

Prior's Mill Church of England Controlled Primary School, Billingham

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111667
Local Authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	310653
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	478
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Cooper
Headteacher	Mrs Judith Duell
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2003
School address	Clifton Avenue Billingham TS22 5BX
Telephone number	01642 650426
Fax number	01642 650426

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than average. The vast majority of pupils are White British, with less than 3% from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal is below average, so too is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with strengths in pupils' personal development. Standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are average, except in reading where they are above average. Writing is a relative weakness. Since the last inspection there have been occasions when standards reached by pupils in the school's national tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 have been above average, especially in reading and mathematics. This reflects differences in the composition of the different year groups. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

Pupils understand the importance of their own and others' well-being. They work in harmony to create a positive atmosphere for learning. The school takes satisfactory care of pupils and ensures that they feel safe and secure in school. Academic guidance is satisfactory, because while there is some that is good, many teachers are not accurate in their assessment of pupils' learning and do not plan tasks that precisely meet pupils' needs. Teaching is satisfactory; it ensures that pupils make adequate progress over time. In lessons where teaching is good or better, pupils make good progress and are increasingly confident about tackling work on their own. The curriculum is satisfactory with good provision for out of school clubs following improvements made since the last inspection. A weakness is that there are insufficient resources for information and communication technology (ICT). As a result, pupils' opportunities to develop skills in this subject are limited.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher provides good leadership for the spiritual and moral development of pupils through the provision of clear guidance for pupils about behaviour and relationships. This is underpinned by high quality assemblies which lead to an excellent response from pupils of all ages. For example, in 'Diamond Day' assemblies, pupils enjoy celebrating the success of others. Since the last inspection subject leaders have developed their role in monitoring the work of the school, but evaluations of standards and pupils' achievement have not been accurate enough to ensure consistently good progress and led to some targets not being met in the school's national tests in 2007. Staff are actively involved in initiatives to improve the school, many of which support pupils' good personal development. Governance is satisfactory, although governors' evaluation is not detailed enough to allow them to hold the school sufficiently accountable for standards. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and has the capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. There have been good improvements since the last inspection to outdoor provision, the development of children's independence and arrangements for physical and creative development. Children make good progress in all areas of learning from starting points that are mostly typical for their ages. This is because teachers' planning is of a high quality and the teaching and learning are good. Children are very well cared for and this helps them to feel safe and secure, and to develop good personal and social qualities. Their confidence quickly develops and with this the ability to select from activities that interest and challenge them. By the end of Reception nearly all children reach the nationally expected goals for their learning and a good proportion exceed them. As a result, children are very well prepared for the move into Year 1. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed and has the overwhelming support of parents who speak highly of how well their children are cared for and develop.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing.
- Improve the accuracy and use of teachers' assessment to support pupils' progress.
- Improve the accuracy of school evaluation.
- Improve pupils' accessibility to computer facilities.

A small proportion of the school's whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory but which have areas of under performance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 Inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards in Year 2 are average in writing and mathematics and above average in reading because of the impact of the school's strategies for teaching reading and the good partnership with parents. Data shows that pupils make satisfactory progress from their starting points in Year 1. Since the last inspection, results in Year 2 have fluctuated year on year, reflecting variations in the ability of different groups. However, a relative common weakness is in writing because pupils are given insufficient time to practise their writing. Standards in Year 6 follow a similar pattern of annual variations. There is a picture of broadly average standards since the last inspection, with occasionally some groups exceeding the average. This was the case in 2007 when pupils' performance in mathematics was significantly above average, although in English and science their performance was at the national average. The school reached its targets for Level 4 in these tests, but inaccurate assessment and limited opportunities for writing meant that more able pupils did not achieve as well as they should have. Not all pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to reach the ambitious targets set by the school, but most are. The school has increased support and intervention this term to increase the rate of progress for these pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups make the same progress as others in their class.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Most pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is above average. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They enjoy the high quality assemblies and respond well to their themes. During these occasions, pupils reflect on how they might become better citizens.

Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of keeping healthy and enthusiastically take part in daily 'Wake up! Shake up!' sessions. They have a secure understanding of how to keep safe knowing that, if they are troubled, they can access support from a playground friend or member of staff. Pupils make a good contribution to the school, to the church and through fund-raising. Those serving as councillors represent the views of pupils well. Other pupils acquire a satisfactory range of skills that helps them for their future lives. However, pupils' independence in the use of ICT is restricted by their limited access to computers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The quality of lessons seen during inspection ranged from outstanding to satisfactory. Where lessons are better than satisfactory, teachers make effective use of accurate assessment to set tasks that match pupils' needs and pupils work independently at a good rate. In a significant minority of lessons, teachers do not make enough use of assessment to pitch learning at the right level. Demands on pupils are not high enough and they make satisfactory rather than good progress. In writing lessons, teachers often spend too long on lengthy explanations and do not leave sufficient time for pupils to practise and consolidate their writing skills. This has led to some underachievement in writing.

Teachers' mark work regularly and conscientiously. Unfortunately, the good practice seen in some classes is not consistent across the school. While some pupils are given good advice on how to improve, for others this is not made clear. Pupils say they learn best when they are actively involved and have to do things for themselves. This was certainly one of the hallmarks of good and better lessons. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the progress that pupils make because they work closely with teachers and know the pupils well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum meets requirements. It has some good features. While literacy and numeracy planning is satisfactory there are insufficient opportunities in other subjects to promote pupils' writing. Some do occur and in the more successful lessons pupils learn, for example, to write about science experiments and give 'eye witness' accounts in history. Positive subject links are limited in ICT because there are not enough computers. Consequently, pupils' independence in learning is restricted.

Older pupils extend their physical education skills through a successful partnership with the local high school. Themed days, such as a healthy fun day and celebration of Chinese New Year, also extend learning well. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities which vary from term to term and are open to pupils in both key stages. These are well attended and promote a range of skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Staff show a strong commitment to pastoral care and the school is a welcoming place for pupils and visitors alike. The school offers satisfactory provision to promote pupils' safety, enjoyment and well-being in their future lives. Opportunities to learn about and live healthy lifestyles and contribute to the community are good. Arrangements for health and safety, including child protection, are in place and meet requirements.

Pupils receive regular feedback and encouragement about their work. Most know how well they are doing, but advice on how to improve is inconsistent among teachers and some assessment is inaccurate. Senior staff have identified this weakness and are beginning to prioritise improvements, but this has not yet had time to impact favourably on standards. The

school involves other agencies to support their work with pupils at risk and to help train staff. Monthly newsletters keep parents informed about what is happening in school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school runs smoothly day to day. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. There have been good improvements to standards in science and provision in the Foundation Stage. However, improvement has been slower in raising standards in writing. The role of subject leaders has developed through more regular monitoring since the last inspection, however, self-evaluation is insufficiently accurate. As a consequence, the school overestimates some aspects of its performance, such as the standards of the most able pupils in Year 6. The school sets challenging targets for pupils and has recently devised manageable action plans to support those pupils who are at risk of not meeting their targets. Senior leaders work hard to promote equal opportunity. Weaknesses in assessment have been identified by some senior staff and action taken last term is beginning to have an impact, but the school did not act quickly enough to avoid the disappointment of some missed targets in numeracy and literacy in 2007.

Governance is satisfactory. Individual governors have links with different subjects which keep them suitably informed. Whilst they have a good knowledge of certain aspects of the school's work, they do not hold the school to account sufficiently for standards and achievement.

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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?	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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3

Personal development and well-being

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	3
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

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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Prior's Mill Church of England Controlled Primary School, Billingham,
Stockton-on-Tees, TS22 5BX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspectors when we visited your school recently. Your school is a satisfactory one, which gives you plenty of opportunities to develop good personal qualities. Your reading skills are good and most of you reach the expected level in writing and mathematics. Most of you make satisfactory progress in your learning, though we judge, and your school agrees, that more of you could reach the higher levels, especially in writing. You will notice that you will have more challenging work and more time to practise writing in the future. Some of you told us you would like more opportunities to use computers to work independently. We discovered that your school has fewer computers than most other schools and have suggested that the number of computers is increased.

You told us that you feel safe and happy in school. We agree that your teachers take care of you and quickly sort out any problems you have. It was good to find out that your parents are pleased with your school and that you all get along so well in and out of the classroom. We know that some of you have a good idea of how well you are doing with your work and that your lessons are interesting and help you to learn well. We have suggested that the school makes sure that all of you know how to improve your work and that all work is matched to your needs in all lessons so that you make even more progress.

We could see that your school is a happy place, where everyone works in harmony to make things better. Your school leaders will be looking hard at how to make improvements in the future and you can help by continuing to work hard and care for each other.

Our best wishes for the future to you all.

Yours sincerely

Moira Fitzpatrick

Lead inspector