



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

**Inspection report**  
**The Priory Primary School**

**Sandwell Education Authority**

Dates of inspection: 11 and 12 October 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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## **Contents**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Basic information about the school</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key issues</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Inspection findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Standards achieved by the pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The quality of education</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Implementation of the action plan</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Appendix – Information about the inspection</b>	<b>9</b>

## **Basic information about the school**

Name of school:	The Priory Primary School
Type of school:	Primary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mr T Hancock
Address of school:	Dorsett Road Friary Park Wednesbury West Midlands WS10 0JG
Telephone:	0121 556 1383
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mr I Carr
Local education authority area:	Sandwell
Unique reference number:	131212
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr R Hubbleday HMI
Dates of inspection:	11 and 12 October 2004

## Introduction

1. The Priory Primary School is situated in Friary Park, which is an area of Wednesbury consisting mainly of former local authority housing. There is significant social and economic disadvantage. Thirty seven per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. There are 255 pupils in full-time education and 27 pupils attend the nursery part-time. Nearly all the pupils are of white British heritage. The school has identified a high number of pupils, 66, as having special educational needs. Five pupils have a formal Statement of Special Educational Need. Attainment on entry to the school is well below average.
2. The school was inspected in February 1999. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.
3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of February 1999. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on 14 occasions to monitor the progress being made.
4. In October, three HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 1999.

## Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:
    - the school's results in the 2003 national tests were very low at the end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and compared poorly with those achieved by similar schools. The results were especially poor in English. The school's results were much better in 2004. However, a legacy of underachievement continues to limit the headway that the pupils make. Overall attainment remains well below the levels expected but the pupils are making broadly satisfactory progress;
    - the school has good procedures for identifying pupils who have special educational needs, and support for them is well targeted;
    - pupils in the Foundation Stage are making better progress than before and there has been a significant improvement in their ability to recognise sounds and letters. Standards in personal and social development are a strength;
    - the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in all but one of the 22 lessons seen and good or very good in 16. The pupils behaved well in lessons and around the school. Many, however, lack the necessary skills and self-motivation to work as effective independent learners;
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- attendance, at 91.1 per cent, is well below the national average. However, this is a marked improvement on the previous year's figure. Many parents take their children out of school for holidays, and lateness is also an issue and accounts for over two per cent of the absence figure;
  - the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with some important strengths. It was satisfactory or better in 20 lessons, including 13 in which it was good or very good. It was unsatisfactory in two. The teaching has improved considerably over the last few years. Good practice is more widespread and less dependent on the strengths of talented individuals;
  - several teaching assistants have been at the school for a number of years and have made a significant contribution to the pupils' progress. They are knowledgeable, hard working and committed to supporting the teachers and pupils effectively;
  - the school is only just beginning to offer an acceptably broad curriculum and still has a long way to go before it consistently provides suitable levels of challenge and richness within all subjects. It has rightly focused on improving the curriculum for the core subjects, particularly English and, increasingly, mathematics and is now seeking to give more emphasis to the foundation subjects and to develop links between subjects;
  - the teachers' understanding of assessment and its importance has improved and many of the pupils' books have good examples of marking which indicates precisely what they need to improve. Target-setting is used effectively and linked to a clear expectation about the rate of progress the pupils need to make;
  - the Wednesbury Education Action Zone has played an important part in enhancing the pupils' experience of school and in promoting better progress. Funding for a learning support assistant has benefited many pupils, as has support for developing the curriculum for information and communication technology (ICT) and the arts;
  - the leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides clear and effective direction for the school's work and is ably supported by a loyal team of senior colleagues. His appointment in January 2004 brought much-needed stability after a long period of turbulence. His clarity about the issues facing the school and ways they should be tackled has enabled members of staff to work confidently and to greater effect;
  - the work in a few subjects has benefited from lively and enthusiastic leadership but many subjects have been less fortunate. Often, a teacher has taken on a responsibility but has not stayed at the school long enough to make an impact. There has been little continuity in the co-ordination of science; a new subject leader has recently been appointed from within the school and has much to do;
  - the governing body continues to improve its means of holding the school to account. It now has an almost full complement of governors and the chairs of committees are being more proactive. A particularly helpful step has been the
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formation of a strategic monitoring group which evaluates progress on the action plan;

- after a slow start when the school first became subject to special measures, the local education authority (LEA) has improved its support for the school, and this is now of good quality. There are clearly focused plans for sustaining support and working strategically in partnership with the school;
- there are ambitious plans to replace The Priory with an extended school which will bring a number of support agencies together to serve the Friary Park estate. Work has not yet started but it is hoped that a new building will open on the site in 2006.

## Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards of attainment;
- further strengthen the curriculum;
- improve the pupils' attendance and punctuality.

## Inspection findings

### Standards achieved by the pupils

7. The school's results in the 2003 national tests were very low at the end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and compared poorly with those achieved by similar schools. The results were especially poor in English, with well over half of the pupils in each key stage failing to achieve the nationally expected levels in reading and writing. Though definitive comparisons with the national pattern are not yet possible, the school's results were much better in 2004. At Key Stage 1, about half the pupils reached the expected Level 2 in reading and writing, and well over three quarters of them did so in mathematics. At Key Stage 2, nearly 60 per cent reached the national expectation in English, a rise of 16 percentage points over the previous year, and 70 per cent reached that standard in science, a rise of 13 points. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 4 remained static, but the proportion reaching the higher Level 5 rose markedly in all three subjects.

8. These advances in the test results are significant and reflect the improving standards in the pupils' work in lessons. Difficulties in staffing and elements of weak provision in recent years have resulted in a legacy of underachievement which continues to limit the headway that the pupils make. However, although overall attainment remains well below the levels expected, assessment data shows that the pupils are making broadly satisfactory progress.

9. The more-able pupils are few in number but are generally given appropriate learning challenges and are making at least satisfactory, and often good, progress. The school has

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good procedures for identifying pupils who have special educational needs, for diagnosing the particular nature of those needs and for monitoring the pupils' progress. Support is well targeted and, by the end of Key Stage 2, some have overcome their difficulties and all are making progress that is at least satisfactory.

10. Throughout the school, standards in English are well below nationally expected levels but the pupils make at least satisfactory, and sometimes good, progress in lessons. In Key Stage 1, the pupils' writing demonstrates an emerging understanding of sentence structure and of the use of appropriate connectives. Handwriting is clear and well formed, but spelling and punctuation are less secure. At Key Stage 2, the pupils learn about, and practise writing in, a suitably wide range of genres. Although the writing of a few pupils in Year 6 is well organised in paragraphs, accurately punctuated and appropriately sophisticated in expression, it is often spoilt by persistent problems with spelling. Beyond this minority, many pupils are working at levels a year or more below those expected for their age. Simple sentences and vocabulary predominate, textual cohesion and organisation are weak, and handwriting lacks fluency.

11. Standards in reading are below expected levels across the school but many pupils enjoy reading and talk about it enthusiastically despite their restricted experience of good quality children's literature. At Key Stage 1, the pupils use a range of appropriate strategies, such as segmenting words, to read unfamiliar texts. At Key Stage 2, the more-able pupils readily explain their reading preferences, have favourite authors and know about different types of stories. Less-able pupils read a range of straightforward texts competently and use appropriate strategies to correct their own mistakes.

12. Standards in speaking and listening are poor. The pupils listen to their teachers and to each other satisfactorily, but their speaking skills are underdeveloped. Contributions to discussions were hesitant, often unclear and lacked precision in the vocabulary used.

13. Standards in mathematics are well below nationally expected levels. In both key stages, many of the pupils are adept at basic arithmetic and present their work well. However, they are less confident in applying mathematics to new situations; pupils in Year 3, for example, struggled to measure furniture, and in Year 6, the pupils were hesitant when tackling calculations about real-life situations. The pupils had few strategies to fall back on and did not readily engage in discussion with one another to explore solutions to these practical problems. While the books of older pupils show much creditable work, there is limited evidence of investigatory work, of general problem solving and of data handling.

14. Standards in science are below nationally expected levels and the pupils are not developing sufficient understanding of scientific method in a systematic manner. Their knowledge of scientific principles is improving but the quality and depth of work undertaken are inconsistent across the school. In a Key Stage 1 lesson on medicines the pupils barely made satisfactory progress because there was too little opportunity to explore ideas beyond the most basic. In contrast, two upper Key Stage 2 lessons, one on pulse rates and exercise and the other on solutions, promoted a good understanding of how to plan a fair test, gather evidence and, crucially, analyse the results rigorously and explain patterns. Despite strengths in the teaching, however, the pupils' lack of understanding of basic terms, such as 'observing' and their unfamiliarity with the process and structure for recording evidence meant that they made slow progress.

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15. Attainment in ICT is below average but improving. The pupils have lacked opportunities in the past to experience the full curriculum but are rapidly gaining confidence in the use of different applications of ICT and are becoming more self-reliant. At the end of the last academic year, for instance, pupils in Years 5 and 6 used digital cameras and presentational software effectively to support their work on myths and legends.

16. Data shows that the pupils in the Foundation Stage are making better progress than before, although overall standards remain below average. There has been a significant improvement in the pupils' phonic skills and most recognise sounds and letters as well as is normally expected for pupils of their age. Reading and writing, however, lag behind this standard and many pupils have limited spoken language and understanding, which hinder their progress in these, and other, areas. Standards in creative and physical development are closer to the levels expected, and personal and social development is a notable strength.

### **The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

17. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in all but one lesson and good or very good in 16. There has been one fixed-term exclusion in the last year, for serious vandalism. The pupils behaved well in lessons across the school, showing respect for their teachers and co-operating effectively with each other. Attitudes to learning were generally positive and the pupils were receptive to good teaching and followed instructions well. Many, however, lacked the necessary skills and self-motivation to work as effective independent learners.

18. Behaviour around the school was good. The pupils moved between lessons in an orderly manner and entered classrooms ready to work. Their good understanding of acceptable conduct on the playground is effectively fostered through the positive relationships they have with lunchtime supervisors. In addition, older pupils have taken seriously their responsibility for organising playtime resources, the provision of which has promoted better social skills. The pupils welcome visitors in a friendly and appropriate manner and show a sense of pride in wearing the newly introduced school uniform.

19. Attendance, at 91.1 per cent, is well below the national average. However, this is a marked improvement on the previous year's figure of 88.7 per cent. Many parents take their children out of school for holidays, and lateness is also an issue and accounts for over two per cent of the absence figure. Good attendance is celebrated in assemblies and unexplained absence is followed up on the first day it occurs. The education and welfare officer is suitably involved where there are serious concerns.

20. The school makes good provision for the pupils' social and moral development. A programme of personal, social and health education includes regular opportunities for the pupils to discuss issues and concerns. These timetabled sessions of "circle time" have had a significant impact on the pupils' confidence and their willingness to understand different viewpoints. Their spiritual and cultural development is more limited, but the school's provision is satisfactory and improving. An assembly, led by the headteacher, had an appropriate sense of occasion and included a suitable act of worship. A new policy for religious education is beginning to broaden the pupils' understanding of a range of faiths but is at an early stage of implementation despite being a key issue from the previous inspection. Visits to the school by such organisations as the Zulu Nation touring group have had a positive impact and the school has been involved in the Wednesbury Arts Festival, the

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Sandwell Dance Festival and several sporting events. These recent initiatives have enriched the pupils' experience, but opportunities within the curriculum and daily life of the school to enhance the pupils' cultural knowledge and to foster a sense of awe and wonder are limited.

### **The quality of education**

21. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with some important strengths. It was satisfactory or better in 20 lessons, including 13 in which it was good or very good. It was unsatisfactory in two. The teaching has improved considerably since the school's inspection in 1999; the much-reduced number of lessons in which the teaching was unsatisfactory is a significant step forward. In addition, there was considerably more teaching of good quality than there has been on previous visits. In the past, the school has relied heavily on a few experienced members of staff to sustain elements of good practice when much of the school has been in turmoil. Now, in contrast, an important feature of the provision is that good practice is more widespread and less dependent on the strengths of talented individuals.

22. There were examples of good teaching at all key stages. The teachers were well prepared, had identified suitable learning objectives in their planning and had thought carefully about the deployment of teaching assistants and the use of resources. Lessons were purposeful and stimulating, with clear expectations about the pace at which the pupils needed to work and the quality of the outcomes. Discipline was well judged and usually unobtrusive, being rooted appropriately in well-established systems and mutual respect.

23. Several teaching assistants have been at the school for a number of years and have served the pupils' needs well. Their contribution to the pupils' progress continues to be significant. They are knowledgeable, hard working and committed to supporting the teachers and pupils effectively. They often provide the pupils with valuable opportunities to ask questions and talk at greater length in small groups than are generally available in whole-class lessons. While the teachers are aware of the importance of improving the pupils' limited oral skills, the school has yet to develop a policy for promoting speaking and listening across the curriculum.

24. In the weaker lessons, the teachers tended to talk for too long and did not monitor sufficiently what the pupils were doing to ensure that work was productive and accurate. Too much time was spent in consolidating knowledge rather than moving onto new ground at an appropriate pace.

25. The school is only just beginning to offer an acceptably broad curriculum and still has a long way to go before it consistently provides suitable levels of challenge and richness within all subjects. It has rightly focused on improving the curriculum for the core subjects, particularly English and, increasingly, mathematics and is now seeking to give more emphasis to the foundation subjects and to develop links between subjects. A new system of constructing medium-term plans has recently been introduced, and it highlights the importance of starting from the pupils' current knowledge and then defining the next steps they need to take to reach specific learning objectives. A strong emphasis is placed on setting work at different levels of complexity for particular groups of pupils. The teachers are managing this new system well in English and mathematics, where they are supported by extensive and detailed learning plans drawn from the national strategies. They are struggling to achieve the same precision in other subjects where they have a less detailed understanding of the curriculum and little assessment information on which to build.

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26. The teachers' understanding of assessment and its importance have improved and many of the pupils' books have good examples of marking which identifies the pupils' levels of attainment and indicates precisely what they need to improve. Target-setting is used effectively and linked to a clear expectation about the rate of progress the pupils need to make. The focus on targets is informed by effective monitoring of the pupils' progress, which is robust at Key Stage 2 and productive at Key Stage 1 although the data is less secure. Across the school, the assessment information is used well to identify which pupils need support.

27. The school makes effective use of its outdated accommodation, and the recent re-organisation of class bases and the library has improved the allocation and accessibility of resources. The refurbished library offers an attractive environment for the pupils to study in but is not complemented by an adequate provision of reading books in classrooms. In addition, those that are available are not displayed attractively.

28. The Wednesbury Education Action Zone has played an important part in enhancing the pupils' experience of school and in promoting better progress. Funding for a learning support assistant has benefited many pupils, as has support for developing the curriculum for ICT and the arts.

### **Leadership and management**

29. The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides clear and effective direction for the school's work and is ably supported by a loyal team of senior colleagues. His appointment in January 2004 brought much-needed stability to the senior leadership team after a long period of turbulence. His clarity about the issues facing the school and ways they should be tackled has enabled members of staff to work confidently and to greater effect. Strategic planning is of a high order and this has been accompanied by a rigorous analysis of progress which has ensured that the school has never lost sight of its priorities. The use of data, for instance, has improved considerably. Whereas previously the school had large amounts of information which it struggled to analyse purposefully, it now uses data in a precise and manageable way to evaluate outcomes and steer future provision. Challenging targets have been set for all areas of the school's work.

30. The senior team undertakes an extensive programme of monitoring, including regular and rigorous observations of teaching. Weaknesses in the school's work have been identified and, if required, individual teachers have been appropriately supported. There have been improvements as a result, but where issues have not been resolved, alternative strategies have been pursued. In-service training has been managed particularly well: staff are expected to identify how their practice will be improved by courses they have attended, and explicit attention is paid to these intentions when their lessons are monitored.

31. The subject co-ordinators for English and mathematics are members of the senior team and have played an important part in developing the curriculum, securing stability and ensuring consistency. The work in a few other subjects, for instance ICT, has benefited from lively and enthusiastic leadership but many subjects have been less fortunate. Often, a teacher has taken on a responsibility for one of the foundation subjects but has not stayed at the school long enough to make an impact. There has been little continuity in the co-ordination of science; a new subject leader has recently been appointed from within the school and has much to do.

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32. The governing body continues to improve its means of holding the school to account. It now has an almost full complement of governors and the chairs of committees are being more proactive. A particularly helpful step has been the formation of a strategic monitoring group which evaluates progress on the action plan.

33. After a slow start when the school first became subject to special measures, the LEA has improved its support for the school, and this is now of good quality. A wide range of advisory expertise has been deployed with increasing effect and has been appropriately co-ordinated and evaluated. There are clearly focused plans for sustaining support and working strategically in partnership with the school.

34. There are ambitious plans to replace The Priory with an extended school which will bring a number of support agencies together to serve the Friary Park estate. Feasibility studies were carried out and the funding was identified but negotiations have been protracted. Work has not yet started but it is hoped that a new building will open on the site in 2006.

### **Implementation of the action plan**

35. The inspection report of 1999 required the school to address five key issues. These related to: improving the pupils' progress and raising standards at both key stages; improving teaching, particularly at Key Stage 2; developing the use of assessment; improving the provision for religious education; and securing better behaviour. Overall, reasonable progress has been made but the school recognises that academic standards are still too low.

36. Standards in both key stages are rising as the quality of teaching improves. Data indicates that the pupils are making satisfactory progress overall although the rate varies in different parts of the school. Ambitious targets based on robust projections have been set for the future, which, if achieved, would bring the school's performance closer to that of similar schools. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 2 has improved considerably and has significant strengths. Overall, the teaching across the school is satisfactory.

37. A comprehensive programme of assessments to track the pupils' progress was introduced several years ago and has been developed effectively. The quality, and use made of, ongoing assessments of the pupils' work in lessons vary from very good to unsatisfactory, and are satisfactory overall.

38. The teachers' knowledge of the curriculum for religious education has gradually improved but development in this area has been faltering and there has been little monitoring of provision. The headteacher has assumed responsibility for co-ordinating the subject and it is beginning to receive suitable attention.

39. The teachers, teaching assistants and lunchtime supervisors apply the school's code of behaviour consistently and have high expectations. The pupils respond appropriately and their behaviour is now a strength of the school although there was a period several years ago when staffing turbulence had a severe impact on the good order of the school.

## **Appendix – Information about the inspection**

The school was inspected by one HMI and an Additional Inspector in February 1999. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in September 1999 and at regular intervals thereafter to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of February 1999.

In October 2004, three HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Twenty one lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and three registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, the chair of governors and a representative of the LEA; informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 1999 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.