

Priors Wood Primary School

Cozens Road, Ware, SG12 7HZ

Inspection dates

6–7 February 2014

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		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Some pupils do not achieve as well as they should from their starting points. Not enough pupils make better progress than that expected nationally in writing.
- Progress throughout the school is uneven across subjects and for some year groups, for example, in Year 3, where progress slows.
- Not enough pupils attain the higher National Curriculum levels of which they are capable.
- Teaching is sometimes slow to provide challenging work for pupils in lessons, particularly for those who are more able.
- Support staff do not always help pupils learn because teachers do not plan to use them well enough throughout the whole lesson.
- Leaders have not yet secured consistently good teaching and achievement.
- The governing body has not monitored the school's performance closely enough to hold leaders to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher is a driving force for change in the school and the benefits are already to be seen in teachers' practice. She has the confidence of governors, staff and parents.
- Children in the Nursery settle to school quickly, making good progress so that the large majority attain well by the end of Reception.
- Pupils' conduct is good. They are safe, well mannered, cooperate well and remain calm even when the tasks in lessons are too easy.
- There is some good and outstanding teaching, in particular in Years 5 and 6.
- Attendance has improved since the previous inspection and is above average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons or part lessons, seven of which were shared with the headteacher.
- Shorter observations were carried out across the school to see the teaching of phonics (use of sounds and letters in learning to read). Inspectors heard some pupils read individually.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, teachers, a group of pupils, governors and several parents.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at documentation, including: the school improvement plan, records of monitoring and safeguarding, minutes of the governing body’s meetings, the school’s evaluation of itself, data on pupils’ current progress and samples of pupils’ work.
- The inspector took account of 45 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 21 staff questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

Susan Aspland, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Isobel Randall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school with a nursery class.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action, school action plus or by a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is broadly average. This is additional funding provided by the government for pupils in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and others.
- A breakfast club is provided for pupils during term time.
- Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has been restructured following the retirement of the previous headteacher. The governing body has appointed a new headteacher and a senior leader to lead the Early Years Foundation Stage. Both took up post in September 2013. Subject leaders have also been internally appointed during the autumn term 2013 to lead English and mathematics.
- The school meets the current government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement so that more pupils make good or better progress given their starting points, particularly in writing, by ensuring that:
 - teachers raise their expectations of what all pupils can achieve and ensure pupils, including the more able, quickly settle to more demanding work
 - pupils always respond to teachers' marking of work and use the guidance given to improve their later work
 - support staff have opportunities to intervene throughout the whole lesson so that no learning time is lost.
- Improve the quality of leadership of the school by:
 - ensuring that all leaders focus more precisely on the progress rates made by different groups of pupils from their individual starting points to inform the guidance to teachers on how to accelerate progress
 - developing subject leaders' skills so that they have a more accurate understanding of what is working well in the school and what needs to improve to inform their actions in leading and guiding improvement in teaching and achievement
 - improving governance in order to hold the school to greater account for the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with the knowledge, skills and understanding broadly expected for their age. There are variations between year groups and for those pupils whose entry points are lower who enter from settings other than the school's Nursery.
- Children make good progress during their time in Nursery and Reception. Most are well prepared to enter Year 1, with the proportion of children achieving a good level of development higher than the national average and a small minority of children exceeding this.
- Progress is not consistently good after pupils leave Reception. School assessments and the standards of pupils' current work indicate that most pupils are achieving the levels of progress expected nationally across both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, but not enough pupils make better progress. Where teaching is not consistently good, progress is slower, for example in Year 3.
- Standards at Key Stage 1 have usually been broadly in line nationally. However, standards improved in 2013 and were above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's assessments and attainment seen in lessons indicate that pupils' current attainment in Year 2 is likely to be in line with the latest national data in writing and mathematics and above this standard in reading. However, over time, pupils do not make consistently good progress in Key Stage 1, given their good starting points at the end of Reception.
- The proportions succeeding in the Year 1 phonics check have usually reflected the national average pattern. There are some variations, noticeably for the few pupils each year who are eligible to pupil premium funding who, sometimes, do not attain as well as well as their peers. However, these pupils are helped to catch up by the end of Year 2.
- Hearing pupils read and observing the teaching of phonics at Key Stage 1 show that pupils are on track to make the progress in reading expected nationally and reach better standards in 2014. They are keen to read and use their knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words successfully.
- By the end of Year 6, increasing numbers of pupils are attaining higher levels in reading and speak knowledgably about books. For example, those pupils with responsibilities for the library value the school's provision for reading. These attitudes are shared by other Key Stage 2 pupils.
- Standards at Key Stage 2 have usually been in line with national-average attainment. Although there was a significant improvement in 2013, particularly in reading, standards remained average overall.
- Attainment in writing lags behind that in reading and mathematics, in particular for more-able pupils, particularly girls. The school's data on the progress of pupils currently in the school show that although improvements are to be seen at the higher levels in writing, more-able girls are lagging behind.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics is, currently, broadly average. More-able pupils are not being challenged enough to reach higher standards, girls in particular.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make at least the progress

expected nationally with some making good progress when support is well targeted.

- The pupils eligible for the pupil premium who completed Year 6 in 2013 made progress at least in line with that of others in the school. These pupils usually attain broadly in line with similar pupils nationally by the time they leave the school, with some variations year to year because numbers in any one year are relatively small. Attainment by Year 6 is up to three terms behind others in English and mathematics. However, some eligible pupils have learning difficulties and the school is closing the gap in attainment between eligible pupils and others by targeting support for these pupils to achieve higher levels.
- Pupils' achievement over time in art and sports have been recognised through the awards that the school holds, for example, the sports games silver award was accredited in 2013.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because not enough pupils make good progress across the school from their starting points, particularly in writing. In some lessons, teachers do not give pupils enough time to practise their writing skills at length. In others, less-able pupils are not given sufficient guidance to apply their knowledge from phonics lessons to spelling accurately in their writing, for example, in the poems they compose.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially the more able, are not consistently high enough. Work provided does not always challenge pupils of different ability to make more rapid progress and achieve higher standards.
- Teaching in writing and mathematics is not helping enough pupils to attain higher levels. For example, in Key Stage 1, too many pupils do not get on quickly enough to practise their skills because they are sometimes unnecessarily interrupted by teachers' questioning which is giving particular guidance to less-able pupils.
- Teachers' guidance to pupils about writing has improved since the previous inspection. Marking of writing gives good guidance, but pupils do not habitually use teachers' comments to improve their current work so that they become more aware of their rate of progress. Pupils can talk about progress in a lesson, but do not yet have a sense of what they are achieving over time and whether they could achieve more.
- Support staff are sometimes not deployed rapidly enough or used to full effect throughout lessons. Sometimes they have to spend too long listening to teachers' guidance and direction without opportunities to intervene and support pupils who need to get on with their work.
- There is evidence of good and outstanding teaching in the school. In these situations, pupils are well challenged and stretched in their learning whatever the structure adopted in the lesson. For example, in a Year 5 lesson, the teacher aroused pupils' curiosity by a murder-mystery scenario. Pupils made outstanding progress towards seeking solutions to the mystery through trial and improvement, sensitively facilitated by adults' guidance. Similarly, a Year 6 teacher swiftly reshaped a mathematics lesson on decimalisation to ensure that pupils' errors were addressed, using support staff well to contribute to careful assessment of pupils' understanding.
- The leadership recognises the weaknesses which have been typical of teaching and where progress slows across the school, and has acted to improve the situation. Recent, essential, practical improvements are evident to ensure that classroom walls are used to support learning. For example, in a Year 4 class, an adult skilfully referred pupils to lists of adjectives scribed on a

collective display to support their writing of poetry. Practice in marking is also showing improvement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Pupils' behaviour requires improvement. Pupils are not always required to stick to their work when learning is demanding. They remain calm and settled throughout lessons despite times when work is too easy or they have to wait too long listening to guidance which is not always relevant to them. Some pupils report that they want harder work.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are not yet consistently positive. However, the new leaders have taken swift action to develop pupils' attitudes towards their work. For example, in an assembly, Key Stage 1 pupils shared examples of trying hard with reference to the school's mascot, 'Robby Resilience' – and there can be no doubt what he stands for.
- Attendance is above average and rising and the vast majority of pupils arrive on time. This is helping more pupils to make better progress.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Leaders ensure that entry to the school is secure and that staff are rigorously checked prior to appointment. Pupils appreciate the care the school takes of them and the changes that have happened in this school year. They are overwhelmingly confident in school staff to deal with any concerns they may have. They know about different types of bullying; they report it is rare. There have been no reported incidents of racism and they learn about the work of national role models in eradicating this, for example, in football.
- Pupils enjoy the wide range of opportunities they have to take on responsibilities around the school, in particular the new 'playmaker' leaders and the school librarians.
- The vast majority of parents are convinced of their children's safety and well-being at school. They have noticed the improvements that new leaders are bringing about.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because progress since the previous inspection has not been quick enough. Leaders have taken immediate action to improve achievement across the school. However, some helpful initiatives are too recent to be accurately evaluated in their impact on achievement, for example, improving pupils' attitudes to learning to concentrate on their work.
- Leaders have refined arrangements for the management of teachers' performance. Frequent observations of teaching are leading to regular guidance to teachers on how to improve their practice and are strengthening the accuracy of assessment of pupils' work in Key Stages 1 and 2. There is no complacency about teaching quality. The headteacher has set rigorous standards for teaching and all leaders are working to reach these.
- All staff overwhelmingly support the sense of purpose leaders are bringing to the school and feel well supported in their professional development from the guidance and training they receive.
- Improvements are on track to improve achievement in writing for some pupils and sustain achievements in reading. However, leaders have not yet focused closely enough on the progress

of different groups of pupils so that the data gathered can be used to guide teachers' work to accelerate all pupils' progress in all year groups.

- English and mathematics coordinators do not yet have a clear sense of what is working well or what needs to improve further to help more pupils to achieve higher levels. They have undertaken recent training for their leadership roles and prepared thoughtful plans of how to take forward learning, achievement and teaching in their areas of responsibility.
- Competent leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage enable children to achieve well in Nursery and Reception. Work is in hand to further refine procedures for children moving into Year 1.
- The local authority recognises that although achievement is improving in some subjects, progress in addressing all the priorities from the previous inspection has not been fast enough. It is providing good support for current leaders since their appointments.
- The school has maintained a curriculum that provides motivating experiences for pupils, in particular in art and music. Year 5 pupils spoke passionately about their recent experiences singing for charity at the O2 arena and Key Stage 2 pupils sang skilfully in rehearsals.
- Leaders are using the government's sports funding to provide good opportunities for pupils to participate in inter-schools' competitive events at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Pupils enjoy the wide range of sporting activities on offer to them both in the school day and through the clubs the school provides.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported by charity work including annual events to raise funds for a charity. The school community has recently experienced a tragic event and leaders have provided good guidance and support to pupils to cope with bereavement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Self-review has strengthened governance and an external review is called for to help governors take their skills further forward. Governors are gaining an accurate view of their developmental needs, seeking guidance from others to support them. For example the Chair of the Governing Body has undertaken a coaching programme with a Local Leader of Governance and has applied more effective committee structures and the frequency of governors' monitoring visits to the school.
 - Governors recognise that they have not fully held the school to account for its performance since the previous inspection as they intended. They are actively supporting the systems introduced by the headteacher to give them more information on school performance and recent training in use of performance data is helping them to identify appropriate school priorities. Minutes of the governing body show that it is becoming better informed to ask the right questions about pupils' progress and attainment.
 - Governors are working with leaders and teachers to raise the quality of teaching but have not yet ensured it is consistently good. Changes to performance management arrangements are ensuring governors are better informed to make pay-related decisions linked to achievement.
 - The governing body manages finance adequately and knows how funding for the pupil premium is being used to support eligible pupils to secure them higher levels.
 - All statutory duties, including safeguarding, are met.

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	117271
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430762

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Rudd
Headteacher	Rebecca Collins
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2012
Telephone number	01920 464135
Fax number	01920 466540
Email address	head@priorswood.herts.sch.uk

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