

Princes Risborough Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133513
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	316137
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Bradley Simmons HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	256
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Orsler
Headteacher	Mrs S Whitlow
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2004
School address	Wellington Avenue Princes Risborough HP27 9HY
Telephone number	01844 345251
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors carried out this inspection.

Description of the school

Princes Risborough is an average sized primary school. The roll has risen steadily over the past few years. The school serves a relatively advantaged area of Buckinghamshire and includes specialist provision for 12 pupils who have social communication difficulties. These pupils are reflected in the higher than average percentage of pupils who have statements of special educational need (SEN). The percentage of pupils entitled to a free school meal is lower than the national average. The vast majority of pupils are White British.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to all aspects of the work of the social communication difficulties department, the curriculum across the school, academic support and guidance for all pupils, and leadership and management at all levels.

Improvement is also required in relation to the teaching and assessment of early reading, including systematic phonics, and to the teaching and assessment of writing and mathematics.

Princes Risborough Primary has some significant inadequacies. Prime amongst these is the failure of senior leaders, in conjunction with the local authority, to secure an adequate level of provision this term for pupils within the school's social communication difficulties department. These vulnerable pupils are not getting the continuity of provision they require. There are, at present, no permanent teaching staff within the department. The two temporary teachers in post this term are both part-time. On the days they are not in school, learning support assistants are responsible for planning, teaching and assessment within the department. These staff do not possess the level of professional knowledge required to undertake these essential tasks. As a result, planning builds insufficiently on prior attainment and pupils' progress against their individual education plans (IEPs) has not been tracked at all this term.

Across the rest of the school, pupils are making satisfactory progress overall. In the Nursery class, good teaching and a judiciously considered curriculum underpin the flying start made by pupils. This demonstrates the potential of Princes Risborough's pupils. This initial rate of learning is not sustained, particularly in English and, to a lesser extent, in mathematics because teaching, although satisfactory overall, is variable. Teachers' expectations of pupils are sometimes too low. Assessment is weak. For example, early reading records were not passed from the Foundation Stage to Year 1 this year, and, as a result, time has been wasted re-assessing pupils' capabilities. Crucially, teaching across the school is not underpinned by sharp strategic planning which focuses on the weaker areas of the school's work. This results in a lack of focused planning and limits the impact of teaching upon learning.

In Years 5 and 6, there is some good teaching, for example in science, which enables pupils to reach their potential. However, the good percentage of pupils attaining the highest level in the science national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2007 highlights underachievement of the same pupils in English and mathematics. Standards attained by Year 6 pupils have declined since the last inspection; these are now just meeting national averages.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, and there are some strengths. Pupils' behaviour, their knowledge about and commitment to following a healthy lifestyle, and their charitable work are good. The school has neglected opportunities to promote pupils' cultural development, including preparing them for life in an increasingly diverse British society. Pupils exhibit a satisfactory enjoyment of school. At times, however, they are frustrated by the lack of challenge presented by some tasks. In addition, the curriculum is not sufficiently adapted to inspire pupils to reach their potential.

Safeguarding and child protection procedures are strong, and relationships with, and information to parents are good.

In discussions, senior leaders demonstrated a good awareness of the inadequacies in the school's performance. Their track record in improving the school's performance since the last inspection has, however, with the sole exception of improved attendance, been too limited. Monitoring regimes are not focused securely upon learning and have given senior leaders an unjustifiably good evaluation of teaching. Leadership is not distributed widely enough; there is no shared understanding amongst staff of what they need to focus upon in order to raise standards. Key planning documents do not contain strategies to tackle weaknesses in provision. Governors do not receive the level of information they require to hold the school satisfactorily to account.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision is satisfactory overall. Teaching and assessment are strong in the Nursery and are having a good impact on children's progress. The teaching of early reading, including systematic phonics, and number skills, is good. The environment is fresh and exciting and children enjoy a range of good activities in each of the six areas of learning. Children's progress slows during their Reception year, so despite their good start in the Nursery, they leave the Foundation Stage with attainment in line with national expectations; more could be expected of pupils who make such a strong start in the Nursery. In the Reception class, assessment of individual pupils' reading and writing skills is not diagnostic enough to spot problems early and intervene quickly.

Throughout the Foundation Stage, pupils socialise well with each other and their behaviour is good. Outdoor provision is strong; children enjoy a good range of activities in their outdoor space from exuberant physical activity to early writing, painting and music.

What the school should do to improve further

- In conjunction with the local authority, secure, as a matter of urgency, improved provision for pupils within the social communication difficulties department by appointing suitably qualified and permanent teaching staff.
- Improve assessment systems so that teachers build accurately and more rapidly on pupils' existing skills.
- Improve the curriculum so that it increases pupils' enjoyment and progress, and so that it provides planned opportunities for pupils' cultural development.
- Ensure teaching is underpinned by agreed whole-school strategies for improving pupils' skills and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Ensure leaders at all levels evaluate accurately the work of the school and pursue improvement relentlessly and rigorously.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils enter the school with skills and abilities that are very securely in line with those normally expected. Consistently good teaching in the Nursery enables children to make a flying start and demonstrates their good potential. They make good progress. However, teaching in Reception does not capitalise upon this, so by the time pupils leave the Foundation Stage, their attainment remains in line with national expectations.

Pupils make adequate progress during Key Stage 1. Overall results at the end of Year 2 have been variable over the past few years. They have never exceeded national averages and once within the past three years dipped to a level significantly below this. In 2005 and 2007, a

significant percentage of pupils did not reach the level in writing expected nationally for this age group.

Pupils make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 2 and attained standards in 2007 that were around average. Although the progress made by pupils shows an improving picture over the past few years, overall standards have declined since 2004. Too few pupils have attained the higher level 5 over time, particularly in writing and, to a lesser degree, in mathematics. A good percentage of pupils attained this level in science in 2007 indicating that more should have done so in other subjects.

The progress of pupils who have social communication difficulties is inadequate. There is limited tracking of pupils' progress and, as a result, learning tasks are not matched sufficiently their very specific needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils feel safe, well cared for and they report that 'pupils here are nice to each other'. Behaviour is good; pupils are polite and courteous and interruptions to learning are rare. The school has improved attendance since the last inspection. This is now in line with the national average. The school council participates well in the life of the school. Its members are rightly proud of the role it played in selecting new play equipment for the playground.

Pupils show a keen awareness of how to follow a healthy lifestyle. A large and increasing number cycle to school supported by the after-school cycling proficiency club. Pupils take advantage of the fresh fruit and vegetables available at break time. They make good use of well resourced and extensive outside play areas and play well together.

Pupils' spiritual development is just satisfactory. Pupils listen attentively during assemblies and pause quietly during the brief moments provided for reflection. The school is neglecting opportunities to promote pupils' cultural development. Pupils have not visited differing places of worship or welcomed visitors from the main British faiths into school within the past two years. The curriculum contains few opportunities to learn about the range of diverse cultures which make up British society. Although pupils are rightly proud of the money they raise for charity, the school does not capitalise, for example, on its fundraising support for a school in Kenya by developing pupils' understanding of cultural differences. Pupils within the social communication difficulties department are happily settled and relationships with adults are good. Staff provide sensitive encouragement to individuals.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory. In most lessons pupils are well managed and relationships are good. However, teaching does not consistently ensure that pupils make the progress they could. Teachers are not addressing gaps in pupils' learning with sufficient rigour. As a result, pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress. Reading records lack the diagnosis required to move pupils on. In many lessons assessment information is not used well enough to pitch teaching and tasks at the right level for different ability groups. Sometimes too much is expected of pupils but, often, the work set does not provide sufficient challenge. Too much lesson time

is allocated to teacher input, ostensibly to improve pupils' speaking and listening. However, this leads to pupils spending too much time sitting passively.

Although teachers make the purpose of each lesson clear to their pupils, too often their planning, teaching and assessment do not identify the key points that pupils need to grasp to make more progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This problem is compounded by the lack of a strategic approach to improving pupils' performance in these subjects. In English lessons, for example, teaching is not sufficiently focused upon the key features that underpin good writing. Pupils' potential is demonstrated more clearly by their better progress in the nursery and in science where a wider range of good teaching and learning strategies are used.

The quality of teaching and learning within the social communication difficulties department is unsatisfactory. Teachers and support staff have insufficient understanding of how pupils learn and activities do not challenge and interest pupils sufficiently. In some lessons, support materials are not used enough to support learning. For example, no visual cues were used to help pupils understand the next steps in a physical education lesson.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Although the curriculum is based upon nationally produced schemes of work, it has not been sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of all pupils in the school and this limits their progress and enjoyment in key areas of learning. Through recent monitoring, subject coordinators have started identifying some aspects of the curriculum that are inadequately matched to pupils' needs. However, action based upon these analyses is not being rigorously planned by subject leaders and driven and monitored by senior leaders. The curriculum offers too few opportunities for problem solving and investigative work and there are limited opportunities for pupils to apply their learning in one area of the curriculum to another. This is particularly true of writing. The school recognises the need to review its curriculum to promote pupils' enjoyment and achievement. The school offers a satisfactory range of enrichment activities. Pupils participate well in extra-curricular clubs and activities. Participation in residential school visits is limited but improving.

The curriculum for pupils with social communication difficulties is unsatisfactory. It is not adapted sufficiently to meet their specific needs. Planning builds insufficiently on prior attainment. There is a lack of balance in activities. For example, swimming and physical education lessons take place on the same day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Care, guidance and support are inadequate overall because academic guidance is too weak. Nevertheless, the school provides a good level of pastoral care and support for its pupils. Staff have developed a warm and friendly environment in which the individual needs of pupils are respected and valued. Adults take good note of any concerns pupils may have, and deal with these sensitively.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Newsletters and reports inform parents about the curriculum and about their children's attainment. Sound links generally exist with those parents of pupils within the social communication difficulties department.

Across the school, assessment procedures are weak; this was a key issue at the time of the last inspection and there has been insufficient improvement. Marking is too variable. The best marking is focused, addresses pupils' learning targets and helps them make the progress of which they are capable. However, most of the marking is not good enough because it does not help pupils to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate overall. Senior leaders have too rosy a view of the quality of teaching and learning. Their monitoring is too focused on teaching, and too little on learning.

Strategic leadership is not distributed widely enough. Too much responsibility for school improvement rests with the headteacher and deputy. There has been no analysis of the progress made by different groups of pupils over time. The school improvement plan contains a list of actions without detailing the strategies that will be used to secure better pupils' progress. It contains no reference to weaknesses identified by the school in reading, writing and mathematics. It contains no annual targets for each year group of children so the governors are unable to hold the school to account for its performance. Monitoring and evaluation functions within the plan are confused.

During the inspection, senior leaders demonstrated clearly that they were aware of the significant shortcomings in the school's performance, including the failure to deliver a consistent improvement in pupils' progress. However, their track record in securing improvement since the last inspection has been too patchy. Their failure to secure adequate provision this term for pupils within the social communication difficulties department is a serious omission.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Achievement and standards

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	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
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

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?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 January 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Princes Risborough Primary School, Princes Risborough, HP27 9HY

Thank you for the welcome you gave to us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you very much.

We found out some good things about your school. Your behaviour is good. You are very polite and you listen very carefully during lessons. You know a great deal about how to live a healthy lifestyle. We were very impressed with the number of you who cycle to school, and with the number of you who ate fresh carrots at break time! The school council has done good work, such as choosing new playground equipment for you to use.

You are clearly doing everything you can to play your part in the life of the school, but we decided that the school should be doing more for you. Firstly, we have asked the school to improve the social communication difficulties department. At the moment, it is not good enough to give those of you who work in it the help that you need.

We have asked the school to make sure that all the teachers agree what steps they are going to take to improve the progress of children in each subject. We have also asked the school to make sure it plans your lessons more carefully and finds out accurately what you know and can do already. This is because we want teachers to make sure you move more quickly to the next stage in your learning.

We have said that teachers should be planning more interesting activities for you during some lessons, so you enjoy school more and make more progress. We have told the school that you need to find out more about how different groups of people live in Britain today.

At the moment the school is not doing as well as it could for you. Please be very clear that this is not your fault. The school is being given a Notice to Improve. This means that the school will get the help it needs to get better. An inspector from Ofsted will visit to check that the school is improving.

Good luck in the future.

Best wishes,

Bradley Simmons

Her Majesty's Inspector