

Priory Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109436
Local Authority	Bedford
Inspection number	356542
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Marion Wallace

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	159
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Roger Stokes
Headteacher	Anita Hemsley
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 21 lessons taught by seven teachers. They held meetings with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at its improvement plan and those of subject departments, minutes of governing body meetings, pupils' work, assessment information and curriculum planning. In addition, 79 parental questionnaires were received and analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The progress of pupils who join the school other than at the usual time.
- The provision and progress of more-able pupils, especially in reading.
- The progress of girls in Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The provision and progress of pupils identified with school action special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Information about the school

Priory Lower School is a small primary school situated in the centre of Bedford. The very large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and the predominant group is Bangladeshi. The percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above average and a small minority of pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average, but the percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. Mobility is very high and many pupils join and leave other than at the usual times. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision is in a Nursery unit and a Reception class. Nine languages are spoken in the Nursery and a very small minority speak English as their first language. The school has achieved the Basic Skills Award, Healthy School Award and the International Schools Award. There is a children's centre adjoining the school site. This provision is not managed by the school's governing body and was not inspected by the team.

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

Priory is an outstanding school. Pupils of all abilities and from a wide range of backgrounds achieve well. The school is extremely popular with parents, carers and pupils who appreciate and acknowledge the high quality care and exciting learning opportunities. One parent summed up the views of the vast majority saying: 'Brilliant! Priory is an excellent school, children are extremely happy and well behaved; they thoroughly enjoy learning. The teachers are fantastic.' Pupils were equally enthusiastic about their school saying, 'We love our school and learning especially maths, literacy, science, information and communication technology (ICT), art and history.' Pupils new to this country commented on how well the school has helped them to understand and speak English.

These are the key strengths of the school.

Pupils make excellent gains in their personal development because relationships are extremely strong and the school ethos is very warm and welcoming.

Progress is good because the quality of teaching and learning is good or better.

The provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and ensures all children make a positive start to their education.

Care, guidance and support are extremely strong, so pupils behave superbly well and are sensible and enthusiastic learners. The learning mentor supports pupils who need additional help very well.

The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils extremely well and consequently they develop very positive attitudes to their learning.

The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well and is passionate about providing high quality care and learning environment.

Excellent links with the local community and external agencies contribute very effectively to the provision. External agencies appreciate the unique effectiveness of the school referring to 'Priory magic' because the school does 'such an amazing job' helping so many children and their families.

Community cohesion is outstanding at school, local, national and international level.

These are the key areas to develop.

Although attendance has improved a lot it could be even better if families did not take extended breaks and holidays in term time.

While increasing numbers of pupils are reaching the expected levels at both key stages in reading, not many pupils reach the higher levels.

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There is an excellent commitment from all staff to provide each pupil with the very best possible education and a continual drive for improvement. Equality of opportunity and the elimination of discrimination are pursued determinedly. The school's highly effective systems for evaluating the strengths and areas for development are playing their part in helping the school's leaders to continually raise standards, despite many barriers to learning. The school's excellent organisation and strong, shared vision demonstrate its outstanding capacity to continue moving forward.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the levels of attendance to above average by working more closely with parents and carers to reduce holidays and long-term leave during term time.
- By February 2012 increase the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading at Key Stage 1 to 20% and at Key Stage 2 to 35% through ensuring that teachers use assessment information more rigorously to plan challenging reading tasks for more-able pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

From very low starting points, pupils reach broadly average standards by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 4. Progress is good or better for all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who join the school other than at the usual time often with no or very little English. In previous years, the school identified that girls in Year 2 were not making as much progress as boys in reading, writing and mathematics. This has now been addressed and there are now no significant gaps between girls and boys. Excellent relationships contribute to the very positive climate for learning. In an excellent Year 2 literacy lesson, all pupils made outstanding progress because they were inspired to search for interesting words to describe a character. One pupil wrote, 'She has hair that shines like the sun, she is gorgeous and pretty.' More-able pupils used dictionaries well to find ambitious words and to check spellings. Good challenge continues throughout the school and Year 4 pupils use descriptive words, such as 'gruesome' and 'repulsive', to describe their characters.

Pupils take a pride in their work which is neatly presented and handwriting skills are well developed. The school's tracking and the inspection evidence indicates all pupils are on course to reach or exceed their challenging targets. Excellent outcomes are contributing well to pupils' economic well-being. Pupils work extremely well in teams and develop an excellent work ethic. They really enjoy learning because lessons are very well planned and teachers create an exciting climate for learning. Pupils in Years 2, 3 and 4 have targets for literacy and numeracy and they know them well. There is a strong focus on key skills and teachers seize every opportunity to encourage the pupils to articulate their ideas and develop their language skills. While pupils achieve very well in their writing, numeracy and ICT skills, opportunities to challenge more-able pupils in their reading skills are less well developed. As a result, more-able pupils do not achieve as well in independently understanding meaning from text.

Pupils behave extremely well because they thoroughly enjoy coming to school. Attendance is average and improving; it is however, adversely affected by extended leave and holidays in term time. Pupils say they feel extremely safe and they can discuss any problems they have with adults. Pupils have a good knowledge of what constitutes a

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healthy lifestyle, selecting healthy options from the school lunches and attending the wide range of activities such as multi-skills. They make an excellent contribution to their school and local community. All children learn to be responsible and enjoy opportunities to be class monitors and playground buddies. The school council is very well organised and pupils plan, organise and run events to raise money for charities, for example, a cake sale for Oxfam and local homeless. Pupils made and sold the cakes, counted the money and paid it into the local bank.

Pupils have excellent awareness of other cultures, ethnicities and religions because the school celebrates and acknowledges the different ethnicities within the school. There is a real joy in celebrating the many languages within the school. The school are proud of links with schools in China, Poland, Germany and Shillington, a small village school in rural Bedfordshire. Visits to the local Gurdwara, Mosque and churches make a valuable contribution to pupils understanding. During an 'Open Book' assembly, pupils were captivated by the story of Lazarus and how Jesus helped him to regain life. They reflected sensitively when challenged to consider how they would help others during the day.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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

How effective is the provision?

The large majority of lessons observed during the inspection were at least good or better, and teaching and learning over time have been good. Teachers use assessment information well to plan work that matches the needs of all pupils, more-able pupils and

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different groups are challenged well in most aspects of their work. Teachers use a range of methods and strategies to incite learning. For example, in a Year 1 science lesson pupils gained a good understanding of darkness and light for their age because they were able to explore how shadows were made and explore light boxes and light tubes. Teachers use questions effectively to check pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils enjoy well-planned opportunities to discuss their ideas with others; for example, in a Year 3 history lesson pupils talked enthusiastically to their partner about things that came from China. In a Year 4 mathematics lesson, pupils were challenged to respond to mental oral questions in German.

Teachers give good oral feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. Marking is regular but does not always challenge pupils to improve their work. Teaching assistants support pupils with additional needs and those who speak no or little English very well, so they make the same good progress as others.

The curriculum is extremely well planned and matched to the needs of all groups of pupils. The very strong personal and social education programme assists pupils' outstanding personal development. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are used superbly well in other subjects. Year 4 pupils used the computer to research myths and legends from Bedfordshire and countries such as Poland. They use their literacy skills well to plan the content of a film they are going to create. Curriculum enrichment is excellent and there is a wide range of clubs and activities which are popular and well attended. Recent visits include Bedford Museum, a butterfly farm, Whipsnade Zoo and Warwick Castle. High quality art work results from pupils working with an artist in residence who has fired imagination and raised expectations in art. Excellent paintings of flowers and big paintings inspired by emotions such as happiness are attractively displayed.

The extremely caring ethos results in very happy pupils who thoroughly enjoy school life. Pupils' needs are central to the work of the school and all adults effectively help children, parents and carers to get the best from learning by excellent communication. The school works extremely well with external agencies to support all pupils in need of help. Induction and transition arrangements for children entering the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage and when moving on to other schools are excellent.

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?

The headteacher's excellent leadership and management skills have permeated through the school. These are the key reasons for the continual improvements, good progress and high-quality learning environment. Outstanding leadership has enabled significant

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improvement in the use and provision of ICT and this is reflected in improved pupil progress and staff effectiveness. Senior leaders have encouraged a culture of self-challenge and review for all staff this has resulted in a high quality learning environment and consistently good or better achievement for all pupils. The headteacher's ability has been recognised by the local authority and she supports headteachers locally. There is extremely strong, enthusiastic commitment from all staff to provide each pupil with the best possible education. Leaders have a very thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and they communicate their ambition extremely well. Middle leaders observe and evaluate learning regularly in their area of responsibility. The headteacher is dedicated to making sure pupils achieve their best and that staff bring high-quality expertise to their work. Pupils' work is monitored rigorously. The headteacher leads the school with quiet competence and compassion, valuing the work of others and encouraging staff and pupils to take responsibility for their actions.

The governing body ably supports staff and challenges the school well to ensure school improvement initiatives are successful. Governors monitor and evaluate the work of the school effectively and are well organised. Tracking of progress over time is very thorough and senior leaders quickly identify any dips in standards and swiftly put strategies and interventions in place to promote improvement. Appropriate developmental areas to further improve the effectiveness of the school are clearly identified in the school improvement plan.

The school promotes equalities expertly, ensuring that there is no discrimination between different groups. This is reflected in the consistently good or better progress of all groups of pupils, including those who enter the school at different points and who join the school with no or very little English. All safeguarding procedures and checks on adults are robust. Child protection, risk assessment and safeguarding procedures meet current statutory requirements and represent examples of good quality practice. Risk assessments for the building and visits are extensive and detailed. The cultural diversity of the school is highly valued and, consequently, the promotion of community cohesion is superb because pupils develop an excellent understanding of the school and local community for their age. Excellent partnership links with local schools and various support agencies contribute to the school's excellent provision. Inmates at Bedford prison built a sound shed for the Nursery and students at University of Bedfordshire contribute to sporting activities.

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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
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle extremely well into the Nursery and Reception classes because links with parents, carers and the local community are excellent. Most children join the Nursery class with exceptionally low skills and experiences for their age. A significant number of children enter Reception with no pre-school experience and speaking little or no English. Children make good progress in both the Nursery and Reception class in all areas of learning but overall standards are well below average when children enter Year 1, particularly in linking sounds and letters and using numbers as labels for counting.

Progress is outstanding in their personal, social and emotional development and behaviour is excellent. Relationships are extremely strong and consequently children make excellent progress in their personal development. Children make good progress in their speaking and communication skills because teachers encourage them to respond to individual questions and to talk about their ideas. Personal aspects of care and welfare are exemplary and this contributes to a very positive start. Staff provide interesting activities and children have good opportunities to learn through activities led by adults and those they choose for themselves. Good teaching, good links with parents and carers and extremely well-planned induction arrangements contribute successfully to children's enjoyment of school. Opportunities for using the outdoor area to enhance all areas of learning are well developed. Most activities are fun and challenging. In the Nursery, children cut up their own apples, pears and carrots for their morning snack and their skills improved noticeably as they did this. They are encouraged to develop independence pouring their own milk onto cereal snacks. Nursery children make good progress in learning to say and identify body parts through singing games. Occasionally, opportunities for mark-making and writing are missed. Children in Reception learn to cooperate with each other extremely well e.g. when building 'The Great Wall of China.'

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Provision for children new to this country is excellent and they make superb progress because of the quality of support they receive. The provision is well led and managed.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

There were 79 responses from parents and carers; this is a very good response for a school of this size. Most parents and carers are extremely happy with the school. They feel it is very welcoming and friendly. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers say that their children enjoy attending and a very large majority say their children make good progress. Parents and carers regard the school as extremely caring and supportive and say the staff are approachable. Parents and carers were unanimous in saying the school provides a very safe learning environment. They identify a number of strengths in the school including: the good quality of teaching and learning; the good progress all pupils make; the excellent care and support for pupils and families who are new to this country; relationships with staff; the school ethos; the children's enjoyment; and the outstanding leadership and management of the school. There were very few criticisms from parents and carers. Inspection findings confirmed the many positives expressed by parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Priory Lower 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 79 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 159 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	54	68	25	31	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	56	70	24	30	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	43	54	30	38	4	5	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	42	53	35	43	3	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	44	55	35	43	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	41	51	37	46	3	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	46	41	51	3	4	0	0
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)	29	36	42	53	0	0	3	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	46	35	43	5	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	41	38	48	4	5	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	38	39	49	2	3	4	5
The school is led and managed effectively	35	43	33	41	4	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	50	35	43	0	0	1	1

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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:	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 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 pupils' 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.



18 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Priory Lower School, Bedford, MK40 1JD

Thank you all very much for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking with you and your teachers. We will remember how extremely polite and considerate you all were and how well you all behaved. A number of you and your parents and carers told us that Priory Lower is an excellent school, and we agree. These are the things we found that your school does well.

You get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception and continue to make good progress through the school. You reach standards by the end Year 4 that are broadly average.

You all enjoy learning immensely and your teachers are very good.

Your behaviour is excellent and you are extremely sensible and know how to keep safe.

You really enjoy and benefit from the many fun activities, clubs, visitors and visits, such as trips to Bedford Museum and Warwick Castle.

Those of you who join the school other than at the usual time or who speak very little or no English settle in extremely well and make good progress.

Your school cares for you extremely well and teaches you a lot about how to be healthy and to care for others.

Your knowledge of different languages and other countries is excellent.

Your headteacher and all the staff work very well together as a team to make sure that the school is a very safe and secure, fun place to learn.

These are the things we have identified for staff and governing body to improve.

Your attendance has improved a lot but it can be even better if you avoid taking holidays and long term leave in term time.

Help those who can do more challenging work to reach higher levels in reading.

Thank you for a very enjoyable and memorable visit to your school and best wishes for your future. You can all help by continuing to work really hard.

Yours sincerely

Marion Wallace

Lead inspector

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