

Priory School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114598
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	338414
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Pye

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Arr-Jones
Headteacher	Martyn Ofield
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed 29 lessons and 29 teachers were seen teaching. In addition, a number of part-lessons were seen. Meetings were held with governors, parents, staff and groups of students. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at student progress data, students' books, the school improvement plan, school monitoring reports, and other documentation. They analysed 103 questionnaires from parents, 935 from students and 37 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at:

- how successful the school has been in improving performance in some weaker subject areas
- the quality of the school's analysis of the performance of student groups and the effect of any actions taken
- the impact of leaders and managers at all levels on improving the students' attainment and progress
- how well the school has reviewed and planned its work in the areas of equal opportunity and community cohesion.

Information about the school

The majority of students in this larger-than-average secondary school come from a White British background. A very small minority speak English as an additional language. The number of students entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average; the number with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average. The largest groups of these students have specific learning difficulties and/or behavioural, social, and emotional difficulties. The school has achieved recognition in the specialist subject areas of the performing arts, languages and science, and has the Artsmark Gold and International Awards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The school provides an outstanding education for its students. Senior managers have, under the focused guidance of the headteacher, overseen a steady improvement in students' achievement since the last inspection. Attainment is high. The school carefully tracks progress, for both individual students and groups of learners. This reflects the schools' commitment to equal opportunities, and shows that achievement is outstanding for all groups, including those students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders and managers at all levels are skilled, highly committed to improvement and are well motivated. Their positive impact is seen in the very effective work done to address the relative dip in performance in subject areas such as design technology. Monitoring and self-evaluation are very well embedded and lead to highly relevant development planning. There is an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement. A very large proportion of parents feel that the quality of education is high. As one commented, 'Priory is an excellent school and both of my children are very happy there. The staff maintain a good atmosphere and take the children on really interesting and memorable trips'.

The excellent curriculum is a particular strength of the school. It is very closely matched to the needs of the students, including those who are more suited to a vocational pathway. The specialist subjects, particularly the performing arts, have forged productive links with other organisations, including a range of primary schools, which share resources and expertise. Students say they enjoy learning, that there is a very good range of activities on offer and most feel very safe in the school. Students are extremely well equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for the next step in their education. The students' very positive attitudes combine with good teaching to help ensure outstanding progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use some sophisticated questioning techniques to check students' understanding and to develop their learning. There is no complacency, however, and leaders recognise that some inconsistencies in teaching need eradicating. Not all lessons have sufficient pace and teachers' marking does not always give sufficiently clear guidance to students about what they must do to improve their work. The use of assessment information to plan work that challenges students of different abilities is inconsistent.

The specialist subjects contribute very well to the school's promotion of community cohesion. Dance and drama productions take place for the benefit of the local community. There are productive and growing links with international bodies and other schools nationally. The school has accurately reviewed its work in this area and identified a need for it to be extended to include aspects such as linking with different faith groups. A few parents and carers had some concerns about the quality of

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home'school communication. The inspection found that, while there are generally good links between home and school, there are occasions when messages become confused and also parents and carers are not always clear about how they can support their children's learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching by eradicating inconsistencies in:
 - the quality of marking so that students are clear about how to improve their work
 - the quality of teachers' planning of work that challenges students of different abilities
- Provide parents and carers with more information and guidance about how they can help their children with their learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students are achieving extremely well. Year 11 students are on target to attain highly. Their enjoyment of learning contributes to their excellent progress. Year 11 students showed enjoyment in a drama lesson, and were highly committed to improving their performances. In a sociology lesson, students demonstrated high levels of motivation. They participated eagerly in discussions about deviance, listening carefully and reflecting extremely well on any points raised.

Observations confirmed the picture of improvement in recent years. Students enter the school with average levels of attainment, but standards when they leave are significantly above the national average. The proportion of students leaving with five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is well above average and has been consistently so for a number of years. This includes groups such as those students entitled to free school meals, and those few for whom English is an additional language. The effective student progress tracking system helps ensure that any underachievers can be quickly identified and relevant support provided. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls.

Students have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles; they enjoy physical activity and the fresh food options in the canteen. Behaviour is good overall, although students acknowledge that there are, on occasions, incidents of misbehaviour and bullying. However, students are not unduly concerned because they say these are quickly dealt with by the school. Students make an excellent contribution to the community, with many taking advantage of the numerous opportunities they have to take on positions of responsibility. They act as members of working parties, mentors, and prefects and are confident in giving their opinions of their learning experiences. Attendance is above average and has improved as a consequence of school actions. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They react very positively to the excellent opportunities they have to develop enquiring minds. Visits to Glyndebourne,

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for example, add extremely well to their cultural awareness.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching overall is good. High levels of interaction and practical, paired and group work were evident in the outstanding lessons seen. Lessons, such as one observed in science in Year 8, are characterised by positive relationships and a good use of humour.

Consequently, students want to engage with the learning. Teachers use a range of techniques and strategies to meet the different learning styles of students. The use of assessment information to plan work that challenges students of different abilities is not fully embedded and, where it is not used effectively, progress slows. There are examples of very good marking but, in a minority of subjects, students do not have a clear idea of how to improve their work.

The excellent curriculum provides extremely well for the needs of the individual. Higher attainers have the chance to study two languages from Year 8. Year 10 students can access diplomas and there is a range of GCSEs in subjects such as photography and sociology, as well as AS courses. Links with other providers help deliver vocational

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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opportunities, for example in horticulture, while other courses are run in health and social care and engineering. These are complemented by a very good variety of extra-curricular activities, many centred on the specialist subjects. In addition, take-up rates are high in sporting and other outdoor activities, trips and other visits. A very good life skills programme helps ensure that students are taught about relevant modern issues, for example substance abuse and internet safety.

The school has had a successful focus on care, guidance and support in recent years, with every senior management meeting having this on the agenda. Consequently, very well-targeted support arrangements exist for all students. These include personal counselling for students experiencing difficulties and the provision of adult and student mentors. There is a particular focus on those students at risk of underachieving and the school willingly involves a range of external agencies to benefit the individual. Partnerships with other schools and colleges are very well used to ensure good transition arrangements are in place.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The vision for the school has been very effectively shared with staff. The headteacher, his team of senior managers, a highly motivated staff and the knowledgeable and effective governing body have all contributed to the improvement in attainment and achievement levels. Monitoring and evaluation, for example of teaching and learning, are very secure, and result in good levels of feedback to staff on how they can improve their practice. Learning area reviews are highly effective in identifying areas of strength and issues for improvement. Commendably, these involve interviews with students about their experiences in the subject area under review. One result is the identification of the need to move aspects such as homework information onto the online learning platform. An extremely efficient method of monitoring the school and subject development plans helps to ensure that senior managers can clearly identify progress towards the challenging targets set. Robust safeguarding procedures are in place and adults, including governors, receive regular training. The school is highly committed to equal opportunity, with the specialist subjects especially able to provide numerous opportunities for all students to develop their own particular skills and gifts. A parent forum and a regular newsletter aid communication with parents and carers, but the school recognises that there is scope to improve the information given about supporting

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students' learning at home.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

There was a relatively low response rate to the questionnaires. Of those parents and carers who did respond, a very large proportion are happy with the school. A small number rightly had concerns about the quality of home'school communication. The school is going to address this issue. Some parents and carers also expressed concerns over behaviour. Inspectors observed behaviour in and around the school and pursued this issue with students. The students did say there were occasional examples of bullying but that they felt safe because the school dealt quickly with any incidents. To deal with overcrowded corridors, the school has introduced a one-way system.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Priory School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 103 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1152 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	39	65	53	8	8	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	33	32	65	63	5	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	29	28	63	61	7	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	26	65	63	9	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	22	58	56	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	18	52	50	27	26	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	16	67	65	17	17	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	23	22	64	62	9	9	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	27	58	56	13	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	25	50	49	17	17	6	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	15	67	65	13	13	4	4
The school is led and managed effectively	20	19	68	66	12	12	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	38	37	53	51	8	8	3	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



10 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Priory School, Lewes, BN7 2XN

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit. Many of you were eager to tell us your views about the school. We listened carefully to what you had to say.

Thanks especially to the groups of students who took time to talk to us. We judge that yours is an outstanding school where you make very good progress and reach high standards by the end of Year 11. You are extremely well prepared for the next stage in your lives. You are benefiting very well from the outstanding leadership and management skills of the adults in the school, all of whom are working to continually improve things for you.

Your positive attitudes to learning, along with the good teaching that you receive, contribute to these high academic levels. We have asked the school to look at ensuring that you are all given work that appropriately challenges you, no matter what your ability. The school is also going to make sure that you all have a clear idea about how to improve your work. You told us that you have varied activities in lessons and that you enjoy learning. We believe that the curriculum you receive is excellent and gives you many options that best suit your needs. We are particularly pleased that you make an excellent contribution to the school and local community. The performing arts subjects encourage you to contribute extremely well to the community, but you also accept other responsibilities, not least as school councillors. You told us that you feel safe in school. You also said that there were examples of bullying but that the school deals with these. We judged behaviour to be good. You confirmed this in your conversations, saying that misbehaviour tends to be calling out in lessons and is based around a small number of students. You have good knowledge of how to keep healthy and we were pleased to note that your attendance has improved over the past few years. Some of your parents are concerned about the quality of communication between the school and home. We have asked the school to look at ways of continuing to improve this.

On behalf of my colleagues, I wish you well in your future life and thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Michael Pye

Lead Inspector

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