

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0300 123 4234
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



4 May 2010

Mr T Averre-Beeson
The Priory School
Pickeridge Close
Taunton
Somerset
TA2 7HW

Dear Mr Averre-Beeson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Priory School

Following my visit to your school on 27 April 2010, 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 third 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and 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 third monitoring inspection on 27 April 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with students, representatives from staff, the local authority, Lilac Sky and the chair of governors. Boarding was not inspected as part of this visit.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit there have been further significant changes to staff and the way that the school is organised. Key examples are that the executive headteacher took over day-to-day running of the school from February half-term and the school has been organised into three discrete learning communities known as Blackdown, Mendip and Quantock. The Lilac Sky management team has also been supplemented by a Director of Learning, on attachment for two days per week this term, from the neighbouring Chilton School.

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

School records show that over the last four terms progress in Year 8 has been sustained, although rather slow in English and science. It was slightly faster in mathematics. In Year 9, following a significant dip early on, progress in English, along with science and mathematics is steady but, again rather slow. In Years 10 and 11, progress in English has been fastest since the last monitoring visit. In Year 11, progress over the last two terms in mathematics has dropped and for science it has been significantly poor. The impact of withdrawal from science GCSE to entry level has the biggest impact on the Quantock Learning Community because these students are capable of GCSE levels. For all other subjects these students generally make the best progress. Students in the Blackdown Learning Community make the least progress in English, mathematics and science. Local authority and school monitoring records show increased progress and achievement for these students in other areas. For example, they are improving and developing social and emotional skills through highly personalised learning programmes designed for those students who have the greatest difficulty in a school setting.

For the first time all students have been entered for GCSEs in English and mathematics. They are also taking adult literacy and numeracy courses, with a few already having achieved Level 1. Students seen during the monitoring visit said that they were enjoying their learning more and wanted to do better. Some classes seen were very small with less than a handful of students. Teachers effectively shared what the learning objectives for lessons were and assessed students' progress against them. But students were not told often enough in lessons how well they



were doing in relation to their own specific learning targets, or how they could improve their work. Consequently, in too many lessons the learning objectives were not tightly focused on what the students needed to do in order to make or secure the next small step in their learning.

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.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

There has been a dramatic reduction in the need for the physical restraint of students, with none since February 2010. Students said they felt safer in the school since the last inspection visit and so did the inspector.

Exclusions have dropped significantly. Over the last three months no student has been externally excluded. This is because of the quick intervention provided by the appropriate use of the 'withdrawal and reflection room'. Sometimes students only need to spend a very short time there, for example five minutes, to compose themselves and be helped by the staff to consider their behaviour and return to their lesson ready to learn again. Discussion with students also showed that they were beginning to learn to respect each other more and consider each other's needs. The inspector saw this in many lessons. Another prime example was that some students were very concerned that those who were in the Blackdown community should have equal chances to take GCSEs and other accredited courses.

Students said that they were more proud of their school now and that they wanted a uniform to show that they were part of a school. But they also wanted a way of helping to shape the format of the clothing and have a greater knowledge of, and influence upon, the way that the school develops.

Attendance for some students is still not good enough and now, as in the past, this continues to hamper their learning.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection:

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

The effectiveness of provision



The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last monitoring visit. Nevertheless, students' progress remains far too slow for them to catch up and attain as well as they could. Senior leaders are aware of this and the school is rightly moving away from those courses that are not recognised by other establishments for accreditation to access further, higher educational or training routes.

Lessons are now regularly monitored by senior leaders. Students' grades are regularly assessed and held centrally so that senior staff can track progress more effectively. From this information they are in a better position to notice trends and patterns.

Lilac Sky have decorated the corridors and replaced doors to classrooms so that they have viewing panels. This makes the building more welcoming and allows for easier monitoring of corridors. They have also installed photographs on corridor walls of the students at work and play to help celebrate their success. Students and staff greatly appreciated these efforts and from the lessons observed it was having a positive impact on learning and helped to make the school a safer place to be.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection:

- Assess pupils' achievements regularly and accurately and use this information when planning learning activities – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

School policies have been reviewed, a new staff handbook has been produced and regular performance management procedures have been introduced. Students are given regular feedback on their grades along with targets for improvement, but they are not referred to often enough in lessons to drive progress. The governing body has recently re-established committees and appointed additional governors to ensure it can effectively carry out its duties.

Lilac Sky has instituted a significant staffing review with the aim of improving the effectiveness of the school. New job descriptions and structures have been devised and shared with staff. National advertisements, interviews and redundancies are taking place to secure the changes for the autumn term.

Although not inspected as part of this monitoring visit, a boarding inspection took place on 24 February 2010 and boarding was judged to be good overall.

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 – good.
- National Minimum Standards to be met to improve social care – not monitored on this visit.

External support

The school and the local authority have made alternative education provision for those students who refused to attend the school and whose families would not work with the school.

The local authority is effectively monitoring the work of Lilac Sky and the quality of the provision of the school. Lilac Sky have done much to improve the school buildings and this is having a positive impact on learning. An urgent start is required to the proposed building works, particularly in the boarding areas. However, it is imperative that these buildings are fit for purpose and are designed around the specific learning needs of the students to ensure their development across all aspects of the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Priorities for further improvement

In previous monitoring visits the school was asked to make two further improvements as a priority:

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