



Priestley Smith School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103614
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 286706
Inspection dates 24 May 2006 to 24 May 2006
Reporting inspector Steven Parker AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Perry Beeches Campus
School category	Community		Beeches Road
Age range of pupils	2 to 17		Birmingham, West Midlands B42 2PY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 3253900
Number on roll	55	Fax number	0121 3825471
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	29 October 2001	Headteacher	

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Priestley Smith is an all age, day special school for pupils with little or no sight who have a wide range of abilities. Many have additional difficulties, such as learning or physical impairment. The school is housed in new, purpose built accommodation, on the Perry Beeches campus in the north west area of Birmingham, which it shares with mainstream nursery, primary and secondary schools. Pupils come from all over the city and from surrounding West Midlands authorities. Over half the pupils have English as an additional language, the most common first languages being Urdu and Punjabi. A third are entitled to free school meals. There are three pupils looked after by the local authority.

The school is experiencing a gradual reduction in numbers as a result of the local authority's inclusion policy. The school runs a successful outreach service, supporting visually impaired pupils in mainstream schools. Five staff are employed in this work, in collaboration with the city's specialist support services.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Priestley Smith is a good school, where pupils make excellent progress in their personal development as a result of the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive. Consequently, their life chances are much improved. Pupils make good progress in their learning due to good teaching, supplemented by the high quality work of support staff. The foundations of good achievement are laid early as children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception Years. All pupils achieve impressive results in certificated courses at the end of their time in school. Their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary and they are consistently enthusiastic about everything they do. They are given a stimulating range of work to do, well matched to their needs. However, pupils in mixed age classes do not always have the opportunity to study all aspects of some National Curriculum subjects. Good opportunities to work and play with mainstream peers provide valuable experience of the wider world. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils help pupils to feel safe and secure.

Leadership and management are effective and the governing body is extremely supportive of the school. The school knows its strengths and areas for improvement and inspectors agree with its judgements. Much of the knowledge upon which these judgements are based, however, is informal, and not always gained from a structured, systematic approach to monitoring and recording the impact of the full range of the school's work. A weakness in the current monitoring arrangements is the lack of governors' involvement.

Priestley Smith has developed and sustained highly successful partnerships with parents and other services and agencies, despite the insecurity it has experienced over a long period about its future role and purpose. It provides good value for money and has a strong capacity to continue improving its provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that there is a systematic approach to planning and recording pupils' work across the school to ensure that they experience the full range of National Curriculum subjects.
- Further develop and refine systems to evaluate all aspects of its operation, ensuring that governors are fully involved, so that the school has a full picture of its effectiveness.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Every individual pupil makes good progress through the school. All achieve well and some attain impressively high standards. Pupils get off to a good start in the Nursery, so that, by the time they leave the primary department at the end of Year 6, they have often made significant gains, especially in language development, reading and social skills. They are then well placed to benefit from specialist subject teaching across the secondary phase. Pupils come to the school with a wide range of capabilities and the

individualised teaching they receive ensures that each of them achieves the best they can. A number of pupils have particular gifts and talents, for example in music or art, and these are well nurtured, so that they can gain appropriate recognition at the end of Year 11. Every pupil, no matter what his or her difficulties, leaves with a range of accredited qualifications, well chosen to ensure their success, in, for example, GCSE, entry level exams and the ASDAN Youth Award Scheme. Many move on successfully to further education courses or employment to suit their needs. The school makes good use of its knowledge of how well pupils are doing to set them challenging but achievable targets and ensure they make steady progress. Teachers are rightly ambitious for their pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils make exceptional progress in all aspects of their personal development, because focused, unsentimental support underpins the whole ethos of the school. High quality, specialist teaching for visual and mobility needs is directed very carefully towards enabling pupils to be as independent as possible. From the moment they enter school the children learn to try things out, to make healthy choices and to 'have a go'. Issues and challenges are discussed sensitively and tasks carefully presented in steps that give children confidence in their own abilities. Consequently, even those who might have experienced failure before entering the school develop their self-awareness and independence in learning and thinking, all of which will stand them in good stead in the future. Pupils show a particularly good awareness of their own needs as blind or visually impaired learners. They make very good progress in self-help and independence skills and develop hugely in terms of the role they play in the school and wider community. Pupils are involved very well in the running of the school. The junior and senior school councils are active bodies which take their responsibilities seriously and influence school life and attitudes. Pupils feel they are enabled to 'make a difference'.

Pupils enjoy school and are highly appreciative of what the staff provide for them. The majority of pupils have good attendance records, although a small number who spend long periods out of the country have a disproportionate impact, lowering the school's overall figures. Pupils are very friendly and polite, and their behaviour is exemplary. Excellent support for speaking and listening in all lessons means that they become highly effective communicators by the time they leave the school and express their opinions freely. Because of the emphasis on independent living skills, those pupils with the most complex special educational needs also take increasing responsibility for their own choices, actions and learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall with particular strengths in coming to understand different cultures and traditions and learning to care for others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall and sometimes excellent. Most teaching is lively and well planned, with stimulating resources used to make learning enjoyable. A particular strength lies in the very high quality Braille materials that are produced in the school to enable pupils to access all activities successfully. Teachers organise their lessons very carefully. This, combined with the effective partnership of their very able and experienced learning support assistants, ensures that all pupils succeed. There is a consistent focus on developing pupils' communication skills and discussion is a core ingredient of the successful lessons. The quality of teaching and learning is closely monitored, and teachers appreciate the constructive and helpful feedback that they receive. As a result of the school's improved assessment procedures staff are increasingly skilled in encouraging pupils to build on their earlier learning. Teachers work extremely well with therapists, medical staff and specialist teachers to ensure that pupils have the skills and resources they need to have the best possible access to lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A good curriculum is provided for all pupils, including the youngest. The highly successful specialist curriculum includes the teaching of Braille, mobility training and the use of technological and low vision aids. The school teaches all the necessary subjects of the National Curriculum, and up-to-date policies and schemes of work exist for all areas. Planning is generally good, but some pupils in the mixed year group classes either miss or repeat some aspects of different subjects, because their learning is not properly mapped over time.

There is a good range of additional activities through clubs and residential and community visits. Individual pupils benefit considerably from collaborative partnerships across the schools that share the site. Sporting and other links with other specialist providers for children with visual impairment strengthen the curriculum further. Extremely good links with local businesses, Connexions and national agencies mean that there is very strong work experience and workplace skills provision.

There is particularly good support for personal, social and health education. This helps pupils stay healthy, keep safe and understand about being a responsible citizen. The school makes very good links between subjects through the targets linked to pupils' special educational needs, and takes every opportunity to develop literacy, thinking skills and numeracy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is exceptional. Pupils say they feel they are listened to and valued, and know that everyone is trying to help them achieve 'their best'.

Child protection procedures are in place. The school's arrangements for dealing with any incidents of bullying are effective. Pupils and parents are confident that adults will sort out any problems to do with behaviour or bullying. Older pupils feel a great deal of responsibility for supporting younger children and willingly share their experiences with them. These pupils, and the visually impaired adults who support the school's work as visitors or governors, provide very good role models. Priestley Smith pupils say they enjoy the sessions when they go into the other mainstream schools or where pupils from these schools join their classes. They commented that these opportunities help them in their learning, but also help them to appreciate that others sometimes have to work hard at their learning too.

The school is quite rightly proud of the progress it has made in providing for pupils' inclusion in the broader community of Perry Beeches schools and in their preparation for life. Individual education plans are now very effective in identifying the most important things pupils have to learn. Older pupils are involved in negotiating their own targets and know and understand them very well. There is a real sense of a 'team around the child' properly involving families and other agencies in supporting pupils' access and progress in all areas very well. This ensures that they are very well prepared for their life in the broader community.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The newly constituted leadership team is working very effectively and the headteacher is well supported. This leadership structure ensures that the primary and secondary departments are well managed. The headteacher has a clear vision for the development of the school and outreach provision, and has worked long and hard to make this a reality. Strong leadership has enabled the whole school to cope extremely well with the move to new premises and new working practices. By enthusing and mobilising colleagues, senior staff continue to sustain high morale across the school and outreach support provision, despite the insecurity over the school's future.

The school has a sound understanding of its strengths and what needs attention, and uses this information to inform plans for improvement. Subject leaders are playing an important part in these processes as they become more proactive. However, much of the school's knowledge about itself is informal and based on anecdotal evidence. There is limited structured monitoring and recording of activities to check on the school's effectiveness. This limits the possibility for focused evaluation and demonstration of the impact of important aspects of the school's work, for example, the inclusion

opportunities that pupils experience. Careful management of a complex budget situation has sustained the school's resources, but there are concerns about its continuing viability as pupil numbers fall. Governors have been very supportive in this situation and provide strong partnership both in the management processes and in advocating for the school with the local authority. They know that expending efforts in this direction has resulted in their not being as active as they used to be in visiting the school and in monitoring its work as closely as they should.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, we visited your school recently to find out how well you are getting on. Thank you for making my colleague and I feel so welcome, showing us your work, which really impressed us, and talking to us so confidently. We were particularly helped by listening to your very well expressed views on how well the school helps you to learn, and about how much you appreciate the support you get from all the staff.

What we liked about your school:

- The new buildings and the chances you have to go into the other schools on the campus and spend time working and playing with the pupils in them.
- It is a very happy place which you enjoy going to very much.
- Teachers are good at planning work that is just right for your needs so that you learn successfully and achieve often very good results.
- Very good specialist help in learning to use Braille, improving your mobility and developing communication skills make sure that you can participate fully in all the activities.
- You behave exceptionally well and really care about each other.
- The headteacher has helped everyone to cope with all the changes.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- To make sure that you have the chance to study all the right bits of the National Curriculum.
- To find better ways of showing how effective Priestley Smith is in its work.