

Mersham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	118377
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	379609
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2012
Lead inspector	Mike Capper

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Morris
Headteacher	Mark Brooks
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 March 2009
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	18–19 June 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Mike Capper

Additional inspector

Marion Hobbs

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 20 lessons taught by eight teachers. Discussions were held with parents and carers at the start of the school day, and with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at school documentation, including teachers' planning, assessment information, safeguarding policies and samples of pupils' work. The inspectors analysed 99 questionnaires from parents and carers, 107 from pupils and 26 from members of staff.

Information about the school

Pupils come to this average-sized primary school from both the local community and further afield. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The vast majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who are supported by school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a single-age Reception class.

The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school where pupils achieve well and flourish socially. The school is not yet outstanding because, while teaching is mostly good, there is still some satisfactory teaching and this means that progress is not consistently good in every lesson. Pupils have good information and communication technology skills but, due to the limited number of computers in classrooms, there are too few opportunities to use their skills in lessons.
- Pupils make good progress most of the time and attainment by the end of Year 6 is above average. Literacy and numeracy skills are well developed, with progress in reading being especially strong across the school.
- Teachers have high expectations in most lessons and work is purposeful and engaging. Teachers meet pupils' differing needs successfully most of the time, but occasionally work is not pitched at the right level for all pupils, and time at the end of lessons is not always used well enough to identify next steps in learning. Teaching assistants make a very valuable contribution to learning, especially when working with small groups of pupils both in and out of lessons.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes towards their work. They are keen to do their best, behave well and feel safe. They greatly enjoy school, especially the very wide range of clubs and visits which help to make learning exciting.
- Good leadership of performance has helped to ensure that a slight dip in pupils' attainment in 2011 has been successfully tackled. Leaders support teachers well, monitoring their work thoroughly and giving clear guidance about how to improve. There is a good understanding of current priorities because self-evaluation is accurate. The school engages very well with parents and carers. They are highly positive about how well the school supports their children.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2013, move the remaining small pockets of satisfactory teaching to good by:
 - ensuring that there is the right level of challenge for every pupil in all lessons

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- always using the ends of lessons effectively to check progress and to identify next steps in pupils' learning.
- By December 2013, improve the provision of computers in classrooms so that pupils can use and apply their technology skills in their everyday learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

When children join the school, most are working at the levels expected for their age. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children quickly acquire new skills. This good progress is built on well in the rest of the school and attainment is above average by the end of Year 6.

Parents and carers are very pleased with their children's achievement, typically making comments such as 'My child has flourished' and 'I am incredibly happy with my child's progress.' Inspectors found that pupils make good progress in most lessons. In the Reception class, children quickly improved their writing skills as they wrote about 'The Olympics', describing in simple sentences the different competitions. Timely interventions from adults helped children to improve their use of simple punctuation. In a Key Stage 2 numeracy lesson, pupils were challenged well as they solved number problems. Pupils were highly motivated and there were some delightful moments of enlightenment as they began to devise formulae to solve the problem. In a Key Stage 1 literacy lesson, pupils used their knowledge of a book about 'being afraid' to produce high quality writing, improving their use of adjectives as the lesson proceeded. Although progress in lessons is typically good, there are a few occasions when it is satisfactory. For example, in a numeracy lesson about colours and shapes, learning was satisfactory because work was not pitched at quite the right level for all pupils, slowing progress.

Attainment in reading is above average by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Early reading skills such as phonics (letter sounds) are taught systematically and younger pupils confidently 'sound out' unknown words. Pupils have many opportunities to share books with adults and they read frequently in lessons, ensuring that skills improve very quickly and that pupils develop a love of books.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs learn well in lessons. In intervention groups outside lessons, new skills are broken down into small steps and progress is consistently good.

Leaders ensure that there are no significant variations between the progress of boys or girls or other groups. They monitor the attainment of groups very carefully to close the gap for any pupils who are in danger of falling behind so that they achieve well by the time they leave the school.

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Quality of teaching

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of teaching, with comments such as 'Teachers motivate pupils to work hard and fulfil their potential' reflecting their views. These views are endorsed by pupils. Inspection findings show that teaching is typically good, including for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

Teachers get on well with their pupils and have high expectations. They plan carefully for lessons so that differing needs are met well most of the time, although there are a few occasions when there is not the right level of challenge for all pupils. There is a good pace to learning in most lessons and teachers give pupils many opportunities to think for themselves. This was seen to good effect in the Reception class, where children explored their own ideas when building 'swimming pools' for a diving competition. Throughout the school, pupils enjoy lessons because work is made purposeful. For example, in a Year 6 literacy lesson, pupils were keen to write because they were involved in being detectives and writing crime scene reports. Skilled teaching assistants support learning well, especially when working with disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously and, in English books in particular, give good guidance to pupils about how to improve their work. At the end of lessons, teachers use 'learning boxes' (where pupils write about their work) to help them assess progress, but they do not always extend this by, for example, talking in more detail about what pupils have done and identifying next steps in learning.

Curriculum planning is thorough and takes good account of the way that different groups of pupils learn. For example, there has been a recent focus on making more use of the school's outdoor areas to support learning and this has helped to increase even further the engagement of boys. The school has a well-resourced computer suite and pupils show good skills when working in there, but resources in the classrooms are sparse. Consequently, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use their technology skills in their everyday learning. In contrast, pupils are encouraged to write in different subjects and this is one of the main reasons why attainment in writing has improved so much over the last year.

Teaching successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is a good focus on teaching pupils to be respectful and to take responsibility. Topics such as recent work in Year 4 on life in an Indian village help to promote pupils' cultural awareness.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers are very clear that behaviour in school is usually good and that their children are kept safe. Pupils agree and their great enjoyment of school is seen in above average rates of attendance. Pupils typically say that 'learning is fun' and 'I always have a smile on my face when I come to school'. Pupils have good self-

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esteem and keenly take responsibility by being eco-eagles, school councillors and playleaders. They show good respect for each other, applauding the success of sports teams in assembly and happily sharing their good work in lessons.

The school sets high expectations for behaviour and gives sensitive and effective support to any pupils with identified behavioural difficulties. Consequently, pupils behave well nearly all of the time. They are polite and courteous to each other and to visitors. They develop very positive attitudes towards learning, although just occasionally they do not take enough care in their presentation of work. They rightly feel that they are kept safe, a view with which parents and carers concur. They are very clear that bullying rarely happens but say that 'If we do fall out, there is always someone there to help us.' Pupils know that bullying can take many forms. For example, they explain about the dangers of cyber-bullying and the impact that name-calling can have on others.

Leadership and management

The school has built well on strengths found in the previous inspection and has successfully tackled the key development points from that time. There is a good drive for improvement based on a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The use of data to check progress is exemplary and this meant that the school was able to respond very quickly when attainment in writing dipped in national testing in 2011. The renewed focus on giving pupils opportunities to write at length and to use their literacy skills in different subjects has proved very effective in rapidly raising attainment back to its previous above average levels. Initiatives such as this demonstrate that the school has a secure capacity for further improvement.

Leaders ensure that there is no discrimination and they promote equality of opportunity effectively by checking carefully that no group is being disadvantaged either socially or academically. They rigorously monitor provision and use this effectively to identify priorities, although the written development plan is overlong and has too many targets. Leaders make good use of training and performance management to support teachers to improve. While teaching is improving, there still remain some small pockets of satisfactory practice.

The governing body is fully involved in strategic planning and plays a good part in driving improvement. They ensure that pupils are kept safe and that safeguarding procedures meet requirements. As the school has no deputy headteacher, the governing body is mindful of the need to monitor carefully the workload of the headteacher who takes on many additional responsibilities and they are rightly reviewing the leadership structure to see how it could be improved.

There is a broad and balanced curriculum. It focuses well on promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, the recent focus on 'The Olympics' has enabled pupils to learn a great deal about the importance of having high aspirations by 'reaching for the stars' and not being scared of failure.

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.

20 June 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Mersham Primary School, Ashford TN25 6NU

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and hearing some of you read. We found that your school is providing a good education and is helping you to do well.

These are the best things about your school.

- We could see, and you confirmed in the questionnaires, that you thoroughly enjoy school. It is great that there are so many exciting things to do outside lessons. The Bushcraft Club sounds great fun!
- You are taught well and you make good progress in most, but not all, lessons.
- You behave well and work hard. You are right when you say that the school does all the right things to keep you safe.
- All adults in school are caring and they give you suitable help when you have problems with your work.
- The school's leaders are determined to make the school even better and they are clear about the few things that still need improving.

We have asked your school to do some things to help it improve even further. These are to:

- make sure that teachers always provide you with work that is not too hard or too easy for you and use time at the end of lessons to help you understand what you will be learning next
- provide more computers in the classrooms so that you get more opportunity to use modern technology in your everyday learning.

You can help your teachers by continuing to work hard all the time and by making sure that you always present your work neatly.

Yours sincerely

Mike Capper
Lead inspector

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