

# Priors Wood Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	117271
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	379385
<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–22 June 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Selwyn Ward

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>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	230
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Louise Rudd
<b>Headteacher</b>	Janet Williams
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 November 2007
<b>School address</b>	Cozens Road Ware SG12 7HZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01920 464135
<b>Fax number</b>	01920 466540
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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	21–22 June 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	379385



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Selwyn Ward

Additional Inspector

Jillian Smith

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 18 lessons taught by nine teachers, with a particular focus on the progress of boys and girls in reading, writing and mathematics. Inspectors listened to pupils read, and spoke with parents and carers, groups of pupils, staff, and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at pupils' books, school development planning, school self-evaluation and leaders' monitoring of teaching. They also took account of the questionnaire responses of 100 pupils, 23 staff and 90 parents and carers.

## Information about the school

This is an average-sized school. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average. Of these, most are identified as having moderate learning difficulties. The school has met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. Priors Wood has Artsmark Gold and Activemark awards and has Healthy Schools status. It operates breakfast and early morning clubs at the start of each day.

**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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>

## Key findings

- Priors Wood is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because pupils do not make consistently good progress in lessons and over their time at the school. Also, there are inconsistencies in assessment arrangements, and leaders have not had a wholly accurate view of the school’s effectiveness. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Pupils’ achievement is satisfactory. Pupils generally do better in Key Stage 2 in mathematics than in English, and particularly writing. In part, this is because there is an over-reliance in some classes on worksheets that limit opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their literacy skills.
- Teaching is satisfactory but lesson time is not always used to best effect to ensure that all pupils make good progress. There is much good marking, but this is not consistent. There is not a routine expectation that pupils check their own and each other’s work in order to minimise errors in their writing, nor to read and respond to the comments teachers write when they mark their work.
- Pupils behave well and confirm that they feel safe at school. They are keen to do well. They listen well in lessons, only beginning to lose attention when lesson introductions go on for too long.
- Leaders and managers have been effective in maintaining teaching that is satisfactory but have not been rigorous in driving improvements in performance and in pupils’ attainment. Lessons are monitored regularly but leaders have had an overly positive view of teaching because their lesson observations focus on what the teacher is doing rather than on how much pupils are learning. Leaders have identified that assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not as reliably accurate as they should be. They have also acknowledged that they do not all have a secure understanding of how to accurately interpret performance data.

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

- By the end of the summer term 2013, raise attainment, particularly in writing, and accelerate pupils' progress in lessons, by:
  - always matching work to pupils' different capabilities, including by giving pupils success criteria that are matched to their different abilities so that more is expected of the more-able pupils
  - maintaining a brisk pace of learning and not allowing lengthy periods of passive listening to limit the opportunities for pupils to get on with writing and practical activities
  - making more effective use of 'learning partners' to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills
  - always giving teaching assistants an active role during whole-class teaching
  - reducing the reliance on worksheets that constrain opportunities for pupils to write and present information in their own way
  - reviewing the organisation of sessions where pupils learn the connections between letter patterns and the sounds they represent (phonics) so that pupils are taught by teachers in groups organised by their attainment rather than their ages.
  
- By the end of the spring term 2013, improve the effectiveness of assessment by:
  - working together within the school, and with staff in neighbouring schools, to assure the accuracy of teachers' assessments, including of children's skills and knowledge at the start and end of the Early Years Foundation Stage
  - consistently giving all pupils clear guidance through marking that shows them what they need to do to improve their work
  - routinely expecting pupils to check and evaluate their own and each other's work, including their spellings and punctuation, and giving them time to read and respond to the comments teachers write when they mark their work.
  
- Increase the accuracy of school self-evaluation and the impact and effectiveness of leadership and management by the end of the autumn term 2012 through ensuring that:
  - leaders' lesson observations are focused on pupils' learning and rates of progress, and that teachers are always given clear guidance on the specific changes needed to accelerate learning
  - points for development identified by school leaders when they visit lessons and scrutinise assessment and pupils' work are rigorously followed up
  - all leaders receive appropriate training in interpreting performance data, and other staff have the training and support to assure the robustness of their assessments
  - the school development plan sets out specific actions to achieve the school's priorities and incorporates measurable targets against which the

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governing body can gauge the school's success.

## **Main report**

### **Achievement of pupils**

School leaders have identified that there is uncertainty over the accuracy of some assessments in the school. They acknowledge that not enough is done to assure the reliability of assessments, including through checking and moderation within the school and in conjunction with other neighbouring schools. The reliability of assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage, in particular, has come into question. Assessments have previously suggested that children have joined the school with capabilities below those expected for their ages and have left the Reception Year with high attainment. The school now believes children's attainment on entry and at the end of Reception is broadly average. Children in both Nursery and Reception have well-developed social skills. During the inspection, children made good progress at the start of a lesson in the Reception Year aimed at strengthening listening and learning skills, but the lesson did not fully capitalise on this because the session went on for too long and children's attention waned. This was similarly the case in lessons seen in Key Stages 1 and 2.

Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is average at the end of Key Stage 1. This is so for pupils in the current Year 2 and has consistently been the case in each of the years since the last inspection. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is also average in reading and writing, and for pupils in the current Year 6, attainment in mathematics is above average. This is similar to the position in 2011, when pupils' mathematical development was the equivalent of around six months ahead of the national average. There were differences last year between the attainment of girls and boys, but that has not generally been the case, and the gender gap for current pupils has narrowed. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are supported in lessons to make similar progress to their peers.

Parents and carers are generally pleased with the progress their children make but inspection evidence concurs with the small minority who comment that, as one explained, 'Progress is only average because the teacher does not get the best out of my child.' Several parents and carers commented that, 'More-able pupils are not pushed to their full capacity.' Inspectors confirm that this is the case in those lessons where work is not matched sufficiently to pupils' different capabilities.

### **Quality of teaching**

Teachers are effective at motivating pupils and engaging their interest. As a result, pupils comment positively about the teaching at Priors Wood, as do their parents and carers. Teachers generally plan lessons around well-focused objectives that show pupils what they are expected to learn. 'Top tips' set out the success criteria that the teacher is looking for, but these are the same for all pupils regardless of their ability or prior attainment. That means that more-able pupils are not pushed to extend themselves beyond what is expected of the rest of the class. Where all pupils are

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given the same worksheet or template to complete, this constrains opportunities for writing and often means that work pitched at the average in the class is too easy for the more able and too challenging for lower attaining pupils. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are helped to keep up with their peers because they benefit from well-targeted support from teaching assistants. Support staff are not used to best effect, however, during the often lengthy lesson introductions and periods of whole-class teaching. On these occasions, they are sometimes largely passive observers when they could be providing additional support by, for example, keeping a record for the teacher of which pupils are putting their hands up to answer and those who are less active participants.

The introduction of more systematic teaching of phonics has had a positive impact in moving forward children's reading and writing in Reception and in Key Stage 1. However, the present arrangements, whereby phonics is taught separately in each class, limit opportunities to group children according to the level at which they are working rather than their ages.

Teachers' questioning often promotes thoughtful responses from pupils. Teachers call on pupils to discuss ideas with their 'learning partner'. This helps pupils' personal development, as they grow in confidence. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to maximise the impact of this in developing speaking and listening skills when teachers simply ask pupils to report back what they told their partner rather than what their partner told them.

There are examples of marking that gives pupils helpful guidance on what they need to do to improve their work, but this is not the case in every class and for every subject. Pupils do not all routinely check their own or each other's work, and sometimes careless spelling and punctuation errors go uncorrected.

**Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils, and their parents and carers, confirm that this is the norm at this school, although Year 6 boys are sometimes boisterous in the playground. Pupils listen well in lessons. They collaborate sensibly when asked to work in pairs or small groups, and they work with concentration when set individual tasks. For example, in the 'Big Writing' sessions, where pupils are set writing tasks in a relaxed atmosphere, all settle to work without fuss and their positive attitudes mean that they complete a decent amount of written work in the time available. Pupils feel safe at school, and almost all parents and carers agree. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe when using the internet, and they are aware of the risks of cyber-bullying when using email, networking websites and mobile phones. Although, in the questionnaire responses, only 80% of parents and carers agreed with the statement that the school deals effectively with any bullying, almost all of the others indicated that they were unable to comment because they had not heard of any incidents of bullying. Attendance rates are average.

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## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leaders evaluated the school as good because of some confusion over how performance data should be interpreted. Year 6 test scores that have only been in the average range have been wrongly viewed as above average. Monitoring of lessons has also given leaders an overly positive picture of provision because they have focused on aspects of teaching, such as teachers' subject knowledge, rather than on pupils' learning and progress. Points identified for improvement have not been specific enough to move teaching that is satisfactory to good, and the school does not have systematic arrangements for following up points for development in subsequent lesson observations.

Nevertheless, the management of teaching of teaching and learning has been sufficient to ensure that none of the teaching is inadequate. Leaders have themselves identified where assessments have been unreliable and where there is therefore a requirement for more professional development. They have also had success in maintaining a positive climate for learning, where pupils work hard and are keen to do well, and in narrowing the gender gap between girls and boys. This illustrates leaders' effectiveness in tackling inequalities and discrimination. Recent initiatives, such as 'Big Writing' to raise attainment in English, are having a positive impact and show the school's capacity for improvement.

The school's capacity for improvement is also shown through its development of a creative curriculum which greatly contributes to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to their positive engagement and attitudes to learning. As the Artsmark Gold award attests, art and music are given particular prominence. Pupils are introduced to the work of an unusually wide range of artists, and the impact of this stimulus is evident in the good standard of pupils' own artwork around the school. Pupils are all taught to play the recorder and they take an interest in music. Classical music routinely forms part of the calming backdrop for writing sessions. There is an especially good range of extra-curricular sports. The pupils and their parents and carers who make use of the breakfast and early start clubs value them and the sociable start they give to the school day.

The headteacher and leadership team have the full confidence of parents and carers, several of whom wrote to praise the way they were kept informed and helped to support their children's learning. The governing body is supportive. It has ensured that safeguarding requirements are met, although it has been overly dependant on leaders and staff in interpreting performance data. This has limited the effectiveness of its challenge over pupils' attainment and progress. It agrees the school development plan but has not set clear, measurable targets for improvements in attainment that it can then refer to at its meetings in order to gauge the school's performance.



## 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



25 June 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Priors Wood Primary School, Ware, SG12 7HZ**

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when we came to inspect your school. I would particularly like to thank those of you who filled in questionnaires and who spoke to inspectors about your work. A special thanks too to those of you in Year 2. I learnt a lot about Sir Francis Drake at your pirate assembly.

Priors Wood is providing you with a satisfactory education. We were pleased to see how well you all get on together and how well behaved you are. You make reasonable progress through your time at the school, and your attainment is average overall at the end of Year 6. It is above average in mathematics but you do less well in writing. We have therefore suggested some ways in which you can be helped to make faster progress in lessons and, particularly, to improve your writing. You can help too by telling your teachers whenever you think the work is too easy or too hard and by always taking care to check your spellings and punctuation. You can also improve your work by doing your very best to follow the advice that teachers give when they mark your work.

We have asked that when staff visit each other's lessons, they always check on the progress you are making. We have also asked leaders to work with other local schools to check the measures of how well you are doing so that they can be assured that assessments give them a completely accurate picture.

Thank you again for the welcome you gave us, and our very best wishes to all of you for the future, both at this school and, for those of you in your last term here, for your new start next year at your secondary schools.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward  
Lead inspector

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