they feel that the school cares for them well and inspires them to work hard. Parents also commented on how well they felt the school was doing. Their responses to the questionnaire were more favourable than those usually seen. As one parent said, reflecting the views of many, 'Long may the school continue to make our child smile.' Students' personal development is good because they demonstrate mature attitudes to keeping healthy and safe, knowing the correct choices they should make, and most follow these.

Extremely good use of targets to challenge students ensures that any student who is falling behind is quickly identified and additional support is put in place. Teaching is good, with many lessons which are engaging and enthuse students. Objectives are shared with students to identify what they are to learn but at times, these are not precise enough to support assessments of how well students have done in the lesson. Marking in books does not always support students in identifying how to improve because it is not sufficiently thorough or frequent. Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning in lessons and to allow students to access support around school in the many computer facilities or at home. This is one example of why the school makes excellent deployment of resources to ensure students do well.

The leadership of middle managers has improved and is good. They have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved and how to bring about the necessary improvements. Leaders at all levels regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning to identify how to improve lessons but these observations are too focused upon the quality of teaching and not as much on the progress that students make in their learning. Hence, areas for improvement are not always identified.

A sense of urgency has ensured that significant improvements have taken place in a relatively short time. The school has a secure self-evaluation of the major areas but the impact of the recent innovations has not always been evaluated and further areas to develop appropriately identified.

The school's specialist status is reflected well through the promotion of enterprise across the curriculum and the school's work in the community. Very good relationships with local employers are used well to enhance students' entrepreneurial skills and financial capability. The highly effective use of enterprise to develop independent learning skills as well as leadership and team-working qualities ensures students are very well prepared for the world of work.

There is strong support for community cohesion. Some impressive work has been done in supporting vulnerable students, through the parent and family adviser, enabling them to achieve more success in school. The school is reducing inequalities in achievement, as students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are now meeting their targets. Students take an active part in the local community and partner primary schools. The school has undertaken some

effective work on analysing its learners' needs, and the revised curriculum is the result of this. The school has analysed its work in some areas of the community, but as yet not all, although there is a programme in place to cover these in the future. Students have a good understanding of multicultural Britain and the international dimension through contacts with their business work, for example, selling produce through a link with Ghana.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve assessment by clarifying learning objectives and using them to evaluate learning in lessons and by marking written work more frequently and thoroughly.
- Improve further the quality of teaching by placing more emphasis on students' progress when evaluating the quality of lessons.
- Evaluate the impact of recent innovations so the school can identify successes and areas in need of further development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students start school with standards which are broadly average and, in recent years, have made satisfactory progress so that they leave with broadly average standards. The school has made significant changes to the way in which it tracks the progress of students towards their challenging targets so that now standards are above average and students make good progress. The rigorous analysis identifies any student who is starting to drift from the high standards expected, hence the majority of students across the full ability range are on track to meet their challenging targets.

Standards in English have improved significantly and in ICT, where the majority of students are gaining an appropriate qualification. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar good progress because they receive targeted support. Students new to the country and learning English as an additional language make good progress towards gaining a greater understanding of English and then often make very good progress with their work when they are better able to access the curriculum.

The school is meeting, or close to meeting, its challenging targets, including those for specialist status.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students demonstrate a good response to moral issues; behaviour is good and relationships are very positive, which highlights their good social development. Incidents of bullying are relatively low. Students say these are dealt with quickly and well, although a very small number of parents expressed concern in the returned questionnaires. Students' spiritual development is good as they address serious and challenging issues in lessons. There have been very few incidents of racism in school.

Attendance is good and the proportion of students with low attendance has reduced. Students enjoy school, they are willing and enthusiastic, and they quickly become involved in tasks and collaborate well with each other. They treat school facilities with respect and feel safe, being able to describe safe practice for practical lessons. Students understand the principles of a healthy lifestyle, identifying sensible meal options and involvement in exercise as a means of staying healthy

Students have good literacy and numeracy skills and an excellent understanding of how business and enterprise work. They also have very good independent working skills and the ability to work together in teams. A high proportion of students progress to further education, training or work and thus they are excellently prepared for future employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good, as shown in the good personal development and the improved progress of the students. Relationships and behaviour in lessons are good, with students listening well to others and respecting each other's views. Teachers have good subject knowledge and often communicate their enthusiasm for their subjects to their students, giving these lessons a vibrant learning atmosphere.

Most lessons use methods that motivate students well through practical tasks or group work, which enables them to interact well with each other. This, together with the outstanding opportunities students have to use ICT, is making an important contribution to the development of their independent learning skills. Teachers consistently share the purposes of lessons with their students, although their objectives are often not precise enough to serve as assessment criteria when they come to recap what has been learned at the end of each lesson. This means that students' learning is not consolidated as fully as it could be.

Staff use a variety of techniques to assess students' understanding in class, such as posing open-ended questions that require thoughtful responses and encouraging students to reflect on their own and others' work. However, they do not mark written work frequently or thoroughly enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has significantly changed its curriculum to raise achievement, particularly at Key Stage 4 with the introduction of vocational courses in sport and enterprise. The strong emphasis on matching courses to individuals is having a positive impact upon raising standards. For example, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported through a range of tailor-made classes which help them develop in key areas. The effective 'school of learning days' have been introduced this year and they have been instrumental in improving enterprise skills. Students have fed back their views on these days but there is too little evaluation of the progress which students make in order to plan effectively for future days.

Links with the local college through the Yeovil Federation enable the school to offer flexible vocational provision for students aged 14 and above. Many students are involved in these courses, ranging from salon services to engineering. The school has very effective links with local employers to enhance the opportunities for students to learn in the workplace.

Able students are given opportunities for further challenge through grouping arrangements and individual tutorials, and some enter GCSE in mathematics and languages earlier than Year 11. All students complete an ICT qualification which means they are able to utilise these skills across other areas of the curriculum. There is a rich range of activities available both at lunchtime and after school, with a good number of students attending.

Well-formulated future plans are ambitious and embrace the school's vision to have a programme which flexibly responds to students' needs. These include early entry for GCSE, vocational opportunities and openings for students to start and complete courses at a fairly late stage in school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students receive good pastoral support and very good academic guidance. Effective support is in place to reduce absence. A proactive approach ranging from targeted group sessions to one-to-one support for learners and their families has made a significant impact on attendance figures. Notable successes include the improved attendance in Year 9 and of vulnerable learners who are now accessing education again. The school uses the language expertise of the attendance officer to work with students who are learning English as an additional language to ensure new entrants to the country understand the expectations for attendance.

Behaviour has improved through the coordinated work and support of behaviour teaching assistants which means potentially problematic behaviour is defused quickly. Good support is given to students with learning difficulties in the learning centre and additional support is provided for students with a disability so they are able to take part in physical education lessons. Children in the care of the local authority are well supported through the school's strong relationships with their carers, social workers and other external agencies. The school meets current government requirements for safeguarding.

Highly effective academic guidance has been instrumental in raising achievement. Academic mentors support students causing concern. The system of tracking students' progress ensures they have a good understanding of their own level and it motivates them to improve. Students also are assessed on their ability to improve their work. Parents are updated regularly on how well students are progressing and questionnaires from parents showed that many found this useful, whilst some commented they preferred the previous system with more written comments.

Students are well supported prior to, and at the start of, Year 7. Information and guidance about career pathways and future choices has been meaningful, including an effective 'speed dating' session so that Year 9 students are informed about their option choices from Year 10 students who were already following them. Students also feel well supported for transfer at the end of Year 11.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management across all areas within the school have been instrumental in making significant changes in a very short time. The excellent and inspirational leadership of the headteacher, very well supported by the senior leadership team, has ensured that staff are aware of the high expectations made of them. Complacency is not tolerated so that now staff are held to account for their actions and standards. This means there is a strong sense of common purpose and drive across all areas.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and includes inputs from a variety of stakeholders, including students. This has been used to formulate a clear plan on how to carry on improving.

Subject leadership is more consistent and is good. Subject leaders are aware of the strengths within their own areas. There are good plans to utilise the expertise of local employers to extend this further. The subject visit to English identified a number of weaknesses; these have been rectified so that now English is recognised as a lead department within the local authority. Very good support is given to new entrants to the profession so that new teachers fit in well and are able to develop their skills in a highly professional atmosphere where they feel their opinions are valued.

The school has a well-organised programme of extended and drop-in lesson observations to observe teaching on a regular basis. However, the evaluation of lessons pays insufficient attention to the progress that students make in their learning, which causes staff to over-rate their quality and miss important points for improvement.

Governance is well established and effective in supporting the school and challenging it when necessary. Governors have ensured suitable equalities policies are in place and monitor the impact of these. Deployment of resources is excellent.

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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?	1
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/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
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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**

20 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Preston School, Yeovil BA21 3JD

When I visited your school recently with my colleagues, we met some of you at lunchtime, and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were very impressed with your friendliness and helpfulness and how proud you are of your school. We agree fully with those of you who told us you attend a good school which has made a number of improvements very quickly. The work you do with the local community, along with your understanding of different cultures in Britain and Ghana, means you make a good contribution to the local community and beyond.

Staff care for you well, and make sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education, including for college or the world of work. The new arrangements for making sure you meet your targets have made a big difference, so that now you reach above average standards and make good progress.

The work you do in English has improved and this is because the subject leader has brought about significant improvements. You enjoy some good lessons and a curriculum that lets you follow a wide variety of courses, with particularly good ICT. We observed some good teaching but feel that the objectives in lessons are not always sharp enough and that your books are not marked often enough or in sufficient detail to show you how to improve. We have asked the school to improve this, along with checking the quality of lessons to consider how well you learn as well as how good the teaching is.

You know how to become healthy and how to keep safe and the dangers that you meet when out of school. The school provides a great deal of support including access to the school nurse, the bilingual attendance officer and the parent support member of staff.

Your highly effective headteacher and the senior management team are very determined that you will all do as well as possible. They are well supported by the governors. Together they monitor the work of the school, but with so many new initiatives, they have not evaluated how effective some of these have been. Again we have asked the school to make sure they check how effective these are. You can help through your comments with the student voice.

I wish you well in this good school, which many of you told us is very supportive. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector