

Merridale Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104334
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	377067
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Helen Morrison

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	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Amanda Costello
Headteacher	Simon Lane
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. A total of 16 lessons taught by nine teachers were seen. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, school leaders and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at: curriculum planning; data on pupils' achievement, including their current progress; documents relating to the care and protection of pupils; plans for improvement; pupils' work; and records of the school's monitoring of its performance. They also analysed 124 questionnaires that were returned by parents and carers, together with 79 from pupils and 26 from staff.

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

- How well does teaching ensure that all pupils make good progress, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in writing throughout the school?
- Has the school succeeded in raising levels of attendance?
- Have leaders, managers and members of the governing body successfully tackled the issues from the last inspection?

Information about the school

Merridale is an average-sized primary school where about three quarters of the pupils are from a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is high with a large majority at an early stage of learning English when they join the school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is high. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, although this varies between year groups.

The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Nursery class, which provides part-time education, and a full-time Reception class. The deputy headteacher was absent on family leave at the time of the inspection. The school has National Healthy Schools status.

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

Merridale Primary is an outstanding school which is rightly valued by its community. Staff, pupils and parents and carers are proud of their school and the education it provides. When asked what might be done to improve the school one pupil responded, 'Nothing - it's perfect'. Pupils enjoy coming to school and, as a result, attendance is above average. The strong leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders and members of the governing body, has ensured that ambition and high expectations for all pupils are the basis of the exciting and engaging curriculum. Many activities are based out-of-doors and the school uses its grounds exceptionally well to promote a love of learning. For example, the yurt provides all pupils with a unique environment in which to learn and play and younger pupils are excited by activities in the forest school.

Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected in their excellent behaviour and lively understanding of themselves and the world around them. There is a strong sense of working together to help one another in school and pupils make an outstanding contribution to the wider community.

The school is extremely caring and provides exemplary support for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Links with parents and carers are promoted very effectively. The school works with a large number of support agencies to assist families and ensure that their needs are very well met.

Teaching is good and as a result all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those eligible for free school meals, make good progress and achieve well. Early Years Foundation Stage staff skilfully encourage children to talk about their activities so that all children, including those who join the school knowing only a few English words, quickly gain confidence and make good progress. Staff plan exciting activities for children so that they enjoy learning indoors and at forest school. However, the activities available in the out-of-doors learning area adjacent to their classrooms do not always provide enough opportunities for children to develop their communication and early literacy skills.

Pupils' handwriting skills have improved since the last inspection and are now good. The school has rightly identified the importance of developing pupils' speaking and listening skills as a basis for fluent writing. Progress in this and other aspects of writing, such as spelling and grammar, has accelerated since the introduction of a structured programme linking letters to the sounds they make, and is now good. The

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school has ensured that pupils enjoy learning by providing a good range of practical experiences. For example, pupils in Year 6 enthusiastically wrote letters of complaint based on role play. However, a few lessons, though satisfactory, do not always provide more-able pupils with enough challenge and interest for them to progress as rapidly as they could. Pupils across the school regularly evaluate their own learning in lessons using 'learning ladders' and teachers mark books and set clear targets for improvement. However, occasionally pupils are not always given enough time to consider and respond to marking so it does not consistently help them to improve their work.

The skilful and resourceful leadership of the headteacher is at the heart of the school's success. This, together with the strong desire shared by all staff and members of the governing body to provide the best education for all pupils, underpins the school's outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. School policies and practices are reviewed more regularly than at the time of the last inspection and this ensures that they meet pupils' needs. Accurate school self-evaluation is based on detailed analysis of data about pupils' performance, which is shared with all staff so that any underachievement is identified promptly and interventions put in place to address it.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and improve progress in writing across the school by ensuring that:
 - more-able pupils are fully challenged in every lesson so that they reach the high standards of which they are capable
 - pupils are given sufficient time to respond to the good advice they are given on how to improve their work.
- Improve outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage by increasing the range of learning opportunities available out-of-doors so that outdoor learning promotes communication and early literacy skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils enjoy learning and all groups of pupils achieve well across the school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because they are given personalised support by knowledgeable teaching assistants in taking small, manageable steps in learning. Pupils who speak English as an additional language, including those in the early stages of learning English, are given carefully targeted teaching so their English vocabulary increases quickly and, as a result, they make similar progress to their peers. Pupils' learning and progress are good in most lessons; they are engaged, have excellent attitudes and maintain their concentration. For example, pupils in Years 4 and 5 responded with enthusiasm to inspiring teaching and wrote instructions of a very high standard for their age for the use of 'magic wellies'. Occasionally, the pace of learning drops when a few more-able pupils

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find the work too easy.

A large majority of children start in the Nursery class with skills that are well below those expected of their age, and speaking and listening skills are particularly weak. Well-planned activities and effective adult intervention ensure that all children make good progress. However, their skills are still below those typically expected when they enter Year 1, particularly in communication, language and literacy. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 as a result of consistently good or outstanding teaching so that attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 2. For example, pupils in Year 1 were excited by the challenge of using clues to solve riddles and enjoyed using their good knowledge of adjectives to compose riddles of their own. The attainment of all pupils at the end of Year 6 has been above the national average in mathematics for the last two years and current Year 6 pupils’ work shows this has been maintained. However, attainment in English at the end of Key Stage 2, while broadly average and rising, does not yet match that achieved in mathematics.

Pupils’ excellent personal development is the key reason outcomes are judged outstanding. They are eager to take on responsibilities, such as acting as peer mentors or members of the school council, and are proud to represent the school in community events. Pupils know they will be listened to if they approach an adult with a concern. They have an excellent understanding about how to be safe and to look after themselves, particularly road safety and when using the internet. As a result, they feel safe in school. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and taking regular exercise. Their keen interest in learning and environmental issues, strong skills in mathematics and information and communication technology, and increasing awareness of the world of work contribute to a good preparation for the next stage of their education and later life.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	1
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	2

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

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contribute to their future economic well-being	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

In the best lessons, teachers use good subject knowledge to plan exciting activities which enthuse pupils and capture their interest. Where lessons are satisfactory, teachers' explanations are sometimes too long so that pupils do not make as much progress as they could. The outstanding curriculum is enriched by skilful use of information and communication technology and memorable outdoor experiences, such as work done in the school's yurt in which, for example, older pupils enjoy an overnight stay. The curriculum is carefully tailored to meet pupils' needs well. An excellent focus on using visits and visitors which widen pupils' life experiences and make a very positive contribution to their personal development.

The school is a very caring community where pupils' welfare is given high priority and families are well known to staff. All groups are included successfully in each aspect of school life and receive outstanding levels of care. Precisely targeted support for potentially vulnerable pupils is enabling them to become increasingly confident learners.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The drive and ambition of the headteacher is shared by all staff and members of the governing body, and this demonstrates the school's outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. Rigorous monitoring of teaching by senior leaders and the careful use of highly effective teachers to extend and share good practice has led to well-targeted professional development and, as a result, pupils' attainment is improving.

The governing body holds the school to account well and fulfils its statutory duties effectively. Members of the governing body are very well informed about the life of the school and its performance. They visit the school regularly to gain first-hand information, and work well with senior leaders in developing and monitoring strategic

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planning.

The school is committed to equality of opportunity so that additional support is provided promptly for pupils identified as underachieving, ensuring they catch up quickly. As a result, all groups of pupils make good progress. An exceptionally wide range of partnerships with local schools and community groups, together with international links, promote outstanding community cohesion by providing exciting learning opportunities for all pupils. The school understands the needs of its own and neighbouring communities very well. Pupils learn about different cultures and beliefs and any discrimination is tackled promptly. Pupils from different backgrounds get on very well together and they show respect for views that may be different from their own. Partnerships with parents and carers are very strong, especially through workshops which help them to be fully involved in supporting their children’s learning.

Safeguarding procedures are regularly monitored and evaluated by senior leaders and members of the governing body. This, together with regularly updated training for all staff and teaching about safety, ensures that pupils are safe in school.

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	2
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	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

As a result of good teaching, children make good progress in both Nursery and Reception.. Carefully structured activities that ensure all children, including those for whom English is an additional language, enjoy learning and achieve well. However, children’s skills are still below those found typically for their age when they start Year 1.

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The curriculum captures the children’s interest and imagination and activities are well chosen and engaging. For example, in the forest school children excitedly hunt for mini-beasts and make dens. There is a good balance of adult-led activities and those the children choose for themselves, which provide good opportunities for children to follow their own initiative. However, the out-of-doors area adjacent to the classrooms is cramped and not used well enough to promote children’s communication, language and literacy skills.

There are good systems to record and monitor children’s progress. There is close teamwork between all adults and a strong commitment to helping parents and carers support children’s learning. Children are well cared for and procedures are in place to ensure that they are safeguarded effectively.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The school clearly enjoys the confidence and support of the parents and carers who returned questionnaires, with almost all saying that they are happy with their child’s experience. Far more questionnaires were returned than is typical for a school of this size, with a large number of individual comments reflecting the very good quality of care for all pupils. A few parents and carers commented that they felt the school could do more to recognise their views, particularly about whether or not to introduce a school uniform. Inspectors found that the headteacher and staff welcome parents’ and carers’ views. They make time to talk to them whenever there are concerns, as well as seeking their opinions on general school matters through annual questionnaires. The school’s most recent parents’ consultation on school uniform indicated the majority opposed its introduction.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Merridale 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 124 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 233 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	96	77	26	21	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	88	71	34	27	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	84	68	39	31	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	83	67	37	30	3	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	91	73	30	24	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	90	73	31	25	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	81	65	40	32	1	1	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)	71	57	44	35	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	73	59	45	36	3	2	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	73	59	46	37	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	70	56	46	37	5	4	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	85	69	33	27	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	98	79	24	19	1	1	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



21 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merridale Primary School, Wolverhampton, WV3 0UP

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and showing us what you are learning. We really enjoyed talking to you, sharing your lessons and reading your questionnaires. We agree with you that yours is an excellent school. Here are some of the reasons why.

- Your teachers care for you and look after you exceptionally well.
- You behave extremely well around school and get on really well together.
- You make good progress and by the end of Year 6 you reach standards in mathematics that are higher than those of most eleven-year-olds.
- You enjoy learning out-of-doors, especially in the yurt and at forest school.
- You are exceptionally good at helping the school to run smoothly as well as finding ways to help people in need.
- You have excellent links with the local community and know a lot about people in other places who have different cultures and customs.

In order for you to make even faster progress, we have asked your headteacher, staff and the governing body to do the following.

- Make your writing even better by ensuring that those of you who are capable of reaching high standards always have challenging work to do and by giving you opportunities to follow up your teachers' marking so you use their advice to improve your work.
- Improve the outdoor area for Nursery and Reception children so they have more opportunities for speaking and listening, reading and writing.

You can all help by continuing to try to do your best at everything you do.

I wish you lots of success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Morrison
Lead inspector

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