

Priory School

Mountfield Road, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2XN

Inspection dates 25–26 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leaders ensure that students achieve well in the large majority of subjects. Students secure qualifications that enable them to progress to the next stage of their education, work and life.
- The most able students do particularly well. Most go on to study in local sixth form provision. Each year, a few achieve well enough to go to top universities.
- Teaching is usually good and, in many lessons, students cooperate well with teachers to move their learning forward at pace. There are particular strengths in English, the humanities and languages.
- The curriculum is very broad so that students have a rich learning experience. Students also take part in an extensive programme of trips, visits and a very full activities week.
- The headteacher, senior and middle leaders provide good leadership to the school, which is appreciated by staff, students and parents. Governors fully support the headteacher's work.
- Students are articulate and thoughtful. They like to read and explore ideas. Many like to examine the rich diversity of modern Britain and examine the religious beliefs and traditions of others.
- Pastoral care is a strength of the school which is based on a strong set of values. Disadvantaged students and those with special needs are cared for extremely well. The school works tirelessly with those struggling to attend regularly.
- Almost all parents are supportive of the school and the work that it does to enable students to build an individual 'sense of self'.
- The school makes an effective contribution to the personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all its students and excels at developing their creativity and artistry.
- Students behave well and avoid disrupting each other's learning. The vast majority of teachers challenge poor behaviour appropriately.
- The school's work to keep students safe meets statutory requirements; its work on e-safety is exemplary.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Middle attaining students do not do as well as they should, especially in mathematics.
- Students do not always receive written feedback on their work which helps them to improve.
- Leaders, including middle leaders, do not always check with sufficient rigour that all processes and systems are up to date or hold their teams to account robustly. They do not check thoroughly enough the impact of staff training or new initiatives aimed at improving teaching.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 34 parts of lessons. Over half of these were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors also observed a house assembly and a chapel assembly and spent time observing students' work in form time.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, a group of other teachers and representatives of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke by telephone to a representative of the local authority.
- The lead inspector met with a group of six parents, as well as considering over 260 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. The team also considered six letters and a phone call from parents received during the inspection.
- The team considered the views of 39 members of staff, collected through a confidential staff survey.
- Inspectors met with five groups of students and heard a few of them read.
- A full range of the school's documents was reviewed, including its self-evaluation documents and development plan. Inspectors also considered information about students' achievement, letters to parents, samples of reports and minutes of the full governing body and some of its sub-committees.

Inspection team

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Full report

Information about this school

- Priory School, Lewes, is a larger-than-average sized 11 to 16 secondary school.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is just above the national average.
- A much-lower-than-average number of disadvantaged students are eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government).
- The very large majority of students are from White British families and nearly all have English as their first language.
- The school contains a specialist unit for hearing impaired students which is run by the local authority. Currently, the unit caters for six students who have statements of special educational needs and 15 others who have hearing needs.
- A few students each year follow programmes of study at one or other of the school's education partners: College Central, Eastbourne; the Brighton Pupil Referral Unit; Plumpton College; Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Brighton; Avante Garde (hairdressers, Lewes); or Heathercraft Training Academy. The school is planning to extend its alternative provision by opening a Forest School, aimed initially at Year 8 students, in September 2015.
- The headteacher is in a local education trust. The Lewes Cooperative Learning Partnership is a group of schools locally who works together to improve the provision of education in Lewes and outcomes for students.
- The school currently meets the government's minimum floor standards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable middle attaining students, especially in mathematics, to do as well as the most able, by:
 - ensuring that regular, high-quality marking by all teachers provides helpful feedback to students so that they know how to improve their work
 - developing middle leaders' ability to hold teaching staff to account more robustly for the progress of all students in all of their classes.
- Further strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that all processes and systems are effective through:
 - frequent monitoring and evaluation by governors
 - regular review and evaluation by senior leaders
 - clear analysis of the impact of staff training in line with school priorities.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher leads the school well. The vast majority of staff say so. Governors are fully supportive of his work, which they monitor through a rigorous process to manage his performance. The vast majority of parents speak positively about his leadership and a few are able to give close personal testimony to the kindness and care he has shown to them and their sons or daughters.
- Senior leaders support the headteacher's vision and ambition for all students. They encourage all staff to have high expectations for the students.
- Leaders and governors are taking decisive action to reverse the four-year declining trend in results in mathematics. Current in-year student achievement data indicates that their actions are having the required effect.
- The majority of middle leaders manage subjects effectively. Those responsible for leading the pastoral system are highly effective, so that behaviour is improving all the time, attendance is improving and exclusions are reducing. Most middle leaders take an active role in promoting and monitoring highly effective teaching. A few, however, are not sufficiently involved in holding more junior teachers to account for students' progress.
- The checks the school makes on its own performance are secure. The checks it makes on aspects of its procedures are broadly effective, but they are not frequent or rigorous enough, especially with regard to safeguarding matters. The work the school does to keep students safe meets statutory requirements.
- Leaders check teachers' work through regular visits to lessons. They judge teaching against a suitable framework. The outcomes of this monitoring are considered and used to plan focused training for individuals. This process could be sharper and reviewed more regularly so that even more teachers can benefit from training in 'what works'.
- Leaders, including governors, check carefully how additional funding to support disadvantaged students is used, and challenge the school's leaders to ensure that it has maximum impact. They are working to ensure that the gap between disadvantaged students and their classmates continues to close.
- The school makes a very strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students were observed appreciating the musical performance of three students in a chapel assembly. They talk enthusiastically about how they are able to express themselves artistically and in dance and drama. They participate actively in charitable activities, such as Fair Trade week. Although chances are limited locally to engage with the diversity of modern Britain, students themselves are keen to learn about others' lives. Some opportunities are provided for this by overseas educational visits.
- The curriculum is very broad, so that students have a rich learning experience. In Year 7, students are able to sample three languages. They also study classics. Choices at GCSE are equally broad. The Life Skills programme enriches their experience, which is further enhanced by religious studies and critical thinking. This is added to through an extensive list of trips, visits and a very full activities week.
- A commitment to equality of opportunity, underpinned by the values of the school, means that the school closely tracks the attainment and progress of all groups of students. Teachers and leaders act quickly when an individual is found to be underachieving and additional support is provided. Discrimination is not tolerated.
- Students commented that they enjoy discussing ideas and the beliefs, values and traditions of other people in modern Britain. Students, with their families, celebrate local, civic and political traditions associated with important principles like democracy, justice and freedom. The school encourages this wherever it can, thereby supporting students' understanding of fundamental British values. Students have opportunities to exercise leadership and participate in democratic processes.
- Strong partnerships exist with local providers of alternative education, so that the monitoring of students' work and behaviour in these settings is appropriately robust.
- East Sussex County Council provides a small amount of effective professional expertise to the school as the need arises. For example, it has secured the services of a mathematics expert who is currently working with the school to support improvements in that area.
- Independent and effective careers advice is offered from Year 9 onwards so that students can make the correct choices about which subjects to study at GCSE and post-16. Many students, confirmed by parents, commented that senior leaders worked closely with them individually to help make the right decisions. Some students are encouraged not to take up courses that will limit their prospects in the future. The most able students are encouraged to aim high and seek access to appropriate professional occupations.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the school well, and in many areas of work they are highly effective. They visit

regularly and carry out checks on the main systems and processes, such as the work the school does to ensure that students are always safe. However, these checks are not always thorough enough.

Governors are fully aware of the weaker performance in mathematics because they regularly review information about students' achievements and the quality of teaching. They are supporting senior leaders' efforts to reverse the decline in mathematics. Each subject area has an attached governor. The governors review the school's performance each year and ask appropriately challenging questions. Much of their information comes from detailed reports from the headteacher.

- Governors have a good understanding of the school's finances. They have secured additional funding to support some initiatives. They monitor the budget well so that the school has access to the resources it needs.
- Governors are clear that only good performance will be rewarded and they manage this carefully by overseeing the process of managing performance of staff adopted by senior leaders. They support the headteacher in providing focused training to address any weaknesses in teaching.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students generally conduct themselves around the site well. The removal of the lesson change bell has reduced considerably the risk of overcrowding in narrow corridors.
- When students are stimulated and interested they engage with enthusiasm. They show real interest and passion for learning. A class of students looking at modern poetry were truly inspired and, as a result, became passionate about understanding some of the deeper meaning. Students, themselves, commented that when teaching is not so well prepared they lose interest and some get distracted. Inspectors saw this.
- The vast majority of students, parents and staff say that bullying is very rare. All agree that it is dealt with sensitively and fairly. The principle of restorative justice (taking positive actions to put matters right) underpins the school's approach to dealing with bullying.
- Over time, there have been few incidents of a racist or homophobic nature. Students respect each other, and staff, and challenge intolerant behaviour themselves on the rare occasions when it occurs.
- The school maintains a good log of the rewards students receive. The school also tracks any incidents of poor behaviour so that it can analyse any patterns or identify any developing problems.
- The school has taken action recently to reduce the number of excluded students. This has been successful. Previously, the numbers excluded were well above national averages, especially for disadvantaged students and those who are disabled or with special educational needs. The school has worked with families, introduced its own, positive, internal exclusion unit, and formed helpful partnerships with other providers of education. This reduces the need for a small minority of students to miss too much learning.
- Attendance is improving steadily and is now in line with the national average for secondary schools.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- The checks that the school makes on adults working with students are appropriate, but need to be reviewed more regularly.
- The school's work to keep students safe online, known as e-safety, is exemplary. Students know exactly how to stay safe.
- Students receive excellent support when they face challenges in their personal lives. The school's pastoral care is strong and helps to keep students safe. The school's well-planned Life Skills, personal, social, health and critical skills programmes provide students with helpful advice and guidance about issues facing them, such as sexual health and substance misuse. Consequently, students are increasingly able to make positive decisions about their lives.
- The site is well maintained, secure, tidy and free from litter.
- The school monitors effectively the safety, security, attendance and behaviour of all its students educated at its alternative provision partners. Students are equally safe in those settings.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have good subject knowledge for the most part. They communicate it well and create lessons where students can build their knowledge.
- In Year 7, students are beginning to build skills as well as knowledge in lessons. Imaginatively, the school is beginning to report their progress in this aspect of learning alongside reports of students' academic development.
- Many teachers have good relationships with their students. In religious studies and history, for example, students are able to discuss difficult issues in an atmosphere of trust and confidence.
- Students make good or better progress when they receive feedback on their work. Some teachers are adept at asking questions to check students' learning during lessons. Others speak to students individually to check their understanding. Not all provide regular, constructive written feedback on students' work so that too few know exactly what they have to do to improve work. In such cases, this limits the middle and lower attaining students who need more help to progress.
- Teaching is supported by a well-trained group of assistants who carry out their tasks effectively. Those supporting the hearing impaired students, both in the unit and in mainstream lessons, are particularly skilled and contribute to good results for these students.
- Homework is given regularly and supports learning. A range of online tools is available for students so they can study independently or with help from their parents. Parents like this.
- In a range of lessons, students were observed benefiting from teaching that enabled them to engage with issues of right and wrong, such as debates in history about the impact and morality of the First World War. They were encouraged to consider issues of poverty through study of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. They learned about global diversity in geography.
- The school's library is a well-used central resource. It supports the school's effective Stop Talking and Read (STAR) programme and provides access to a wide range of material for students of all ages. Students' literacy is developed continuously in many subjects, with key words and model sentences in evidence in wall displays. Students were observed learning how to structure creative writing in an English lesson.
- Teaching in mathematics is checked regularly and rigorously to ensure that improvements are secured and students' progress begins to speed up. Currently, there is not enough inspiring teaching to enable the most able students to do as well as they should.

The achievement of students is good

- In 2014, the large majority of students in Year 11 eventually secured five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics. This was due to the school giving a large proportion the chance to re-sit their examinations. Senior leaders wanted all students to have the best chance of succeeding.
- The proportion of students achieving this important benchmark was above the national average. Even if the students' results from their first attempt are compared to national averages, the overall performance of the school is still just above average.
- Students also attained well in the creative subjects like art and drama, with better performance than their peers nationally. In history, French and Spanish, results were also strong and above national averages.
- Students generally enter the school having achieved well in primary schools. Nonetheless, in 2014, the proportion who went on to achieve expected progress is only broadly in line with the national average. The proportion who went on to exceed expected levels of progress is well above average. In the current year this pattern is repeated.
- The most able students achieve well, with many doing better than their peers nationally, especially in English, languages and science. The vast majority go on to study A levels at local sixth form provision and a few go on to study at top universities.
- Middle attaining students who entered the school with average attainment did less well in 2014. Fewer exceed the national expectation than those with high prior attainment. There has been little improvement in this measure over time. In English and mathematics, the proportion of this group who make expected progress has declined sharply over the last three years.
- In 2014, the results achieved by students in qualifications not included in performance tables were good. Most students achieved valuable results in religious studies GCSE Short Course and level 2 qualifications in computer use.
- Disadvantaged students generally do not do as well as their classmates achieving, on average, a grade less at GCSE in English and mathematics. However, the gap is beginning to close as a result of current

strong progress. Due to the relatively high starting points, their achievement compares well with their more affluent peers nationally.

- Disabled students and those with special educational needs, especially those supported at school action plus and those supported in the hearing impaired unit, achieve well. Their performance compares favourably to national averages as a result of the effective interventions and support they receive.
- The progress of hearing impaired students is good and has improved in the last year. This is due to more sharply-focused roles for teachers and additional direct training. The school has begun, with Year 11 students, the process of moving those with special educational needs to the new education, health and care plans, in accordance with the 2014 SEN Code of Practice.
- The school will no longer be entering students early for GCSE examinations; but, in 2014, the benefit to the students was an improvement of about 0.8 average points per qualification.
- Students following programmes of study at alternative provision achieve a range of suitable qualifications at level 1, with some going on to be successful at level 2.
- Results in mathematics have been declining over the last four years, with a slight reversal in 2013. Senior leaders, governors and the local authority are aware of this and have put in place a range of actions to reverse this decline. The situation is being monitored closely.
- As a result of their good achievement, only a tiny number of students are not in employment, education or training in the year after they leave school. This compares very well with similar schools in the region.
- Progress in lessons generally supports the good attainment in examinations.
- By the end of their time in school, as well as good academic achievement, students have developed a very strong 'sense of self'.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114598
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	453319

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,159
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pauline Quinton
Headteacher	Anthony Smith
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 May 2010
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