

Priestley Smith School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103614
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323866
Inspection date	15 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Mick Megee

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	2-17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	47
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Denise McManus
Headteacher	Helen Porter
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Perry Beeches Campus Beeches Road Great Barr Birmingham B42 2PY
Telephone number	01213 253900
Fax number	01213 825471

Age group	2-17
Inspection date	15 May 2009
Inspection number	323866

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Priestley Smith is a small special school for students with visual impairment. Many students have additional learning, physical or medical difficulties. The school is located on a campus shared with mainstream nursery, primary and secondary schools. Students come from a wide catchment area including all of the city of Birmingham and the surrounding West Midlands authorities. The school manages the city-wide Mobility and Reprographics Services that support pupils with visual impairment in mainstream schools. In liaison with the Sensory Support Service, members of the school's teaching and support staff provide outreach support for students with visual impairment in mainstream schools and other special schools. A new headteacher was appointed from September 2008.

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 School provides a good education for its students so that they make good academic progress and achieve outstanding personal development. The key factor in the school's success is the school's very good understanding of what is going well and what needs to be improved. Under the astute leadership of the new headteacher, the school has much improved its procedures for monitoring and evaluating students' progress, so that there is a clear vision and good planning for the future that is based on firm evidence.

Students make good progress and achieve well because of the good teaching and good curriculum that the school provides. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make excellent progress because of outstanding teaching. There is very good progress in the primary department in all subjects that reflects the skilful teaching. Achievement in the secondary department is not quite as strong as elsewhere, because a few teachers are not yet as proficient in setting work at the right level for every student. Progress in English is very good throughout the school, but it is not so good in Years 10 and 11 in mathematics, where targets have not been sufficiently challenging.

Students greatly enjoy the good range of activities provided for them, including a good number of lunchtime clubs. However, not all teachers are equally adept at reinforcing basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, across every subject in the curriculum. Care, guidance and support, taken together, are good. Pastoral care is excellent which means that students feel safe and cherished by the staff. This is the reason why their personal development is so strong. As one parent said, 'These are very considerate and understanding people who know what they are doing and that's made a heck of a difference to my son.' Relationships are very warm throughout the school, and classrooms are harmonious, good-humoured places of learning. Most students know their individual learning targets well and the next steps they have to take, but a few students have only a hazy idea because one or two teachers do not promote these targets sufficiently well in lessons.

The headteacher has made a good start by introducing measures to rapidly improve the school's performance. There is a purposeful, enthusiastic feeling amongst staff that the school is entering a new, more productive phase that will result in higher personal and academic outcomes for the students. Given her very effective leadership so far, honest and accurate self-evaluation and the strong support she has from the other senior leaders, governors and all staff, the school is excellently placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The changing profile of the children entering the school means that, for an increasing number of children, standards are much lower than usually seen at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Nevertheless, all children make excellent gains in learning and personal development, even though they join the school with a wide range of starting points and additional needs. This is because of the very strong teamwork by staff in the classroom, and because of the excellent leadership and enthusiasm of the head of the department. There are very good induction procedures, regular home visits and excellent communications with parents so that the children settle into school life quickly. Translators are provided where necessary. Parents receive two or three phone calls from staff each week to keep them fully informed. The school

encourages parents to learn Braille and to support their children's learning at home. Parents justifiably feel that they and the staff have formed a very strong bond. Teaching is consistently outstanding and classroom staff take every opportunity to promote children's learning in all areas. Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding because they are made to feel special and at home by the warmth and kindness of the staff. Children quickly develop very positive attitudes to learning. The curriculum offers effective, individualised programmes, exciting activities and a good balance between activities chosen by the children themselves and those provided by adults. Staff ensure that children have plenty of opportunities for outdoor learning, although the current physical environment restricts easy access to the outside area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers match the activities in each class with the needs and capabilities of every student.
- Ensure that teachers emphasise students' individual targets in each lesson.
- Ensure that students' basic skills in literacy and numeracy are promoted through all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are below the average for the majority of students, although there are an increasing number of students whose standards are exceptionally low when they start. Nevertheless, students achieve well from their various starting points and students in Year 11 gain good results in most of their subjects. One older student remarked on how much he had achieved at the school: 'I've been here for 10 years and my educational progress has gone from strength to strength.' Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress. In the main school, achievement in English is particularly strong throughout, but achievement is less strong in mathematics in Key Stage 4. The school, through its new monitoring procedures, recognised this issue early last year, and has put in remedial strategies to resolve it. Achievement is held back in a few classes because a few teachers do not skilfully emphasise students' individual goals or provide lesson activities that accurately match all the varying needs and capabilities of the students within the class.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

'This is a small school and so we have a close network and that means everyone gets on really well,' said one of the students, to the evident agreement of his colleagues. There are very strong relationships and firm friendships between staff and students, often cemented by good-humoured banter. Students work extremely well with each other. They are very protective of one another, sensitive to each other's special eye conditions, and behave considerately at all times. As a result, all feel very secure. Students love coming to school, as shown by their high level of engagement in lessons. Those who can attend well do so, and absence is almost always for serious medical reasons. Students show a real desire to work as independently as possible, and greatly enjoy the increasing opportunities they have to learn in the neighbouring mainstream schools. Students understand very well the meaning of a healthy lifestyle, and the more vocal students berate the staff, in a teasing way, if the tuck-shop has no apples on a particular day. Students are well prepared for the future by the good acquisition of independent living skills, literacy and numeracy skills, specialist information and communication technology skills and increasing mobility. Students conscientiously take on a range of responsibilities around

the school, such as escorting visitors to lunch and as members of the student council. Students feel that they are now much more actively involved in the school's decision making, for example by being involved in helping to draw up the school development plan. Students come from far and wide to attend the school so the transport arrangements limit the contact that they can develop directly with the local community. Students' social, moral and cultural development is strong, but spiritual development is less effective as there are few organised opportunities given for reflecting on their lives during the school day.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are characterised by very positive relationships between everybody and by good teamwork between all teachers, support staff and specialist practitioners. Students have a strong work ethic in lessons. As one student was heard to say to his friend, 'You don't come here to do nothing, you come here to work!' There is a very imaginative use of resources within lessons. For example, in one lesson students were creating a scrapbook of ideas related to 'The Beach', in order to make a weaving. The teacher produced an excellent array of tactile items, such as shells and starfish, so that students would have every opportunity to explore and describe these items and so extend their tactile vocabulary. Teaching is particularly strong in the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary department where teachers, on the basis of good assessment, plan and deliver lessons that match the full range of needs of the students. Teaching is not quite so skilful in the secondary department, where a few teachers are not so successful in matching the activities to the differing needs of the students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

All around the school are vibrant displays of students' work that indicate the good range of subjects and activities that the school provides, especially in the creative arts. The school deploys very good resources, including specialist technology, that greatly assist students to make fast progress, for example in Braille and touch typing. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of educational visits, residential experiences and lunchtime clubs such as 'Wake up and shake up' and trombone tuition. The school has been working hard to ensure that basic skills such as literacy and numeracy are reinforced in every lesson. This is not yet consistently done in every class. There is good preparation for the next stage of education through the Connexions service. The location of the school on an integrated campus provides the students with increasing opportunities to learn alongside their peers in mainstream schools. Students in the secondary department would justifiably like to have more opportunities for both social and educational integration, but this is currently restricted while the secondary mainstream school is undergoing a programme of intensive support.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is fully compliant with current government requirements for keeping the students safe. There is a very good balance, particularly from teaching assistants, in giving the students the assistance they require at the same time as promoting independence in their learning and their personal lives. The school enjoys a very strong partnership with parents. One parent,

typical of many, spoke of the effective two-way communication between school and home: 'If you have any concerns, you just put a note in the diary and they ring you up that evening. Without fail.' The students say that they would happily turn to any adult in the school if they had a problem. One student voiced the views of many when she said, 'We feel very loved and cared for here.' While pastoral care is outstanding, academic guidance is not quite so effective for some of the students. The school is working hard to increase the involvement of students in their own learning, for example through providing more frequent opportunities for self-assessment. This is an ongoing area of development. Most students know their own individual targets and the next steps they need to take. In a few cases, however, the students are vague about their targets because teachers have not sufficiently emphasised them in lessons.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

In the short time she has been in the school, the headteacher has set out her vision for the future very clearly. She has gained the commitment of all the staff to her mission. The keynote of this first period of her tenure has been to gain a good understanding of what the school is doing well and what needs to be improved. She has put into place robust processes for tracking students' progress and for evaluating the work of the school. She has revised the way in which information about students' outcomes is collected and analysed. The school now has at its disposal very clear evidence of how well students make progress. The school is now able to compare the progress made in different key stages and subjects, although it does not yet analyse the performance of the different groups within the school, such as ethnic and gender groups. There are very secure procedures in place for monitoring the performance of staff that link in very well to the performance management processes. She is distributing leadership well throughout the school, taking good advantage of her colleagues' different strengths. She is successfully widening and developing the role of middle managers. Together with the senior leadership team and the governors, the headteacher has been able to plan the school's development on the basis of secure knowledge of what needs to be done. It is still too early to say how successful the planning has been in terms of students' outcomes. Governance has been revitalised through good recruitment of experienced and knowledgeable people, including a good representation from the visually impaired community. The headteacher has carried out a thorough audit of community cohesion, and is now acting upon its findings such as the further promotion of multicultural awareness. There are some innovative measures to promote cohesion such as the weekly appearance of one visually impaired student on a local radio station, and increasing links with a school for students with visual impairment in The Gambia.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

18 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Priestley Smith School, Birmingham, B42 2PY

You may remember that two inspectors came to your school recently. Thank you for helping us with our visit and for contributing to the inspection. Thanks especially to those students on the school council who met with me. Please pass on my thanks also to those parents who took the time to come and meet with me, and thanks to all parents for filling in the questionnaire. This was very helpful to us.

You told us how much you like the school, and that the school is a good one. We agree with you, and these are some other things we found out.

- You make good progress in your schoolwork and you are growing up fantastically well because of the good support you receive.
- Teachers and classroom staff are doing a good job of teaching you and making sure you learn well.
- You have a good range of subjects and activities that keep you interested.
- The staff look after you very well and give you good support when you need it.
- The new headteacher and those in charge of the school do a good job of leading and managing the school.

To make it even better we have asked the school to make sure that:

- all the lesson activities are at the right level for all of you
- all teachers focus well on your individual targets in lessons
- you have the opportunity to improve your basic skills, such as your literacy and numeracy, in every lesson.

Perhaps you could help by trying to remember to work at your own targets in every lesson.

All the very best for the future

Mick Megee Lead inspector