

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



22 March 2018

Mrs Rachel Gibb
Headteacher
The Priory Church of England School
West Bank
Dorking
Surrey
RH4 3DG

Dear Mrs Gibb

Short inspection of The Priory Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 2018 with Taj Bhambra, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in November 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You have gathered an increasingly skilful team of senior leaders to oversee the renewal and updating of the school. You have set about strengthening aspects of the school's work such as teaching, learning and assessment which you had identified as in need of improvement. Leaders have focused their work recently on raising standards and improving pupils' outcomes. The school met the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school in 2015 due to its academic performance. When the school was last inspected, inspectors advised leaders to improve assessment. This had not happened when you took on the headship in September 2016 and it is, therefore, not surprising that the school was judged to be 'coasting'. To be clear, historically, pupils were not making strong progress from their starting points. Disadvantaged pupils continue to make slower progress than their peers. You are fully aware of this.

Other senior leaders share your evaluation, as does the increasingly effective governing body. They know the school's strengths and the remaining areas for improvement. As a team, you are rightly focused on raising standards overall. You are reviewing and remodelling the school's curriculum to make it more relevant for the pupils. This is especially the case for the sixth form. At the moment, 16 to 19 provision elsewhere is perceived as more desirable by many pupils and some parents. You are determined to change this perception.

You are also determined to improve the quality of each pupil's experience in key stages 3 and 4. You are keen that pupils much more regularly benefit from the stronger aspects of the school's work, such as the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in design and technology. In this subject, teachers plan work that relates to pupils' starting points and then extends and challenges them. Teachers can account readily for each pupil's attainment and progress over time. They use information from assessment to hold each other to account. Leaders, in support of the subject leader, are able to track the performance of pupils easily and intervene quickly should it be necessary.

In other subjects, this level of contemporary practice is found less frequently or consistently, particularly in science. In too many subjects, teachers simply do not follow the school's reasonable assessment policy which says, for example, '...the process should make it clear to the student "what they have done well" and "what they need to do to improve".' In some cases, in the samples seen, neither peer, self-, nor teacher assessment had been undertaken. In another, pupils' learning had been reviewed only once this year, despite the requirement for teacher assessment every six weeks, and in another whole-class example incomplete and inaccurate work was left unchallenged or unchecked. Pupils did not know or understand how to improve their work. You were rightly disappointed by inspectors' findings. This reflected the concerns you have raised in the school's self-evaluation. It is clearly an area where you are focusing significant time and energy to rapidly raise standards by holding middle leaders to account.

Similarly, the pitch at which some teaching was being delivered during the inspection was below the level of many of the pupils' existing knowledge, skills and understanding. In some subjects, teaching repeats what pupils have learned earlier in their education or does not address misconceptions that they have developed over time.

We agreed that pupils' conduct is generally good. This has been helped by the successful implementation of a policy to reduce low-level disruption. Pupils behave well in lessons, choosing generally not to distract or disrupt each other's learning, even when teaching is mediocre and uninspiring. The pupils were unfailingly polite and courteous to the team. They embodied the school's Christian values well. The school's contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is one of its strengths. This comes from a historically strong religious education department, strong pastoral care, and an effective programme of personal, social, health, economic, and citizenship education. It is reinforced by the school's commitment to the performing arts, including drama and music. Many pupils access individual music tuition via the school and participate in whole-school performances.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders' work to keep pupils safe is a strength of the school. All administrative processes are completed effectively. Governors review the checks made on anyone wishing to work or volunteer at the school. Governors receive appropriate training and ensure that staff training on safeguarding matters is up to date.

When you joined the school in September 2016, you reviewed the school's safety and safeguarding procedures. You found that the site was too open and unprotected. Pupils confirmed their feelings of insecurity while on site in a few of the responses they made to our survey. Notably, therefore, you have commissioned building works to improve the school's security, which include the installation of electronically controlled front gates. You also ensure that anyone entering the premises is checked carefully at the school's reception. You insist that the side gates are locked at the beginning of the day, once lessons are underway.

Leaders ensure that pupils are provided with good-quality education on how to keep themselves safe, including in relationships and online. Staff are well trained in safeguarding matters. You ensure that training is tailored to particular local needs such as the increased threat of child sexual exploitation and the growing challenge of knife crime. Many pupils receive good-quality support for any well-being or mental health issues. Leaders work effectively with other agencies where this is necessary. The school benefits from good relationships with the police's youth intervention team, the local authority education welfare officer and, where relevant, social services.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, inspectors checked the current quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the progress and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, provision and outcomes in the sixth form, and the overall effectiveness of the curriculum.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not do as well as they should. They lag behind their classmates in all measures. There are considerable gaps between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally. For example, in the 2017 published information about the school, disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 attained an average progress 8 score of -0.68 . This was well below average. The school's overall progress 8 score was -0.02 , which was broadly average. Governors are aware of these differences and justifiably hold you to account for them.
- There is little evidence that teachers take into account systematically the barriers to learning faced by these pupils. The impact of leaders' work to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is not yet seen in published information. This is because the vast majority of teaching is aimed at the whole class, irrespective of individual needs and differences. Teachers, generally, do not check regularly enough that pupils understand what they are supposed to be learning.
- The most able pupils receive less challenge than they should. With some exceptions, mainly in the separate sciences, few attain the highest GCSE grades and even fewer consistently attain the high grades on level 3 academic programmes, which are necessary to access courses in top-class universities. Teachers' often low expectations in some areas of the school put an unhelpful cap on what pupils can achieve.
- Teaching in science is not strong enough. Too few pupils make rapid progress in lessons. This is because tasks set do not promote effective learning. About a fifth

of the most able pupils are taught biology, chemistry and physics separately at GCSE level. In 2017, the value-added scores for pupils studying these subjects at A level were below the national averages. Recruitment to science courses in the last two years reflects the low standards.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the sixth form is half the size of the cohort in the rest of the school. With the newly appointed leader of the sixth form, you are currently reviewing the key stage 5 curriculum to make it more relevant to these pupils' needs. Your review is also intended to make the sixth form sustainable into the longer term and provide a realistic and viable set of 16 to 19 study programmes for all pupils at The Priory.
- There are fewer vocational programmes available than in the past. Your intention is to ensure that the ones that remain are equally valuable and taught well, so that they will be purposeful and beneficial for those who opt to study them.
- Your intended improvements to the quality of the provision are dependent on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You have tried imaginative and creative ways of enabling teachers to understand how their practice affects pupils' relative rates of progress. In a recent professional learning exercise, you asked all staff to peer review a sample of pupils' work. Your report shows that the large majority of the staff who participated in the 'book look' recorded that there was limited evidence of the impact of assessment on pupils' progress, as seen in the randomly-selected sample.
- Intended improvements are also dependent on the quality of subject leadership. Work undertaken by new leaders in English and mathematics is already showing signs of strong impact.
- You are working now on a revised strategy for assessment across the school. You are rightly balancing considerations about teachers' workloads with the need to reset expectations, as set out in part 2 of the teachers' standards. This is so that pupils maximise their one and only chance to succeed in education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching improves in science
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment overall improves quickly by:
 - sharing the strong practice that exists in, for example, design and technology
 - raising teachers' expectations of what each pupil can achieve
 - aligning teaching more fully to age-related expectations and examination specifications
 - resetting minimum expectations for the quality of teachers' assessment
- disadvantaged pupils are supported fully to make rapid and sustained progress over time, leading to strong results.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Guildford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors observed learning across the school by undertaking four lengthy tours. Both inspectors spent time in lessons in science. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors on three of the learning walks. Inspectors took into consideration 136 responses to Parent View and 76 free-text comments. They also met a group of eight parents formally. Inspectors considered 142 responses to Ofsted's confidential pupil survey and met with a group of six Year 10 pupils and a group of five students from Priory6 (the school's sixth form). Inspectors reviewed 52 responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey, met with a group of four teachers at different stages of their careers and spoke with several teachers while touring the school. In addition to meetings with members of the senior leadership team, inspectors reviewed documents relating to the school's work including leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and its current action plan. The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing body and had a telephone call with the school's improvement partner.