

Merebrook Infant School

Dulverton Drive, Furzton, Milton Keynes, MK4 1EZ

Inspection dates 28 February–1 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Standards in writing by the end of Year 2 are not high enough.
- Some pupils do not achieve a good enough understanding of phonics (the sounds that letters make).
- Teaching does not ensure that pupils make good progress in all year groups.
- Lessons are not always conducted at a quick enough pace, and time is wasted.
- Pupils of different abilities do not know exactly what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson.
- Older pupils do not consistently behave well in lessons.
- Subject leaders have yet to make a significant contribution to raising standards and making certain that all pupils make good progress.
- There are too few opportunities for staff to share and build on the school's best practice.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are making adequate progress and reaching broadly average standards in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals reach higher standards than average.
- Younger pupils behave well.
- Attendance is improving and is above average.
- Under the effective leadership of the interim headteacher, inadequate teaching has been eradicated and more lessons are taught well.
- The newly formed governing body is developing well and has acted swiftly to appoint a headteacher.
- Teachers and members of the governing body are improving their skills by regularly seeking and acting on external advice.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons, of which two were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made a number of other shorter visits to lessons and attended two assemblies. They heard some pupils in Year 2 read.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils and local authority representatives.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the data the school has collected on pupils' attainment and progress; procedures for keeping pupils safe; and the school development plan.
- Inspectors took account of the 25 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) in making their judgements and 18 questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

David Wynford Jones, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Anna Majcher	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average infant school.
- The majority of the pupils are White British. The remaining pupils come from a number of different minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language is considerably higher than average but few are currently at the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is broadly average. However, the proportions identified for additional support through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are well below average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority or whose families are in the armed forces) is average.
- There are no pupils currently being looked after by the local authority or whose families are in the armed forces.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision off-site.
- The interim headteacher has been in post since March 2012.
- In September 2012, there were major changes in the composition of the governing body.
- The privately run 'children's club' was not visited during the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring lessons proceed at a quick pace, time is not wasted and all teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively
 - making certain that pupils of different abilities know exactly what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson
 - providing more opportunities for staff to share and build on good practice.
- Raise standards and quicken pupils' progress in writing by:
 - ensuring all pupils develop and use their knowledge of phonics
 - consolidating the recently introduced strategies to develop children's writing skills in the Reception and Year 1 classes and extending into the Year 2 classes
 - promoting a wider range of strategies to help pupils to develop their vocabulary and improve their spelling.
- Improve the leadership of the school by:
 - developing the skills of middle leaders in helping their colleagues to teach well consistently and in checking that all pupils are making good progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children join the Reception classes with knowledge, skills and understanding below those expected for their age. They settle quickly into a well-organised routine. Children from both classes mix together well and make good use of the shared indoor and outdoor areas. By the end of the Reception Year, the large majority are meeting the expected level of development in all areas of learning.
- Standards in writing, at the end of Year 2, have declined steadily over a number of years. In 2012, they were below average. Too few reached the standards expected of a typical seven-year-old child.
- In the Reception and Year 1 classes, following the introduction of the focused daily sessions and a common approach to the teaching of writing, the children are systematically developing their skills, and standards in these classes are rising more rapidly.
- Older pupils write for a range of purposes and in different styles, for example stories, accounts, poems, letters and postcards. However, the majority of pupils do not use a wide range of vocabulary to make their writing interesting, the spelling of common words is often incorrect and basic punctuation is not used correctly. Some pupils' handwriting and presentation skills are poor. Following the school's recent emphasis on developing the basic skills, standards are beginning to rise and are closer to national expectations. Nevertheless, given the pupils' starting points and ability, standards are not high enough.
- Most pupils make average progress in developing their reading skills and reach the levels expected for the age. Most pupils have an adequate understanding of phonics and use their knowledge to tackle new words. However, the less-confident Year 2 readers do not always use their phonic skills to best effect. More-able readers read with fluency and understanding. They are able to use a number of strategies including phonics and context clues when they encounter unfamiliar words. Some talk confidently about their favourite authors.
- In mathematics, pupils are developing a secure understanding of number and are able to undertake basic calculations. Some pupils in Year 2 are able to investigate number patterns and can add and subtract numbers up to 100. By the end of Year 2, pupils consistently reach average standards.
- The progress of the pupils supported by the pupil premium is more rapid. They are making slightly better gains in learning than their classmates. This is because effective checks are made to see how well they are doing and additional support is provided to move learning on when necessary. The 2012 Year 2 results show that the standards reached, by pupils in this group, in reading, writing and mathematics were above the national average for pupils eligible for free school meals. The outcomes for free school meals pupils were similar to the national average for all pupils.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make broadly average progress. They are supported appropriately by teaching assistants who make sure that they are fully included in activities, understand the tasks and have equal access to the same learning opportunities as other pupils.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because pupils do not make consistently good progress over time.
- Although teachers routinely tell the pupils what they are going to be doing in lessons, they do not make it clear what they expect pupils of different abilities to achieve by the end of the lesson. In some lessons, the pace of the lesson is too slow and time is not used effectively. For example, pupils spend too long sitting on the carpet listening to the teacher rather than taking an active part in their learning. Some lessons, particularly in Year 2, are interrupted by teachers

having to remind pupils how to behave.

- Not all staff consistently encourage pupils to develop their knowledge of words or extend their writing skills. In contrast, they do help pupils to develop their reading skills by regularly reminding them to read in school and at home.
- Teaching has improved since the last inspection but remains variable. Teachers have responded to senior leaders' efforts and have worked closely with the local authority and others to improve their teaching skills. There is a greater proportion of good teaching. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated. The marking of pupils' work is informative. Pupils are offered clear guidance to improve their work and reach their targets. Teachers act as good role models and promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Where teaching is good, the work is pitched at the right level across the full range of ability represented in the class. The lessons proceed at a quick pace and the pupils respond well to the challenges that they are set. Pupils work with sustained concentration and take an active role in their own learning.
- In these effective lessons, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. They build on earlier learning and make effective use of small group work. Pupils are encouraged to share their ideas with each other and with the adults, and are given the opportunity to reflect on their work and to think about how it could be improved.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' behaviour requires improvement because older pupils do not consistently behave well in lessons and do not always work as hard as they could.
- In contrast, younger pupils are well behaved and have a better attitude towards learning. The large majority of pupils respond quickly to instructions from their teachers and understand the school's behaviour policy, which is applied consistently by most staff.
- Pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. For example, they are aware of the potential dangers of talking to strangers or when handling equipment such as scissors or other sharp instruments.
- They know about different types of bullying, including physical abuse, name-calling and cyber-bullying. There have been no reported incidents of racist behaviour, bullying or serious inappropriate behaviour.
- Pupils are polite to visitors and engage them in conversation.
- Pupils' attendance is improving steadily and is now above average.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities for staff to share and build on good practice. As a result, good practice is not consistent in all classes. Although middle leaders are developing their roles well, they have yet to make a significant contribution to improving the quality of teaching and ensuring that all pupils consistently make good progress. This is partly because they have only recently assumed their responsibilities.
- The interim headteacher has brought a sense of direction to the school and is working effectively with the deputy headteacher and all staff to improve outcomes for pupils. Based on a secure evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, leaders have embarked on a programme for improvement. This is outlined in a suitably detailed school development plan. Equality of opportunity is suitably promoted and attainment gaps are narrowing. Discriminatory practices are not tolerated. The impact of the improvements can be measured by the rising standards and improved attendance.
- Teaching staff are deployed to make best use of their strengths. Staff are working well together to plan lessons and to ensure there is consistency in the assessment of pupils' work. The half-

termly checks on pupils' attainment and progress are recorded and analysed systematically by the interim headteacher and deputy headteacher. Teachers are asked to explain if any pupil has not made the expected progress. The interim headteacher uses this information and her observations of teaching to advise the governing body whether individual teachers should be paid more.

- The curriculum is structured to ensure all National Curriculum subjects are taught. Staff work together to plan topics or themes that combine subjects and to avoid repetition. In all classes, there is an appropriate focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Well-presented displays throughout the school reflect a broad curriculum. Opportunities for pupils to work together promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.
- The local authority has provided good support and was instrumental in recruiting the interim headteacher. Effective advice has been offered on addressing weaknesses in teaching, developing middle leaders, restructuring the governing body and the appointment of a substantive headteacher.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Following major changes in the composition and reorganisation of the governing body in September 2012, the governance of the school has improved significantly. Members of the governing body regularly attend training sessions and are increasingly developing their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Governors are able to compare the school's outcomes with national and local data, and ask searching questions of senior leaders. The detailed responses and reports from the interim headteacher ensure that the governing body has a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including the quality of teaching and the impact on pupils' learning. The governing body makes certain that the school meets the latest statutory requirements, including those for keeping pupils safe and for teachers' appraisal. There are good systems in place to monitor the school's finances with clearly defined limits on expenditure. The governing body makes sure that pupil premium funding is being spent appropriately, for example on additional support staff for one-to-one teaching, small group work and supporting extra-curricular activities, and that it is leading to improved outcomes for these pupils. Following the resignation of the substantive headteacher in December 2012, under the effective leadership of the Chair of the Governing Body, the governing body acted swiftly to appoint an experienced headteacher to start after the Easter break.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	131670
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	402493

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	166
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roddy Lloyd-Jones
Headteacher	Sandie Jenner
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 March 2010
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