

Merstham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124989
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	381018
Inspection dates	6–7 March 2012
Lead inspector	Clive Dunn

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	283
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rod Simpson
Headteacher	Margaret Spencer
Date of previous school inspection	21 October 2008
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Clive Dunn

Additional inspector

Linda Rafferty

Additional inspector

Elaine Hamilton

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 29 lessons taught by 11 teachers. They observed 15 of these for 25 minutes or longer. The rest were observations of shorter sessions such as guided reading or phonics (letters and sounds), or shorter visits to sample the same subject across different classes. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of the school's records and policy documents, teachers' planning and pupils' work. In addition they analysed questionnaires that were returned by pupils, staff and 158 parents and carers.

Information about the school

This school is larger than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils that speak English as an additional language is below average. The proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, are below average. The school meets the current government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

The Early Years Foundation Stage has a Nursery class and a Reception class where children spend some of the time integrated together and some time taught separately each day. Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the teaching staff and senior leadership of the school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. Following the previous inspection, in a period of significant staff changes, rates of progress slowed, leading to some underachievement in English and mathematics. Leaders have identified and successfully reversed this trend in English, particularly writing, and have more recently secured improvements in mathematics. Although there is some significant good practice, this is not consistent enough to raise the school’s overall effectiveness above satisfactory at this time.
- Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress from their various starting points, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, to reach broadly average levels by the time they leave. This reflects satisfactory achievement. Pupils do not always understand well enough how to improve their work to make quicker progress.
- Some teaching is good in all key stages, but not enough to secure consistently good achievement. Strengths in the quality of teaching, particularly in literacy, contribute well to improving rates of progress. Teachers do not always match tasks closely enough to promote good progress, especially in mathematics.
- Pupils’ positive attitudes, engagement and behaviour are a significant strength. They develop personal skills and qualities very well. Pupils respond extremely positively to opportunities to work collaboratively or be actively involved in more practical tasks, sometimes demonstrating exemplary behaviour.
- Leaders’ own evaluations of how the school is performing are broadly accurate. The high priority given to the leadership of teaching and management of performance, particularly for teachers and leaders new to their roles, is supporting the school’s drive for improvement well. The nurturing and caring ethos of the school permeates all levels. Pupils are known extremely well as individuals and their progress is carefully tracked. However, leaders do not consider the performance of different groups of pupils frequently enough to identify any variations and raise attainment more rapidly.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management to accelerate the pace of improvement by:
 - analysing the performance of different pupil groups more frequently to support the school's drive to raise attainment above national averages
 - setting and working towards shorter-term measurable targets to accelerate the progress of identified groups at all key stages
 - using national benchmarks more rigorously to raise leaders' expectations when evaluating the quality of the school's provision and performance.

- Improve pupils' achievement in mathematics by securing consistently good mathematics teaching by Spring 2013 through:
 - strengthening teachers' use of assessment to make sure that teaching and tasks match the needs of different groups more closely
 - shortening the time spent in whole-class teacher-led activities to give pupils more opportunity to achieve well at their own level
 - conducting lessons at a sufficiently brisk pace to support at least good achievement
 - ensuring pupils know how to improve in mathematics, including through teachers' marking.

- Improve pupils' achievement in reading and writing by securing consistently good literacy teaching by October 2012 through:
 - deepening pupils' understanding of how to improve their own writing by giving them more opportunities to assess their own and each other's work against their individual next-step targets
 - improving planning for guided reading so it is clear what skills are being developed in each session.

- Strengthen the link between teachers' planning and the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage to ensure children are sufficiently purposeful and challenged and achieve well when selecting their own activities.

Main report**Achievement of pupils**

Boys and girls make satisfactory progress to reach broadly average levels at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading and writing. Attainment in English rose significantly in 2011. Pupils' current work in mathematics shows standards are rising across Key Stage 2. Current Year 6 pupils are on track to reach broadly average levels in mathematics as well this year. The proportion of more-able pupils that attain the higher levels is in line with that seen nationally. Almost all parents and carers feel that their children make good progress. While this is sometimes the case, not enough pupils progress consistently well.

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Children join school with skills in line with those expected for their ages. The positive attitudes pupils display throughout the school are fostered well in the Nursery and Reception Years. Children develop skills satisfactorily overall, though they make slightly quicker gains in early literacy skills, including their phonics knowledge (letters and sounds) than in numeracy skills. Children are mostly cooperative and mix well, but do not always sustain the activities they choose for long enough, or with enough purpose to achieve well.

Pupils concentrate and apply themselves well in lessons. Their achievement typically increases when they have opportunities to work independently or collaboratively, as seen in a Year 5 physical education lesson. High levels of application and cooperation between pupils were a significant factor in their good achievement as they perfected their 'Haka'. However, these opportunities are not frequent enough. In mathematics in particular, pupils spend too much of the lesson listening to teacher-led input, which slows their progress. Pupils do well in science, developing skills to hypothesise, predict, gather, present and interpret results to a good level. They particularly enjoy the frequent opportunities to engage in practical activities and experiments, which one pupil explained 'helps you understand and remember things'.

Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those who speak English as an additional language, and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make at least as much progress as their peers, and sometimes better. This means that any differences between their level of basic skills and all pupils nationally do not widen, sometimes get smaller and, for individuals, may disappear. The positive climate for learning in the school enables these pupils to engage equally with their peers in lessons, for example demonstrating the confidence to share their achievements with the rest of the class.

Quality of teaching

Parents, carers and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of teaching. Teaching in all key stages has strengths. It promotes pupils' spiritual, social, emotional and cultural development well. In literacy, teachers' good subject knowledge and confident style, and regular opportunities for pupils to be active in their learning, often lead to brisk, lively lessons. During the inspection this included Year 1 pupils working together to create a 'sound adventure' to inspire their writing, and Year 3 pupils excited to record 'scene-setting' ideas, inspired by the teacher's challenge, 'If you really wanted to impress me, what would you do?' Focused phonics teaching ensures pupils develop skills to read and write independently, resulting in some children sounding out the word 'skateboarding' during a phonics lesson in Reception Year.

Effective support from teaching assistants and teachers for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs when tackling tasks enables them to achieve at least satisfactorily. In a guided reading session in Year 6, the teachers' effective questioning and reassuring, encouraging manner ensured these pupils were keen to do well. Teachers' planning for guided reading is variable, and reading skills pupils

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need to develop in these sessions are not always sufficiently clear. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, planning is thorough but not fully reflected in the provision when children select their own activities. Consequently, children are not consistently well challenged. However, where adults are not occupied leading focused tasks, their interactions with children engage them more purposefully.

Teachers encourage pupils to reflect on areas they find easy or difficult. Sometimes a good dialogue between teacher and pupil emerges in the written marking. Leaders recognise that pupils do not always firmly grasp their next-step targets in writing because they do not use them to assess their own and each other's work regularly enough. In mathematics, marking does not regularly show pupils how to improve.

A comparatively prescriptive mathematics curriculum means lessons are sometimes slightly less creative or exciting than in other subjects. The pace at which teachers conduct whole-class teaching in mathematics sometimes slows, which restricts opportunities for different groups of pupils to achieve well at their own level. Leaders are rightly working towards shifting the balance in the way teachers assess pupils' levels in mathematics away from published tests towards a broader and more precise teacher assessment. At present, though teachers regularly set work at different levels for higher- or lower-ability groups, they do not always tailor the tasks precisely enough to promote good progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

All parents and carers who answered the relevant question in the inspection questionnaire agreed that the standard of behaviour in the school is good. Most agree that lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour, and their views were confirmed by the inspection. The overwhelmingly positive views of parents, carers and pupils indicate that this well-ordered purposeful and productive atmosphere would be usual at any time. When working together on collaborative tasks, pupils' behaviour is often outstanding, but such opportunities are not frequent enough to lift achievement further. The school has a strong track record of successfully integrating pupils who have previously displayed emotional, social or behavioural difficulties. There have been no exclusions for many years. Attendance is broadly average and rising. Very few pupils are frequently absent.

Pupils are typically considerate and respectful to each other, which contributes well to their good feelings of safety. They express clear views of what sorts of behaviour constitute bullying and say that it is extremely rare because the school deals with it very well. They are aware of different types, such as name-calling or verbal bullying, or that which relates to race, ability or special educational needs. Regular work to prevent and explore bullying issues contributes well to ensuring the number of incidents is low. Racist incidents are rare and dealt with robustly to prevent reoccurrence.

Leadership and management

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The high priority given to the care and nurture of pupils and staff emanates from the headteacher and creates a strong sense of unity. New members of staff or those accepting new responsibilities feel well supported. Important training and mentoring for the newly appointed mathematics leader, typical of the school's approach, is contributing well to accelerating progress in mathematics.

Leaders at different levels, including the governing body, are broadly accurate in their identification of strengths and areas requiring improvement. However, the school's evaluations lack sufficient rigour, so conclusions about the overall quality of provision are often generous. This limits the challenge the governing body brings leaders to hold them to account, though they are knowledgeable about, and supportive of the school's work.

That said, leaders' identification of and response to the dip in rates of progress following the previous inspection have secured a trend of sustained improvement in pupils' achievement. In particular, this has resulted in several years of rising standards across Key Stage 1, significant improvement in English attainment at Key Stage 2 in 2011, and mathematics attainment now rising closely behind. Combined with rising standards across the school, this shows the school has the capacity to secure further improvement.

The school does not tolerate discrimination of any kind and successfully breaks down potential barriers to engagement to promote equal opportunity. Though the progress of individual pupils is tracked frequently, leaders recognise that they do not consider the performance of different groups often enough to use this to set precise short-term targets to support the drive to raise attainment.

The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as exemplified by pupils' high quality artwork and the specialist music teaching. Although the mathematics curriculum is not always sufficiently well adapted to move the learning of different groups on at a good pace, effective additional intervention sessions in Year 6 are contributing well to the rising attainment.

The overwhelmingly positive views of the significantly higher-than-average proportion of parents and carers that returned a questionnaire reflect the school's strong links with them. Rigorous safeguarding procedures, including a good range of appropriate training, exemplary record keeping and robust checks when recruiting staff, meet requirements and protect pupils well.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

8 March 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Merstham Primary School, Redhill RH1 3AZ

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you and finding out all about how you are getting on. Thank you also to those of you who answered our questionnaire. You told us that you really enjoy school and we can see that by your positive attitudes, enthusiasm and good behaviour.

We have judged your school to be satisfactory overall, which means that it does some things well and is working hard to make other things better. You make the progress that is expected of you with your reading, writing and mathematics skills. We were pleased to see that you do well in science and thought that your artwork was lovely. Your headteacher and teachers know each of you very well and are good at helping you to develop important personal skills and qualities.

Teaching already has strengths and all your teachers and your headteacher are working hard to make sure it helps you to do well all of the time. To help them with this, we have asked them to do some important things.

- Look carefully at how well different groups in the school are doing to find ways to help you make better progress and reach higher levels.
- Help you to do better in mathematics by giving you more time to work on tasks that are not too easy or too hard and making sure you know how to improve your mathematics skills.
- Help you to do better in literacy by giving you regular time to look at your own and each other's work to see how well you have met your next-step targets, and making sure you know what reading skills you are developing in guided reading sessions.
- Making sure children in Nursery and Reception Year do well when they choose their own activities.

You can all help by continuing your good attitudes and behaviour and always trying your very best, particularly when working independently or in pairs or groups, and when following the advice your teachers give you when they mark your work.

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn
Lead inspector

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