

Merley First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113707
Local Authority	Poole
Inspection number	357399
Inspection dates	12–13 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Diane Wilkinson

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Paton
Headteacher	Sally Birley
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 19 lessons and observed 12 teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and pupils, and a small number of parents and carers bringing their children to school were also spoken to. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at analyses of pupils' progress, the governing body minutes, development planning and monitoring, local authority reports, a range of policies and procedures including those associated with safeguarding, curriculum planning documents and a sample of pupils' work. They also scrutinised questionnaires returned by 169 parents and carers, 111 pupils and 21 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The extent to which the gap in attainment between English and mathematics is closing.
- How effectively the school is working to address any gender differences with regard to progress and attainment.
- The degree to which the school has improved the quality of teaching since the last inspection.

Information about the school

This is a large first school where there are two classes in each year group. Most pupils are of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. These mainly relate to specific learning, behavioural, emotional and social, and speech, language and communication needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The school holds the Healthy School, Rights Respecting School Level 1 and Investors in People awards. The Early Morning Club run by the school provides out of school care.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Merley First is an outstanding school. Through excellent leadership and management, the curriculum and teaching have improved exceptionally well since the last inspection and both are of high quality. Reception children get off to an excellent start and pupils continue to make rapid progress throughout other year groups. As a result, pupils' achievement is outstanding and, by the time they leave in Year 4, attainment is much higher than is usual for this age.

Excellent attention is given to providing for pupils' needs and interests, and setting very high challenges which are nearly always met. This, together with the outstanding partnerships the school has with a wide range of other schools and organisations, helps pupils develop a thirst for learning. They very much enjoy school, a fact fully validated by their parents and carers, so attendance levels are high. Assessment is an integral part of all lessons so that pupils develop an especially good awareness of how well they are doing and where to improve. There is an excellent focus on helping pupils develop important literacy, numeracy and science investigation skills so that they apply these especially well in a range of situations, including solving problems. Strengths such as these prepare pupils especially well for the future. Pupils achieve exceptionally well in important aspects of their personal development. They show considerable maturity, play an excellent role in the life of the school and local community, and have an outstanding awareness of how to achieve healthy and safe lifestyles. It is no surprise that the school has gained a national award.

The headteacher has been particularly successful in creating a very strong staff team which works exceptionally well to drive up progress and attainment, ensuring that the gap between attainment in English and mathematics is closing quickly. The governing body is scrupulous in fulfilling its statutory duties, and supports and challenges the school well. The school's approach to self-evaluation is accurate and rigorous. Very comprehensive and rigorous systems for monitoring the quality of provision and pupils' progress mean any weaknesses are speedily identified and addressed. As a result, the school is especially good at meeting the needs of different groups; boys and girls perform equally well and those pupils who find learning difficult often make outstanding progress. Development planning is exceptionally well focused on important priorities, with staff continually seeking ways to enhance provision. These strengths give the school an excellent capacity for improvement.

Pupils are well cared for, including through effective procedures to keep them safe and free from harm at all times. The procedures to support good attendance are especially effective. The support and guidance for pupils is good overall. Strong systems to support good behaviour ensure lessons proceed at a brisk pace, although a small minority of pupils with behavioural problems find it difficult to manage their own behaviour, especially during

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playtimes. The school's excellent assessment and tracking procedures are especially effective in helping the school to monitor and support pupils, including the very small minority who need specific help. However, the targets set for a very small number of pupils who have specific support programmes are not always detailed enough to allow the school to track these pupils' subsequent progress accurately.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- From September 2011 provide more comprehensive information on the targets set for pupils provided with individual support programmes in order to help staff identify their effect on progress and quickly adjust them where necessary.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Throughout the school, progress is outstanding, including for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other groups who may be vulnerable to underachieving. Most Reception children attain the levels expected for their age and a majority exceed them. Children's confidence, self-esteem, enjoyment and capacity for learning provide an excellent foundation for the future.

This is built on exceptionally well throughout the school, with high attainment levels being achieved. Very effective links between subjects help make writing purposeful so that younger pupils enjoy making up their own characters and writing stories about them. Their handwriting and punctuation is very good, with the excellent programme for learning letters and sounds (phonics) helping most pupils to spell accurately. By Year 4, pupils' reading skills are exceptionally well developed. Their written work shows a very effective use of language; for example, connectives, alliteration and similes help to bring their writing alive. They have an excellent awareness of how to write for a range of purposes, for example writing well-crafted stories or reporting facts and opinions from different texts they read. In mathematics, pupils' calculation skills are exceptionally strong. Younger pupils use these very well when working with measures so that, for example, their understanding of time is especially good. By Year 4, pupils work very confidently with decimals and fractions and have an excellent understanding of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Their application of these skills in solving problems is excellent, quickly identifying the methods to be used and working accurately to find the correct answer. Throughout the school, pupils' outstanding awareness of how to approach scientific investigations helps them gain an excellent understanding of important concepts; for example how insulation materials slow the melting of ice.

Pupils are well aware of their rights and responsibilities, acknowledged in the national award, and all have opportunities to contribute to school and community life. They take their responsibilities very seriously, enthusiastically devising class and school rules, raising environmental issues or helping to prevent bullying in the local area, and supporting recycling. Activities such as the daily 'Wake and Shake' sessions, the strong promotion of healthy lunch boxes and an excellent understanding of how to avoid potential hazards, especially during playtimes, ensure pupils have excellent health and safety awareness. Moral and social development are good, with paired and group work within lessons supporting learning exceptionally well. Pupils are well aware of the importance of good behaviour with the large majority behaving well during lessons. However, there is some boisterous play at breaktimes, and concerns regarding behaviour were raised by a small

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minority of pupils and their parents and carers. Pupils' spiritual and cultural awareness develops well through links with schools overseas, with current priorities effectively focused on enhancing pupils' awareness of religious and cultural diversity in this country.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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?

This is a school where children want to learn because the activities are exceptionally relevant and interesting, and lessons enthuse and motivate them especially well. The excellent range of visits, visitors and after-school clubs, including for music and sport, greatly enhance pupils' enjoyment and achievement. The curriculum is especially well planned using 'Sparkly Starters' and 'Fantastic Finishers' that fully engage pupils' interest and provide an excellent awareness of what they have achieved and what they need to do next. Staff are exceptionally skilled at planning lesson activities very well matched to the different levels at which pupils are working, providing a high level of challenge and very effective adult support where needed. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and both they and classroom assistants are very skilled at questioning pupils to gauge their understanding and move them on to the next stage quickly. Pupils are made fully aware of what they are expected to achieve and become skilled at assessing how well they and their partners are progressing towards their goals. Excellent assessment procedures and systems for tracking pupils' progress ensure that there is swift intervention if this slows or when staff feel pupils could progress more quickly. Booster groups or special activities

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support this aspect especially well, helping those pupils who find learning difficult to achieve as well as their peers. Specific programmes for individual pupils also support their progress well, although the evaluation of the effectiveness of these is less well established, hindering teachers' efforts to make them even better.

The school takes its responsibility for the care of pupils extremely seriously and addresses welfare needs especially well, including through the work of the family outreach worker. The Early Morning Club provides an excellent level of care and support. Effective induction and transition arrangements help Reception children to settle quickly and ensure Year 4 pupils look forward to their move to middle school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision is exceptionally well led and managed so there is excellent teamwork amongst all staff and a consistent approach to high-quality teaching and learning. The learning environment is bright, stimulating and secure. The outdoor area is rather small, but staff plan the activities exceptionally well around this, using the school playgrounds and grassed areas to very good effect to support learning. The curriculum is exceptionally well adapted to meet the needs and interests of children. Staff are especially successful at combining the requirements for different areas of learning within one activity. For example, children learn about the different features of mini-beasts while increasing their dexterity through making models of them from construction equipment. An excellent balance of focused activities where children learn new skills, for example in letter sounds, and those where they discover things for themselves support children's development especially well.

Strengths such as these ensure children greatly enjoy their learning and achieve exceptionally well. They develop independence and responsibility, persevering with new tasks and working very well together, for example in role-play activities. Children have an excellent awareness of how well they are doing because they are responsible for photographing their activities and helping adults to record what they have achieved. Adults are very skilled in prompting children to extend their learning further. Literacy and numeracy skills are supported especially well. For example, children often choose to 'read' a book together, telling the story from the pictures. Children naturally choose to do writing because this is taught and encouraged particularly well. One child was seen, without being asked, to label the features of the insect which she drew after looking carefully at it under the microscope. Children intuitively learn to count and put numbers in order, compare the size of objects and time how long it takes them to 'find the bugs' buried in the sand.

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Children are very aware of how to conduct themselves safely, whether using scissors or moving around the small outdoor area. They have an excellent awareness of hygiene and what foods keep them healthy, and they greatly enjoy physical activities. Children are very well cared for and there is a close partnership with pre-school providers and parents and carers to enhance induction and support learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

A higher percentage of parents and carers than is seen in most schools returned the Ofsted questionnaire.

Most parents and carers are happy with the school and agree that their children enjoy being there. They are especially appreciative of the quality of teaching, and the way that their children are kept safe and are encouraged to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspection evidence agrees with these views.

Of most concern to a small minority of the parents and carers who completed the questionnaire, or who wrote or spoke to inspectors, was the way that the school deals with unacceptable behaviour and its communication with them. Inspection evidence indicates that behaviour management is generally good, especially in lessons, but that a few pupils do not always follow the advice they are given and are boisterous in their play, which concerns a small minority of pupils. Evidence indicates that the school uses a good range of ways in which to communicate with parents and carers, for example through its website, regular newsletters, and information about children's progress and the school's work. Where there is the need for a school closure in relation to poor weather or strike action, for example, the school follows local authority guidelines in communicating with parents and carers appropriately. Evidence also indicates that the school welcomes parental suggestions with regard to enhancing communication through the foyer postbox or by email.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Merley First 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 169 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 295 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	114	67	45	21	8	5	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	100	59	62	37	6	4	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	70	41	89	53	7	4	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	71	42	77	46	14	8	6	4
The teaching is good at this school	85	50	75	44	7	4	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	66	39	84	50	16	9	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	90	53	75	44	3	2	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)	79	47	74	44	7	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	67	40	85	50	13	8	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	47	28	80	47	30	18	8	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	52	31	82	48	17	10	8	5
The school is led and managed effectively	54	32	79	47	12	7	15	9
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	90	53	66	39	8	5	4	2

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



14 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merley First School, Merley, Wimborne BH21 1SD

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We very much enjoyed our time talking to you and seeing all the things you do. I particularly want to thank the pupils who gave up their time to talk to us. We have judged your school to be outstanding and are very pleased that you and your parents and carers think it is a good place to be.

Here are some of the things we found out were especially good about the school.

- Reception children get off to a good start and you make excellent progress so attainment is much higher than that normally seen for your age.
- Staff plan interesting activities to help you do your best, and they teach you and assess your work exceptionally well.
- You make excellent progress in your personal development. You are mature, thoughtful and helpful young people who work very well together. Most of you behave well, although a few of you need to play more carefully during breaktimes.
- You are well cared for and get very good advice on how to improve your work.
- You have an excellent headteacher, and staff are working well with her to help your school carry on improving.

Here is what we have asked the school to improve.

- Staff are good at checking how well they support your progress. We have asked them to also keep just as good a check on the special programmes put in place for individual pupils who need specific help.

Yours sincerely

Diane Wilkinson Lead inspector

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