

Priory Academy

Britain Street, Dunstable, LU5 4JA

Inspection dates 25–26 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils reach standards that are above average in English and particularly high in mathematics.
- The quality of teaching is good in nearly all lessons, and a small amount is outstanding.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They feel very safe and have excellent attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is exemplary.
- Leaders are ambitious and dedicated to improving the teaching and learning in the school. As a result, standards are rising.
- All groups of pupils make good progress overall and do outstandingly well in mathematics, whatever their ability or background.
- Governors support the school well, and work hard to ensure that it continues to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding.
- Pupils do not make the same rapid and sustained progress in English, particularly in writing, as they do in mathematics.
- In some lessons pupils do not get enough chances to judge their own progress and reflect on their learning.
- Not all lessons in Years 5 and 6 focus sharply enough on developing basic literacy skills, or emphasise the importance of learning to write quickly and efficiently.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 22 lessons across all four year groups, two of which seen together with the headteacher. The inspectors attended an assembly and visited the school's breakfast and after-school club. They also listened to some pupils read.
- The inspection team held meetings with two groups of pupils, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and senior and subject leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of policies, including those for managing the performance of staff. They also looked at the information the school has collected on the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' standards and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe, as well as the school's judgements on its own performance and its improvement plans.
- There were 50 responses to the online questionnaire called Parent View and 35 questionnaires completed by staff, and inspectors also spoke to a parent about the school. All these views and observations were considered by the inspection team.

Inspection team

Gillian Scobie, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jackie Cousins	Additional Inspector
Mary Hinds	Additional Inspector
Alan Jarvis	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average middle school.
- The school converted to academy status in June 2012. When the predecessor school, Priory Middle School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be satisfactory.
- The majority of pupils are White British, and very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, which in this school provides additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care, is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average, as is the proportion of pupils supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs.
- The school organises a breakfast and after-school club for its pupils, managed by the governing body.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress to outstanding in all year groups, particularly in English, by:
 - developing pupils' literacy skills through regular opportunities to practise these skills in all subjects, particularly in Years 5 and 6
 - ensuring that marking in all subjects provides pupils with clear feedback on how well they have done and what they need to do to improve their work
 - giving pupils more opportunities to respond to this feedback in lessons
 - making sure that teachers apply the whole-school policy for developing good handwriting consistently in all year groups and across all subjects.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - sharing the excellent teaching practice that already exists, so that more teaching becomes outstanding
 - sharpening school improvement planning, so the impact of initiatives in the classroom can be easily measured by leaders and governors.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils start school in Year 5 with above-average levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. They make good progress and reach standards that are above average in reading and writing and particularly high in mathematics by the end of Year 6, and when they leave at the end of Year 8.
- Pupils enjoy reading and less confident readers are given extra help to ensure that they make good progress in their reading skills. A programme of guided reading has recently been introduced in Years 5 and 6 to improve the basic reading skills of some less competent pupils. It is still at an early stage and has not yet made a sustained impact on progress and achievement.
- Achievement in mathematics is consistently outstanding. Pupils are given every opportunity to practise, consolidate and extend their skills. As a result they make rapid and sustained progress, and by the end of Year 8 some are working at two National Curriculum levels above national expectations for their age.
- Progress in English is good overall, but slower in Years 5 and 6 than in Years 7 and 8, where it accelerates. Teachers have worked hard to raise the quality of writing across all groups of pupils, and the proportion of pupils on track to make or exceed nationally expected progress in English by the end of this year has increased.
- Good individual help and guidance means that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress in English and outstanding progress in mathematics, in line with the progress made by other groups. The same applies to the small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Pupils who are supported by the pupil premium have made similar progress to other pupils in both English and mathematics for the last two years. There was a gap in progress between the two groups in the past but this has closed, demonstrating the hard work done by the school to ensure rapid progress across different groups of pupils. The 2012 Year 6 national test results showed that on average these pupils' attainment was two to three terms behind that of their classmates but still above that of similar pupils nationally, even in writing.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers build excellent relationships with pupils. Their high expectations help pupils to develop their confidence and enthusiasm, so they are willing to take risks and try new things.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a passion for their subjects which inspires, interests and motivates pupils. In a drama lesson exploring the concept of 'the absurd', pupils made excellent progress by discussing their ideas in small groups and exploring how to present them to the rest of the class. They were encouraged to reflect on their feelings about the ethics and morality of the consequences of the First and Second World Wars.
- Lesson activities are usually planned well, with a good mixture of support and challenge to make sure pupils of different abilities are all able to work to the edge of their ability. Teaching assistants are used well to help pupils understand key concepts and be able to apply them accurately and confidently.

- Most lessons offer effective opportunities for pupils to put new learning into context. For example, in a mathematics lesson on probability the teacher's clear guidance and carefully constructed explanations enabled the pupils to become confident problem solvers.
- In nearly all lessons teachers ask probing questions to encourage pupils to develop deeper insight and understanding, and they are clearly used to explaining their learning strategies. Teachers regularly adjust the activities during lessons to deal with any misconceptions that may arise.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly but the guidance given is not always developmental, so some pupils are not sure what they have done well and what they need to do to make further progress. In better lessons pupils are given the opportunity to respond to the marking and comments they receive, but this is not consistent across all subjects and so teachers occasionally miss good opportunities to develop pupils' skills in judging their own learning and progress.
- There are some inconsistencies in the way teachers develop pupils' basic literacy skills across a range of subjects, especially handwriting. Pupils are not encouraged enough to take pride in their handwriting, or to further develop the ability to write quickly but clearly in their exercise books.

The behaviour and safety of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and attitudes to learning are exemplary, and disruptive behaviour is very rare. Pupils are enthusiastic and keen to learn, and this contributes to a very positive environment where they listen carefully to the teacher and each other and are able to share and develop new ideas with confidence.
- Pupils respond extremely well to the high expectations of good behaviour set by the school, and are courteous to staff and to each other in lessons and around the school. In a typical example one pupil, seeing that another had dropped his pencil case on his way to a lesson, ran after him to return it.
- Pupils speak very highly of their school. They say that the teachers help them to develop their confidence, and give them high levels of self-esteem and a well-developed interest in the world about them.
- Pupils feel very safe because of the school's well-developed systems to ensure their safety. They understand the different types of bullying and know how to keep themselves safe, including through prudent use of social networking when on the internet.
- Assemblies are used effectively to help pupils learn to respect and value each other and accept their differences. They are used as an excellent vehicle for encouraging pupils to reflect on their attitudes and approach to their teachers, their learning and each other.
- Parents, staff and pupils all commented on the exemplary behaviour of the pupils and their confidence in the school to promote a safe environment where pupils can flourish.

The leadership and management is good

- The headteacher is passionate about education and leads an enthusiastic and highly motivated staff who focus consistently on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

- Leaders frequently check the quality of teaching and learning, and school records shows a continuing pattern of improvement. The headteacher regularly shares the results with staff in meetings, and analyses the information to identify areas of weakness and plan suitable staff training.
- Parents and staff who returned questionnaires were very positive in their support for the school. They speak highly of the way everyone feels valued and is encouraged to give of their best.
- Staff speak very positively about the effective training provided to develop their individual skills so they can better support the needs of the school and its pupils. For example, focused training on how to challenge and support more-able pupils has helped them to make even better progress. They do not yet have enough opportunities to share and learn from the very best practice in the school or beyond.
- The school improvement plan is comprehensive and focuses on the right priorities, although the targets set are not always precise enough for leaders to be able to measure their impact effectively.
- The school promotes strong values of tolerance and mutual respect, and this helps to ensure that the pupils' moral, social, spiritual and cultural development is good. They take part in a number of fundraising activities, including the Poppy Appeal and Comic Relief, and the school has productive international partnerships with France and Kenya. It also has well-developed links with the local community.
- There is a good range of subjects and activities available to pupils, both in and beyond the classroom. Numerous visitors extend the pupils' understanding of important issues, including how to stay safe and the workings of the local town council. Pupils enjoy the multicultural days and the opportunities they have to visit interesting places such as the Houses of Parliament and Whipsnade Zoo.
- The school spends the pupil premium on specific support in mathematics and English so that individual pupils can catch up on basic skills. It also gives pupils opportunities to participate in trips and out-of-school activities. It is used effectively so that everyone is now making at least good progress and as a result the gap between the attainment of different groups of pupils has closed.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are a well-established team who meet all their statutory duties, including those for safeguarding pupils. They have worked closely with the senior management team to ensure a smooth transition from middle school to academy status. They took a central and well-informed role in the appointment of the new headteacher and share her enthusiasm and passion for education.
 - The governors know how the pupil premium is spent, and its impact on the achievement of eligible pupils. They have a clear overview of how staff performance is managed, and how this process relates to pay to ensure that good teaching is suitably rewarded. They are keen to maintain a strong and effective teaching team by placing a strong emphasis on keeping good teachers and developing the skills of potential future leaders already on their staff.
 - The governors consistently challenge the school's leaders, because they have a good understanding of its strengths and have identified the areas that need further improvement. They make good use of available analyses and documentation to monitor pupils' progress, although the targets they set and the criteria for measuring success need are not specific

enough to be fully effective in holding the school to account.

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	138181
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	408931

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	462
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Crossley
Headteacher	Mahnaz Smith
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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