

# Priory Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109647
<b>Local Authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	356597
<b>Inspection dates</b>	22–23 September 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joan Hewitt HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	471
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Anne Cavendish
<b>Headteacher</b>	Keith Scotchford
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 July 2008
<b>School address</b>	Britain Street Dunstable LU5 4JA
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors, including one who focused for half a day on the school's provision for safeguarding pupils. Inspectors observed 20 teachers teaching 21 lessons and also made a series of brief lesson visits focusing on students' levels of engagement. Meetings were held with groups of staff, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and the governor responsible for safeguarding. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including policies, data and analyses, records of the school's monitoring and minutes of the governing body. They also considered questionnaires completed by 217 parents, 79 pupils and 11 members of staff.

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

- the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels in raising achievement, especially in English and their capacity for further improvement
- the quality of teaching in consistently meeting the needs of all groups of pupils, especially boys, the most able and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds in promoting independent learning
- the quality and accuracy of leaders' work in monitoring the school's performance to secure clear and sustained improvement.

## Information about the school

The Priory Middle School is a smaller than average school. Most pupils are of White British heritage although many other ethnic groups are represented, the highest number being of Caribbean heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who have a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average. The school has achieved a number of awards including National Healthy Schools Status and Sportsmark.

**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?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

Priory is a happy school that provides a sound and improving education for pupils in its care. Leaders and managers have introduced some good developments since the last inspection and these have resulted in improvements to pupils' achievements and in the care offered to them. The most obvious improvement can be seen in pupils' much improved achievement at the end of Year 8. Other outcomes including pupils' development as caring and involved citizens have also improved. Good features in the school's pastoral care and its curriculum have been strengthened too. These developments along with the school's accurate self-evaluation demonstrate that the school's capacity to secure further improvement is good.

Attainment at the end of Year 8 has risen so that in 2010 pupils levels of attainment were above those found nationally. In mathematics the standards of attainment were high. The quality of learning is satisfactory and improving, although pupils' progress varies across year groups and subjects. The school's leaders and managers are acutely aware of these variations. They have had some success in addressing this unevenness, for example results improved in English at Key Stage 2 so that standards were close to the national average. The headteacher, ably supported by his senior team, has introduced a rigorous tracking system to identify underachievement and act swiftly to intervene effectively for individuals and different groups. Consequently, these differences are being ironed out quickly and by the time pupils leave in Year 8 this uneven progress has reduced for many, including boys at Key Stage 2. However, leaders and managers do not systematically seek the views of students about their learning and this means that lessons do not always meet the needs of all groups of pupils, particularly the most able. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall as do those pupils from minority ethnic heritages. Those with a statement of special educational needs and those who benefit from additional in-class support make good progress because they receive good quality support.

The care, support and guidance the school offers its pupils is strong because pupils are known as individuals and staff make effective use of well-developed partnerships with outside agencies and other schools. Pupils say there is always an adult they can talk to when they feel worried or upset. Most pupils feel safe but a few express anxieties about occasional name calling. The school takes this seriously and takes effective action to address such incidents when they occur.

Just over half of the teaching observed by inspectors was good, with lessons that provided interesting activities that engaged and enthused pupils. However, too much teaching is satisfactory because lessons often consist of whole-class teaching of the same task. This results in activities which do not closely meet the needs of individuals. Consequently, some pupils find the work too easy while others struggle. Because teachers direct

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activities very closely, pupils do not always have the opportunity to develop independent learning skills

The curriculum offers a good range of experiences. The school's very effective range of interventions, in the form of booster classes and extra support, has resulted in clear improvements in pupils' achievements. Pupils' development of skills in numeracy is particularly good. Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities and most children participate. The school is careful in monitoring the uptake of activities but does not use this data effectively to ensure the involvement of all groups of pupils, consequently not all enhancements are sharply focused to meet the needs of particular groups.

Pupils are positive about their experiences at the school and often get the opportunity to give their views. Parents too are complimentary about the work the school does. One parent commented: 'My child has an active, positive lifestyle at school. He participates in additional activities and is encouraged to achieve and improve on his achievements.'

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise the quality of teaching so that learning and progress are consistently good by:
  - ensuring that lessons provide pupils with independent learning activities so that pupils are increasingly responsible for their own learning
  - ensuring teachers use assessment data to plan their lessons to meet the precise needs of individuals.
- Continue to rapidly close the gaps between the progress of different groups of pupils and across subject areas by:
  - sharing existing good practice
  - further developing systems to seek pupils' views to inform all aspects of school life, including the content and style of lessons.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

### **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

<b>3</b>
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Pupils make best progress in Year 6 and Year 8 because effective interventions help them to address misunderstandings and consolidate their learning. Pupils' learning and progress overall are satisfactory because some lessons do not cater for the needs of all pupils and progress is uneven across different subjects. For example, boys make less progress when they have to listen for long periods of time. Pupils generally have good attitudes to learning especially when tasks are engaging and tailored to their needs. In some lessons, it is only the pupils who raise their hands who are given the opportunity to answer questions. Teachers do not often target their questions or insist on others thinking in depth about their answers. This sometimes slows the progress of the most able. Where students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported by teaching assistants, they make good progress. However, where the school has identified additional support from the class teacher their progress is somewhat slower. This is because tasks do not fully meet their needs.

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Most pupils say they feel safe and enjoy school, this can also be seen in their attendance which is above the national average. Pupils of all ages and backgrounds mix well together and they are sociable and friendly. The few incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Pupils generally behave well around the school, however, a few pupils are sometimes boisterous at break times. In lessons, pupils are compliant and when they have the opportunity to demonstrate self-discipline and responsibility they respond well. Their understanding and approach to healthy lifestyles are good, and pupils particularly enjoy a good range of sporting activities. Pupils have a good understanding of their role as school, local and global citizens. They take on roles as peer mentors and prefects and take their responsibilities seriously. Good links with a local special school and children's hospice have resulted in pupils' good understanding of the lives of others. Pupils develop good skills to support them in the future, for example, in numeracy, but also through developing financial capability and careers education. Art and a range of visitors to assemblies support pupils in developing good cultural awareness and sound opportunities for spiritual reflections.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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?**

Teaching at Priory is securely satisfactory and just over half of lessons are good or better. In better lessons, teaching is lively and this inspires pupils to try hard and they make good progress. Effective use is made of time so that pupils get a sense of urgency. For example,

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in an outstanding French lesson, youngsters sang a French song while making a note of their learning objectives. This increased their enjoyment, gave them the opportunity to practise their language skills and focused them on the learning to come. In less effective lessons, not all pupils are consistently involved in learning because teachers' questioning is not targeted to specific individuals or groups. In addition, teachers tend to set the same tasks for all regardless of ability. This, combined with few opportunities for pupils to work in pairs or groups, results in mostly satisfactory progress. In these lessons pupils are generally passive, but occasionally their behaviour deteriorates and spills over into restlessness and fidgeting when they are expected to listen to the teacher talk for too long.

The care, guidance and support the school provides is strong because of the attention staff pay to individual pupils outside lessons. In particular, the school has been effective in reducing exclusions through counselling and the work of the inclusion support team. The pastoral team have strong links with outside agencies to ensure all pupils, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, receive good quality targeted support.

The curriculum too, is good, offering a range of enrichment activities, particularly in sport. Pupils also have the opportunity to learn how to play musical instruments and sing in the choir. Pupils who are identified as gifted and talented enjoy enhancements outside school hours, for example, the provision of 'maths master classes'. The impact of this can be seen in the good progress of pupils in mathematics. In lessons, the quality of the curriculum is less consistent and pupils express a distinct preference for subjects where a practical approach is taken, for example physical education, design and technology, and art and design.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The leadership and management of the school demonstrate a good level of ambition. The school's leaders are effective in identifying weaknesses and bringing about rapid improvements. An example of this can be seen in the actions the school took following disappointing English results at Key Stage 2 in 2009. A rigorous tracking system was implemented enabling senior and middle leaders to quickly identify the underperformance of individuals and groups of pupils. A range of effective interventions resulted in pupils' achievements improving, so that nearly all pupils made at least satisfactory progress and many made good progress. The improvements in teaching are steady, and middle leaders play their role in monitoring the quality of lessons and pupils' work. However, feedback to

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teachers has focused on lesson structures rather than the quality of pupils' learning. Consequently, many teachers structure their planning around tasks to be completed rather than the learning needs of individuals. Governors provide a good level of support and challenge for the school, ensuring that new strategies are evaluated.

The careful tracking of pupils' progress and effective interventions have ensured that the gaps between achievements of different groups of pupils are closing quickly so that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. The improving performance of the school in achieving sound and sometimes good outcomes for pupils comes as a result of good provision in the curriculum and in the care, guidance and support offered to pupils.

The school's improvement planning identifies clear priorities and they are regularly reviewed. The lack of specific measurable success criteria and milestones sometimes means that the impact of the work of the school is not always precisely gauged. This means that some opportunities to accelerate pupils' progress are missed.

Safeguarding arrangements meet all requirements and there is a noticeable strength in day-to-day practice and the relationships with other agencies to ensure the care and safety of all pupils. Other partnerships and the school's engagement with parents are well developed. For example, The Priory Forum has representation from local businesses, parents and the school. Early signs of impact can be seen in the improved relationships between pupils and local shopkeepers. Strategies to embed community cohesion are further enhanced for pupils as a result of carefully planned actions based on a good understanding of the school's context. Most pupils show a good level of understanding of other cultures and their role as local, national and global citizens.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>



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## **Views of parents and carers**

The large majority of parents who returned the inspection questionnaire agreed with all 13 statements in the survey. Most are happy with their children's experience at the school and in agreement that the school keeps their children safe, that it meets their needs, and that the school is effectively led and managed. Inspectors endorse parents' positive views of the school. A small minority of parents expressed concern about the extent to which the school takes account of parental suggestions and how it deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors investigated these concerns and found that the school has responded to some suggestions from parents, for example, increasing the number of progress reports to parents and has systems to seek parental views. The school was also able to demonstrate that it deals appropriately with misbehaviour.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Priory Middle 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 217 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 488 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	71	33	121	56	18	8	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	76	35	127	59	7	3	3	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	58	27	121	56	17	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	64	29	113	52	16	7	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	53	24	138	64	11	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	45	21	124	57	23	11	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	56	26	137	63	17	8	1	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)	50	23	117	54	15	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	55	25	124	57	17	8	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	41	19	118	54	28	13	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	16	117	54	25	12	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	64	29	120	55	11	5	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	76	35	113	52	13	6	2	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



24 September 2010

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Priory Middle School, Dunstable, LU5 4JA**

Thank you for making the inspectors so welcome when we recently inspected your school. Listening to your views, watching you in lessons and looking at your work helped us to find out the good things about Priory and the things that the school could do better.

You told us how much you enjoy coming to school and we can see why. Priory is a satisfactory and improving school. These are our main findings:

Most of you are making satisfactory progress in your lessons and some of you are making good progress.

The adults at the school look after you well and make sure you have the right support if things are not going well in school or at home.

There are lots of clubs and activities for you to take part in after school.

If you find learning difficult or you are falling behind with your learning the school is good at helping you to catch up.

Leaders and managers are improving the work of the school.

It is clear that the school wants you to do very well and we think you could do even better if:

- all your lessons help you to be independent and the work you get is exactly right for each one of you
- teachers use all your assessment data to look at how different groups and year groups are making progress so that you can all make good progress throughout your time at the school.

You can also play your part by making sure you behave well all the time and working as hard as you can in lessons.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt

Her Majesty's Inspector

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