

Priory Common School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110380
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	325140
Inspection date	12 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Jarvis

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	163
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Howarth
Headteacher	Mrs Anne Fox
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Scatterill Close Bradwell Milton Keynes MK13 9EZ
Telephone number	01908 321646
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- What impact has the action taken by leaders and managers had on pupils' standards and personal development?
- What factors have boosted teaching and the curriculum since the last inspection?
- How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?
- How effective is the Early Years Foundation Stage?

Evidence was gathered from a range of documents, school records, pupil progress data, discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, chair of governors, staff, parents and pupils, observations around the school and responses to the parents' questionnaire. Some aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Priory Common is a smaller than average infant school. Reception children join the Early Years Foundation Stage each September. Like other year groups they are taught in two classes. The large majority of pupils have a White British heritage. Just under one third of pupils come from minority ethnic groups, mostly of Black or mixed heritage, and this has grown almost threefold in the last two years. A below average proportion are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils who have a learning difficulty and/or disability is average. The main areas of need are in moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social needs, and speech and language difficulties. The school has the Basic Skills and Activemark awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'Priory Common offers wonderful learning opportunities. 'The high standards are down to the wonderful leadership of the headteacher and excellent teachers.' These two comments typify the views of many parents and accurately reflect what makes Priory Common an outstanding school. A significant improvement in standards since the last inspection has been brought about by a potent blend of clear-minded and aspirational leadership, significant improvements to the quality of teaching and the curriculum and the excellent attitudes to learning of the pupils. These underpin the excellent progress pupils make both academically and in their personal development.

Standards at the end of Year 2 are much better than at the time of the last inspection. Over the past three years standards have been consistently and exceptionally above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. For example, in 2008, most pupils reached the expected level in all three areas, and half reached the higher level in reading and mathematics. The proportion reaching the higher level in writing has been not quite as high but still well exceeds the picture nationally. The school has been putting in extra measures to address this, particularly in respect of further improving boys' writing, and the gap is closing. The bar is set high in terms of the progress pupils are expected to make and very challenging targets are set and achieved. The school assesses the progress of individual pupils extremely rigorously with excellent procedures for internal moderation. Given pupils' various starting points, the levels they reach by the time they leave the school represent outstanding achievement.

Teaching was satisfactory at the last inspection and is now outstanding. This is a key reason for the school's success. This significant improvement has been brought about through rigorous and very supportive monitoring of teaching from the senior leaders and well-targeted staff training. Many teachers are excellent practitioners, and have passed their skills to each other very effectively. The teachers take very careful account of the different levels of attainment in their classes and pupils' individual targets. Consequently, the pupils are given the right amount of support and challenge to enable them to make excellent progress. Teachers do much to make their lessons lively and varied by selecting resources and activities to capture pupils' interests and keep them fully engaged. It is not uncommon for the teachers to dress up and act out a scene to stimulate learning or to use puppets as a means of talking to pupils. In one outstanding lesson, the teacher asked the pupils to video their introductions to a story in which they were encouraged to use 'WOW' words to enliven the writing. This was then played back on a large classroom display so that other pupils could say what was really good about it and what they thought might have made the story even better. The quality of comments made, through this peer assessment, was extremely high and showed very well how pupils also help each other to do their very best. Learning has been considerably helped by teachers spending time on assessing how well previous lessons went and using this information to fine-tune how well the learning is tailored to individual needs. Learning is also considerably helped by the excellent behaviour of the pupils. Very good support is provided by teaching assistants for those pupils who have an additional learning need.

Leaders have also made significant improvements to the outstanding curriculum, which is broad, interesting and very exciting. As you walk through the school you are immediately struck by the varied and exciting tasks the pupils are undertaking. The smiles on their faces and the fact that not a moment is wasted while learning reveal how much they enjoy the curriculum that is

provided. Special care has been taken to ensure that the learning environment, which is based on a woodland theme, and the activities provided are tailored to bring out the best for six- and seven-year-old pupils. Much better use of information and communication technology has provided a major boost to learning. More role play has been introduced, helping to develop pupils' self-esteem and independence. Regular learning is undertaken outside which adds extra zest and effectively complements the activities that take place in the classrooms. There are numerous enhancements to the curriculum, such as visits to local theatres and museums, a good range of extra-curricular activities, and regular visitors to school. These all help considerably in developing pupils' very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Splendid assemblies help pupils celebrate each other's achievements and do much to highlight the common values being fostered in the school. The many opportunities provided for regular exercise and learning about healthy food ensure that pupils have a very good awareness of healthy lifestyles.

The school makes a strong contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. It knows its pupils and their parents extremely well. The school understands pupils' social backgrounds and the cultural and religious diversity of their changing community. Equal opportunities are promoted exceptionally well so that pupils all make similar very strong progress regardless of their background or need. Good links have been made with a local special school and, as a result, pupils have a very clear understanding of what it is like to have a disability. Pupils develop high levels of tolerance and mutual understanding. As one girl said, 'There are lots of different kinds of people in our school but that does not mean we cannot be friends as we are all the same inside'. Festival days are regularly held to celebrate different faiths. Together with a good range of Parent Teacher Association events, these help to forge good links with the community. Once a year the pupils raise funds for a school in Uganda and additional links are being developed with a school in Shanghai to further broaden pupils' experiences of how people live in contrasting communities. The school evaluates its contribution to community cohesion in a variety of ways. As a result, some good plans for future development have been formulated, such as working more closely with a wider number of families through the creation of 'Parent Champions'. However, the different evaluations have not yet been brought together to focus where the school's actions might have the very best impact.

The leadership of the headteacher is inspirational. This has underpinned the rapid improvement made since the last inspection. Teamwork and job satisfaction are extremely good. She is very ably supported by her senior leadership team and subject leaders who work together extremely closely as a team. The school runs very smoothly on a daily basis, giving the headteacher time to speak to parents, develop her staff and provide much encouragement to individual pupils. All pupils are very well known to all staff, enabling them to keep a very close eye on pupils' welfare. The headteacher is aware that while attendance is good, it could be even better. In this respect she is taking robust action to work with a very small number of families whose children are persistently absent. The governors play a very full part in the life and development of the school because they enjoy being involved. They fulfil their statutory duties extremely well. The school has no complacency and an excellent capacity to sustain further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

When children first come to school their knowledge and skills are broadly in line with those expected of four-year-olds, although a number have weak early reading and writing abilities. By the end of Reception, nearly all children meet, and many exceed, the targets expected of

them in all areas of learning. The Reception classes give children an outstanding start to their time at the school because they are well led and managed by staff who have a thorough understanding of children's welfare and learning. Children make exceptionally good progress because of the excellent curriculum and consistently good or outstanding teaching. The environment both indoors and outdoors provides children with a rich range of learning experiences. Children enjoy activities such as making models and thrive on opportunities to learn and play safely in the outdoor area. Staff challenge children with questions that continually extend their thinking and ideas. For example, when learning how to draw up a notice for their courtyard area, children considered the importance of caring for their environment and using appropriate words to convey this message to others. Accurate assessments of children's learning and progress are a strength of provision. These are used very effectively to plan activities to meet children's needs, engage their interests and to inform parents how well their children are doing. The team has firm plans to develop the already well-organised outdoor area even further as a resource for creative and independent learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor and evaluate the provision for community cohesion more systematically to fine-tune improvements.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

25 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Priory Common School, Milton Keynes, MK13 9EZ

I am writing to thank you for making us so welcome when we recently visited your school and to tell you what we found out. May I especially thank those of you who met with me to tell me what you thought of your school? You were very helpful. I am delighted to tell you that we discovered you go to an outstanding school.

Here are some of the things your school does extremely well.

- Your excellent headteacher has improved the school a great deal.
- It provides you with wonderful opportunities to learn.
- You make outstanding progress and reach very high standards.
- Children in the Reception classes make an excellent start to their education.
- The teaching is also excellent and your teachers give you activities that are exciting, varied and challenge you to work to the best of your abilities.
- You assess each other's work extremely well and encourage each other.
- The curriculum is first-class and gives you plenty of variety and stimulus.
- You behave extremely well and know a lot about how to keep healthy and safe.
- Your attendance is good.
- The school has done a lot to ensure you are respectful of each other's differences and know about people who live outside Milton Keynes.
- Your headteacher, governors and staff are really good at identifying anything that needs to be improved and are very successful in taking the right action.

To improve the school even further I have asked the teachers to look at how successful their plans are for bringing your school community even closer together.

Thank you again for your welcome. We wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Alan Jarvis

Lead Inspector