

Priors Wood Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 117271 |
| Local Authority | HERTFORDSHIRE LA |
| Inspection number | 312550 |
| Inspection date | 5 November 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Richard Cheetham |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3-11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 200 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Andy Caisey |
| Headteacher | Miss Janet Williams |
| Date of previous school inspection | 4 November 2002 |
| School address | Cozens Road Ware Hertfordshire SG12 7HZ |
| Telephone number | 01920 464135 |
| Fax number | 01920 466540 |

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

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspection evaluated the school's overall effectiveness and investigated the following issues: pupils' progress and standards by Year 6, especially boys' achievement in writing, how effectively pupils' personal development and well-being are promoted and the extent of their independence skills, the school's evaluation of teaching and learning, how well the curriculum meets the needs of specific pupils and the effectiveness of middle leaders. Evidence was collected from: school documents and data, parental questionnaires, interviews with pupils, staff and the chair of governors, and observations of teaching and school activities. Other aspects of the school were not investigated in detail but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included, where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school. The number on roll has declined since the previous inspection partly because of the closure in 2005 of the unit for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Nearly all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The school serves a community of mostly above average socio-economic circumstances. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average as is the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils start school with average attainment. The school holds the Healthy School Award and has recently won a silver Artsmark award and an Activemark award.

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: 2

This is an effective school because it promotes above average standards and pupils' excellent personal development and well-being. From the school's good care and guidance, pupils have very confident attitudes to learning and so benefit from the good teaching and an effective and broad curriculum. As a result of this, and the good leadership and management, pupils make good progress from average starting points, achieve well and go on to reach above average standards when they leave. Parents hold the school in high regard and have few complaints. One comment was typical of many, 'I am very happy with my children's education at Priors Wood. It is a close knit school where it is shown that every child matters to them.' The school provides good value for money and this matches how the school sees itself.

At the heart of the school's success is the way all staff work together to help pupils enjoy their time in school and achieve well in various ways. When asked, few pupils could think of any ways in which the school could improve but they could offer many reasons why they enjoyed school, such as the opportunities to develop their musical and artistic skills. Pupils realise that academic progress is important and through good marking of their work and clear target-setting, they know how to improve. This is particularly true of writing where, in response to a downturn in results last year from well above average, the school now gives pupils more opportunities to write and edit longer pieces of writing. Staff successfully encourage boys' literacy skills by choosing resources and themes to catch their interest. Because of this and other teaching and learning initiatives, standards in Years 2 and 6 are above average in English, mathematics and science. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties are assessed early and met effectively often through very well-organised support from teaching assistants. This helps them make similar progress to their peers.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They have a strong sense of the value of supporting one another. Older ones willingly involve themselves in programmes such as play leaders and partners to look after younger pupils. Friendships are strong and relationships are excellent. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are considerate, polite and look out for one another. Through the extensive arts programmes, pupils develop a very good understanding of cultural and faith diversity. They respond readily to the needs of others through, for example, the school council's initiatives on charitable collections. Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles which is very well promoted through many initiatives such as the travel plan, recycling, extra swimming lessons, healthy meals and a wide range of well-attended extra physical activities.

Pupils feel safe in school and are comfortable with one another. They understand how to keep safe in different situations such as on school visits or during pedestrian training. They conduct informal risk assessments which the school intends to develop alongside the governors' good procedures. Pupils' attendance levels are consistently above average but are a little affected by parental choice of holidays in term time. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. Older pupils carry out a wide range of routine tasks to help the school run smoothly. They reliably work for the good of others such as when they set out the outdoor play equipment for the youngest pupils. They take pride in producing the school newspaper and in debating the views of their classmates in the school council. They take the initiative when designing playground equipment or organising charitable events and thrill in representing their school in local and national events such as singing in the Albert Hall.

Through their good progress in communication, numeracy and information technology skills, and their understanding of working with others, pupils have a good platform for their future development. The school seeks to promote this further by increasing the application of basic skills in other subjects and building on its links with the local business community. This is part of an excellent support network on which the school draws to support pupils' well-being. These links include those with secondary education on transfer and the Arts, road safety and first aid organisations, the Sports Partnership and Young Citizens Awards.

The headteacher has skilfully developed an effective senior management team who lead very well by example and have delegated responsibility for most major aspects of the school's work. This arrangement works well and has helped the school make good progress since it was last inspected. The senior management team draws together the school's efforts to provide good capacity for further improvement. However, the leadership of the Foundation Stage does not have a high enough priority. As a result, provision, although improved, is not yet consistent across the two classes. Senior staff regularly monitor the quality of teaching and review the school's progress against its very effective development plan. Their reports to governors enable the governing body to carry out its duties well. Governors are very active supporters who hold the school to account through their own monitoring and through receiving reports. Senior managers draw on an adequate system of recording pupils' progress to set challenging targets and this is promoting higher standards than last year. However, the system is cumbersome and takes up too much management time to monitor the progress of pupil groups efficiently.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

There are some excellent teaching and learning opportunities in the Nursery class and good quality ones in Reception. These enable children to settle to learning quickly and make good progress overall. Pupils gain confidence in their new surroundings because staff establish good routines and expectations and balance indoor and outdoor learning opportunities to best effect. Although the organisation of learning in both classes is effective, it is more flexible and has higher expectations in the Nursery. Here staff are adept at catching the moment to best capitalise on children's new learning. Not enough is done to enable the best practice to spread across both classes. There are very effective links with parents, which have been recently strengthened by home visits. In both classes, staff assess children's learning well and monitor their progress carefully. This shows that pupils make good progress in all aspects of learning and reach or exceed the expected levels by the time they start Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Delegate responsibility for leadership of the Foundation Stage so that best practice is shared effectively.
- Monitor the progress of individuals and groups more efficiently.

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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? | 2 |
| 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? | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| 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? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| 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? | 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 | 2 |
| 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

6 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Priors Wood Primary School, Ware, Hertfordshire, SG12 7HZ

Thank you for making me so welcome to your school when I inspected it recently. I appreciated you telling me how much you enjoy being there, how involved you are in all the different activities and how little you want it to change. I enjoyed my working lunch with the school council and other children. This letter is to tell you what I learned during the day.

I agree with you and your parents that it is a good school. It helps you become confident, caring and capable because it offers you all many different activities. These bring out the best in you, such as in the Arts and sport, as well as in learning to communicate effectively and use mathematical and computer skills well. You make good progress from the start because staff teach you well and show you how to help yourselves. The adults give you many responsibilities and you rise to the challenge by helping improve the school community. Your teachers work very well with people outside the school to help you develop further. The headteacher and senior staff work well together and, with the governors, have good plans for the school's future. With these in mind, I have asked the school to make sure that senior staff look after the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception Classes) better, and that they use the information they have on your progress more efficiently.

It was a pleasure to meet you all and I wish you well for the future.

Richard Cheetham

Lead inspector