

Priory Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109647
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	310055
Inspection dates	2–3 July 2008
Reporting inspector	John Williams HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	495
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Anne Cavendish
Headteacher	Mr Keith Scotchford
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2004
School address	Britain Street Dunstable Bedfordshire LU5 4JA
Telephone number	01582 661158
Fax number	01582 472359

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Priory Middle School is a well-established middle school in the centre of Dunstable. More parents seek to send their children here than there are places available; as a consequence the school is full. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language and below average numbers are eligible for free school meals. There are 80 pupils on the register for learning difficulties and/or disabilities which is average, and there is a designated special resource centre for six children with dyslexia. The school has recently gained the Healthy Schools award and has won the 2008 Chiltern Maths Challenge.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Priory Middle school is an improving school that currently provides satisfactory value for money. It has steadily become a more effective school because leadership and management have addressed areas for improvement. Good progress has been made from the time of the previous inspection, for example, in the way governors fulfill their role. Self-evaluation is accurate and links well to improvement planning. The headteacher and managers at all levels provide good leadership because they know what needs to be done to improve further and they have the right plans in place to achieve this. Given the improvements made in the last three years, the structures and people in place, and the plans for the future, the school can demonstrate good capacity to improve further.

Attainment when pupils begin school is a little above average. Standards by the end of Year 6, and again at the end of Year 8 are above average in all but science, though the latter is improving. More pupils in Years 6 and 8 are now predicted to meet their challenging targets than in recent years. Progress is satisfactory overall and increasing; it is good in mathematics. Progress for pupils with learning difficulties, especially for those with dyslexia, is good, due to effective support from specialist teachers and classroom assistants. Overall, therefore, pupils' achievement is satisfactory though it has been improving year-on-year since 2005. There remains some underachievement by the more able, especially in science. The school has recognised that girls who achieve level 2 in their Key Stage 1 assessment have not been doing as well as they should; strategies in place to improve this are showing signs of success. Teachers are now much better at systematically tracking pupils' progress and monitoring individual targets.

The curriculum is good, providing pupils with an experience that meets current guidelines and requirements and which addresses the needs of all, including the gifted and talented. It is enriched by visits, visitors and a wide range of activities that pupils enjoy. Teaching is sound overall, though some of it is good and even outstanding. When it is only satisfactory, teachers often do not question well and thus opportunities to extend pupils' learning are missed. Pupils' care, guidance, support and personal development are good. Assessment is much improved and pupils have a good understanding of how well they are doing and what it is they need to do to improve. Some marking, for example, in mathematics, is excellent and very helpful to pupils, but there is inconsistency across the school. Variation also exists in homework. It is not systematically set and pupils fail to record it accurately in their planners.

Attendance is above average and pupils clearly enjoy coming to school. They have positive attitudes to their work and have very good relationships with adults and other pupils. They know how to stay safe and healthy and their behaviour is good.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. As one parent said, 'My children settled down well into Priory and have become happy, well rounded young people'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement, particularly in science, and increase the number of pupils gaining the higher levels especially in Years 6 and 8.
- Improve teaching with better questioning and greater challenge
- Bring consistency to marking, the setting of homework and the way pupils record homework tasks in their daily planners.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils begin school with standards that are a little above the national average. Except for science, standards in subjects are above average by the time they leave school and this demonstrates satisfactory progress. The school can clearly show where a number of individual pupils make good progress, for example, those with learning difficulties or disabilities. Pupils are set challenging targets and more are on track to reach them than in previous years, though girls and some of the more able pupils could do better. Pupils' achievement is therefore satisfactory, though it is good in mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are confident and thoughtful young people who show pride in their school and respect for one another. They enjoy coming to school; this is reflected in the school's above average attendance figures. Typically, pupils say, 'School is enjoyable because it is a safe place to be and teachers help us to become confident in relationships.' The 'buddy' scheme enables older pupils to help younger learners improve reading skills and in build relationships. Pupils' behaviour is good. Very few pupils are ever excluded and the school has a good record of integrating all pupils.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good and reflected in the good relationships and respect they show for the views and values of others. They participate well in the many physical activities available during the day, which helps them appreciate the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle and to succeed in competitive sport. Pupils are aware of the importance of healthy eating and this is evident in the recent recognition of the 'Healthy Schools' award. Pupils engage well in decision making through the school council and in raising money for charities, but other opportunities for community engagement are less well developed. The preparation for pupils' future economic well-being is sound.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory because teachers have sound subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. Teachers share lesson objectives at the start so that pupils know what they are going to learn, but not all lessons include time to reflect on learning at the end. Homework is not regularly set and, where it is, pupils do not systematically record it accurately in their planners. Marking, though excellent at times, is inconsistent. Where lessons are only satisfactory there is a tendency for the teacher to talk too much at the expense of providing enough time for pupils to develop independence in their learning. In these lessons, questioning does not challenge sufficiently well.

However, some of the teaching is good or outstanding. Pupils enjoy lessons and make the best progress when learning begins as soon as they arrive in class, as in singing to start a French

lesson, and where the lesson continues with a variety of activities. All teachers use interactive whiteboards confidently and exceptionally well to support learning. Teaching assistants make valuable contributions to learning. Teachers manage classrooms effectively; there are good relationships between them and their pupils. In the best lessons, teachers use ways of helping pupils think about their own learning. Pupils know the National Curriculum level of their work and many have an idea of what they need to do to progress further in these areas.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has given careful thought to matching the curriculum to the needs and interests of pupils in order to prepare them for the next stage of school life. Extra time is allocated to English and mathematics to help ensure pupils can achieve sound future economic well-being. Pupils have good opportunities to study a wide range of discrete subjects including, for example, French and information and communication technology, with ample time for physical education. Where possible, classes are organised according to ability so that the curriculum can be better adapted to meet pupils' needs. There is improved provision for gifted and talented pupils since the previous inspection with a wide range of suitable activities now on offer. Pupils with particular needs, including dyslexia, experience a curriculum that helps them make very good progress. They enjoy enhancement to the curriculum through activities such as field trips, visits from external speakers and theatre activities. The school provides a good range of enrichment, especially sports such as golf, cheerleading and martial arts. Pupils speak positively of these experiences and take up is high.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils and parents are appreciative of the good level of care and support they receive from the school. Many parents say how well their child settled into school and improved in self-confidence. There are good arrangements to induct pupils to the school and similarly when they move to the upper school. Pupils are well known as individuals and their needs are identified and regularly reviewed. This is particularly evident for pupils with learning difficulties, and results in them making good progress. There is good support from external agencies and by classroom assistants for pupils with specific needs. Progress is tracked by managers and leads to early intervention. Safeguarding procedures are in place, including those relating to child protection, and risk assessments are carried out properly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good, which is an improvement from the time of the last inspection. The headteacher and senior staff lead the school well. They are well thought of by staff and by parents. Governance has improved and is now good. Governors have acquired an excellent view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have both challenged and supported the school very well in order to improve.

Performance management and the monitoring of teaching and learning are accurate and take place regularly. The school provides satisfactory value for money because pupils' progress to date has been satisfactory. However, there is evidence of a steady rise in standards over recent

years and there is a clear upward trend in achievement. Improvement planning is good and links to accurate self-evaluation. The new senior leadership team, together with subject teams, is developing well. Senior managers have quickly acquired an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses in their areas. Given the progress since the last inspection, the structures in place and the accurate targets set, the school demonstrates good capacity to improve further.

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Annex A

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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

4 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Priory Middle School, Britain Street, Dunstable, LU5 4JA

Thank you for making Mr Blakemore, Mrs Hill and me so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting and talking with you. You seem to really enjoy coming to school and behave well.

Priory Middle school is a better school than it was when it was last inspected. Mr Scotchford, the staff and the Governors have made good improvements. They lead the school well. They take good care of you and you now know much more about how well you are doing and what you need to do to get better. Your English and mathematics results have improved and although you are getting better at science the results could be higher, particularly for those who are able to achieve the best grades. You also know how to look after yourselves, how to stay safe and how to be healthy. It is good to see so many of you taking part in sport and other activities. We thought achieving the Healthy Schools award and winning the Chiltern mathematics challenge was very good. Well done!

The teaching in the school is satisfactory overall but some of it is really good. We have asked the school to look at ways of making it all good by helping teachers ask you better, challenging questions. We have also asked the teachers to look at ways of improving their marking of your work, to set homework regularly and to make sure you fill out your homework tasks in your planners correctly!

My best wishes go to all of you for your future success at Priory Middle School.

Yours faithfully

John Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector