

Priory Woods School and Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131425
Local Authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	328590
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2009
Reporting inspector	David Smith

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	143
Sixth form	39
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Margaret Salter
Headteacher	Mrs Bernadette Knill
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Tothill Avenue Netherfields Middlesbrough

Age group	4–19
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2009
Inspection number	328590

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

Priory Woods is a large day special school with more boys than girls on roll. The pupils have an increasingly complex range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities including severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some of the pupils present very challenging behaviour. A high percentage of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and a few pupils are looked after by the local authority. A small number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. In September 2007 the school was awarded Specialist Arts College status. They have also attained Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark as part of their wide range of awards. The school is due to be re-located to shared premises with a mainstream school in 2010 as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two classes alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Priory Woods is an outstanding school. Typically, a parent commented that this is 'an excellent, well managed school which my son loves to attend'. Outstanding leadership and management have ensured that there has been excellent improvement since the last inspection. This sustained pace of improvement has been boosted by the school's success in attaining a wide range of awards, including specialist status in the arts. The school's understanding of its strengths and areas for development is accurate and contributes to an outstanding capacity to improve. The governors make an excellent contribution to school improvement, providing both support and challenge. All pupils are provided with equal access to learning and activities in this cohesive and harmonious school.

The effectiveness in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding because of the inspired teaching and excellent curriculum. The outstanding provision in the sixth form ensures that the students make good progress in their work and excellent progress in, for example, the development of their confidence and independence.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Activities and lessons are skilfully fine-tuned to ensure work is pitched at just the right level for each pupil so they are challenged and achieve well. The staff team are enthusiastic and this helps to promote excellent relationships. Pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress in the small proportion of lessons where the pace of learning drops due to prolonged introductions. Also, too few opportunities are provided to use information and communication technology (ICT) in some lessons which again limits progress. The curriculum is outstanding and is enriched by an impressive range of activities and visits.

Pupils feel very safe and make outstanding progress in their personal development and well-being which has contributed to the school achieving a Healthy Schools Award. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and fully appreciate the staff's commitment to the provision of outstanding care, guidance and support. Staff know the pupils very well, so procedures for protecting children are robust and the pastoral support for pupils is excellent. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time in the school and attend well. Staff have the confidence and skills to manage challenging behaviour and this helps to promote their excellent behaviour. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community because they learn to take on responsibility and care for others.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Outstanding leadership and management are based on excellent self-review which promotes an excellent capacity to improve. Teaching and learning are good, with a strong focus on boosting the students' essential skills using an excellent curriculum. As a result students make good progress in their work and achieve well. They make excellent progress in the development of their confidence and independence. On a few occasions, the pace of the lesson drops and slows the learning. The widening range of accreditation caters very effectively for the students' range of needs. The very good use of assessment procedures ensures that all students have access to appropriate external accreditation. The arts curriculum makes an exceptional impact on learning and inspires the students to take a full and active part in the outstanding curriculum. For example, dance and art awards promote students' excellent progress in their confidence, independence and

behaviour. Students are very effectively encouraged to make choices in the activities they wish to take part in. Visitors make a major contribution to activities providing students with, for example, the opportunity to make good progress in wood carving. Students are very supportive of each other and all pupils are included in the activities. Work experience placements make an excellent contribution to students' preparation for the next stage of their education or work. Also, college placements help students to make excellent progress in developing their independence. The students thoroughly enjoy their involvement in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Very good opportunities are provided to develop students' enterprise skills, often based on their own initiative and ideas. Residential opportunities make a major contribution to the students' personal development. Because there is a clear focus on excellent care, guidance and support, including very effective multidisciplinary working, students' personal development is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding as the children make an excellent start to their education in the school. This is a result of the staff's understanding of the children's needs which, in turn, results in the creative use of resources. Inspired teaching by a team of very well motivated staff engages this group of children with complex needs and, as a result, their achievement is outstanding. The welfare of the children is outstanding, as a high priority is given to the promotion of a safe and secure learning environment. The organisation of the classrooms and outdoor areas provides a wealth of learning opportunities which help to promote children's excellent personal development. They make excellent progress in their creative skills and some children are able to complete their artwork independently. They also make very good progress in their physical development, for example, in their control of a ball. Children also become more curious and explore the features of a wide range of objects. Leadership and management are outstanding. The curriculum provides very clear individual routes for learning which are accurately linked to children's needs. Links with parents and other agencies are very strong which helps to promote the children's excellent progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the pupils have increased access to ICT in lessons to boost their learning.
- Ensure that all lessons consistently move at a challenging pace.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In relation to their different starting points, pupils make good and often outstanding progress. Due to their learning difficulties and/or disabilities pupils attain standards that are well below national expectations. There is no discernable difference in the progress of different groups of pupils within the school. It is good that there is a strong focus on developing pupils' communication skills which ensures that they have good access to other aspects of learning. Pupils' good progress at Key Stage 1 builds on their excellent progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and many exceed their challenging targets. Pupils at Key Stage 2 make particularly good progress in mathematics and science which are made relevant to their everyday life. They also make good progress in speaking and listening but less progress in their writing. The school's specialist status has had an excellent impact on the provision of external

accreditation. This is reflected in pupils' good success in their external accreditation at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils are particularly proud of their external accreditation in dance. A recent visit to London that included theatre visits and active workshops helped to motivate the pupils to make very good progress in a wide range of creative and performing arts. Pupils' particularly good progress in physical education is also a major strength and helps to develop the pupils' confidence.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Pupils respond very well to the excellent opportunities provided to promote healthy lifestyles. In particular, they thoroughly enjoy the extensive range of physical activities which help to promote pupils' excellent attitudes. They are very keen to celebrate each other's successes and are mutually supportive when working in pairs and teams. This is evident, for example, in the inspirational assemblies where all of the pupils are fully included in the activities. Meal times are very pleasant social occasions. Also, pupils enjoy each other's company during their breaks. Pupils' social development is excellent; older pupils returning from a residential visit talked enthusiastically about their outdoor and adventurous activities. The school uses contacts and visitors from around the world to ensure that the pupils have extensive cultural experiences. Pupils feel safe and are safety conscious. They express very positive opinions about their time in the school and attend well. Challenging behaviour is managed very effectively and pupils become increasingly responsible for their own actions. The school council makes a significant contribution to developments in the school. They make good progress in developing the skills required for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Typically, learning is tailored to meet pupils' wide range of needs. Teaching is enthusiastic and brisk which challenges pupils to achieve well. Relationships are excellent and the staff work very well together to meet the pupils' wide range of learning needs. Learning is enjoyable and this helps to engage the pupils and minimise any negative behaviour. It is good that in physical education lessons the pupils are able to comment on their own and others' actions in a positive manner. Pupils particularly enjoy practical activities and make good progress in their independent choice of activities. Praise is used very well to reinforce learning. Where teaching and learning are outstanding a wide range of resources and strategies are used to boost progress. When, occasionally, introductions are prolonged, the pace of learning drops and pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress. Also, there is insufficient use of ICT in some lessons which limits progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum is extended by an exceptional range of enrichment activities. This is a major strength of the school and has been enhanced by their specialist status in the arts. Consequently, pupils learn in a rich and stimulating environment and this is demonstrated in the exceptional displays of pupils' art work. Every opportunity is taken to recognise and celebrate

pupils' achievement. For example, pupils have the confidence and skills to display their dance skills to the rest of the school. A parent commented that the school provides, 'lots of fantastic experiences'. The many visits to places of interest, residential opportunities and visitors to the school are enormously appreciated and enjoyed by pupils. The curriculum is flexible and adapts to the learning needs of all of the pupils. There is a strong and very effective focus on the development of pupils' communication skills which provides them with access to other aspects of the curriculum. The staff make the best use of the current accommodation to ensure that this does not restrict the pupils' curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Within an outstanding ethos typified by excellent relationships, the school provides outstanding pastoral support and guidance in their personal development. This ensures that the school meets the wide range of pupils' needs particularly well. This is helped by the excellent links with an extensive range of external agencies and health professionals which have a very positive impact on pupils' progress and development. Parents commented that, 'the school staff operate as a naturally cohesive team'. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are clear and strong and careful risk assessments are made as necessary. Academic guidance is based on the effective analysis of data and pupils' progress is tracked through a range of systems. The school is aware that it has not yet made this process fully effective by embedding the use of comparative data from other schools. Reports provide a very thorough overview of pupils' progress and ensure that they are aware of how to improve their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school has continued the drive for improvement since the last inspection and continues to have an outstanding capacity to improve. This is reflected in the extensive range of external awards attained by the school. Continual improvement has been driven by the very determined leadership of the headteacher in this cohesive and harmonious school. The senior leadership team has a wide range of skills and a shared ambition to provide the very best opportunities for all pupils. The middle leaders make a strong contribution to school improvement. The governors know the school very well and provide an excellent balance of support and challenge which ensures that the school continues to move forward. They meet regularly to monitor the progress of the school and work extremely well with the staff. The available data are now used well to set challenging targets and high expectations help pupils to achieve well. Self-review is rigorous and accurate, providing a clear agenda for improvement. This is an exceptionally inclusive school where all pupils have equal opportunities in a fair and open manner. It is very good that pupils are involved in staff appointments. The ongoing staff development and training are excellent and ensure, for example, that newly qualified teachers are very effectively inducted into the school. The school's management of resources ensures that it provides excellent value for money.

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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?	1	1
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	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	1	
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

15 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Priory Woods School and Arts College, Middlesbrough,

TS3 0RH

I thoroughly enjoyed my recent inspection of your school. Thank you for sharing your views with me. I was particularly impressed by the way you all joined in the excellent assemblies.

I am sure you will agree with my judgement that Priory Woods is an excellent school. The leadership and management are outstanding and the staff make sure that you have an excellent range of activities. Your art, dance and sporting achievements are particularly impressive. Also, your opportunities to spend time on residential trips are very special. The teaching is good which helps you to make good progress. The excellent way you are cared for ensures that your personal development is extremely good.

There are two things the school could do even better and so I have asked the staff to:

- make teaching even better by ensuring lessons are always pacy
- ensure that you get more opportunities to use computers in lessons.

Best wishes for the future and I hope you enjoy your move to the new school.

Yours faithfully

David Smith

Lead inspector