

Mereside Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119345
Local Authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	358536
Inspection dates	4–5 April 2011
Reporting inspector	David Byrne

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	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Cooper
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Diver
Date of previous school inspection	9 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 14 lessons, taught by nine teachers. They held meetings with representatives of the governing body, staff, pupils and the local authority. The inspection team observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation provided by the school, including records of pupils' progress, samples of pupils' work, plans for raising achievement and policies for securing safeguarding and child protection. The team analysed 43 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and also evaluated those returned by pupils and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The quality of teaching and whether its impact on learning and progress is good enough for all groups of pupils.
- How well the curriculum is planned to match pupils' needs and enable them to make good progress in their basic skills.
- The impact of the provision for care, guidance and support on improving attendance, promoting good levels of pupils' personal development and reducing barriers to learning.
- The capacity of leaders and managers at all levels to raise attainment and secure effective strategies for improvement.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average-sized primary school. The vast majority of pupils are from a White British background. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is high in comparison with the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is high, being over twice the national average. A relatively high proportion of pupils join and leave the school at other than the usual times. Since the last inspection, there have been significant staff changes. The headteacher took up post five terms ago and three newly qualified teachers have been appointed.

A children's centre is attached to the school, providing support for families in the locality. In addition, a Local Authority Special Education Resource Facility (SERF) supports pupils from local primary schools. Both of these facilities are subject to a separate inspection by Ofsted.

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: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. Good levels of care, guidance and support enable pupils largely to overcome what for many are significant barriers to their learning due to potentially vulnerable circumstances. Given pupils' well-below typical skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, achievement across the school is satisfactory. Attainment in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6 is low but rising strongly. Weaknesses in writing and in the performance of boys are a legacy of earlier inadequate progress. Inspection evidence shows this inadequate progress has been halted and is being reversed. Current progress is satisfactory and improving securely and quickly. These improvements are due to the skills of the headteacher in effectively strengthening the quality of teaching and learning which is satisfactory and improving strongly. Furthermore, she has successfully enhanced the support for pupils falling behind. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well and participate fully in school life but the most able are not consistently provided for and challenged. A sharp focus on assessing pupils' progress and devising action plans to raise attainment is tackling underachievement. In writing, for example, the gap between the performance of different groups of pupils and the national expectations is narrowing at a good rate, including for boys. At times, pupils are over-directed and pupils are not given enough scope to discuss and debate and develop independence.

The curriculum incorporates all required subjects including French and is very focused on literacy and numeracy. The school is reviewing the effectiveness of the way subjects are planned because activities do not always interest and motivate boys well enough and lessons tend to lack relevance to pupils. There are limited options for pupils to lead their own learning. There are too few opportunities for pupils to improve their skills of reading, writing and mathematics by applying these skills in all subjects and in new and exciting contexts. Initiatives to promote good behaviour are successful and pupils willingly take responsibility for a variety of roles within school. Attendance has been low for many years but the good efforts of staff and, in particular, those responsible for pupils' pastoral care, are reducing absence rapidly.

The leadership and management of the headteacher, coupled with strong governance, are successfully turning the school around after a period of decline. There is a clear vision for its development. Dedicated but relatively inexperienced staff are developing their management expertise and contribute to the improving progress. The school's view of itself is generally accurate and improvement plans are relevant and moving the school forward. The school currently has a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Up to 40% of the 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?

- Raise attainment, especially in English and mathematics by:
 - extending opportunities for pupils to apply their skills of reading, writing and mathematics to a wide range of subjects and contexts
 - providing lessons and activities to include more that interests and motivates all pupils, particularly boys
 - developing the pupils' skills of speaking and debating so that they can extend their vocabulary and improve their skills and knowledge.
- Establish consistently good teaching and effective learning by:
 - providing more challenge for more-able pupils
 - establishing approaches in lessons that develop the pupils' skills and confidence to work independently
 - refining curriculum planning to find links between subjects so that pupils are more interested in their work and can see the relevance of their learning
 - enabling pupils to have more say in what they learn with more options to pursue things that interest them.
- Strive to raise attendance to the national average by strengthening further the partnerships between school and families so that absence is minimised and pupils attend regularly.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Most pupils enjoy school, although a small minority struggle with concentrating for extended periods of time. Girls tend to have more positive attitudes than boys and demonstrate a greater capacity to learn without support. Pupils have a limited vocabulary but they enjoy reading and try hard with their writing. One pupil commented, 'I love literacy because we have lots of help when we are stuck and know what we need to do to get better'. Pupils try hard. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson pupils worked diligently to select the best methods for solving calculations involving addition and subtraction. Pupils respond most positively when they are encouraged to learn practically, although a lack of confidence in talking together and contributing to class and group discussions holds back learning.

From pupils' well-below expected starting points to the Early Years Foundation Stage, progress occurs at a satisfactory rate. It is accelerating rapidly after a period when it was inadequate. Subsequently, attainment is rising strongly. This improvement is taking place because inconsistencies in teaching are being effectively removed and teachers are setting higher expectations for the performance of pupils. Initiatives to give individual support for pupils falling behind in reading, writing and mathematics are having a very positive effect on progress. The impact of the improvements, however, is not yet reflected in the national test results. Pupils that are educated solely in the school make better progress than the relatively high number who joined the school at times other than the usual. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress similar to their classmates.

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Pupils respond positively to the school's systems for promoting good behaviour. Consequently, the large majority of pupils report that they feel safe at school. They have a good awareness of the dangers that they may face in everyday life. They know about the factors that affect health and talk enthusiastically about the healthy tuck shop and some enjoy cycling to school. The adoption of healthy lifestyles by pupils, however, varies. The pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the school and wider community. Their opinions are valued and they talk proudly of the way the school council influences decisions that affect them. Peer mediators are skilled in diffusing disagreements between pupils. Participation in the eco activities such as the gardening club exemplifies their care for and understanding of issues facing the global community. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They develop secure social skills and understand right from wrong but have a limited understanding of others from different ethnic, religious or socio-economic backgrounds. The pupils' good behaviour, rapidly improving attendance and increasing rates of progress in their basic skills are providing them with satisfactory levels of skills for the next stage of their education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Pupils benefit from a dedicated teaching and support team. Its impact on learning and progress is increasing as the changes in staffing and their deployment within the school settles. Subject knowledge is generally good and specialist knowledge supplements that of

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staff where needed, for example, where a talented music teacher teaches for one day a week. Staff successfully manage behaviour and strive to build up the pupils' confidence. Well-briefed teaching and support staff provide good support for pupils who are falling behind and help those who struggle with their behaviour. The needs of the more-able are not consistently met and targets for attainment for these pupils are not as advanced as they might be. In the best lessons, teachers constantly refer to clear lesson objectives and pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own progress and achievement. In these stronger lessons learning moves forward at a good pace; the right balance is struck between activities, teacher talk and opportunities for pupils to think for themselves. Where lessons are less effective, too much direction is given to pupils and opportunities are limited for discussion. Too often, expectations for pupils to present their work neatly are not high enough. Good assessment systems inform teachers' knowledge of pupils' academic achievement. Pupils' work is marked regularly, although the expectations for pupils to respond to suggestions for improvement are not consistently followed up.

The curriculum meets requirements. The recent increased focus on raising attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is having success and good provision is made to promote pupils' personal, social and health education. Information and communication technology is successfully promoted and French widens pupils' cultural development. There are special projects such as Year 6 pupils working with the Blackpool Schools' Cultural Officer, and giving pupils a chance to learn about Ethiopia as part of the Connecting Classrooms project. These add to the pupils' enjoyment of learning because they are interested in the topics and can see how their learning is relevant. The potential of regularly using similar approaches to inspire pupils and staff to boost learning is not yet fully exploited. Pupils have access to a good range of extra-curricular activities and pupils in Key Stage 2 benefit from a residential educational visit to the Lake District.

Staff know the pupils well and provide good quality care, guidance and support with some outstanding features. Members of the pupil welfare group constantly monitor the needs of individuals. Referrals are made where necessary to staff within school. The nurture suite staff provide individual and group counselling which is complemented by provision in the learning support unit, 'The Galaxy Suite'. The relatively high proportion of pupils with the potential for challenging behaviour benefit from the skills of behaviour mentors either in-class or in group work outside. Attendance has remained stubbornly low with high rates of persistent absence. Recent initiatives are having a very positive impact on attendance. The importance of attendance is explained to parents and carers through home visits and regular communication with home; rewards are provided for pupils and classes who reach high attendance targets.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school's educational direction and sets high expectations for staff and pupils alike. Her leadership is helping the new staff team to settle in well and has created good morale and a shared determination to raise attainment. Good partnerships with the local authority have supported leaders and managers very well and have provided good quality training, in particular for the new and less experienced teachers. Effective assessment systems coupled with robust monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning are leading to good quality action plans. These are contributing to pupils' rapidly improving progress and the strengthening of teaching. Revised systems are setting targets that are both realistic yet challenging.

The governing body is well led and managed. Governors have been, and continue to be, critically important partners in working with the headteacher and staff to bring about the current improvements. All statutory requirements are met relating to safeguarding with good quality records and procedures for maintaining the safety of pupils and adults. Good procedures are established to ensure child protection involving very close and effective links with external agencies from welfare, education and health. Partnerships are good. The support of the charity Groundwork has enabled the development of a high quality environmental area in a courtyard and pupils have planted trees as part of a Woodland Community scheme. Good quality communication including blogs offers useful information to parents and carers and encourages them to support learning at home. The school is committed to promoting community cohesion and does a very good job of this within the school and its community. There have been links with schools in Africa but opportunities for pupils to meet and develop an understanding of cultures other than their own are limited. The school promotes equal opportunity satisfactorily. There is a clear view of the performance of different groups and the school knows that more needs to be done to remove the discrepancies that exist. Given the satisfactory outcomes and effectiveness, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

The leadership and management team has been in post for two terms and is working hard to improve the school's provision and the progress children make. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is highly committed and knowledgeable and has a clear vision for the development of the unit. Initiatives such as a rigorous assessment system to track children's progress more accurately are beginning to contribute to accelerated progress. It is too early to measure the impact of these initiatives on outcomes as sustained over time. Children start school with skills that are well below those typical for their age, with particular weaknesses in aspects of their personal and social development and their early reading, writing and number skills. They happily settle into school routines and quickly grow in confidence and independence as they check themselves in at the start of the day and choose their own activities and resources. Although some good teaching was observed, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Rates of progress accelerated in 2010 especially for boys; staff are working hard to maintain this improvement. However, children are not yet reaching the expected learning goals as they move into Year 1.

Children are safe and well cared for and good emphasis is placed on developing their personal and social skills. As a result, they form trusting relationships with adults, play and collaborate happily together and behave well. A varied range of activities is planned to cover all areas of learning and there is an appropriate balance between those children choose for themselves and those led by an adult. Children show good levels of concentration on their tasks, for example, when using a selection of construction equipment to work out how to cross a river. However, opportunities for writing and recording number work in adult-led activities are somewhat limited. The outdoor area is used continuously during the day but lacks some essential resources to develop fully children's knowledge and skills across all areas of learning. There are good links with

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parents and carers, many of whom speak positively about the provision and are keen to support their children's learning at home and in school.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Just over a fifth of parents and carers returned their questionnaires. The vast majority of these are happy with their child's experience at the school. The large majority of parents commented that their child is well cared for and that children new to the school are warmly welcomed. The quality of support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities was highly praised. Teaching was considered by parents and carers to be good and the large majority of parents feel that the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour. The inspectors endorse the majority of the parent's views but while teaching has strengths, it is currently satisfactory in terms of its impact on learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mereside Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 43 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 206 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	56	18	42	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	29	67	13	30	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	21	49	20	47	2	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	63	14	33	2	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	26	60	16	37	0	0	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	53	17	40	3	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	58	14	33	3	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	42	23	53	2	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	51	20	47	0	0	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	51	17	40	3	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	40	23	53	2	5	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	21	49	20	47	1	2	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	65	13	30	2	5	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



6 April 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mereside Primary School, Blackpool, FY4 4RR

On behalf of my inspection team, I thank you for your welcome and the time you took to share your views. Your school is satisfactory. It does a good job helping you to organise yourselves and in helping you when you feel upset, unsure and in need of support. Academic achievement is improving rapidly as a result of improved teaching and strong leadership by your headteacher. Your progress in lessons is increasing and is satisfactory after a time when it was inadequate. You are starting to catch up in writing but there is still more to do to get to where you could be.

Most of you are well behaved and make good friends. You are keen to help others, for example, as peer mediators and are proud when you succeed with your work. Your teachers are working hard to provide exciting lessons. At times, you would benefit from being asked to make more choices about what you do and to be encouraged to be more independent.

Part of my job is to work with the school to find ways of making your school even better. I have identified five things that will do this.

- Give you more opportunities to read, write and do mathematics in a wide range of subjects and contexts and to do more to help boys.
- Give more attention to helping those of you who find work easy.
- Develop your skills of speaking so that your vocabulary improves.
- Give you more opportunities to learn about things you are interested in.
- Continue to improve attendance.

I wish you all the very best for your future.

Yours sincerely

David Byrne

Lead inspector

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