

Priestley Smith School

Perry Beeches Campus, Beeches Road, Birmingham, B42 2PY

Inspection dates 28–29 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- An exceptional headteacher and strong senior leadership team are ably supported by ever vigilant governors. Together they ensure that all pupils have the best possible opportunities to succeed in every aspect of their learning.
- Pupils achieve extremely well because staff have expert knowledge in their subjects. They know how to promote the learning of pupils who have visual impairment extremely well. The most able achieve as well, and sometimes better, in their GCSEs and A levels as all other pupils nationally.
- Excellent technological support ensures pupils have ready access to the specialist equipment that they need to learn. Pupils become highly skilled in using it.
- Outstanding skills programmes ensure pupils are extremely well prepared for their next steps in education as well as for life in modern Britain. These include courses in personal and social understanding, mobility and independent living. Pupils hugely value the independence they gain from them.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They thrive from early years to sixth form in an environment that nurtures their confidence and teaches them to value and respect everyone's different talents and backgrounds. This means their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.
- Early years' children make outstanding progress because the staff work so closely with families even before they arrive in school. Children feel confident and safe to 'have a go' and explore their environment because they trust their teachers.
- All pupils feel extremely safe in the school. Leaders are meticulous in carrying out all the checks they should to ensure this. There are excellent programmes in place that enable pupils themselves to consider risks and keep themselves safe in school and in their communities.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve particularly well. The school leaves no stone unturned in helping them to settle in and to acquire English as rapidly as possible.
- Teaching is outstanding because the leadership and management check on this rigorously and provide staff with excellent opportunities to improve their skills even more. Close partnerships with other schools support staff and the leadership in improving the school further.
- Governors are extremely knowledgeable about every aspect of the school's work. They constantly challenge the school to achieve even more.
- The sixth form has developed extremely well since the last inspection and is also outstanding. Courses are individually tailored to allow each student to excel. Students leave confident that they can succeed in whatever they have chosen to do next.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 19 lessons or parts of lessons, and were accompanied by the headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team for almost all of these visits.
- Discussions took place with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, five members of the governing body, support staff, sixth form students and pupils from other year groups, including the school council. The inspectors also talked with a representative of the local authority, the school's improvement adviser and specialist staff such as the senior mobility officer and Braille teacher.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including the school's own evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, its development planning and how it provides for all of pupils' identified needs. A range of other documentation was examined, including those relating to pupils' behaviour, the ways the school keeps pupils' safe, how the school checks on pupils' progress and the ways in which it keeps parents informed about this.
- Forty-three questionnaires completed by staff members were considered. There were insufficient responses completed by parents on Parent View, the online government survey. The school's recent parental survey, individual testimonies from parents and the school's own pupil survey were considered in order to ascertain parents' views further.

Inspection team

Susan Lewis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mark Emly

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a special school for pupils from nursery age through to the sixth form. All pupils have significant visual impairments and the large majority are registered as blind. Six children attend the nursery and Reception class (the Foundation Department), including one who attends part time.
- Almost two thirds of pupils have additional needs such as autistic spectrum disorders, social and emotional needs, moderate learning difficulties and medical needs. All students have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan, or are in the process of being assessed for one.
- The large majority of pupils are from Birmingham, although others come from nearby local authorities such as Wolverhampton, Solihull and Coventry. Most travel by taxi or minibus to school. A few older students travel independently.
- A high proportion of students, almost half, are supported by the pupil premium. This is the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, which are those eligible for free school meals or looked after.
- Four fifths of pupils are from backgrounds other than White British. The largest group are from Pakistani and other Asian heritages. An increasing proportion are from Eastern Europe. A very high proportion, almost two thirds of all pupils, speak other languages as their main language; many are at the early stages of learning English when they enter the school.
- Priestley Smith is part of a teaching alliance with other Birmingham mainstream and special schools. Member schools support each other through reviewing the quality of each other's work and providing staff training.
- About a third of children join the school in the Foundation Department or in Year 7. Over two thirds join at other times during their school-aged years, sometimes as late as Years 10 or 11, as well as in the sixth form. Almost a quarter of pupils transfer from Priestley Smith back into mainstream schools and colleges or into other special schools, particularly at the end of Year 11 but occasionally at other times in their school career.
- The school hosts the local authority mobility, reprographics and visual impairment technology services. It also provides an outreach service to other schools and families in conjunction with the local authority sensory support service.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision for its pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the excellent start made in assessing and tracking pupils' progress within the new curriculum arrangements so that it is secure in all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- An exceptional headteacher, ably supported by her leadership team, has created an ethos in which all are determined that every child matters and will succeed. Leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, have the highest expectations of themselves and of pupils. They work tirelessly with their specialist teams and technicians to ensure every pupil has the resources that they need to enable them to achieve their best.
- The leadership of teaching is outstanding. Staff performance is carefully reviewed and linked to pupils' progress. Staff are very clear as to how they contribute to school improvement, fulfilling their individual responsibilities very well. All aspects of the school's work, including the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour, are outstanding and continue to improve.
- Very strong assessment and monitoring systems are in place. Information gained about pupils is carefully compared with nationally published data. Ambitious targets are set for each individual, for groups and the school. Leaders check frequently on how every pupil is doing and are swift to intervene if anyone is not making the progress they should. Specific assessments track further how well pupils are doing in their reading and in their use of specialist equipment.
- The school's curriculum has been reviewed in line with the new arrangements. Excellent new assessments have been devised linked to this, particularly for areas known to present difficulty for visually impaired pupils. These include writing and the use of technology. Middle managers and senior leaders are now focused on ensuring new assessments for other subjects will be of a similarly high calibre.
- The school provides an excellent balance of subjects and themes for pupils to study. Qualifications and options are carefully chosen in collaboration with secondary-aged and sixth form students to build on their strengths. Each has their own personalised programme, sometimes including subjects that are unique to them. For example, German rather than French was taken successfully by some students last year, one achieving a grade A in GCSE.
- School leaders, including governors, know the school's strengths extremely well and are determined it will be even better. They draw extremely well on colleagues within the teaching alliance to check and review the school's work, including the ways in which it meets pupils' special educational needs.
- Excellent links with other agencies ensure that pupils have any additional resources and support that they need, whether for transition to their next educational placement or while they are at the school. This includes specialist career support and impartial advice to enable them to make the right choices about their futures.
- Leaders are ever vigilant in ensuring safeguarding requirements are met and highly effective, and that pupils and their families understand how risks might be managed. Attendance is monitored rigorously and has improved considerably. It is now close to that of other schools nationally, even though many pupils have additional medical needs.
- Leaders have ensured that all groups of pupils have access to the full range of learning opportunities available. All groups achieve equally well, including those eligible for the pupil premium. The one-to-one help such pupils receive in carefully identified activities supports their academic achievement and personal well-being very well. Equality is extremely well promoted and diversity celebrated through the wealth of opportunities pupils have to learn about British values and beliefs, their own cultures and that of others. This prepares them very well for life in modern Britain. Pupils from different backgrounds and heritages also achieve equally well.
- The primary physical education and sport premium is used effectively to provide a range of sports that meet pupils' mobility and physical needs. These develop very well indeed pupils' spatial awareness, their health and fitness, and their participation in and enjoyment of sports.

- The mobility service and outreach service are valued enormously by parents, pupils and other schools. Sixth form and Key Stage 4 students are clear that they would not have achieved as much without mobility support and the technical resources that promote their reading, writing and learning in school and at home.
- The local authority recognises the school's achievements. It provides support, for example, for governance where appropriate. It carries out an annual performance review, checking carefully that the school is maintaining its high standards. It provides support relating to pupils' additional learning needs, such as hearing impairment.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governance of the school is outstanding. The governing body is hugely committed to the work of the school and very involved in monitoring its work and evaluating its outcomes. Governors have a highly relevant range of skills and experience that benefit the school, including within its specialist field of visual impairment.
 - Governors fully understand how the performance of staff is managed and evaluated, and the relationship between teachers' pay, pupils' progress and pay progression. They have an excellent understanding of the quality of teaching and know what the school would do if there was any underperformance. They hold the school to account very well, making sure, for example, that materials for parents on the school website are jargon free so that parents can easily understand them.
 - Governors ensure that the school's finances are prudently managed and that all safeguarding requirements are met. They have a very good understanding of child protection procedures. Governors have ensured that pupils have all the resources that they need to succeed, including up-to-date technology.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This is true in all key stages including the Foundation Department. Behaviour is so good because staff have very high expectations and convey these to pupils. The youngest children learn to celebrate each other's successes and wait patiently for their turn, listening carefully to their teachers even when they find this hard.
- Attitudes to learning are exceptional. Pupils say this is because they 'want to learn' and 'do things for ourselves'. They also say they know their teachers value and respect them. Older pupils talk sensitively about the importance of recognising difference and yet how 'we are all the same'. They relish the opportunity to take responsibility for aspects of school life, through the buddy system or through fundraising. Pupils' eagerness to learn is evident when they work together in pairs as well as with their teachers.
- Pupils demonstrate great pride in their work and in their achievements. They ask inspectors to look at the art work and see how 'amazing' is some of the older students' work. They view their school as 'a family', where everything is organised to help them learn. Contacts with other schools, residential experiences, visits and visitors prepare pupils extremely well for next steps and life in modern Britain as they learn to 'get on with people'.
- A small number of pupils arrive at the school with histories of poor attendance. Others have been excluded from previous schools because of their challenging behaviour. Skilled and consistent management of these pupils' behaviour means that almost all make a rapid improvement once they have settled in. There have been no permanent exclusions, and fixed term exclusions are extremely rare. Incident logs reveal these rare occurrences are meticulously and appropriately recorded, managed and reflected upon.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. An excellent personal, social and emotional development programme ensures that pupils' emotional well-being, as well as their physical safety, is a priority. Dangers, such as those related to extremist views, are explored, and tolerance and respect celebrated. This all contributes to pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural

development, as well as to their safety and understanding of life in modern British society.

- Students have a very good understanding of the dangers of social media and how to protect themselves from these. They are very well supported to understand risk, including that linked to independent travel as visually impaired people. They learn to handle equipment carefully in their lessons and show great care and safety awareness as they move around the school.
- The school is ever vigilant in ensuring that risks have been carefully assessed before pupils take part in activities or go off- site. They also ensure that pupils are very well prepared for their future lives by giving them many opportunities and strategies to become confident within their environment. Mobility officers, for example, support families and their children so that risks can be assessed at home and in the community, and pupils therefore can meet friends and travel as independently as possible.
- Pupils say that there is no bullying, but that they have total confidence staff would deal with this fairly if it did occur. They have a very good understanding of different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, because the school is very active in exploring these.
- The school's own surveys and inspectors' discussions with parents show that parents agree that the school keeps their children extremely safe.
- All safeguarding and health and safety requirements are met and meticulously recorded, including those for the early years. There are appropriately qualified first aiders in place and due attention is paid to fire regulations. Very close working with other agencies secures pupils' safety and well-being further, including their mental health.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding because staff are so skilled at promoting each pupil's learning. Staff have a detailed understanding of the pupils they teach and of how to promote the learning of pupils who have a visual impairment. They also convey a love of their subjects that inspires pupils to learn. The youngest children, for example, enjoy the songs and rhymes that help them to understand class routines. They giggle and laugh as their teachers change the words and are excited to hear what they might do today.
- Teachers are particularly skilled at extending pupils' language and ideas, whether building on the child's smallest communication in the Foundation Department or ensuring that students use and understand the correct subject vocabulary in the Secondary Department. This excellent support for language development underpins the exceptional progress of many pupils who are learning English as an additional language.
- The teaching of reading and writing is outstanding. All staff have received phonics training (the ways in which sounds relate to letters). Every opportunity is taken to help pupils break down or work out the meaning of unfamiliar words. Spelling is also systematically supported. Excellent use of technology and of specialist approaches, such as the use of Braille and Moon, mean that each pupil uses the approach that best helps them to make progress. School data show pupils' phonic awareness to be improving.
- Pupils make excellent progress in their reading and writing skills because staff have such strong specialist skills in enabling pupils with visual impairments to read and write and help them to apply these skills in other subjects. The new curriculum provides many opportunities for such skills to be practised. Staff provide excellent spoken feedback to pupils, and through marking, about how well they are doing and how to improve their work further.
- The teaching of mathematics is similarly outstanding. Staff find highly creative ways of exploring mathematical concepts with younger pupils, for example helping them to understand concepts of size and shape through practical exploration and discussion. In subjects other than mathematics, such as food technology, older students applied their mathematical ideas as they made cakes and weighed out ingredients, working out the costs per cake so they could sell them for charity. The most-able students receive very skilled individual support in mathematics that enables them to excel from starting points, achieving GCSE A and B passes early, for example, in Year 9. The introduction of a statistics course then

challenges them further.

- Teachers give particularly strong explanations that hold pupils' attention very well indeed, as in a Key Stage 4 history lesson discussing the work of Louis Pasteur. Students were captivated by the teacher's enthusiasm for his subject and showed an excellent grasp of their previous learning about medicine throughout the ages, as they volunteered ideas.
- Teachers' effective use of questioning is a strength. In a Key Stage 3 mathematics lesson the teacher probed and checked students' understanding effectively so that students were enabled to build on what they already knew and work out answers for themselves. Teachers also make excellent use of the information that they hold about pupils' progress in their subjects to plan work that is almost always pitched just at the right level of challenge for both the most able and those who have more complex needs.
- Pupils throughout the school make such excellent progress in all subjects because of the individual attention they receive from support staff and teachers. Staff work extremely well together in teams, knowing just how much help to give so that pupils can work things out for themselves, such as working out the meaning of a new spelling.
- Homework is used to very good effect to challenge pupils to find out more about a topic or to consolidate something introduced in class. The school works hard to ensure that pupils have all the technological resources they need at home to enable them to complete their work. Braille and large print books and materials are made freely available so that pupils can read as widely as possible.
- Pupils who have additional learning or medical needs are very well supported by staff that have been well trained to understand their needs. As a result, all groups learn very well over time and are fully included. Teachers have excellent behaviour management skills and use humour in particular to keep pupils involved, contributing and rising to challenges in lessons. Group work is also used very well so that two students, for example in a computing lesson, are able to answer questions that neither would have been able to answer alone.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- When children enter the school in the Foundation Department their skills are almost always well below those typical of other children of their age, because of the nature of their learning needs. This is particularly so in communication, early literacy, knowledge of the world and physical development. However, skilled use of routines and expert teaching mean that children rapidly start to make gains in these areas. Consequently, the gap in their attainment with other children of their age is narrowing by the end of the Reception year and continues to narrow as they move through Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Individual pupils attain closer to others of their age by the end of Year 6, particularly in mathematics and in reading, and in their personal development and self-help skills.
- Pupils who transfer into the school during their primary or secondary years usually also enter with skills well below those of others of their age. However, school data and inspectors' observations, analysis of work and of pupils' records show that pupils make outstanding progress.
- Almost all pupils make better than the expected progress from their different starting points, including those with additional needs. They make outstanding progress in mathematics, reading and writing, as well as in their speaking and listening skills and personal development. Pupils are articulate, confident young people by the time that they leave, looking forward to the next stage of their education or training.
- In Key Stages 3 and 4, students take a range of options including functional skills qualifications that challenge each at their own level. The most able take a range of GCSEs including mathematics and English, science, business studies, art, history and languages, achieving good grades. Some have already gained the higher grades in GCSE mathematics. Other students take Entry level qualifications which they then build on to take higher qualifications in the sixth form, including functional skills qualifications. Students make outstanding progress in mathematics and English because these skills are systematically

supported and developed. The school provides them with resources that enable them to practise their skills at home.

- Music and art are developed to a high level with many students taking grades in music. Some develop their musical skills to the level at which they count towards their University place. The school nurtures individuals' talents whether in sports (as through the judo club and paralympic links) or for specific languages such as German.
- Those pupils who are learning English as an additional language often make exceptional progress. This is because the school provides an interpreter and one-to-one support to enable each pupil to settle and to learn to use the resources available to support their learning.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- Children's achievement in the Foundation Department is outstanding, because staff have a deep understanding of how young children learn and how best to promote the learning of children who have a visual impairment. They are very well prepared to start Year 1.
- Excellent relationships are formed with families and children before the child attends the school. These help children to settle quickly into school and to be prepared to have-a-go at new experiences, when usually they would be wary. Families have access to much essential information at this time which helps them to understand and provide for their child's needs.
- Teaching is outstanding. Staff keep careful records of children's small but highly significant steps of progress and share these readily with parents. These records show the strides that children make over their time in Foundation and the wealth of rich learning experiences they have indoors and outdoors. These cover all the required areas of learning but appropriately emphasise personal and social development, physical development and communication, mathematics and literacy.
- Music and songs help children to understand class routines and inspire them to listen. There is a great sense of fun in the classroom, but children are also encouraged to persist when the learning is more difficult. Children celebrate each others' achievements and begin to listen to each other as well as their teacher, laying sound foundations for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leadership and management of the early years provision are outstanding. Leaders have ensured that children make excellent progress and their safety and well-being is a priority. All the required welfare arrangements are in place. The Foundation Department is a calm, nurturing environment in which children's behaviour is outstanding. They feel safe to learn and explore, which supports their emotional development extremely well.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The sixth form offers a range of very high quality provision for students who are not yet ready to transfer to mainstream colleges at the end of Year 11. Students' achievements on entry to the sixth form are wide ranging. A few have achieved higher level passes at GCSE. Others, because of their additional learning needs and challenges, have Entry level qualifications at the lower levels. Whatever their starting points, sixth form data, examination results and students' work confirm that students achieve outstandingly well.
- The sixth form is very well led and managed. Sixth form staff are adept at identifying with students just the right course for them that builds on their current achievements and helps them to aim high. The curriculum draws extremely well on college and school links to ensure that students have the right courses that challenge them and set them up very well for future education and careers. Some, who have not taken GCSE in Year 11, now do so successfully; others achieve Functional skills courses and higher-level Entry level than previously. The most able take A level qualifications, gaining good grades that enable them to go to the University of their choice. They achieve so well because the teaching is outstanding and very well-tailored to their needs and next steps.

- Students' behaviour is outstanding and students have excellent attitudes to learning. They grow remarkably in confidence and social skills during sixth form because the courses they take bring them into contact with others at college and in their work placements. Work placements and careers guidance are highly valued by students, as is the support given to enable them to live more independently in their home communities. As one indicated 'that is the real world and the school prepares us well for it. We know how to approach sighted people and how to get along with everyone.'

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	103614
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	449792

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Denise McManus
Headteacher	Helen Porter
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2012
Telephone number	0121 325 3900
Fax number	0121 325 3902
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