

# The Priory School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123939
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	328020
<b>Inspection date</b>	4 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mike Kell

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

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**Boarding provision**  
**Social care URN**  
**Social care inspector**

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	50
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Paddy West
<b>Headteacher</b>	Christopher Sweeney
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 December 2006
<b>School address</b>	Pickeridge Close Taunton TA2 7HW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01823 275569
<b>Fax number</b>	01823 275569

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, working alongside a social care inspector who was responsible for making judgements on the quality of the boarding provision.

## Description of the school

The school was judged to require special measures when it was inspected in December 2006. Between May 2007 and December 2008, five monitoring inspection visits were carried out to check whether sufficient improvement was being made. In mid January the deputy headteacher was designated associate headteacher with responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school. She has been appointed acting headteacher with effect from April 2009.

The Priory is the only school in the local authority for students who have a statement of special educational needs for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Therefore, some students travel very long distances. There were seven boarders at the time of the inspection. The majority of students are of White British heritage. A few are in public care.

In early January 2009, seven students were moved out of the school as an interim measure. They are taught full-time in two bases in community facilities known as 'alternative provision'. Three students are taught off the school site in what is called 'satellite provision'. One of these students is placed with a private provider of alternative education.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The Priory School is ineffective as it is failing to meet the learning and personal needs of its students. Although the residential provision is good and has retained its effectiveness since its previous inspection, overall the school has not responded adequately to the challenges that it faced.

At the fourth monitoring inspection the school appeared to be making good progress in addressing its key areas for improvement. Leaders began to make the changes required and students were making gains in their academic and personal development. However, the management systems that supported these developments were not adequately monitored and not all staff adhered to the procedures. The conclusion of the fifth visit was that the school had not made adequate progress since being subject to special measures. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work remain fragile and are inconsistently applied or absent altogether.

Students receive mixed messages about what is expected of them as young people and as learners. Not all staff rebuke bad language immediately. Some staff have high expectations and provide challenging lessons, while others have little understanding of students' capabilities and expectations are low. Students' achievements and personal development are inadequate. Standards are well below the national average for this age group. The curriculum is satisfactory, but students do not make the academic progress that they could because of their poor attendance, attitudes and behaviour.

Although there are pockets of good practice, teaching and learning are inadequate. Too often, the quality of learning is reduced by teachers' lack of urgency and of a clear perception of exactly what students are expected to learn. Insecure assessment means that students who are underachieving may not be identified and the setting of academic targets is generally an ineffectual exercise. No overall strategy is in place to collate and use assessment data to target students who are underachieving. The provision for students' care, guidance and support is inadequate. The lack of a thorough understanding of individual needs means that students' pastoral guidance and support is not well targeted. The school does not comply with safeguarding requirements as the central staff record is not fully complete.

Although there are a number of vacancies, the governing body provides a satisfactory level of support and governors appreciate that changes have to be made. Sustained self-evaluation lacks focus and, because leaders do not have a clear understanding of the most important changes required, there is no clearly defined strategic direction.

## Effectiveness of boarding provision

### Grade: 2

The boarding provision is a stark contrast to the rest of the school. Young people enjoy living in the residential provision. They feel safe and enjoy positive relationships with staff. All recommendations from the last inspection report have been implemented. The promotion of

equality and diversity is good, illustrated by the attention to personal care needs, balanced gender staff group, the diversity of cuisine, the sex education programme and the policy on dealing with racism. Good procedures introduce the young people to boarding life, and regular communication between staff and parents is maintained. Care plans are based on comprehensive assessments of young people's needs and long-term plans aim to return boarders to home.

Young people's health is promoted well and is supported by detailed record keeping. Psychological assessment and support is made available when necessary as part of the whole school emotional health and well-being plan and in accordance with the special educational needs of the students directed by the coordinator for special educational needs and the school counsellor. Staff are trained in food hygiene, the storage and administration of medication and in first aid as part of their induction. First aid boxes are appropriately stocked but they do not display a list of contents. A qualified cook oversees well-managed catering arrangements that provide a balanced and healthy diet. An adequate number of showers, bathrooms and toilets provide privacy, and a stock of personal toiletries is available should young people run out.

Young people feel safe and protected from bullying. A designated child protection officer maintains oversight, and staff follow local safeguarding procedures. Boarders agree that behaviour is managed fairly. They can accrue points and money for good behaviour, and sanctions for misdemeanours are fair. Staff are trained to drive the minibuses and the vehicles are checked and serviced routinely. Staff recruitment and vetting procedures generally ensure that young people are cared for by staff who do not present a risk, although the single central record is not completed fully. Visitors sign into the building and are not allowed unsupervised access to young people. Fire safety checks and drills are carried out at recommended intervals and staff undertake fire training. Risk assessments are routine and staff are made aware of potential hazards. A record of staff and young people's accidents is maintained. All boarders may use the unit's telephone to phone their families free of charge and in private.

Boarding provision makes a good contribution to the young people's learning and curriculum and it helps to prepare them well for leaving school. Staff help boarders with homework, reading and educational projects and they provide a wide variety of after-school activities in school and in the community. Boarders have a key worker with direct knowledge of their needs, and care staff maintain continuity by occasionally assisting teaching staff in class and on school visits. Appropriately protected computers and a variety of other recreational facilities are available. Boarders have good opportunities to contribute to the running of the unit through daily meetings with staff, when they are consulted about choices and daily events.

The boarding provision is well organised. The general standard of the premises, furnishings and décor is reasonable, although the building is quite old and requires regular maintenance. The boarding provision has a statement of purpose, and boarders and their parents have information leaflets to show its organisation and running, although these do not show their last review date. Staff complete a daily log, which is discussed at shift handovers and at the beginning and end of the school day. This ensures productive communication between staff. Comprehensive staff induction and an ongoing training programme address key needs, but the training records involve loose-leaf course certificates rather than just a dated list. Two staff have the required qualification in child care and two others are registered candidates. Although very experienced, the head of care does not yet have the qualification required for that level of responsibility. Staff's performance is regularly reviewed and an annual development plan records training needs. A governor conducts regular welfare monitoring visits of the boarding provision.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Complete the single central staff record fully in order to comply with current safeguarding requirements.
- Establish and implement consistent strategies for managing students' behaviour.
- Assess students' achievements regularly and accurately and use this information when planning learning activities.
- Analyse data about students' academic progress and their personal development in order that appropriate individual support and guidance measures can be put into place.
- Use the outcomes of school self-evaluation to determine a clear strategic direction for the school and implement the rigorous management systems needed to evaluate the impact of all aspects of the school's work. National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care
- Ensure that First Aid boxes contain a list of their contents (NMS 14).
- Make sure that the statement of purpose and prospectus for young people and parents show their most recent review date (NMS 1.8).
- Proceed with the planned complete refurbishment and upgrade of the boarding provision (NMS 23).
- Ensure that at least 80% of care staff have the appropriate qualification in child care and that the head of care becomes suitably qualified (NMS 31).
- Construct a dated list of training undertaken by staff on their individual personnel files (NMS 19).
- Ensure that the single central record for staff is completed fully (NMS 27).

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 4

Students' histories of challenging behaviours have slowed the rate at which they learn. The gaps in students' knowledge mean that standards are well below those expected nationally for students of this age. The school does not do enough to accelerate their learning, therefore, students do not make enough progress. They do not achieve as much as they are capable of doing. Consequently, their performance in accredited examinations is not as high as it should be. In 2008, the qualifications achieved did not represent the achievements that should have been possible given the students' levels of attainment on entry.

There are a number of reasons for this underachievement. Some students do not attend often enough, while others are involved in disruptive behaviour. When this is combined with the high number of exclusions, many students do not spend enough time learning. Moreover, inadequacies in teaching and management are a major cause of the unsatisfactory progress. Assessment data is very variable. For instance, it is much more reliable in English than in science and mathematics and so students' relative performance in the three subjects appears to be very erratic. In other instances, such as for students in the alternative provision, no up-to-date assessment information is available. The absence of accurate information on students' achievements means that teachers do not set reliable targets and they do not match learning activities to students' needs. Although some subject teachers are beginning to provide some assessment data, leaders do not have the full picture. In addition, the data that they do have is not analysed beyond a superficial depth. Therefore, the school cannot make any meaningful comparisons of the performances of different groups of students or develop any real understanding of where and how it needs to intervene to raise standards.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 4

Although some students say that they enjoy school, their poor attendance and inappropriate behaviour and attitudes indicate otherwise. Students have a satisfactory understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They know about healthy eating and the importance of exercise, with many participating in lunchtime physical activity clubs. Although the students with the most challenging behaviour are no longer on the main site, safety remains an issue. Some bullying still takes place and violent confrontations still occur. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequate. Many students continue to show little social awareness and consideration for the needs of others, and a high number make choices with little thought to the consequences of their actions. Some components of the school's work make a good contribution to preparing students for leaving school. College links, work experience and vocational courses all provide valuable learning opportunities. However, students do not make enough progress in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills and many fail to improve their attendance, punctuality and ability to work with others. The school's overall failure to prepare students sufficiently well for leaving school can be seen in the destinations of leavers in 2008. Three quarters of those who left did not go into any form of employment, education or training. Students have satisfactory opportunities to contribute to the school community through, for instance, the tutorial sessions that have replaced the school council.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 4

Lessons are taught by a mixture of teachers, unqualified teachers and teaching assistants. Although there are instances of good practice, the overall quality of teaching does not promote students' effective acquisition of new knowledge. The two main reasons for this relate to the lack of challenge and low expectations of students' personal development and their learning. An inconsistent approach to students' punctuality, attitudes, behaviour and language means that the same group of students conducts itself very differently with each teacher. On too many occasions, time is wasted on trying to get students to re-engage with learning or sorting out minor squabbles. Academic challenge is missing in many lessons because staff do not match the learning activities to students' capabilities. In part this is because they are uncertain as to what these capabilities are as students' achievements are not assessed accurately. However, a second contributory factor is that staff do not plan lessons in sufficient detail. There is not a very clear focus on the precise new skills and understanding that they expect students to acquire.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum comprises the National Curriculum with an enhanced programme of sessions devoted to promoting students' emotional health and well-being. While the curriculum for this age group is satisfactory, it does not provide the flexibility to meet individual student's needs, either within the school or part-time in a partner school, for example. The 'stepping up' programme in the summer term of Year 9 provides a good transition for the more work-related curriculum in Years 10 and 11 as students visit college for taster courses. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is geared more towards preparing students for leaving school.

The programme is becoming increasingly effective and more responsive to the needs of individuals. Students have vocational options, both within the school and at a local college. Additionally, a wider range of accredited courses is being made available within school. There are satisfactory enrichment activities through visits into the community and lunchtime clubs, both sporting and non-sporting activities such as art and computing.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 4**

The school fulfils its child protection and risk assessment obligations appropriately. It carries out the necessary criminal record checks but the way in which this information is collated as a single central record does not meet current requirements. Individual members of staff care about the students and they are always concerned about their welfare. Despite this, the overall quality of care, guidance and support is inadequate because there are no concerted, consistently applied whole-school approaches to promoting students' personal development and academic progress. In part, this is because some staff do not do what is expected of them, such as eliminating bad language. In other instances, staff address students inappropriately, such as calling them 'mate', and this blurs the boundary between staff and students' relationships. Leaders now acknowledge that their lack of monitoring has allowed these inconsistent practices to persist. They do not have in place any procedures for monitoring other support and guidance practices, such as in the 'alternative provision'. The shortcomings in pastoral support and guidance are mirrored exactly in the academic procedures. Staff assess students' achievements inconsistently and leaders do not monitor and interrogate the data robustly enough. The consequence of inadequate pastoral and academic support mechanisms is that students do not receive the targeted levels of guidance that will make the most difference to their development.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 4**

The 2006 inspection report highlighted major weaknesses in the quality of provision. The leaders and managers were unable to sustain the good progress made by the fourth monitoring inspection and so there has not been sufficient improvement since the 2006 inspection. Leaders have maintained satisfactory relationships with partners, such as local colleges and parents, but the school still has fundamental shortcomings in its management systems. For instance, the progress of students in the 'alternative provision' has not been monitored by senior leaders since the centres were established and the quality of the satellite provision is not evaluated. Other information, such as how often some students are out of class, is only now being collected. This means historically there is no analysis of how often students miss lessons, or the reasons why they do it and consequently no strategy to deal with it.

The school does not do enough to promote community cohesion. Within the school, there is a lack of respect and students do not relate well to each other, failing to acknowledge the needs of others and their differences. In addition, the school's inability to manage behaviour effectively has resulted in students in the alternative provision being denied the opportunities that other students have, albeit in the short term. The school does not promote students' understanding of the needs and beliefs of other groups and cultures through, for example, visits to different places of worship.



Despite the good support and guidance from the local authority following the previous inspection, leaders and managers have not responded sufficiently to the demands to eradicate the weaknesses identified in the report. The actions taken by the local authority have therefore not had a significant impact and as a result, it is currently carrying out a review of the school before deciding the next steps.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

### Achievement and standards

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

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	4
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	4
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	4
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?	4

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

5 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Priory School, Taunton TA2 7HW

Thank you for making us feel welcome when we visited your school, and a special thanks to those of you who gave up your time to speak with us. Although some of you told us that you enjoy school and like being there, your school is not doing as well as it could. Therefore, it needs 'special measures' to help it make the improvements that are needed. Inspectors will visit your school regularly to check how well things are going. The boarding unit is good and the staff there look after you well.

You do not make enough progress in your work. This is because some of the work that you are given in lessons does not interest you as it does not stretch you or challenge you to learn for yourself. The rate at which you mature as young people does not take place quickly enough either. Too many of you do not come to school as often as you should and a number of you are often late for lessons. In addition, quite a lot of you behave in ways that stop you and others from learning. This means that you are not preparing yourselves very well for leaving school and that will limit your choices at the age of 16.

In order to improve things, staff have been asked to do the following:

- Complete all the necessary paperwork on the staff records
- Tell you about the behaviour that is expected of you and always be consistent in the way that they manage your behaviour.
- Assess your work regularly so that teachers can give you interesting activities.
- Check in detail that every one of you is doing as well as you possibly can with your work and in your personal development.
- Choose the few most important things that they need to do to make your school better and check how well they are getting on with this.

You can help to improve your school by always attending as much as possible, responding to what is asked of you, and by working hard at getting on with your classmates. Thank you once again and I wish all of you the very best of luck in the future.

Yours faithfully

Mike Kell Lead inspector