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Miss Rachael Plunkett
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Dear Miss Plunkett

Short inspection of Priory Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has been consistently above average in key stage 1 and key stage 2. However, you are not complacent as you are aware that progress for some groups of pupils could be stronger.

The continued success of the school is testament to your strong leadership. You, senior leaders and governors have high aspirations for your pupils and encourage them to do their very best, whatever their ability. All leaders ensure that pupils learn in a safe and caring environment where their talents are nurtured and celebrated. Staff share your vision and are proud to be working at the school. Almost all parents and carers are complimentary about the school and comments such as, 'the school team at Priory are excellent', and, 'a caring school where everyone is valued' were typical responses to the Ofsted parent questionnaire.

Pupils are happy in school and enjoy learning. Classrooms provide stimulating learning environments and are well cared for by staff and pupils. Pupils concentrate well in lessons and are proud of their work. In every class we visited, pupils were happy to share their learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive, and as a result, pupils are confident to ask for help when needed. Pupils work well together in lessons. I witnessed many examples of collaborative working. For example, in one mathematics lesson, pupils were working through a problem together to identify where they had made a mistake.

Behaviour around the school is exemplary. Pupils play well together and relationships between pupils are harmonious. Older pupils show consideration for the younger ones. This was illustrated by Year 6 pupils helping a younger child who had fallen over. Pupils told me that behaviour around the school is typically good. This is confirmed by school records.

You have introduced a new whole-school marking and assessment policy. Evidence seen in lessons and in pupils' books indicates that teachers are providing pupils with feedback in line with this policy, which is helping them to improve their learning.

The presentation and accuracy of work for key stage 2 pupils were identified as areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. You have introduced a new handwriting policy and pupils are now learning to join letters as soon as they are able to accurately form them. This has resulted in an improved standard of handwriting in key stage 1 and in upper key stage 2. I saw some excellent examples of neat, legible and well-presented work across the school. We agreed that some of the handwriting of pupils in lower key stage 2 still needs improving.

Children in Reception quickly get off to a good start as they are given interesting activities that are well matched to their needs. They are happy and enthusiastic learners who have very quickly established good learning behaviours. The topic for this term is 'bears', and children enjoyed exploring the story of Goldilocks and the three bears. I saw good use of phonics to read during a whole-class reading activity. The proportion of children leaving Reception having reached a good level of development is consistently above average.

Governors are passionate about ensuring that the school provides the best opportunities for pupils to develop both academically and personally. They have an appropriate range of skills and experience to effectively monitor the work of the school and to challenge senior leaders. They have a very clear understanding of pupils' achievement and the strengths and areas for improvement of the school.

Pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum that makes a strong contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Trips and visits to places such as the theatre and museums enhance pupils' learning. After-school and lunchtime clubs provide a wide range of activities that are well attended. Pupils have the opportunity to participate in sports competitions against local schools and national events such as Young Voices.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety and well-being of pupils are given high priority by school leaders and all staff. You ensure that all the appropriate checks are carried out on adults before they are allowed to work with pupils. The register of adults working in the school is checked regularly by the headteacher and annually by the governors. This register meets all the statutory requirements.

The identity of visitors to the school is carefully checked and they are provided with

information about appropriate behaviour in school and what to do if they have any concerns. All safeguarding policies are up to date and meet the statutory requirements. Staff are trained annually in the latest guidance and kept up to date about any changes throughout the year. All staff are aware of the procedures to follow if they have a concern about any pupil's well-being or safety. Pupil records are detailed and kept securely. The school works with outside agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for.

Parents and staff unanimously agree that pupils are safe in school. Pupils feel safe in school. Pupils are taught how to keep safe and have a good understanding of how to keep safe when using online technology. The school provides information for parents on the school's website and runs workshops on internet safety. Pupils know the difference between bullying and 'falling out'. Pupils say that bullying is rare and have confidence that they will be listened to and any problems resolved should it happen. One parent commented, 'Any problems between pupils are resolved in a constructive way.'

Inspection findings

- To establish whether the school continues to provide a good standard of education, I focused on the following:
 - whether the most able pupils are being suitably challenged across a range of subjects
 - what senior leaders are doing to improve the progress of pupils in mathematics, especially in key stage 2
 - how effectively pupils are developing skills in subjects other than English and mathematics
 - whether senior leaders have reduced the persistent absence of a small number of pupils.
- I chose to look at whether pupils, especially the most able, are set work that is hard enough because this was an area for improvement from the previous inspection. I also felt that it was appropriate, as although the proportion of most-able pupils meeting the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 has been above average, their progress is only average, whereas progress for middle-ability pupils is often above average. You agreed this was a suitable area to focus on as it remains a key priority for the school.
- I found that teachers have high expectations of the most able pupils. In English, most-able pupils are expected to use a wider range of vocabulary and grammatical techniques. We saw some excellent examples of creative and descriptive writing in pupils' books. This starts in Reception where the most able children are able to write in full sentences using simple punctuation. In most mathematics lessons, the most able pupils are directed toward the more demanding work that allows them to develop their reasoning skills. Most-able pupils read a range of suitably challenging novels.
- In 2017, the overall progress of key stage 2 pupils in mathematics declined on

previous years. Leaders have analysed test results to look at the weaker areas of pupils' performance as well as looking at the quality of teaching. This has resulted in changes to mathematics teaching and to the courses pupils are following. Pupils concentrate well in lessons and enjoy the activities provided. Pupils told me that they enjoy mathematics as it 'makes them think'. Books indicate that pupils are provided with a wide variety of mathematical problems, including problem-solving activities. Pupils set their work out neatly.

- Some pupils are not confident to try the more challenging work. Where learning is effective in lessons, teachers are careful to monitor pupils' progress and to encourage them to move on to the more challenging activities. These are precisely matched to their level of understanding, helping to develop resilience and confidence in mathematics. The school's actions are having a positive impact on accelerating pupils' progress, but there is a need to continue to develop their resilience further so that all groups of pupils feel confident to tackle the more challenging activities.
- My third line of enquiry was to find out how well pupils are developing their skills in subjects other than mathematics and English. Pupils are making strong progress in art, Spanish and physical education. In science, pupils are provided with the opportunity to conduct a range of investigations and they are encouraged to extend their learning by making predictions and writing their own conclusions. This was seen in books throughout the school.
- Pupils' skill development is not always as strong in subjects such as history and geography. This is because there are times when the work does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to explore the subject in sufficient breadth or depth. The work provided often lacks the opportunity for pupils to further develop their literacy and mathematical skills by using them in the context of these subjects.
- Finally, I looked at attendance. In 2017, the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent from school was above average. You monitor the attendance of pupils carefully and ensure that the reasons for all absences are followed up meticulously. School records indicate that for the overwhelming majority of pupils, their absence was for a valid reason. Current attendance information indicates that attendance is at least in line with the national average and that persistent absence is now below average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching in subjects other than mathematics and English covers enough breadth and depth to sufficiently develop subject-specific skills
- the resilience of pupils in mathematics is developed by targeting learning activities more precisely to pupils' needs and moving them on quickly to more demanding work
- literacy and numeracy skills are developed further by providing meaningful and interesting opportunities in a range of curriculum subjects

- the work started on improving handwriting is developed further by ensuring a greater consistency of expectations in lower key stage 2.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Pardy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to talk about the improvements in the school since the previous inspection. I held a meeting with three governors, including the chair of governors. You and I observed learning taking place in all classes and also looked at a selection of pupils' work from all year groups. I met with a group of key stage 2 pupils and spoke to pupils informally at breaktime and lunchtime. I spoke with some parents informally at the end of the school day. I reviewed a range of the school's documents, including its self-evaluation document, and documents relating to pupils' progress, safeguarding and attendance. I checked the documents on the school's website. I also considered the views of 37 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 26 free-text responses, as well as the 105 responses to the school's own parent questionnaire. I also took account of the 123 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 25 responses to the staff questionnaire.