

Mersey Park Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105042
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	377169
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2012
Lead inspector	Martin Pye

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	409
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Kenny
Headteacher	Margaret Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Zahid Aziz
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Additional inspector
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Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 21 lessons taught by 16 different teachers, observed break times and listened to pupils reading. They held meetings with groups of pupils, staff and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement, pupils' work and assessment information, teachers' planning, monitoring of teaching records, attendance and safeguarding information. The inspectors analysed 46 questionnaires from parents and carers together with questionnaires from staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Mersey Park Primary School is larger than the average-sized primary school. Most of the pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs that are supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is similar to that found in most schools. In 2011, the school did not meet the current floor standards, which set the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Mersey Park Primary School has gained a number of awards including: Healthy School status, Active Sport Award and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

There is a breakfast and after-school club on the site. This is not managed by the governing body and will be inspected separately 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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a satisfactory school that is showing strong signs of improvement because of the clear-sighted and determined leadership that now operates at all levels. It is a welcoming place and the care it provides is a particular strength. The school is not yet good because achievement over time, particularly in English, is satisfactory. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- In recent years, attainment in English, particularly in writing, has been below average and gaps between the achievements of groups of pupils, in English and mathematics, have been wide. These gaps are narrowing because pupils are now making better progress.
- The impact of teaching over time has been satisfactory, although examples of good and outstanding teaching now exist. Improvements in the quality of teaching mean that all pupils are now making faster progress. However, in some lessons, tasks are not always carefully planned to build on prior learning and some opportunities for pupils to work together and discuss their ideas are missed. Plans to share good practice that already exists within the school have yet to be fully realised.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and they respond well to the many reward systems. The school's caring attention to safety and welfare matters means that pupils feel safe and valued at school. This is reflected in their improved attendance.
- Leadership and management are good. The drive and vision of the headteacher has strengthened leadership at all levels. School leaders monitor teaching effectively and use this information to manage teachers' performance and improve pupils' progress. The school works hard to provide parents and carers with information and support. School leaders are seeking to strengthen the partnership with home in order to assist pupils' learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing so that, by the end of Year 6, it is more in line with the higher standards achieved in reading and mathematics.
- Make sure that all teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - making full use of every opportunity in lessons for pupils to work together and discuss their ideas
 - ensuring that all tasks in lessons are always carefully tailored to build successfully on pupils' prior learning
 - sharing the good practice that exists within the school.
- Strengthen the partnership with parents and carers in order to support pupils' welfare and progress as they move through the school.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Parents and carers report that they are pleased with the progress their children make at Mersey Park School. Inspection findings show that, over time, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. This means that most pupils make progress that is similar to that made by pupils nationally. However, rates of progress have recently accelerated.

Many children enter school with knowledge and skills that are below average and some have skills that are well-below age-related expectations. They make good progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage because the provision is well organised to meet their needs and adults keep careful records that allow them to plan for next steps with informed precision. Nevertheless, because of their low starting points, the literacy and numeracy skills of most pupils when they start in Year 1 are below expectations.

As pupils move through Key Stage 1, they make satisfactory progress and, while attainment in reading, writing and mathematics rises steadily, it is still below average by the end of Year 2. The recently introduced and innovative whole-school approach to the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) is now helping pupils to make faster progress with their reading. The focus on basic mathematical skills is also having a positive impact. Short, sharp daily arithmetic sessions and lessons that give pupils opportunity to use and apply their skills are helping all groups of pupils to improve their mathematical understanding. As a result, attainment in reading and mathematics has been rising and, by the time pupils reach the end of Year 6, it is now much closer to age-related expectations. However, over time, attainment in writing has been weaker, with many pupils making slow progress and leaving the school with skills that are well below average for their age.

The school's current data and work in books show the rate of pupils' progress in writing is now improving. This is because of the drive to raise standards. Focused attention to pupils' spelling and handwriting and to what can be achieved in a lesson is driving up expectations. In one well-paced English lesson, pupils were required to

create questions in response to a video clip and then discuss their writing with a partner. This meaningful focus on literacy skills accelerated their progress. However, at times opportunities for pupils to talk about their ideas and reflect on their writing are missed which slows progress.

The school's inclusive nature and extra-support programmes mean that all groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are now being helped to achieve equally well. Consequently, the gaps between the achievements of different groups of pupils are narrowing fast.

Quality of teaching

All parents and carers that responded to the questionnaire believe that their children are taught well, and pupils agree. While much of the teaching seen during the inspection was good or better, the impact of teaching over time has been satisfactory. The faster progress now being made by most pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, is a clear indicator that strategies to improve teaching are working.

In the best lessons, tasks are finely tuned to meet all pupils' needs and they are given time and opportunity to work with others and to discuss their ideas. In one mathematics lesson, for example, pupils worked in pairs using digit cards to solve number problems. This prompted discussion and allowed the teacher to listen, check for understanding, and then adjust teaching as needed. However, in some lessons pupils do not get the chance to work together or to fully explain and discuss their thinking. These missed opportunities for pupils to practise their speaking and listening skills and to develop independence in their learning limit their progress and teachers' awareness of what pupils know and can do.

Marking is a strength. A consistent approach to assessment and clear written feedback helps pupils to understand how well they are doing and provides helpful guidance about what they need to do next.

The teaching of basic skills is given a high priority with daily attention to the four rules of number and the development of reading skills. The teaching of reading is increasingly effective because it is structured and systematic and pupils enjoy the mix of fun activities included in every session. Support staff make a valuable contribution to pupils' progress; fostering positive relationships and helping pupils to overcome difficulties in their learning or in their lives. The caring attention to individual needs builds pupils' self-esteem; helping them to take an interest in their own and each other's learning and in the world around them.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The majority of a parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire rightly believe that behaviour is good. Most pupils also share this view and, while they report some lively behaviour on the playground at break-times, they feel safe and enjoy coming to school. Pupils also report that behaviour and attendance is better than it used to be because of the many reward systems and incentives – such as the zone system and class attendance league – that operate in school. There is no doubt

that the actions of the home–school liaison worker coupled with the improving provision at school have helped to improve attendance so that it is now above average.

Pupils have an informed understanding of what constitutes bullying and can talk about what to do if it happens. They are confident that any rare instances that might occur would be stopped and say that the pupils who act as playground leaders are kind and helpful. They are aware of the different risks that they face in and out of school, such as when walking or cycling, and know how to respond to these in order to stay safe. The school motto of, 'be nice, work hard, never give up' is clearly understood by pupils, and all staff encourage them to act responsibly. The recent pupil-led campaign to reduce dog-fouling in the local park, for example, helps them to become community-minded and to realise that their actions can make a positive difference.

A particular feature of the school's work is its commitment to supporting pupils who face difficulties in their lives. These pupils receive extra support from trained staff and this, together with liaison with home and other organisations, is successful in helping them to cope well in lessons and around school.

Leadership and management

Leadership at every level is strongly focused on securing school improvement. In a relatively short space of time, the headteacher has created a capable and ambitious leadership team, developed more precise data analysis and established effective monitoring systems. As a result, although some inconsistencies remain, teaching has improved and staff are increasingly accountable for the standards achieved. The school's self-evaluation informs development planning and links well with the performance management and training cycle for all staff.

The governing body has a clear understanding of its strategic role and takes its responsibilities seriously; members make frequent visits to the school to evaluate provision and ensure that safeguarding requirements are met.

The curriculum is good. Following recent changes, it meets pupils' needs well. Child-led starting points provide a route into topics that allow pupils to practise and develop their basic skills across a range of subjects. Imaginative lessons and enrichment activities make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Whether marvelling over a mystery box containing items from the school's past, enjoying a ukulele lesson or experimenting with sculpture and art, pupils display a sense of wonder and enjoyment in their learning. While pupils' awareness of the wider world is limited, visits to local museums and events such as a recent multi-faith week help to stimulate their curiosity and increase their understanding about the lives of others.

The good pastoral care, assisted by links with specialist agencies, successfully promotes equality and tackles discrimination. Parents and carers appreciate the inclusive nature of the school with one commenting: 'It is a lovely place. My child has come on really well since starting at Mersey Park School.' Support for homework, including reading at home, is not as strong as it could be. School leaders are looking

for ways to strengthen the partnerships with home in order to support pupils' learning beyond the school day.

The pace of recent change and rising standards demonstrates that the school has good capacity to improve further.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



24 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mersey Park Primary School, Birkenhead, CH42 0PH

Thank you for your welcome when I inspected your school with two other inspectors. We very much enjoyed our visit. Thank you for telling us about your work and all the other things you do at school.

During our visit, we were impressed by your good attendance and behaviour. You are looked after well and the teachers plan many interesting activities for you to do. This means you enjoy lessons and feel safe.

Your headteacher and staff know how well your school is doing and how to improve it in the future. It is a satisfactory school that is improving very quickly.

We noticed that you make faster progress in reading and mathematics than you do in writing. However, we could see that this is now improving because you are working harder. We also noticed that in the very best lessons the teachers give you tasks that require you to work with each other and you are given time to talk about your work and ideas. Your teachers are now going to make sure that this happens more often in all your lessons. In order to help with this, your headteacher is going to make sure that the teachers in the school share good ideas and ways of teaching that will help to improve your learning.

You can help by continuing to behave so well in school, by always doing your best in every lesson and by keeping up with any homework that you are given.

Thank you again and my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Lead inspector

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