

Priory Junior School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 110702 |
| Local Authority | CAMBRIDGESHIRE LA |
| Inspection number | 310395 |
| Inspection dates | 17–18 April 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Lynne Blakelock |

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

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| Type of school | Junior |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 7–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 305 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr M Williamson |
| Headteacher | Ms T Gould |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 March 2004 |
| School address | Longsands Road St Neots Cambridgeshire PE19 1TF |
| Telephone number | 01480 398039 |
| Fax number | 01480 356051 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Priory Junior School is a larger than average school. It is situated on the outskirts of the market town of St Neots and serves pupils from a wide area of the town and the village of Hail Weston. On entry to the school, the standards at which pupils are working vary but are generally similar to those expected for their age. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and have English as their first language. The percentages of pupils that have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or a statement of special educational need are above average. The school was awarded the Basic Skills Quality Mark for the second time in 2006. It achieved Activemark Sport in 2007. The headteacher was appointed in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Priory Junior School provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education for its pupils. The school is now resolutely moving forward, based on a realistic assessment of its strengths and areas for improvement. Whilst the impact of leadership and management on the school's performance is satisfactory, the headteacher's implementation of highly appropriate approaches to change is laying a firm foundation on which to build. Middle managers' roles and effectiveness are developing well although there is not yet a sharp enough focus on specific areas to quicken the rate of progress of pupils.

Pupils achieve satisfactorily. Their steady progress through the school reflects the sound quality of teaching. Teaching is an improving aspect of the school's work, with some good practice, which is encouraged by whole-school development initiatives. In particular, teachers make clear to pupils, and regularly reinforce the purpose of learning. However, tasks do not always match closely enough the different levels at which pupils are working in their mixed ability groups. This slows their progress, especially of the more able pupils. Those who find learning difficult make good progress and reach standards that are above those of similar pupils nationally because they are supported well in specific tasks. The quality of marking of pupils' work is an area in which the school has improved since the last inspection

The standards that pupils reach by the end of Year 6 are average in English and science. They are above average in mathematics. English standards, which are lower than in other subjects, show improvement because shortcomings in pupils' writing skills are being successfully tackled. Girls' standards, which were lower than boys in 2007 national tests, particularly in mathematics, are also improving because the curriculum is planned to take into account their preferred ways of learning. The curriculum is a good aspect of the school's work because it exposes pupils to a broad range of interesting activities, both in and out of school time. Activities promote pupils' learning and enjoyment and their personal development well. Information and communications technology (ICT), however, is not yet resourced fully or extended enough through the curriculum to ensure pupils' skills are further developed as a tool for learning.

Pupils' good personal development is the starting point of the school's work and is bound together by the strong lead of staff in this caring and happy school. Pupils have suitable opportunities to develop the diverse skills they will need for the next stage of their education. Their sensible behaviour and care and respect for other pupils, staff and the wider community are important steps towards gaining these skills. The improved provision and the good care, guidance and support of pupils encourage them to feel happy and secure in school. All health and safety procedures are in place and any pupils' concerns are handled sensitively. Productive home-school relationships mean that parents are increasingly involved in their children's learning. One parent wrote that pupils 'thrive in an environment which gives them additional responsibilities and allows them to contribute to school development.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Help pupils to make more rapid progress by ensuring that all have work that closely matches their abilities.
- Increase the resources and extend the provision for ICT to develop pupils' skills and to enrich the curriculum more widely.
- Provide a sharper focus for middle managers in their drive to raise standards.

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

By the end of Year 6, pupils' standards are broadly average and improving. Based on their starting points the progress that they make is steady and achievement is satisfactory. Standards in mathematics in 2007 were above average because effective teaching strategies have been embedded through the school. The management of the school has also identified the under-achievement in pupils' writing, which pulled English results down in 2007. Carefully thought out strategies are resulting in better progress in pupils' construction of sentences and independent writing skills. In 2007, girls performed less well than boys in all subjects. This has led, for example, to effective single sex intervention groups in mathematics, and consequent improvement in their work. Pupils who find learning difficult make good progress through the school because they are supported well. More able pupils make satisfactory progress, but tasks do not always provide sufficient challenge for them. In 2007, fewer pupils reached higher than average standards in English than is found nationally.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good because of the variety of opportunities presented through the curriculum and everyday school life. Pupils enjoy school, as seen in their good attendance, positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour. They say they feel safe and well cared for and are supportive towards fellow pupils. They generally respond enthusiastically in lessons. Participation is high in the wide range of activities outside lessons, which includes a thriving cross country club. Pupils are aware of the importance of exercise and a balanced diet, as reflected in their sensible choices for lunch. Participation in the school council gives the pupils a good insight into the democratic process. They develop good collaborative skills through working with partners and in groups and in taking responsibility for helping round the school. These contribute to a sound preparation for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The good subject knowledge of teachers enables pupils to build steadily on their knowledge and skills. Pupils understand the purpose of lessons and teachers regularly revisit learning objectives. Teaching styles help both boys and girls to remain focused and interested. However, the quality of learning is variable and results in progress that, overall, is no better than satisfactory. This is because tasks do not always match closely enough pupils' learning needs, particularly those of the more able pupils, and this restricts progress. In good lessons, especially in Years 5 and 6, there is a brisk pace, good variety of activities and pupils are very involved in their learning. Assessment of each other's work is a developing area and is focusing pupils more on the quality of their learning. Marking is used increasingly well to point the way to specific improvements as well as to praise and encourage pupils, although this is stronger in literacy than mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned and engages pupils because it makes learning interesting. It is based on literacy and numeracy, with growing opportunities to practise these skills across subjects. This approach includes through themes, such as an in-depth project on India. Pupils have a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education. A wide range of clubs and visits, carefully designed to meet the needs and interests of all pupils, contributes to the sense of achievement and pride in belonging to the school community. Pupils enjoy the wide range of creative opportunities, including musical, artistic and sporting activities. Corridors and classrooms show evidence of the broad and effective provision for art and enliven the learning environment. Those who find learning difficult are well catered for and provision for gifted and talented pupils is developing. Although the school has invested in resources, the potential of ICT for a broader skills base and to enrich the curriculum has not been fully explored.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school looks after the pupils well. Risk assessments are carried out regularly; staff training in child protection and first aid are up to date. The school does all it can to prevent any unacceptable behaviour. Helpful arrangements for pupils who are new to the school, and good partnerships with outside agencies, encourage pupils to settle quickly to learning. They receive good personal as well as educational guidance. Particularly good support from teaching assistants enables pupils who find learning difficult to achieve well. Support for the gifted and talented pupils is not yet fully effective in enabling them to reach their potential. Pupils have a good understanding of their literacy and numeracy targets and this ownership helps to focus them on raising their standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is providing focused leadership. Carefully thought out strategies, along with appropriately challenging targets, are now bearing fruit, such as pupils' good progress in mathematics. Although their impact on progress is satisfactory overall, solid foundations have been laid. The headteacher is supported well by the deputy headteacher and, together, they have encouraged a strong team spirit and staff commitment that contribute strongly to making this a happy and improving school. Well organised middle managers have a good knowledge of pupils' learning needs. Their focus on specific improvement issues, though, is not always specific enough in their drive to raise standards. Professional development opportunities link closely to school improvement priorities and confirm the school's satisfactory capacity to improve. Governors have an increasing knowledge of the school and are developing their role as 'critical friends'.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 | 3 |

Achievement and standards

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| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| 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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 3 |
| 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

21 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Priory Junior School, St Neots, PE19 1TF

Mr Kerr, Mr Skinner and I thoroughly enjoyed the two days we spent with you recently. This letter tells you what we found out about your school. However, first I want to thank you for your friendliness and helpfulness during our visit and for telling us about your time here.

Your school is a satisfactory and improving school. Already, standards in mathematics are good and they are improving in English and science. You are all making satisfactory progress. Those of you who sometimes find learning difficult are making good progress. Teaching is also improving and you enjoy the different ways that you learn.

Ms Gould and your teachers look after you well and make sure you are safe and happy. Your parents agree and are pleased with the school. We were pleased with your good attendance and good behaviour. You told us that you enjoy opportunities to help run the school. The school council is just one of the ways that you are able to practise skills that you will need when you are older.

All of the staff work hard to improve the school. We have asked Ms Gould to look at three areas of the school's work that will help this to happen. First, the tasks that you are given in lessons should offer you the right amount of challenge, to help you to make good progress. ICT also needs to be developed further so that you can learn more skills and use them in a greater variety of ways in other subjects. Finally, we have asked teachers who are in charge of subjects to help you to make more progress across the school by concentrating on the same areas for improvement.

The inspection team hopes that you will continue to work hard, and by doing so, help the teachers to help you.

I send you our best wishes for the future.

Mrs Lynne Blakelock

Lead inspector