

Priory Park Infant School

Almond Road, St Neots, PE19 1DZ

Inspection dates 21–22 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Teaching has not been consistently strong enough to ensure that all pupils, including those who need extra help, make good progress.
- The work that teachers plan for pupils does not always match their different abilities.
- At times, teachers' introductions to lessons and their explanations are too long and this limits the time pupils have to work on their own or find things out for themselves.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work does not always give them precise enough guidance about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Although leaders have tackled weaknesses in teaching and all pupils are now making better progress, these improvements are not yet sustained over time.
- Current systems for leaders to check the effectiveness of their actions on pupils' achievement are not rigorous enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are happy to come to school and say that they feel safe. Parents and carers agree that their children are safe and well cared for.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive. Their behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. They are polite and respectful to adults.
- Relationships are strong and pupils' achievements are frequently celebrated.
- The headteacher, members of the governing body and other leaders are ambitious for the school. Their drive to move the school forward is helping to speed up pupils' achievement.
- Teaching is improving because leaders observe lessons and provide teachers with clear guidance and training which helps them to improve their skills. Consequently, all pupils, including those who need extra help, are making better progress than in the past.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons or parts of lessons and two assemblies. Three of the lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff and members of the governing body. In addition, the lead inspector talked with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors talked with pupils, listened to them read and observed them at play during break times.
- The school's safeguarding policies, improvement plans, governing body meeting notes and records of pupils' behaviour were reviewed. Inspectors also looked at the work pupils were doing in their books, and at records of their progress.
- Inspectors took account of the 45 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View), including two responses that were shared directly with inspectors and 17 replies to the staff questionnaires. The views of parents and carers were sought at the start of the school day as they brought their children to school.

Inspection team

Sarah Warboys, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Mason

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Priory Park Infant School is an average-sized infant school.
- Most pupils are White British. An average proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and, of these, a few speak English as an additional language.
- A well-below-average proportion of pupils are supported by the pupil premium, additional government funding for particular groups, including children in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The percentage of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported by school action is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- No pupils are educated in alternative provision away from the school site.
- The 'Priory Park Playgroup' and the 'Apricot Day Nursery and Out of School Club' operate on premises adjacent to the school site. Both are subject to separate inspections.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on recent improvements in teaching and thereby raise pupils' achievements in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that all staff:
 - make better use of assessment information to set work for pupils that is more closely matched to their different levels of ability
 - use time more effectively in lessons to increase opportunities for pupils to work on their own and find things out for themselves
 - provide pupils with clear and precise feedback when marking their work that lets them know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve leadership by ensuring that all leaders, including members of the governing body, increase the rigour in their checks on the effectiveness of their actions, so that they are better placed to make well-informed decisions to improve teaching and thus raise pupils' achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with abilities that are typically expected for their age. At the end of their Reception Year, their skills are similar to national averages. By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 2, their standards in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly average. This means that too many pupils, including those who need extra help, have made adequate, rather than good progress. Improved teaching is ensuring that all pupils are now making better progress, though this improvement is not yet sustained over time.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have not made good enough progress in previous years. Recently, these pupils have made better progress because of the extra support they receive in lessons and in small group work. This help focuses on very specific gaps in their knowledge and skills. For example, some pupils take part in extra activities which are successful in promoting their social skills and their ability to express their feelings.
- Those who arrive at the school unable to speak English receive small group teaching which enables them to learn and practise new words and phrases. As a result, they make good progress and their confidence in using the English language enables them to play a greater part in lessons.
- Of the pupils who left the school in Year 2 in 2012, those who were eligible for free school meals were on average about half a term ahead of similar pupils nationally in English and two terms ahead in mathematics. They were about a term behind other pupils in their year group in English and reached similar levels to their classmates in mathematics. The school makes effective use of the extra money it receives from the pupil premium funding. It provides one-to-one tuition, small group work, extra resources and access to educational trips and visits. Consequently, these pupils make progress at a faster rate and are catching up rapidly with their classmates.
- Although current standards in reading by the end of Year 2 are average, they are improving. This is because young children are taught phonics (the links between letters and the sounds they make) systematically. This is continued into Key Stage 1. Last year's phonic assessment for Year 1 pupils showed that three quarters of pupils reached the required standard which was above the national average of just over half. Pupils are provided with good support for learning to spell using their phonic knowledge in lessons. They read regularly at school and are supported well by their parents and carers at home.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching in the past has not been good enough to ensure that all pupils make the best possible progress. In some lessons teachers' introductions and explanations are too long and pupils do not have sufficient time to work on their own and find things out for themselves. Teachers do not use pupils' assessment information precisely enough to set work for them that matches closely enough their different abilities. As a result, pupils do not always make the best possible progress.
- The quality of teachers' marking of pupils' work is uneven across the school. Some teachers provide pupils with a clear idea about what they have done well and what are the next steps in their learning. However, not all pupils are given precise enough guidance about what they need to do to improve their work.

- More recently, all pupils, including those who need extra help, are making progress at a faster rate because of better teaching. The school's current checks on pupils' achievement shows that their skills in Years 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, are on track to be above expectations for their age by the end of the school year.
- Adults in the Early Years Foundation Stage are skilled in interacting with all children as they play. They constantly praise them for their efforts and tell them how well they are doing. There is an appropriate balance between the activities that are led by adults and those in which children can learn by exploring for themselves. Children make good progress when adults make learning practical and fun. For example, during the inspection, children enjoyed being out of doors learning to blend sounds together to make words and writing them in chalk on the patio.
- The best learning happens when teachers set work for pupils which is at just the right level of difficulty for them to move forward in their learning. Adults ask pupils searching questions that help them to clarify their thinking and explain their answers. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress when adults provide them with extra resources and break learning down into small, manageable steps.
- Teachers' use of 'talk for writing' has been particularly successful. They regularly ask pupils to retell stories and to talk to each other to share their views. In Year 2, for example, pupils are challenged to discuss with a partner how to add more interesting words and a range of punctuation to their own writing, in order to improve it. This focus on story telling and shared working is enabling pupils to practise their speaking and listening skills and provides the opportunity for them to organise their ideas before writing.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Good relationships support learning throughout the school. Adults constantly encourage pupils to join in activities and they value their contributions to class discussions. Adults teach good behaviour and pupils are responsive to their guidance. Pupils learn to work together and are supportive of each other. Consequently, pupils develop confidence and self-esteem well.
- Actions to improve attendance have raised attendance to the national average. Pupils have a good understanding of the school's systems for promoting good behaviour. Typically, their attitudes to learning in lessons are good and they behave well as they move around the school. Good behaviour, positive attitudes and hard work are rewarded and celebrated in whole-school assemblies.
- Pupils say, and their parents and carers agree, that they feel safe in school because adults, they say, 'help us to learn and look after us when we are hurt'. Pupils have a good understanding of what is meant by 'bullying' and say that these incidents, such as name-calling are uncommon. They know how to seek help when it is necessary. Some Year 2 pupils are trained as 'peer mediators' and help others sort out minor disagreements.
- Occasionally, and usually connected to teachers' long explanations, a few pupils become restless, go off-task and this slows their learning.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Those in charge have a good understanding of what the school does well and what needs to be done. Plans for improvement are focused on the right priorities, though leaders, including the members of the governing body, do not always measure precisely enough the effectiveness of

their actions on pupils' achievement. Some of the improvements undertaken by leaders are at an early stage and have yet to become fully embedded across the school.

- Leaders have successfully addressed weaknesses in teaching and as a result, it is improving. However, teaching is not yet good enough to secure consistently good progress for all pupils, sustained over time. Led by a determined headteacher, the school is now moving forward at a faster rate. She has established a strong team of staff who are behind her drive to raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress. Staff morale is high.
- The school pays due care and attention to ensuring equality of opportunity and takes action to tackle discrimination. Leaders and teachers meet regularly to check on the progress pupils are making. Where underachievement of particular pupils has been found, appropriate action has been taken to address weak teaching and to provide pupils with the extra help they need.
- Teaching is improving because senior and other leaders provide teachers with feedback after observing them teach. They are set targets for improvement and undertake training to develop their skills. Staff are keen to learn from each other. Close working relationships with two local schools means that teachers are able to benefit from sharing the best practice that exists within the three schools.
- The subjects taught provide interesting opportunities for learning through topics and themes that suitably support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are regularly set 'challenges' in lessons that foster their curiosity and help to engage them in learning. Pupils enjoy singing together in assembly and they participate fully in creative and sporting activities.
- The local authority has provided effective support for the school, particularly in developing the skills of its leaders.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have provided good support to the headteacher in taking decisive action to tackle weak teaching in the past and to make sure that recent improvements are sustained. They are involved in arrangements for managing staff performance and understand how teacher's pay is linked to pupils' progress. More has been expected from staff who receive higher salaries. Governors are clear about pupils' achievement and how the school compares to others nationally. The headteacher provides comprehensive reports for governors, which enables them to hold leaders to account for its performance. Governors have successfully managed the school's finances. They check that the pupil premium is spent on narrowing attainment gaps between these and other pupils. Governors benefit from training opportunities so that they understand more fully the issues involved when making decisions about what happens in school. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	110687
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	405297

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Barbosa
Headteacher	Angela Smith
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2011
Telephone number	01480 398010
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