

Priestley Smith School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103614
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	376935
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2012
Lead inspector	Pauline Hilling-Smith

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	4
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Denise McManus
Headteacher	Helen Porter
Date of previous school inspection	15 May 2009
School address	Beeches Road Great Barr Birmingham B42 2PY
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Age group	2–19
Inspection date(s)	20–21 March 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Pauline Hilling-Smith

Additional inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 14 lessons taught by 13 teachers. Meetings were held with pupils, representatives of the governing body and staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, listened to children read, and looked at: pupil's work; the school's evaluation of its performance; the current school development plan; minutes of meetings of the governing body; and safeguarding documentation. The responses to 27 questionnaires from staff and 33 questionnaires from parents and carers were also analysed.

Information about the school

Priestley Smith School is an average-sized special school for pupils with a visual impairment. The school gained specialist status for physical and sensory impairment in September 2010. Pupils come from the City of Birmingham and six neighbouring local authorities. The school manages the local authority's Mobility and Reprographics Services and works in partnership with the Sensory Support Service to provide outreach to other schools in Birmingham.

The school is co-located with four mainstream schools. All pupils have visual impairment and a growing number have associated complex learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The large majority of pupils are Asian British, nearly all of whom have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. A new assistant headteacher was appointed in September 2011.

The school is a National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) Leadership Development College, holds Healthy School status and has the European Award for Language.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. Pupils make exceptional progress in their academic and personal development because of the outstanding quality of specialised teaching, a highly enriched and individualised curriculum, and outstanding levels of care and support. Very occasionally, gaps in staff knowledge of phonics hinder pupils’ faster progress in reading or their understanding of how pupils with the most complex learning difficulties learn mean that planned activities do not always fully extend pupils’ learning.
- Leadership and management are outstanding because there is a great attention to detail and teamwork is very well developed. Partnerships are excellent and extend the work of the school very well. The leadership of teaching and the management of performance are well led by the headteacher.
- Behaviour throughout the school is outstanding and high priority is given to ensuring pupils’ safety. Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils develop a strong moral code and reflect deeply on issues that affect both themselves and others.
- In the new and excellent sixth form, pupils achieve a very wide range of external awards through the outstanding curriculum opportunities provided in partnership with local schools and colleges.
- The outreach work that the school undertakes is highly effective in supporting and assessing pupils with visual impairments in other schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that a higher percentage of lessons are outstanding by:
 - providing training for all staff in the teaching of phonics
 - ensuring that all activities planned for pupils with the most complex learning difficulties extend their learning at all times.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment on entry to school is often low as a result of pupils' visual disabilities and associated learning difficulties, and sometimes due to previous learning experiences. The number of pupils who have complex learning needs is increasing and a small but growing number have profound learning difficulties. Inspection findings agree with the parents and carers that all pupils achieve exceptionally well during their time at the school. The vast majority of pupils make rapid progress in English and mathematics due to the specialised teaching they receive in small groups and on an individual basis. This means that the gap between themselves and their peers in other schools with the same starting point closes dramatically. There is no difference in the progress of the different groups of pupils. However, not all staff pronounce phonic sounds correctly and this slows the progress of those pupils who are at the early stages of reading. Despite this, both print and Braille users have come into line with levels expected of them.

Assessment data are used to track pupils' progress carefully and compare results with those of pupils in other schools nationally. Progress in reading is carefully recorded and shows that, by the end of Key Stage 2, pupils are achieving their potential and the majority are coming into line with pupils without a visual difficulty. By the end of Key Stage 4, a small minority of pupils have exceeded national expectations and reached standards which enable them to follow their chosen courses in a sixth form leading to a university place.

All pupils make remarkable progress in their development of independent living skills. This means that they are able to achieve high levels of independence and some pupils become independent travellers. Pupils develop their listening skills very well as they progress through school. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children sing enthusiastically and use their voices to learn throughout the day. As a result of this, some pupils become very proficient musicians and enjoy performing as well as gaining awards. Achievement in art is also high and begins with an early emphasis on honing residual visual skills and creating textures and models with precision.

Quality of teaching

The impact of teaching on pupils' progress over time is outstanding. Pupils make outstanding progress when working on an individual basis, developing and practising skills or activities which are matched very closely with assessments of their progress and ability. Very occasionally, in whole-class teaching, activities are not always matched to the ability of the least-able pupils which slows the pace of learning. In the vast majority of lessons, questioning is used to great effect and expert staff extend and deepen knowledge and understanding based on the pupils' responses. For example, in one outstanding lesson pupils discussed the difference between discrete and continuous data; they then went on to experiment with ways of presenting statistics to see which way was the most efficient when they were asked to extract information.

Schemes of work meet the needs of the pupils very well because they are carefully planned to cover the requirements of the curriculum, extend knowledge and deepen ideas, particularly in social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and consolidate essential skills. Teachers implement the planned curriculum well. They ensure that activities build on prior knowledge and skills and promote relationships as well as providing opportunities for pupils to practise literacy and numeracy in all lessons. However occasionally, some staff mis-pronounce the sounds in words and pupils are confused. In a good music lesson the youngest pupils sang counting songs and learned that each person needed an instrument and some also needed a beater. Pupils' attitudes to race are explored well through discussions and interpretation of material leading to the award of Rights Respecting School. Other cultures are celebrated effectively, as in the visit to the Buddhist temple during the inspection. This exemplifies the outstanding opportunities for developing pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. Parents and carers returning questionnaires agree with inspectors when they say that teaching is always good or better. Pupils say they appreciate the good and better teaching they receive.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour during the inspection was impeccable and evidence suggests that this is mostly the usual picture. Pupils have excellent enthusiastic attitudes to learning and there is enjoyment and good-natured humour in lessons and around school. All pupils are keen to behave well, including those who have additional emotional and behavioural difficulties which make it very difficult for them to behave well at all times and in all situations. All staff are very committed to ensuring that relationships with pupils are strong, as is liaison with parents. This means that any behavioural issues improve quickly and exclusions are exceptionally low. Pupils are highly respectful towards each other and encourage each other to do well. They are extremely polite and courteous towards staff and visitors. Pupils are very considerate when moving around school and manage the risk for themselves and others, of bumping into anything or anyone. The impact of the mobility training is very effective in opening up possibilities for independence.

Pupils say that there is no bullying in school and they have a well-tuned perspective on the different forms of bullying. There is a safe area in the joint primary playground where a member of staff is available to resolve any issues or misunderstandings that might arise between the pupils from each school. Pupils know what constitutes an unsafe situation out of school and they take care to avoid such situations. As a result of all this, pupils say they feel very safe and parents and carers strongly agree that pupils are safe. Attendance is above average and pupils ensure that they are punctual, despite a number having to catch two buses across the City during the rush hour.

Leadership and management

All staff who replied to the questionnaire are very proud to work at Priestley Smith and believe that the school is very well led and managed. All parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire said that they would recommend the school to others, many commenting on the rapid improvements their children have made. They greatly appreciate the lengths to which the school goes to liaise with them

about their child's welfare. The school places great value on partnerships and these are developed to a high degree. This means that pupils access many more opportunities than the school itself could offer, for example in co-located mainstream primary schools, off-site secondary schools and in sixth form provision. The headteacher and governors have ensured that there is a shared vision of high expectations through a team approach to all the school's work. There is a meticulous approach to all the school's work, including the leadership of teaching. Everyone contributes to school development by checking how well the school is performing and making suggestions about the well-planned professional development. Staff and governors are aware of the need to keep in touch with the development of the teaching of reading in mainstream schools, as well as the need to incorporate further training in how pupils with complex needs learn due to the changing needs of the school population. All this means that there is outstanding capacity to improve further.

The outstanding curriculum meets the needs of pupils exceptionally well. It is very rich and achieves an appropriate balance between the development of core skills and creativity. There is outstanding provision for social, moral, spiritual and cultural development through visits, discussions and reflection. Arrangements for transition are planned in detail and these have excellent impact on pupils' success in their next placement.

All staff are very welcoming and this ethos permeates the school. The school takes positive action to promote equality of opportunity and to tackle discrimination in all of its work. Safeguarding meets all statutory requirements. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary, with excellent procedures and very well trained staff.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



22 March 2012

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Priestley Smith School, Birmingham, B42 2PY

Thank you for being so polite and helpful when we inspected your school. We enjoyed talking with you and visiting lessons.

I was particularly impressed when I spoke with the school council because of the respect given to everyone during the discussion, and because even the youngest pupil showed an exceptionally strong moral code. I could see that you represented the views of all the pupils very clearly and that, because you know you are listened to, you make sure you consider issues very carefully.

We found out that the school is outstanding because you are making excellent progress in learning school subjects and often making remarkable progress in your independent living skills. You are able to be so successful because the headteacher and governors make sure you have the best of everything and the staff make sure they know you as individuals very well.

We have asked the school to do two things to make impressive learning even better. The first is to provide all the staff with some further training in teaching reading. The second is to make sure that everyone in class is always learning as well as they can, because they are working all the time, on a task which is at just the right level of difficulty.

Please continue to do all you can to play your part so that everyone now and in the future can continue to be very successful.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Hilling-Smith
Lead inspector

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