



The Priory Parish CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105085
Local Authority Wirral
Inspection number 287121
Inspection date 2 November 2006
Reporting inspector George Crowther

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Aberdeen Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Birkenhead
Age range of pupils	4-11		Merseyside CH41 4HS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 6477188
Number on roll (school)	181	Fax number	0151 6502185
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs C Francis
		Headteacher	Mr P. Faragher
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Priory is a smaller than average primary school that serves an area of considerable social disadvantage. Pupils' attainment when they start school is well below average and, for some, very low. A high proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average. Almost all the pupils are from White British backgrounds. Of those from minority ethnic heritages, very few are at the early stages of learning English. The school has a language unit for 10 pupils who have speech or communication difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Priory provides an outstanding education for its pupils. Everyone in school has very high expectations of the pupils' progress and behaviour, and the pupils respond very positively. During the last few years, pupils' achievement has improved markedly. For example, in 2005, the school's Year 6 national test results placed it in the top 100 most improved schools in the country. The school has a clear picture of its own effectiveness, but caution led it to underrate some aspects of its work. It is exceptionally well placed to bring about further improvement and provides excellent value for money.

Often from low starting points, pupils make outstanding progress across the school. By Year 6, standards are at least broadly average, and for the last two years have been above average. A particular strength is the good progress pupils make in each class, which cumulatively accounts for the first rate progress across the school. Consistent good teaching, encouraged and expected by the school's leaders, is at the heart of pupils' success. Pupils of all abilities and from all backgrounds, including those in the language unit, make similar progress.

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy school and say that lessons are interesting and fun. They have positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is very good. A significant minority of pupils, however, find it difficult to focus on their work and lack the skills to work independently. Despite some improvement over the past few years, attendance is too low. The quality of teaching is consistently good. Lessons are interesting and challenging. Pupils are encouraged to enjoy their learning and teachers have high expectations of achievement. The curriculum is very rich and well planned and meets the diversity of pupils' needs effectively. Good provision in the Foundation Stage gives children a flying start at school.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Over a number of years, the headteacher has stamped his high expectations on a school that has many challenges. A strong determination that pupils should achieve as much as possible is now an intrinsic part of school life. There is a very clear view of what needs to be done next. The staff work effectively as a cohesive team to raise standards, but they also have a strong affinity for encouraging pupils' personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance for the small number of pupils who are absent too often.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

When they start school, many children have very weak basic skills. They make good, often outstanding, progress and by Year 6 have done exceptionally well to reach at least broadly average standards, and often better. Progress in the Reception class is good because the staff provide a rich range of activities and support each child's learning effectively. By the time children join Year 1, however, standards are still well

below average. During Years 1 to 6, pupils make at least good progress because high quality teaching and extra support help them to be successful. Consistent improvement leads to outstanding achievement by the time pupils leave the school. The results of national tests at the end of Year 2 have improved considerably over the past few years and are now about average. Progress from Year 3 to Year 6 has also improved markedly and is significantly better than for most schools. Pupils reach and often exceed the challenging targets set for them. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in the language unit, make good, often exceptional, progress. The work they do is well matched to their needs and they get very good support from teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

From the beginning, the school successfully nurtures pupils' confidence and enthusiasm for learning. One pupil spoke for many when he commented, 'I like lessons because they're so much fun you don't know you're learning.' This explains why pupils are so keen to do well. A significant minority of pupils, however, have difficulty sustaining concentration and lack the skills to work independently. Teachers work hard to encourage these pupils to do well. Pupils' good behaviour meets the school's high expectations. Relationships are excellent. As one pupil said, 'I like our school because everyone is very friendly.' Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A rich range of experiences, such as residential and other visits, develops pupils' understanding of themselves and their place in the wider world. Despite the school's best efforts, attendance is below average because a few pupils are absent too often.

Pupils develop a good understanding of their own well-being. They know how to make healthy choices in the food they eat and the exercise they take. They say, 'You have to have a balanced diet, but you are allowed treats sometimes'. Pupils feel safe at school and they know how to stay safe out of school. They have good opportunities to express their views through the school council. Older pupils quite naturally look after the younger ones and feel this is what is expected in their school community. Pupils make good progress in developing the skills they will need in later life, particularly in their academic work, but also in social skills such as in teamwork.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Although the school judged the quality of teaching and learning to be good, the inspection finds it outstanding because consistently good teaching, from class to class, results in outstanding achievement for the pupils. Teachers' very good management and organisation of pupils' learning are based on excellent relationships. Carefully planned lessons meet the wide range of pupils' needs. Imaginative activities, such as when Year 5 and Year 6 pupils dramatised an excerpt from a story, capture and hold

the pupils' interest and help them to learn quickly. Lively, engaging teaching generates enthusiasm, as seen when Year 3 pupils learned that knowing pairs of numbers making 10 could help them work out pairs of numbers making 100 or 1000. Teachers explain new work clearly and involve the pupils effectively through questions and discussion. Good support from teachers and teaching assistants for pupils helps them to do their best, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Good systems for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress are currently being revised and improved. They enable management to set challenging targets for individual progress, to identify pupils who may not be doing as well as they should, and to take action. Teachers make good use of information about pupils' progress to plan the next steps in learning. Careful assessment of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the setting of precise learning targets, support their progress effectively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school judged its curriculum to be good, but the inspection considers it outstanding because it supports exceptional achievement in many aspects of pupils' work. A rich range of activities and experiences meets the pupils' needs very well. The curriculum is carefully planned and organised, which helps all the pupils to build their skills and knowledge rapidly. A good and developing curriculum in the Foundation Stage helps the children to make good progress in all aspects of their learning. Throughout the school, a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy results in high achievement, but the curriculum also has strengths in the arts and design and technology that encourage pupils' practical and creative skills. For example, many pupils learn to play a musical instrument and they enjoy the many drama activities. Opportunities for learning outside lessons are outstanding in range and quality, particularly the wide range of visits that support pupils' learning. The curriculum meets the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities very well. Clear plans for their learning and skilled support from staff help support their progress effectively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school judged this aspect to be good, but the inspection finds it outstanding because, as many parents feel, the care, guidance and support for each pupil is a key strength. Many pupils need extra support because of difficulties in their lives. The staff know individuals very well and work very hard to ensure that each pupil is safe, happy and ready to learn. The pupils say they feel safe and cared for in school because, 'The teachers are kind, they care about you, and they help you if you're unhappy.' This confidence in the care staff provide makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. The school has tried and tested procedures for matters such as child protection and health and safety.

Pupils' academic progress is monitored frequently and the information is used effectively to ensure that each pupil is doing as well as possible. Teachers have a good

awareness of pupils' individual needs and what they should be learning next. They provide good guidance and support to help pupils of all abilities to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school judged this aspect to be good, but the inspection finds it is outstanding because leadership has set the high expectations that have driven on both staff and pupils to exceptional achievement. The headteacher has very clear values, which are shared by the staff. He does not accept that pupils who start school with weak skills cannot be successful. Indeed, he insists that they must succeed. Over a number of years, the school has created a very positive environment for learning, focused on high achievement, and this is the basis for its current excellence. Leaders have an exceptionally good understanding of how pupils' learning can improve further, based on careful assessment of their progress. In this way, the school uses what it knows about pupils' existing achievement to raise standards. Lessons, teachers' planning and pupils' work are monitored carefully, and action is taken to improve pupils' learning. The school uses performance management well to set staff targets concerned with raising pupils' achievement. The school improvement plan provides a very clear way forward. All these strengths put the school in an exceptionally good position to improve further.

The views of parents, pupils and other members of the school community are sought and acted upon. The school is very successful in ensuring that all pupils are fully involved in learning and school life, whatever their background, ability or particular needs. Governors provide considerable support and have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school to find out how well you are doing. I think your school is one of the best I have ever visited because everyone works so hard to make sure you learn as much as possible. Here are all the things that are so special about your school, and one way in which it could be an even better school.

- You try hard with your work and so you are learning new things very quickly.
- By the time children get to Year 6, they have learned a lot.
- You enjoy your lessons because the teachers make learning fun.
- Everyone is very friendly and you all get on extremely well together.
- You are well behaved and very friendly towards visitors.
- The older children are very responsible and they look after the younger ones well.
- You have a good understanding of how to be healthy and stay safe.
- The teachers are very good at helping you to learn quickly.
- Your parents like the school because the teachers get to know you really well.
- There are lots of interesting things to do in lessons.
- You really enjoy all the activities outside lessons, particularly the visits.
- There are lots of interesting music and drama activities.
- You like the way the staff take great care to make sure you are safe and happy.
- All the staff work hard to make sure your school is a good place to learn.
- Your headteacher and the staff think that you are all capable of doing well.

The only thing I found that is stopping you learning even more is that some of you have too many days off school. You must try to be at school every day so that you can learn as much as possible.

Thank you for helping me with the inspection of your school.