

The Priory School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124901
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	340678
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.
The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	9–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Eade
Headteacher	Mr R Mackenzie
Date of previous school inspection	6 January 2007
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Age group	9–16
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Boarding provision**Social care Unique Reference Number**

SCO24610

Social care inspector

Dorrit Andrews

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors and a social care inspector. The large majority of time was spent inspecting boarding provision and observing lessons; 16 lessons were observed taught by 14 teachers. Meetings were held with students, governors and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, students' work, school policies, procedures and records as well as 50 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether the school's work is of the high quality necessary to achieve outstanding outcomes for students
- the rigour applied to assessing students' progress together with the use of assessment to plan challenging work for students
- the contribution of the whole curriculum to promoting literacy and numeracy
- the effectiveness of the governing body in giving the school support and challenging its results.

Information about the school

All students have a statement of special educational needs, almost all have moderate learning difficulties (MLD). All students have additional needs covering a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities. These include autism, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, physical disabilities, medical conditions, speech, language and communication difficulties and severe learning difficulties.

Residential provision, for up to 24 students during term time, currently accommodates five students for the whole week and 31 students for various numbers of days during the week.

The school gained specialist school status for cognition and learning in July 2009. It has the Healthy Schools Award, Sports Mark and Active Mark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The Priory School is outstanding in its effectiveness; it meets expertly the wide range and increasing complexity of students' needs and it provides outstandingly for their well-being and ensures all students achieve well. This significant success is the result of the school's continuous improvement, driven by outstanding leadership, particularly that of the headteacher, senior managers and the governors. Strong, sharply focused leadership ensures the school benefits in all areas from rigorous self-evaluation and consistently high expectations. In addition, it has a stable and highly motivated staff who work closely together. For the same reasons, boarding provision has maintained its outstanding quality, which contributes significantly to students' exceptional personal development, their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to outstanding outcomes for them, overall. Students' self-confidence and independence are carefully nurtured through outstanding care, guidance and support in school and in boarding.

Since its last inspection, as a result of its capacity to improve the school has made considerable headway in developing its outreach service to mainstream schools, strengthening its partnerships along the way. Moreover, the specialist status recently granted for cognition and learning is a further and significant boost towards building new accommodation for vocational studies and broadening the already excellent vocational curriculum for Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching has improved as a result of rigorous monitoring of lessons; it is good, as it was at the time of the last inspection, but overall, the pace and challenge of learning is stronger. This leads to students making good progress in lessons and to their good achievement. In a small minority of lessons teaching is now outstanding because, here, assessment plays a more effective part in planning students' work, which leads to excellent progress in these lessons.

The staff make the school a lively, stimulating and enjoyable environment for students. A multitude of colourful and informative displays across the school celebrate students' achievements. Their writing and art work stand out in particular as examples of the good standards achieved. This reflects the excellent curriculum. Literacy and numeracy are very effectively promoted. The provision for art stands alongside physical education and science as strengths of the school. Many enterprise projects such as growing vegetables or planting trees are well-planned, challenging activities which develop students' workplace skills and financial capability exceptionally well. Students are prepared outstandingly for the future by work experience, careers advice and the good number of accredited courses passed by the time they leave school. Usually, all students move on to college courses.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop assessment and make intensive use of it in every lesson to increase the challenge to students, in particular by:
 - striving for as many more able students as possible to achieve the challenging targets set for them.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students enjoy learning and set about work with confidence and enthusiasm, which leads to good achievement. In every class, their contribution to lessons is lively and demonstrates clearly that they are learning effectively. Whatever their needs, students make good progress because they are allowed to consolidate new knowledge and skills by frequently revisiting what they have learnt in previous lessons. Particularly good progress is made in literacy and numeracy. Good recall of number facts, calculation skills and a detailed knowledge of the characters in *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, illustrate the systematic way in which students learn and make progress. Students' attentiveness and good efforts ensure that by the end of each lesson they have grasped learning objectives such as the key facts in writing and reading instructions. Key skills such as reading are encouraged effectively in the evenings for student boarders. In their English and mathematics books, students' work is methodical, well-organised and neat, showing clearly their capacity to reach the high expectations their teachers set. The outcomes in Years 10 and 11 in relation to work-related learning and accredited courses are good. Most students gain an average of eight Entry Level Certificates in the full range of subjects including English, mathematics, science and information and communications technology. This achievement stretches most but not all, although the school now identifies more-able students, who are being directed into GCSE courses.

Students are firmly attached to the school's ethos of positive self-regard and respect for others. This has a very good impact on behaviour and attendance, which are high. It means that students also respond exceptionally well to guidance on keeping safe and being healthy. They indicate clearly that they feel safe and they possess a good understanding of eating healthily. In physical education, and for the many participating in further sports, they are energetic and enthusiastic. Students play an active part in the life and improvement of the school, in particular through the work of the school council. They contribute enthusiastically and generously. The school is closely engaged with its community and this provides students with many opportunities to contribute more widely through performances by the school choir, school plays, helping in homes for the elderly and raising funds for many good and urgent causes.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and their assistants set high expectations and teach at a brisk pace which challenges students effectively. As a result, students arrive in lessons ready to learn, are quickly engaged and contribute constructively to learning. Lessons are well-planned, building systematically on what students learnt in previous lessons. Work is skilfully arranged to match students' learning needs and different capabilities. A regular feature at the start of lessons is an effective revising of key skills and knowledge, testing students' recall. This allows teachers to make a good assessment of their progress. In a small proportion of lessons the combination of exceptional expertise, in-depth knowledge of each student, thorough assessment, pace and challenge leads to outstanding learning and progress. While assessment is used well in most lessons it does not have the impact on planning and work that is the case in the outstanding lessons.

The curriculum responds exceptionally well to the wide range of students' needs and interests. The opportunities for literacy and numeracy have a high priority throughout the curriculum and in boarders' activities. The programme for older students emphasises exceptionally well the knowledge and skills necessary to support their entry to further education, training and employment. Specialist status is enabling the school to make a start on developing further the curriculum's vocational opportunities, which are already

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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wide in range.

The staff's detailed knowledge of students, the very close attention to all their needs and the very good relationships between staff and students ensure all are cared for extremely well. The arrangements for keeping students safe, particularly for the significant number of vulnerable students, are highly organised and very effective. Students' behaviour is managed very effectively in a calm, consistent manner. The care, guidance and support for students are strengthened significantly by the links with many social agencies and with parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Strong leadership and very effective management are firmly established, setting a clear direction. Senior leaders, governors and staff are ambitious in what the school can achieve for its students and in how it contributes to the community. Safeguarding procedures are implemented very robustly. Equality of opportunity is promoted very strongly and discrimination eliminated by rigorously monitoring the school's work. Outreach provision is highly organised and impacts very positively in supporting local schools. The engagement with parents is constant in providing a wide range of support. Partnerships with schools, colleges, projects, agencies and employers are highly developed and often account for the variety and choice in students' learning opportunities. There is much in the life and work of the school that promotes community cohesion effectively, although its promotion has not involved the high level of planning and action to make it outstanding. Governors bring their substantial experience and expertise to bear exceptionally well on the management of their duties, challenging the school and supporting its improvement. They have played a significant part in the school's gaining specialist status and in the improvements to the vocational curriculum currently underway.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Boarding provision

The quality of boarding at Priory School is outstanding. The school meets all key national minimum standards and exceeds a number of them. No recommendations were raised at the previous inspection.

Boarders are provided with a high quality of care and outstanding pastoral support. The individual needs of each boarder are identified and actively promoted across the school community. Daily communication between care and teaching staff, and strong working partnerships with external professionals, also contribute highly to the welfare of boarders.

Staff follow clear procedures for the management and administration of medication both on and off site and maintain effective communication with parents regarding medication and other pastoral matters. All staff have received medication training, and qualified first aid staff are always available on duty. Boarders are provided with healthy, nutritious meals and are able to contribute their ideas to menus. Special dietary needs are catered for and systems are in place to monitor individual eating patterns. Meal times are well-managed, orderly, social occasions and facilitate the development of boarders' social and independent skills. A number of boarders referred positively to the quality and range of food provided and said, 'We can always choose' and, 'We have lots of fresh fruit to keep us healthy.'

Robust policies and procedures promote and safeguard the welfare of boarders. Staff are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities towards boarders in their care and strong links are maintained with external safeguarding agencies. All staff receive appropriate child protection training and regular updates. Boarders do not identify bullying as a problem in the school and there is a clear understanding by pupils of what they should do if someone is making them unhappy. All boarders are able to identify a number of adults across the school community who they feel confident in speaking to about any worries. Staff are vigilant in their supervision of boarders and have very good knowledge of the individuals in their care and any potential conflicts.

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The standard of behaviour is very high and is based on establishing positive relationships with pupils and communicating clear expectations and routines. Boarders clearly know the daily routines regardless of how many nights they are accommodated. They greatly benefit from this knowledge as it enables them to settle well, increase their confidence and feel safe and secure. A number of boarders spoken with commented, 'We know what to do as staff show us when we first board' and, 'We always know what is happening next as staff talk to us.'

Health and safety matters are taken seriously by the school. Risk assessments, policies and procedures support the maintenance of a safe environment for boarders, staff and visitors. A range of safety matters are discussed with boarders, including keeping safe in the community. For example, one boarder was able to describe how she would ask for help if she become lost in a shop. Sound procedures are in place for the recruitment and checking of staff.

Care staff and the school's residential provision and activities programme strongly contribute to pupils' progress and social development. Excellent opportunities are provided for pupils to develop a range of knowledge and life skills with support from staff, who know pupils well. Pupils are proud of their achievements and particularly enjoy being able to do more things for themselves. Staff actively encourage and support pupils to express their views in relation to the running of the school and boarding provision. Current forums include separate residential and school council meetings, 'I want you to know forms' and direct contact with staff. Pupils report that their ideas are listened to and that they receive feedback. The provision of a common room is being planned as a result of listening to pupils.

Boarding accommodation is pleasantly decorated and furnished, well maintained and clean. Boarders' achievements, art work, group work and house routines are effectively displayed throughout communal areas and provide a welcoming environment. There is a continual programme of refurbishment in place to maintain standards and to improve the accommodation still further. Recent improvements include upgrades to bathrooms and additional single room provision.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The individuality of pupils is recognised and they are provided with individualised programmes of support. Pupils' opinions and suggestions are valued in relation to the running of the school and changes are made as a result of consultation.

The leadership and management of boarding continue to be very strong and effective and contribute highly to the overall outcomes. High expectations are placed on staff in their delivery of care and support to boarders. There is a strong sense of team work across the school community and staff are highly committed to their role. Boarders are looked after by experienced and competent staff, who have a clear understanding of their needs. The low turnover of care staff provides boarders with consistency and stability and promotes positive relationships. The deployment of staff is well planned and effectively managed. This contributes strongly to the progress being made by each boarder. Robust monitoring systems are in place for the effective monitoring of pupils' welfare both internally and by the local authority and the school's governing body.

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National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

- All of the National Minimum Standards have been met

This is the grade for the boarding provision

The effectiveness of the boarding provision	1
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Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire are happy with their child's experience at school. Nearly as many believe their child enjoys school, is kept safe and is helped to have a healthy lifestyle. Most parents think the school is well led and managed. They are happy with the contact they have with the school and the attention given by the school to their suggestions and concerns. There is a close correlation between the positive views expressed by parents and the evidence found by inspectors on the school's effectiveness.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Priory School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 50 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 110 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	20	40	28	56	1	2	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	28	56	19	38	2	4	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	24	48	23	46	1	2	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	46	21	42	4	8	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	31	62	17	34	0	0	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	50	21	42	2	4	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	44	26	52	1	2	1	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	23	46	23	46	1	2	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	66	14	28	2	4	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	46	22	44	2	4	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	42	26	52	1	2	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	29	58	19	38	0	0	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	60	19	38	0	0	1	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be. ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



28 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Priory School, Bury St Edmunds, IP32 7BH

Thank you for your very warm welcome and the great friendliness shown to us during our visit to your school recently.

We also thank all of the students, and the school council, who talked to inspectors and shared their views of the school.

We found that your school is outstanding and we are giving it top marks. This is because of all the hard work done by the headteacher, governors and staff in school and in boarding to make your school as good as it is.

Your school is outstanding also because of your very good attendance, excellent behaviour and your good work in lessons. You are making good progress and gaining good qualifications. You are developing really well as young people and are ready to leave school with much success under your belt.

You really know how to stay safe and what you need to do to stay fit and healthy. All of the interesting and enjoyable work and activities you do in school and in the evenings in boarding teach you important skills that will be useful in the future.

So that your school will continue to get better, I have asked the headteacher to make sure the work you do in lessons stretches you as much and as quickly as possible, because inspectors know most of you can make even greater progress.

You can help by working even harder and being determined to do your very best.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon

Lead Inspector

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