

Preston Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117403
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379413
Inspection dates	28–29 June 2012
Lead inspector	David Wynford-Jones

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Lawson
Headteacher	Alison Brooks
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2007
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Wynford-Jones

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector visited an assembly and eight lessons, observing four teachers. The inspector heard some pupils in Years 2 and 6 read. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. He observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the data collected by the school on pupils' attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school development plan. Fifty-five questionnaires completed by parents and carers were analysed, together with those from staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Preston Primary School is considerably smaller than most schools of its type. The vast majority of the pupils are of White British origin. Others come from different minority ethnic heritages. There is no predominant minority ethnic group and no pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs is slightly higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at other than the usual starting or finishing times is also slightly higher than average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average for primary schools. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Major building and landscaping work was completed in December 2011. There have been significant staffing changes during this academic year. The school runs breakfast and after-school clubs during term time.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school and has the capacity to improve further. It is not outstanding because: pupils are capable of reaching higher standards in writing; initiatives to improve outcomes in mathematics have not been consolidated sufficiently; and assessment information is not always used effectively to set high expectations.
- Pupils' achievement is good. Typically, attainment at the end of Year 6 is securely above average in reading and broadly average in writing and mathematics. Progress in mathematics is accelerating but progress in writing is not improving fast enough. This is because pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length or to consolidate their writing skills in different subjects.
- Pupils' attendance is well-above average. Most pupils have a positive attitude to learning and behave well. Their understanding of personal safety is good.
- Good teaching and a willingness to embrace new initiatives, for example in mathematics, ensure that most pupils are making good progress. The vast majority of lessons have a good structure and are well paced. The criteria by which learning can be assessed are shared with pupils. However, teachers do not routinely make explicit their expectations of pupils of different abilities. Consequently, some pupils, particularly the more-able, are not always challenged sufficiently. Marking is informative and consistently offers pupils clear guidance to improve their work. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage have yet to make best use of the outdoor area to promote the children's early literacy and numeracy skills.
- Effective leadership and management, and an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development, have led to improvements, especially in mathematics, but these are not fully embedded. The recently updated electronic assessment programme is being used with increasing

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effectiveness to improve the quality of teaching and to raise standards. However, not all staff are confident in using it.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in writing and consolidate the improvements in mathematics across the school by:
 - developing the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor area to include more opportunities for children to practise their literacy and numeracy skills
 - making certain that all pupils consolidate and extend their writing skills across the curriculum and are provided with more opportunities to write at length
 - embedding the recently introduced strategies to raise attainment in mathematics
 - ensuring that in all lessons the expectations of pupils with different abilities are made clear.

- Develop the skills of senior leaders and all teachers in using the electronic assessment programme and ensure it is used effectively to raise the teachers' expectations of all pupils, especially those who are more-able.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge broadly in line with those expected for their age. They settle quickly and grow in confidence. This is because induction arrangements are good and relationships are well established. Good use is made of the outdoor area to promote most aspects of the children's learning, especially their physical development and their knowledge and understanding of the world. However, its potential for promoting children's linguistic and mathematical skills has not been maximised.

Attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 varies slightly from year to year. This is because of the small size of each year group and the impact of pupils joining the school partway through their school career. Typically, standards at the end of Year 2 are above average in reading, and broadly average in writing and mathematics. By the end of Year 6, standards are securely above average in reading and they are now above average in mathematics, reflecting the impact of the initiatives. Standards in writing are broadly average. Lesson observations and scrutiny of assessment data and pupils' work show that most pupils are now making good progress in reading and mathematics. Pupils make satisfactory progress in writing. Different groups, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, make similar progress to their peers. Nearly all the parents and carers who returned questionnaires were pleased with their children's progress in developing their key skills.

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Reading is promoted effectively. Pupils enjoy reading and take advantage of opportunities to read at school and at home. Most pupils have a good understanding of the different ways to read unfamiliar words, including the use of phonics (the sounds that letters make). There is an appropriate emphasis on the teaching of phonics. For example, in the Reception class a child eagerly sounded out the word 'forest' as the class teacher wrote the word on the board. Home/school books and the ongoing support from parents and carers ensure that pupils' reading skills are consolidated at home.

Pupils are now reaching higher standards and making accelerated progress in mathematics. This is because there is a greater emphasis on providing the pupils with opportunities to explore and investigate different mathematical concepts within problem-solving situations. For example, pupils in Year 6 were asked to calculate if they would prefer to have their weight in 20-pence coins or their height in one-pound coins. This involved complex calculations which included accurate measuring, weighing and an understanding of money and number. Pupils are asked to look for patterns and sequences, and to respond to open-ended questions from their teachers. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' understanding and use of mathematical terminology. These and other equally effective strategies are not, however, firmly embedded throughout the school.

Pupils are developing their writing skills satisfactorily. Their progress is not accelerated because they are not routinely asked to write at length and are not always reminded of their literacy targets when writing in other subjects. Pupils do not consistently make the best use of a dictionary or a thesaurus to extend their vocabulary. Most do not improve the content of their writing by routinely including for example, adjectives, similes, metaphors and alliteration.

Quality of teaching

Relationships with pupils are good. Teachers act as good role models to promote the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They provide opportunities in lessons for pupils to reflect and to develop their social skills. Most lessons are taught well. Pupils are engaged and work with sustained concentration. Teachers consistently inform the pupils of the purpose of the lesson and ensure that they are aware of the generic success criteria. However, teachers do not routinely set clear targets for pupils of different abilities. As a result, some pupils, particularly the more-able, are not always challenged. Most lessons proceed at a quick pace, and information and communication technology is used effectively to support the pupils' learning. Teachers use questioning strategies effectively to consolidate pupils' understanding and to challenge their thinking. Good use is made of talk partners. Pupils regularly share ideas with each other, thus developing their speaking and listening and social skills. Pupils' work is marked regularly. They are given clear guidance to improve their work. There are some good examples where teachers have revisited earlier comments but this is not consistent in all classes. Pupils' literacy targets are not routinely reinforced when writing in other subjects.

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Just occasionally, the pace of lessons slows. The introduction is overlong and pupils spend too long sitting on the carpet. Adult support is usually deployed well to help individuals and small groups. However, staff are not always deployed effectively at the start and end of lessons. The deployment of support staff particularly benefits disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. This enables them to make similar progress to their peers.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils have a good understanding of personal safety. They say they feel safe in school and know whom to approach if they are worried or concerned. This was confirmed by the questionnaires returned by parents and carers. Nearly all respondents stated their children feel safe at school and are well looked after. Comments from pupils included precautions to avoid accidents during the recent building work, site security and dangers when using the internet. They say they feel safe because the teachers know them well, they have lots of friends and they look after each other.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They have positive attitudes towards school. Their attendance is well-above average. Pupils consistently show respect for each other, staff and visitors alike. They confirm that incidents of inappropriate behaviour, for example fighting and rudeness, and different sorts of bullying such as name-calling, are rare. They say that if an incident occurs, it is dealt with swiftly and fairly by staff. There have been no exclusions or reported racist incidents since the last inspection. The majority of pupils have yet to develop the skills of taking responsibility for their own learning.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and the governing body have provided stability and a clear sense of direction during a period of significant staff turbulence and major building works. Together, they have ensured that issues from the previous inspection have been addressed effectively and all staff are involved in the school's future development. The school development plan is based on a secure analysis of the school's strengths and areas for development; it is clear and addresses the right priorities. Staff have responded positively to the headteacher's drive to improve performance through their professional development and performance management. Clear targets have been set and staff are regularly held to account for pupils' attainment and progress. The school has recently updated its computerised assessment programme. However, senior leaders and teaching staff have still to make best use of the programme to track and analyse pupils' performance in order to raise expectations and to challenge pupils to reach higher standards.

The effective governing body works closely with the headteacher to bring about improvements and to ensure that pupils are kept safe. The latest government requirements on safeguarding are met fully. Detailed analysis of the school's

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performance enables the governing body to identify the school's strengths and areas for development, to challenge the leadership team and to ensure that any possible issue of discrimination or equality of opportunity is investigated thoroughly. The governing body promotes the breakfast and after-school clubs which provide pupils with an opportunity to meet with friends in different classes in a safe and relaxed setting.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and promotes pupils' learning, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, well. The thematic approach provides pupils with a good opportunity to see the relevance of their learning in different subjects. For example, the topic on the Greeks in Years 5 and 6 successfully brings together pupils' work in history and geography and enables the teacher to incorporate work on the 2012 Olympics. The curriculum is suitably modified to meet the needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. The curriculum is enhanced by a suitable range of after-school activities, visits and visitors to the school. Relationships with parents and carers are good. Links with members of the local community have been strengthened. Many gave generously towards the building extension, which incorporates a community room. The clear vision for the school's development and progress made since the last inspection demonstrate that it has the capacity to improve further.

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).

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.



2 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Preston Primary School, Hitchin SG4 7UJ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school, and for completing the questionnaire. I enjoyed my visit and talking to you. In our discussions, you told me that you enjoy school and feel safe because the staff look after you. You know that you can turn to them if you are worried. Your behaviour is good and you show positive attitudes towards learning. Your attendance is well-above average for primary schools. Well done – keep it up!

Your school provides you with a good education. By the end of Year 6, your attainment is consistently above average in reading. There have been marked improvements in mathematics recently and standards are now above average. In writing, they are not quite as high and are broadly average. The standards you reach overall represent good progress and achievement during your time at school.

I have asked your school to help you make even better progress and reach higher standards especially in writing and mathematics by making certain that:

- staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage make more use of the outdoor area to enable you to practise your literacy and numeracy skills
- all teachers provide you with opportunities to consolidate and extend your writing skills in other lessons and continue with the work they have undertaken to raise your attainment in mathematics
- teachers ensure you know exactly what they expect you to achieve in lessons
- senior leaders and all teachers develop their skills in using the electronic assessment programme and use it effectively to challenge you to reach higher standards.

Please remember that to make your school better, you must always try your best.

Yours sincerely

David Wynford-Jones
Lead inspector

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