

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

4 February 2010

Mr S Davidson
The Headteacher
The Priory School
Pickering Close
Taunton
Somerset
TA2 7HW

Dear Mr Davidson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Priory School

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate.

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and the monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of The Priory School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 27 January 2009

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with staff, the headteacher, groups of pupils, representatives from the governing body, the local authority and Lilac Sky. Boarding was not inspected as part of this visit.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit Somerset local authority has contracted the company Lilac Sky to lead and manage the school. As a result of this, considerable changes to staffing structures and support are in the process of being instigated since the contract began 15 days ago.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Since the last monitoring visit, baseline data have been effectively managed, although there are some gaps in the records for December 2009 due to the disruptions that occurred at that time. Data now indicate the attendance rate of pupils and distinct patterns are beginning to emerge. The school needs to maintain these records and build on them further in classrooms so that the evaluation of teaching is consistent at all levels and includes teachers' own evaluations of how well their individual lessons have had an impact upon pupils' learning, especially in literacy.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection:

- Analyse data about pupils' academic progress and their personal development in order that appropriate individual support and guidance measures can be put into place – satisfactory progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Since the last inspection and up until December 2009 satisfactory strategies were in place and being followed for managing pupils' behaviour. In December 2009 pupils' behaviour became unacceptable and the strategies in place at that time were not robust enough to ensure the safety of pupils and staff. Appropriate actions were taken by governors and the school managed to end the term on a better note. Pupils' behaviour continues to disrupt their learning and that of others. The school is in the process of developing new structures and procedures to reinforce good behaviour and to celebrate where pupils have made the right choices. It is too early to judge the impact that these are having on improving learning outcomes.



Judgement

Progress since the last inspection:

- Establish and implement consistent strategies for managing pupils' behaviour – inadequate progress.

The effectiveness of provision

Since the last monitoring visit the school has developed greater use of target setting and is sharing these targets better with staff and pupils. A more formal assessment procedure has also been introduced. Where staff are taking advantage of these systems clear progress in lessons can be demonstrated. A new lesson planning sheet was introduced just before the inspection visit and it is too early to say how effective it is at improving attainment and progress for pupils, or self-reflection and assessment for staff.

In classes seen during the inspection the curriculum was too often not meeting the needs of the pupils. Not enough use is made of modern teaching materials and insufficient use was made of computers and interactive whiteboards to sustain and enhance pupils' learning, understanding and interest. Pupils of all ages need to be aware of, and use, up-to-date materials and equipment in design and technology.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection:

- Assess pupils' achievements regularly and accurately and use this information when planning learning activities – not monitored on this visit.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The previous acting leadership team took the school forward following the last inspection and satisfactory progress had been made at the time of the last monitoring visit in September 2009. This impetus was sustained until December when a number of factors then hindered their work. The most significant of these were the concerns of staff and pupil about the changes to come in the following term, along with significant changes to the home lives of a number of the pupils. Compounded by staff absence due to illness, pupils' behaviour became unacceptable. Appropriate decisions and actions were taken at the time involving a significant proportion of pupils who were receiving alternative provision away from the main site. In January most of these pupils were re-integrated back onto the main school site at the same time as Lilac Sky's contract for running and improving the school began.

There have been considerable changes over the last 15 days and the school remains in a very fragile state, with boys and staff being anxious about future changes and their roles and responsibilities. Some changes need to be made quickly to ensure that the pupils are in a better position to learn and reach their potential. Not least of these is improving the poor quality of buildings and teaching areas. It is important that the planned building programme is designed around the specific needs of the



pupils in order to enhance their development across all of the Every Child Matters outcomes.

The boarding provision was not inspected as part of this monitoring visit.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection:

- 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 – inadequate progress.
- National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care – not monitored on this visit.

External support

The local authority and the school have not resolved the poor attendance of a significant proportion of pupils. Evidence seen during the monitoring showed at least seven pupils who are not getting their educational entitlement. Some of these pupils are refusing to come to school. Much more needs to be done collectively with other agencies to support these boys and their families to ensure that they either attend school or receive an appropriate education elsewhere. The school has made alternative provision for a small number of other pupils and is rightly looking at how effective this provision is. These are urgent priorities that the school, with help from other services, needs to address swiftly.

The amended action plan provided by the local authority has been replaced by the action plan and contract of service produced by Lilac Sky. This plan meets requirements. Section 5 of the plan is a relative weakness. Here the evidence to demonstrate whether outcomes are successfully met is too reliant on external validation.

Priorities for further improvement

At the last monitoring visit the school was asked to make two further improvements a priority. Literacy levels have increased for most of those pupils who attend regularly and in several cases exceptionally so. For example, one pupil made two years' progress in two terms. However, not enough pupils attend classes regularly enough, or engage with their learning to make sufficient and rapid progress in their literacy skills.

- Rapidly accelerate pupils' literacy levels, particularly those in Year 11 – inadequate progress.



- Continue to work with the local authority to ensure that all pupils are placed appropriately and that all pupils on the school roll receive the education to which they are entitled – inadequate progress.

