

# The Old Priory School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6076
Unique Reference Number	131422
Inspection number	329729
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

The Old Priory School (known as TOPS) is an independent day special school for up to 30 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 years. There are currently 21 pupils on roll and all are looked after by a local authority. TOPS is one of two schools owned by Ethelbert Children's Services and opened in 1997 to facilitate the educational placements for pupils who are resident in their homes. The school was registered with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in November 2002 and was last inspected in May 2004. The school operates from The Old Priory School building and two additional sites, each a 20-minute journey away. The pupils characteristically exhibit severe emotional, behavioural and social difficulties and most have histories of disrupted education and exclusion from mainstream schools. The school aims 'to offer a holistic therapeutic approach to schooling and learning.' There have been several changes of headteacher over the past six months and the current headteacher has been in post for five weeks.

## Evaluation of the school

TOPS provides a satisfactory standard of education and care for its pupils. A period of instability over the past six months has resulted in mixed messages to staff and pupils in respect of the management of behaviour. As a result, pupils' behaviour has not always been managed consistently and other aspects of the school's work have not been given sufficient priority. In addition, not enough attention has been given to address weaknesses identified at the last inspection, particularly in relation to the curriculum and keeping school policies and information up to date. Nevertheless, the staff and the company have the well-being of the pupils at heart and, with the arrival of the new headteacher, suitable and timely plans are in place to address the identified weaknesses. For example, the new headteacher has made a good start in rejuvenating the curriculum and this has been very well received by the staff and pupils. Since the last inspection, good improvements have been made to the accommodation, and the resources for information and communication technology (ICT) have been upgraded. The school does not comply with a number of regulations for independent schools.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. Weaknesses relate to subject policies and curriculum planning rather than to the subjects available for pupils to study. In fact, the range of academic and vocational subjects available for study is good. But not all subjects offer pupils the extended academic qualifications that they are capable of achieving. For example, vocational accreditations with CITB (Construction Industry Training Board) and NPTC (National Proficiency Test Council) equip pupils with nationally recognised accreditations that they can later extend at college. But, while academic studies prepare pupils for entry level GCSEs for a range of subjects, there are limited opportunities to study for full GCSEs and inconsistent opportunities to take examinations in mathematics and science. ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) provides good opportunities to use areas of pupils' interests to develop knowledge and skills. The headteacher is leading the way to support the staff in expanding this integrated approach to learning. A revised curriculum and timetable are in place and there are signs that pupils are more actively engaged and interested in what they are learning. The new arrangements also make better use of resources and facilities across the three sites. There are opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation for personal, social and health education (PSHE) but the programme is not well planned and not given high enough priority within the curriculum. Other subjects are planned in isolation, missing opportunities for pupils to develop academic and personal skills across a range of learning experiences. ICT is at an early stage of development. Subject policies and schemes of work for the revised curriculum have not yet had time to catch up with new arrangements and many were already out-of-date. Therefore, curriculum planning is not yet sufficiently detailed to support the staff with their lesson plans effectively. At Key Stage 4 pupils can attend college for one afternoon each week. This, together with the use of local facilities for physical education, makes as a good contribution to pupils' personal development. Multicultural aspects of pupils' knowledge and awareness are encouraged through themed weeks, although opportunities to use visits and visitors to enrich the curriculum are limited.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Sometimes it is good. Relationships between pupils and staff in lessons are good, and pupils are well supported to stay focused on learning. This ensures that set tasks are completed with as little disruption to the learning as possible. Pupils respond confidently to teachers' questioning and this helps to extend their thinking. The best lessons are well planned to provide a series of activities that are delivered at a good pace and relate specifically to clear learning objectives and individual targets. Lesson planning is weakest where the focus is on what will be done rather than what will be learned. Current weaknesses in curriculum planning hamper teachers in their lesson planning in this respect. The use of homework is not effective in promoting self study or extending learning. This is reflected in responses in the pre-inspection questionnaires from pupils and the staff at the homes. Staff are keen to develop their classroom practice, as demonstrated by high levels of professional dialogue about pupils' responses in lessons witnessed incidentally throughout the inspection.

Assessment procedures are satisfactory. A range of information is collected to show pupils' skills on entry to the school and subsequent assessments are referenced to National Curriculum levels. These assessments are becoming more detailed. But this information is not used systematically to inform teaching or to set targets for attainment. Consequently, it is difficult to determine the amount of progress made by pupils from their individual starting points. Nevertheless, pupils' work and their nationally recognised qualifications indicate that they make satisfactory progress. The level of their attainment varies, matching the range of abilities within the pupil group. Some, but not all, are working below standards seen nationally.

### Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The behaviour of pupils at TOPS is satisfactory although there have been periods over the past year when it has not been as good as it should be. This is linked to periods of instability and uncertainty for pupils and staff, when inappropriate behaviour was not managed consistently. In contrast, during the inspection, any inappropriate behaviour was well managed and pupils took responsibility for their own conduct, ensuring that problems were short-lived. Pupils maintain good relationships with staff and the vast majority are very supportive of the school and how it helps them. Good relationships with the local community mentioned at the last inspection have been strengthened. For example, in consultation with the local council, the pupils have taken responsibility for the upkeep and improvement of the local alleyway. Similarly, pupils are responding enthusiastically to increased opportunities to contribute to social events, such as making all the arrangements and preparation for the Christmas party themselves as part of a planned approach to integrated studies. Pupils are also actively involved in setting goals for their own behaviour through regular reviews of their progress. There is not yet a planned programme to inform pupils about public institutions and services in England.

### Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Attention to the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory. Relationships between staff and pupils are good. The school benefits from a range of good generic policies from the company to support pupils' well-being but the educational aspects of their development are not always given sufficiently high profile in the documentation. For example, a detailed plan to improve the accommodation for those with a disability is in place but it would benefit from more emphasis on removing any barriers to the curriculum, taking account of the particular learning needs of the pupils. Similarly, policies are not always tailored sufficiently to reflect the practice at the school. Some, such as those for bullying, restraint, exclusions, child protection, fire procedures and the safe use of ICT have not been reviewed for some time. Policies to support behaviour management are insufficiently detailed to inform staff and pupils about agreed strategies, and these are not well linked to

those in the homes. As a result, the behaviour of pupils has not always been well managed and expectations between the school and the homes are not clear.

Not enough attention is given to improving pupils' attendance. Rates of attendance generally improve as pupils settle but the amount of authorised absence is too high. Time sanctioned for reviews and family contact significantly reduces the time available for education, sometimes by over a quarter of the teaching time every week of the year. This makes it very difficult for some pupils to achieve higher grades and greater accreditations, which in turn reduces opportunities for entry to further education or employment. The attendance register meets the regulations but the admissions register does not because it has no alphabetical list of entries.

The company has rigorous arrangements to assess risks relating to the three sites and any concerns brought to their attention during the inspection were addressed immediately. A similarly rigorous approach applies to the recruitment of staff and to their training in safeguarding pupils.

### Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Extremely thorough checks are in place to check the suitability of staff to work with the pupils. A single central record of staff is in place to show that the relevant checks have been made.

### School's premises and accommodation

The three school sites provide an adequate and suitable environment for learning. At Eastry the classrooms, workshops and administrative block present a bright and attractive environment with plenty of outside space for recreation and vocational work. This site has been developed well since the last inspection and is well appointed to meet the learning needs of the pupils. At Park Lane the setting is less attractive, and in some need of repair and refurbishment. Nevertheless, it presents pupils with a learning environment for formal studies and practical construction work. The TOPS building has a suitable range of classrooms and a small hard outside surface area for recreation. Most of the classrooms have interactive whiteboards as a result of investment since the last inspection. There are no facilities for pupils who are ill at any of the school sites.

### Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers receive regular reports on their children's progress throughout the year, sensibly linked to reviews of social care, education and statements of special educational need. There is a company prospectus relating to TOPS but this is out of date and does not meet a number of regulations as listed at the end of this report.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school has received one compliant over the past year. The policy for handling complaints meets all of the regulations.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- revise subject policies and schemes of work to support teachers in their planning effectively (paragraph 1(2))
- provide an appropriately detailed personal, social and health education programme (paragraph 1(2)(f))
- ensure that assessments inform teachers' planning effectively so that pupils can make greater progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement a revised written policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils (paragraph 3(2)(d))
- update the admissions register so that it also includes an alphabetical list of entries (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide the address and telephone number of the company's registered office (paragraph 6(2)(b))

- provide particulars of the school's policy on exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour, and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).



## Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			✓	
The behaviour of pupils			✓	

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			✓	
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## School details

Name of school	The Old Priory School		
DCSF number	886/6076		
Unique reference number	131422		
Type of school	Special day school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1997		
Age range of pupils	11-16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 20	Girls: 1	Total: 21
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 11	Girls: 1	Total: 12
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 20	Girls: 1	Total: 21
Annual fees (day pupils)	£24,804-£32,968		
Telephone number	01843 599322		
Fax number	01843 599333		
Email address	jack.banner@ethelberthomes.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Jack Banner		
Proprietor	Ethelbert Children's Services		
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI		
Dates of inspection	11-12 November 2008		