

Priory School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115443
Local Authority	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA
Inspection number	299989
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Declan McCarthy

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	30
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Carolyn Evans
Headteacher	Mrs Jacqui Faux
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2006
School address	Burr Hill Chase Prittlewell Southend-on-sea Essex SS2 6PE
Telephone number	01702 347490
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Priory is a special school for pupils with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Most pupils enter the school with histories of very poor attendance and have been out of mainstream school for considerable periods of time, mainly as a result of permanent exclusion. About 20% of the pupils have a Youth Offending order. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and the vast majority enter school with attainment which is below average. Nearly all pupils are white British boys and a very small number are white European. The number taking free school meals is high. At that time there were difficulties in recruiting suitable staff. Since its last inspection the school continues to experience difficulty in recruiting suitable staff. The school is working towards Healthy School status and the governing body are working towards the Governors' Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Priory school is now providing a satisfactory education for its pupils and is an improving school. The good leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by the senior managers and chair of governors, has ensured that good progress has been made in all areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and that all staff are well trained and supported. This has led to high quality care, support and guidance which has had a major impact on improving pupils' behaviour and attendance. The very high turnout of parents at a recent parents' evening clearly demonstrates the confidence that they now have in the school. The school provides satisfactory value for money and has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall. Those pupils who attend regularly make good progress in English, mathematics and in most other subjects. However, their progress in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and information and communication technology (ICT) are limited because the curriculum is not yet fully developed and the arrangements for leading these subjects are not fully secure. Those pupils in Years 10 and 11 who attend regularly make good progress in their accredited courses. This enables them to transfer to local colleges or employment when they leave school and has a positive impact on their economic well-being. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual moral social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Pupils' behaviour is good and their attendance is satisfactory overall. Most have good levels of attendance, reflecting their enjoyment of school, because there are effective systems in place to promote and monitor attendance. The school meets the requirements for safeguarding pupils, enabling pupils to stay safe.

The headteacher, with very good support from the senior teacher with responsibility for teaching and learning, has ensured that teaching is nearly always at least satisfactory and often good or better. A few weaknesses remain in science teaching and its leadership, which limits the progress pupils make in this subject. Nevertheless, teaching is greatly enhanced by the support of well trained teaching assistants in lessons. There has been good improvement to the curriculum, which is now satisfactory. There are now highly relevant learning opportunities in music, a wider range of sporting activities which promote pupils' healthy lifestyles and a good range of visitors to promote citizenship. Senior leaders have ensured satisfactory improvement in the use of ICT to support learning in different subjects. A few governors, under the good leadership of the Chair, are providing effective support for the school by systematically reviewing its work. However not all governors are involved in this process which means that some governors are not as effective as others.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen subject leadership of science, ICT, and PSHE to further improve teaching, learning and pupils' achievements.
- Develop the PSHE and ICT curriculum further so that it promotes pupils' progress and achievement more effectively.
- Improve the quality of teaching in science so that pupils progress as well as they do in English and mathematics.
- Fully develop the strategic role of all governors so that the school sustains its capacity to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are below average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Those that attend regularly make good progress but the poor attendance of a small minority of pupils leads to their inadequate progress. Progress in English and maths is satisfactory overall. Most pupils make good progress in English, and mathematics lessons because teaching is nearly always good in these subjects. Pupils make outstanding progress in music lessons because the planned activities are highly relevant to their interests. This makes a very good contribution to their enjoyment of learning. Pupils' progress in science lessons is sometimes too slow because expectations for learning are not always high enough and lessons are sometimes uninteresting. Neither do pupils make as much progress in PSHE and ICT because planning for these subjects is not yet fully developed. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 gain a number of Youth Awards, Certificates of Achievement, Entry Level certificates and GCSEs in a range of academic and vocational subjects. Pupils make satisfactory progress towards their targets in their individual learning plans (ILPs).

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. As they move through the school, pupils' self-confidence develops well and they become increasingly aware of the impact of their behaviour on others. The school's recently introduced system of restorative justice is helping pupils to express how they feel and to understand each other's feelings and reactions. Good progress has been made in improving pupils' behaviour and attendance, although a small minority continue to show poor attendance, despite the school's best efforts to improve this. Given the nature of their special needs, pupils are reasonably co-operative and their behaviour during lessons and at other times are often good; this is especially the case during music lessons, which pupils thoroughly enjoy.

The extent to which pupils adopt safe practices and healthy lifestyles is satisfactory. Pupils eat a healthy lunch. Sport of all types is popular and boys enjoy the out-of-hours coaching and playing football during break and lunch time. Pupils' contributions to the community are satisfactory as they participate in community service as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Youth Award Scheme. They also voice their views through the school council and discuss issues such as lunchtime arrangements and school rules. Overall, pupils' improving personal qualities, their satisfactory basic skills and good preparation for the world of work prepare them soundly for their life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall. The school has successfully reached its target of 60% good or better teaching as a result of the effective monitoring and support for teaching and learning by the headteacher and senior teacher with responsibility for teaching and learning. Consequently, pupils' learning has improved and is now satisfactory. The teaching of English, mathematics, design technology and food technology is generally good. Music teaching is considerably enhanced by the school's use of outside experts who provide well-thought out practical music activities to promote enjoyment and achievement. Effective team work between

skilled support staff and teachers considerably enhances pupils' learning. All staff have good relationships with pupils, who nearly always respond well in lessons. Although their subject knowledge is generally good, weaknesses remain in the knowledge some staff have in ways of providing high quality learning experiences in ICT, PSHE and science. This is mainly because leadership in these areas is not yet fully developed. Science lessons are sometimes too dull and pupils say that science is boring. Teachers make satisfactory use of assessment in lessons, providing feedback to pupils on how well they are achieving and what they need to do to improve. Teachers nearly always use their knowledge of pupils' learning to match tasks closely to different abilities so that all pupils progress equally well in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum now meets pupils' needs soundly. There is a strong emphasis on pupils' ability to enjoy and achieve, as well as attending to their individual personal and social needs, emotional literacy and basic skills in reading and mathematics. The overall balance between subjects is satisfactory and there has been particularly good recent improvement to provision in religious education, music and citizenship. The school makes very good use of outside visitors to help teach music and citizenship, which impacts positively on enjoyment and achievement. However, subject planning for ICT and PSHE is not yet fully developed. The range of extra curricular activities has broadened. Pupils particularly enjoy their coaching sessions in football, rugby and basketball. Teaching time has increased to meet national recommendations and pupils' preparation for life after school is good. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are now able to gain external accreditation in a wide range of areas, including the Duke of Edinburgh, ASDAN Youth Award schemes and unit awards in English, mathematics and music. Vocational education has improved and older pupils participate in an increasingly wide range of work related activities. This is facilitated through developing good links with local employers. Links with colleges are also strengthening. As a result, every pupil who left school in 2006 went on to either work or further training.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good pastoral care is promoted through effective links with community organisations and outside professionals. Vulnerable pupils are supported by external specialists such as the Youth Offending Team, mental health services and social services. Pupils in need receive additional support from a trained counsellor and individual learning mentors. Breakfast club has been re-introduced and this is helping to improve pupils' personal welfare and punctuality. The school has effectively improved its procedures for monitoring attendance so that most pupils now attend regularly. All staff have been effectively trained in the safe handling and restraint of pupils. Working relationships are very good and procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety and child protection are good. Pupils' educational guidance is satisfactory. Formal procedures for assessing pupils' work are strengthening and cognitive tests undertaken in Year 7, 8 and 9 are helping the school to draw up accurate individual learning plans. The use of assessment for learning is being developed and pupils who are under-achieving in Year 9 receive additional support prior to the national tests. Careers guidance is good and considerably enhanced by good links with the Connexions service.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides effective and purposeful leadership, in moving the school forward. She has an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development and takes effective action to sustain continuous improvement. For example, she has successfully taken tough decisions to eliminate weaknesses in teaching and has ensured that support staff are well trained to promote high quality teaching and learning. The headteacher enjoys the confidence of parents, governors, pupils and staff alike. For example, through her leadership, nearly all parents attended an after school parents evening to see multi-media presentations of their children's work, which was presented by their children. The headteacher has established effective links with outside agencies as well as parents. Through her hard work, with very effective support from the senior teacher in developing staff skills and confidence, she has improved the quality of teaching and the curriculum. Consequently, most pupils have now re-engaged in learning and are making at least satisfactory progress. Most staff are providing good support for the headteacher in sharing the drive for sustained improvement. However the school continues to experience staffing difficulties so that subject leadership for science, PSHE and ICT are not yet fully effective. The governing body is providing satisfactory oversight of the school's work. A few governors, ably led by the chair, are providing good strategic monitoring but the remainder have yet to develop this role.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Priory School, Burr Hill Chase, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS2 6PE

We really enjoyed visiting your school and seeing all the things that you do. Thank you for making us feel welcome and for telling us more about your school. This is what we found out about Priory School.

The school gives you a sound education and takes good care of you. It is improving all the time and has helped you to make good progress in your behaviour and attendance. Most of you make good progress in your work because most of the teaching is good. You get a lot of good support from the teaching assistants who help you with your learning. You told us how much you really enjoy music and sports activities. There are good opportunities for you to gain qualifications. We were impressed with your good behaviour in lessons and around school. We could also see that you are growing up to be more confident young people.

Your headteacher is managing your school well, and, together with the staff and governors, Mrs Faux is very keen to make the school even better for you. I have asked them to do this by making sure that:

- Good teachers are appointed to lead science, ICT and PSHE to help you improve your learning and make better progress in these subjects.
- Improvements are made in planning your learning of PSHE and ICT.
- Science teaching is improved so that you can make better progress.
- All governors are involved in helping to improve your school.

You can help the staff and governors by continuing to try as hard as you can.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy

Lead inspector