

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



08 December 2008

Mrs J Morgan
Headteacher
Priestnall School
Priestnall Road
Heaton Mersey
Stockport
SK4 3HP

Dear Mrs Morgan

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 8 December 2008, to look at work in promoting equality.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: observing lessons, scrutinising school documentation, discussions with parents, pupils, teachers, managers and other professionals who provide additional support to the pupils in the school.

The school is a large secondary school which has been designated for students with physical disabilities.

The quality of provision to promote equalities is outstanding.

Features of good practice observed

- The headteacher sets a strong ethos, which focuses on raising the aspirations of all staff and students. She is well supported by a recently extended senior leadership team who take responsibility for leading the five colleges within the school. The leadership of each college is focussed on meeting the students' emotional and academic needs. Students show strong allegiance to their college. This is reflected in the competition and reward boards displayed around the school. Student achievement is rewarded against each aspect of the Every Child Matters Agenda and special college assemblies take place to celebrate

student achievement. This explicitly values all levels and types of achievement, and raises the self esteem of vulnerable pupils. At these events, students also demonstrate excellent support and respect for each other.

- The staff demonstrate an excellent knowledge of the range of emotional and academic needs of the students and as a consequence, vulnerable students achieve outstandingly well. Regular training programmes led by specialist staff are in place to support staff understanding of the diverse nature of the school population. Particular emphasis is placed on raising staff awareness of the 'hidden conditions' such as autistic spectrum disorders.
- A partnership with a local centre which specialises in Autism is a valuable resource for the staff and students. Training and support is provided jointly for all new staff, and staff expertise is shared effectively between the two schools. This ensures that students on the autistic spectrum are given outstandingly good care and support. Parents of students with this disorder appreciate the level of care and guidance their children receive and these students make excellent progress, both academically and socially. Training is also provided by the school for local feeder primary schools, which aids the early identification of students with this disorder.
- Assessment information from primary schools is used effectively by the leadership to ascertain student potential. The leadership uses this information well to set challenging targets for the students. A learning mentor, employed by the local authority, works effectively to ease the transition of students between feeder primary schools and Priestnall. Vulnerable students are identified prior to transfer and effective additional support is provided where needed.
- The leadership team evaluates the progress made by students effectively. There are robust systems to check that students achieve their challenging learning targets. Additional support is provided for any students who are underachieving and as a consequence, most students make at least good progress. By the time they leave school at 16, all students have gained a good range of qualifications which enable them to take up work or college placements with confidence.
- Equalities are promoted outstandingly well in the curriculum. In Key Stage 3, there are fortnightly 'deep learning days'. These are days where students study an extended curriculum, which has a practical, problem solving focus. A recent deep learning day was planned around the theme of 'tolerance'. Students experienced a range of activities, which included viewing life from the perspective of a disabled person. Students explained that this made them think differently about what it must feel like to be disabled. Students who are wheelchair users say they enjoy school and that there have been no incidents of intolerance towards them by fellow students. In Key Stage 4, school is increasing its range of pathways, so that all students are able to take qualifications most suited to their needs. The school provides an

excellent range of extra curricular activities, including sports and music clubs.

- Effective partnerships enable the school to provide high quality care, guidance and support for all students. The school nurse, local authority behaviour support staff, the CAMHS team and an educational psychologist are deployed well by the school to ensure coherent support for individual students. Partnerships with the local colleges and the connexions service ensures that students are given excellent guidance for their options prior to leaving school.
- The 'renaissance centre' provides an excellent alternative curriculum for students who find it difficult to cope in the main part of the school, and are at risk of opting out. The provision in this centre is well designed to meet the learning needs of individual students. Highly skilled staff provide effective support enabling vulnerable students to join classes and college courses, and the centre is highly successful in reintegrating these students. Current students are on track to achieve well and parents are highly supportive of the provision.
- A nurture group provides students who experience emotional difficulties with additional support. High quality counselling is available and any student experiencing emotional difficulties is able to self-refer. Students value this counselling service highly and it is well used. Students gain confidence within this group and as a consequence are re-integrated well into mainstream. The school accesses funding for its vulnerable students to ensure that they are able to take part in all activities.
- Inclusion is outstanding. All students are encouraged to take an active part in all activities and vulnerable students are fully included in the life and work of the school. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities report that they have many opportunities and say that school provides well for their individual needs. For example, a disabled student was able to take part in a school residential visit without parents as carers, because staff were happy to be trained to care for all his needs. Parents of vulnerable students report that communication is excellent and that staff keep them well informed of their child's progress.

Areas for development

- Improve the use of individual student learning targets to ensure that they link effectively to the work set in lessons.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop promoting equalities in Priestnall.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gill Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector