

The Priors School

School Lane, Priors Marston, Southam, CV47 7RR

Inspection dates 19–20 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- There is not enough good and outstanding teaching and so pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- In some lessons, pupils do not learn quickly enough because activities do not always offer the right amount of challenge, particularly for more-able pupils. In these lessons, pupils often spend too much time listening to the teacher.
- Achievement is not as high as it should be across the school. Too few pupils reach the higher levels, particularly in writing.
- Systems for checking pupils' achievement across the whole school do not provide a clear enough picture of pupils' progress in English and mathematics.
- The school's improvement plan is not helping to improve teaching and raise standards. It does not include targets for raising pupils' achievement.
- Checks made by senior leaders, including governors, do not always focus clearly on the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- The support and teaching provided for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are helping them to make good progress.
- School leaders have effectively managed considerable change into Free School status. This includes the demolition of the old school building and a move into temporary accommodation.
- Pupils who, in the past, have lacked confidence or struggled to get along well with their classmates, thrive in this school.
- The curriculum has outstanding features and ensures that pupils enjoy school.
- Relationships between the school, parents and other community groups are exceptionally good. This plays a strong part in the life of the school and means that pupils feel very well cared for and extremely safe.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons, of which five were joint observations with the headteacher. She also listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the school's senior leaders, groups of pupils, five members of the governing body and two groups of parents.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence, including the school's documents for self-evaluation and safeguarding. She also studied standards in pupils' workbooks and the school's own assessment data.
- The inspector took account of the 40 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and met some parents informally at the start of the school day. The inspector also analysed the responses made by parents to a recent survey undertaken by the school. Staff questionnaire responses were checked.

Inspection team

Marilyn Mottram, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Priors Primary School, which is situated in the heart of Priors Marston village, is part of the government's Academy Free School initiative. The school first opened in September 2011 under a funding agreement issued by the Department for Education.
- A new school building is being constructed and is due to open in September 2013.
- The school is currently operating in temporary accommodation.
- Pupils enter the school in Year 1. They work in mixed-age classes.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school but the number on roll is rising.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, for whom the school receives additional income (the pupil premium), is well-below average.
- The proportions of disabled pupils, those with a statement of special educational needs, or those who need extra support at school action plus, are average. The proportion at school action is well below the national average.
- There are no pupils from minority ethnic groups or who are known to speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to accelerate the pace of learning and improve pupils' progress by:
 - providing activities that build upon what pupils already know and can do and so offer the right amount of challenge, particularly for more-able pupils
 - reducing the time pupils spend in lessons listening to teachers.
- Raise standards in writing across the school by:
 - providing clearer feedback to pupils so that they know what to do to improve their work and reach the higher levels for their age
 - raising expectations for presentation, handwriting and spelling.
- Improve the effectiveness of senior leadership by:
 - refining systems for checking pupils' achievement and using this information when judging the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that governors have a clear picture of pupils' achievement
 - ensuring the school improvement plan has targets linked to raising standards.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Standards in Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics are broadly in line with the national average. Too few pupils reach the higher levels for their age in these subjects.
- Pupils' progress in different year groups is too variable. Work in pupils' books and observations during the inspection show that too few pupils make better than expected progress and achieve as highly as they should, particularly in writing. Pupils' learning targets are not used effectively enough to inform pupils of how well they are doing and help them to take more responsibility for their progress.
- Standards of spelling, presentation and handwriting are not high enough. Spelling is taught regularly but there are examples of poor presentation and misspelt words in pupils' books that remain unchecked. Some pupils have not developed a fluent and legible style of handwriting in Key Stage 2. These aspects hinder progress to the higher levels in writing.
- Books show that pupils write for a range of different purposes and across subjects. However, there are few examples of pupils making independent choices about the style they will write in or how they will present their work. This prevents them from achieving higher levels in writing.
- In the reading check for Year 1 pupils last year, the school achieved results below those found nationally. The school responded well to this. Pupils are now taught phonics (linking letters with the sounds they make) in small groups with some individual sessions. This is resulting in improvements.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Observations of one-to-one work and small-group sessions show that these pupils have good opportunities to work independently and use practical resources, including software programmes, to help increase their understanding.
- There are no gaps in achievement between pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding and others in the school. The school rapidly identifies any pupils in need of additional support and ensures that they receive appropriate help.
- Pupils achieve well in drama and music. Teachers frequently plan drama activities relating to books and plays they have read with pupils. For example, the pupils are currently dramatizing Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Such activities support pupils' achievement in speaking and listening and result in good social skills.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The most common weakness in teaching is the lack of challenge taking into account pupils' different learning needs. For example, in a mathematics lesson, some pupils completed their work quickly and then had to wait for additional work. This slowed down their learning. Work in books confirms that there are not enough opportunities for pupils to engage in open-ended problem solving activities and develop their own independent learning skills.
- Teachers do not reshape tasks and explanations in lessons quickly enough to improve learning. For example, in one session, some pupils already had the skills needed to read and spell the

words being taught. They were offering more sophisticated words and showing a higher level of understanding about the spelling system. However, their skills were not recognised and they continued to work through the activities planned. This limited pupils' progress.

- In a few lessons, pupils spend too long listening to teachers or working in discussion groups without a clear focus. For example, in some group discussions, not all pupils took active roles but allowed others to lead the debate and write down findings. On other occasions, pupils were not clear enough about what they needed to do to complete the task and achieve well. This wastes valuable learning time.
- Work in pupils' books show that too few pupils are working at the higher levels for their age in writing. Although evidence shows that pupils apply their writing skills across subjects, teachers' expectations for spelling, handwriting and presentation are not always as high in these subjects as they are in literacy lessons. This means that pupils do not always try their best and achieve as well as they should.
- In the best lessons, pupils work together well. They are clear about the task set and they know how to check whether or not they are achieving well. For example, following drama work, young pupils were working with partners to write a play script. They were checking their own writing using a checklist. They could talk about their learning and they knew what they needed to do to make their writing better.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are well supported. Their needs are identified early. The special needs coordinator has introduced good systems to involve parents in their children's progress. Pupils' progress is checked and discussed frequently and information is used well to inform teachers' planning of learning.
- The curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils' spiritual and moral development. For example, the gatherings for daily assemblies allow pupils to think about current environmental issues and moral issues which affect their lives. These sessions help to reinforce pupils' understanding of the school's values.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' attitudes to learning in lessons are good. They are clear about the sort of lessons they enjoy most. Older pupils talk about enjoying writing lessons that are linked to their own experiences. For example, pupils are writing information books connected to their recent residential trip. They say that they concentrate more and work harder with this sort of writing because they enjoy it and see a purpose.
- A particular feature of the school is the care and kindness pupils have for one another. Pupils show great pride in their school. The local community and families play an important part in the daily routines of school life. This involvement contributes to the strong sense of right and wrong demonstrated by pupils.
- Any minor incidents of misbehaviour are dealt with quickly by staff and pupils feel very safe in school. They know what to do in potentially unsafe situations. For example, they talk confidently about using the internet safely and use a catch-phrase they have been taught to help them if they ever feel at risk. They are clear about whom to go to in school if they feel worried or upset.
- Attendance is high. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere at the start of the day. Pupils arrive promptly and willingly work together and help each other to settle into the day.

- Parents and carers who responded to the Parent View questionnaire, and those who spoke with the inspector, are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They greatly value the care and support the school provides.
- Pupils know about different types of bullying and report that bullying is extremely rare. Pupils talk about the need to make everyone feel comfortable. They want everyone to be included in school life and they know that discrimination is wrong.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher and governors are ambitious for the school. They have effectively managed considerable change, including the move to temporary accommodation and the transition into a free school academy. However, school improvement planning is not focused sharply enough on raising standards.
- While the school's leaders have information about pupils' achievement, the tracking systems are over-complicated and the information is presented in too many different ways. It does not give a clear enough picture, and cannot be used easily to identify any underachievement or effectively to plan improvements.
- The headteacher checks the quality of teaching through regular visits to lessons. However, records of these activities do not focus sharply on how well pupils are learning or highlight clearly how teaching could improve pupils' achievement. Targets set for teachers following lesson observations do not always clearly say what needs to be done for teaching to be good or outstanding.
- Decisions about teachers' pay are linked to the progress of pupils. However, leaders do not monitor the impact of teaching assistants as closely or provide them with sufficient opportunities to improve their skills.
- The school plans a broad and varied range of topics for pupils to study. Subjects are enriched by the high-quality trips and projects arranged by the school leaders. For example, pupils are currently taking part in a Shakespeare project. They enjoy performing dance, music and drama productions for the local community. There are a range of after-school clubs including drama, arts and craft, a construction club, sports clubs and a choir. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the various performances and theatre productions they have enjoyed.
- The school has used well additional government funding (the pupil premium) to support pupils who need additional help with reading, writing or mathematics. These pupils achieve as well as other pupils in school. This shows the school's commitment to equal opportunities for all pupils.
- The school has ensured that its safeguarding policies and procedures meet all requirements. Leaders have been extremely vigilant in ensuring that safeguarding procedures are not compromised during the upheaval of major building work.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well led and secure systems have been quickly established to manage the headteacher's performance. Governors have set suitable targets for the headteacher which link to the school's performance. They have a rapidly developing understanding of how to check how well pupils' achievement compares with other schools nationally. They are often in the school and visit classrooms regularly so they know the quality of teaching. The governing

body has undertaken a detailed audit of governors' wide-ranging skills and is engaging in appropriate high-quality training to support their areas of need. A strength has been the way in which governors have ensured the best use of the school's finances including the small amount of extra funding received for disadvantaged pupils. The governing body ensures that safeguarding policies and procedures meet all requirements and they have kept a tight overview of this during building work. Governors know the school's strengths and areas for development well. They have a very good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and good capacity to ensure the future success of this new school.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137488
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	400339

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

Type of school	Academy free school
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Porter
Headteacher	Gary Murrell
Date of previous school inspection	NA
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