

Merstham Primary School

London Road South, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 3AZ

Inspection dates 28–29 November 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		Good	2
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:

- Teaching over time has not ensured that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress and achieve well. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not make quick enough gains in their learning, given their starting points.
- Pupils' progress and achievement vary across year groups. Pupils' confidence and ability to apply their mathematical skills are not developed sufficiently as there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply them in everyday 'real-life' activities.
- Too few pupils in Years 1 to 6 consistently write using accurate spelling and use a wide range of written vocabulary in their stories or accounts.
- The achievement for pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs and those eligible for extra funding known as the pupil premium requires improvement as there are still gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology (ICT) in their day-to-day activities.
- The changes for improvement new senior leaders have started, such as reviewing roles of some senior staff, and enhancing pupils' writing skills, have not yet had enough time to boost pupils' learning and quality of teaching to good levels.

The school has the following strengths:

- There is a clear sense of purpose in the way the new headteacher, and aided recently by the new deputy headteacher, is directing improvement. They, along with governors, promote a calm, secure and caring environment. They are realistic in their views of the school's overall effectiveness.
- Pupils speak and read confidently by the time they leave the school.
- Pupils behave well, say they like their school and report that staff are quick to tackle any problems they may have. Parents and carers are generally supportive of the school.
- Initiatives to improve teaching to good levels are starting to help pupils make up for past slower progress, while themed topics are taught and planned effectively.

Information about this inspection

- Most of the inspection was spent observing teaching. Inspectors observed teaching in 22 lessons, including two joint lesson observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Inspectors also observed small groups of pupils working with an adult other than their teacher.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised information on pupils' progress and looked at work in pupils' books. They considered information about safeguarding, monitoring of teaching and behaviour management.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and talked to these children about their learning.
- Inspectors talked to a small group of pupils formally and others informally in lessons and on the playground.
- Meetings were held with leaders, members of school staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 40 responses to the Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the views expressed by a number of parents and carers who spoke informally at the beginning of the school day. The results of 25 questionnaires completed by staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Kevin Hodge, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Raminder Arora	Additional Inspector
Simon Francis	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a slightly larger than average primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is lower than average and nearly all pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from service families, is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is around the national average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action is slightly below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The current headteacher was appointed since the last inspection and the deputy headteacher started at the school at the beginning of this term.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that all teachers expect pupils' progress and learning to be good or better in all lessons, particularly for those who have special educational needs or are eligible for pupil premium funding
 - giving pupils more choices in their learning and greater opportunities for independent learning
 - ensuring activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage entice and develop children's interests and learning more deeply
 - ensuring that all staff expect pupils' work in Years 1 to 6 to be presented to a high standard.
- Raise all pupils' levels of understanding, confidence and progress, especially in writing and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring pupils develop a wider written vocabulary and have greater accuracy in their spelling skills
 - ensuring there are more opportunities for investigative work and real-life problem solving in mathematics
 - boosting children's learning and skills in their number, language and physical skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Improve and strengthen the effectiveness of the school's leadership and the quality of the curriculum by:
 - ensuring that the roles of the assistant headteachers continue to be evaluated to ensure they are confident to lead and develop others' professional development and practice
 - ensuring that governors build on the recent review and training on the use of information on pupils' progress to increase their support and challenge in raising the school's effectiveness
 - planning more opportunities for pupils to use ICT within day-to-day activities.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement. Despite some recent success in raising pupils' achievement, particularly for older pupils, gaps remain in pupils' knowledge and skills which means that their achievement over time is not good. Results dipped to below average in last year's national tests in Year 6, particularly in mathematics. Although improving, pupils are not consistently good at applying their mathematical skills to everyday problems.
- Pupils' ability to write using accurate spelling and a wide vocabulary is inconsistent but improving. For example, pupils' writing in a Year 3 lesson was enhanced when they enjoyed learning about how to build tension into their writing. A weekly whole-school focus on writing is helping to raise the profile of writing and pupils' willingness to write at length. Pupils also speak clearly and confidently.
- The progress and achievement of pupils supported through pupil premium funding, and that of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs, has lagged behind the achievement of other pupils since the last inspection, in both English and mathematics, sometimes by two or more terms. However, they are now catching up more quickly with others than had been the case, as their needs are identified more accurately and they benefit from better phonics teaching.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes settle in quickly and relate well to each other, having levels of ability which are typical for their age when they start school. While the activities set for them help them gain secure number, language and physical skills, their progress requires improvement, because activities set do not promote good levels of interaction or learning as they are not always stimulating or require deeper thinking from the children.
- Pupils work well with partners and in small groups, are interested in learning and usually respond positively to their teachers. Some pupils would like to have more open-ended work, and pupils' ICT skills are not fully extended in day-to-day activities.
- A range of methods helps pupils read to the levels expected, and both younger and older pupils know a range of authors and enjoy reading. In response to pupils not meeting national levels in their phonics (the sounds that letters and combinations of letters make) screening check last year, the school recently adopted a whole-school scheme for the teaching of phonics. This is making a difference in helping younger pupils' confidence to read unfamiliar words.
- Many pupils speak confidently and clearly and willingly discuss and explain their work to classmates to test out their ideas or possible answers to questions. This is a strength, particularly for the more able pupils.
- Pupils benefit from regular physical education lessons, active playtimes and initiatives such as the 'bike it' scheme. These, along with regular sports based clubs, are being prompted by the effective use of additional sports based funding.
- Pupils at the early stages of speaking English are supported appropriately within lessons, but like their classmates, their progress also varies and requires improvement.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is not consistently good or better through the school. It has not ensured that pupils' achievement has improved since the last inspection.
- Although improving recently, in too many lessons teachers do not allow pupils to start sooner on harder work or have more open-ended work. Similarly, pupils who are entitled to extra funding sometimes lag behind other pupils, despite teaching assistants generally being supportive within classes.
- In some lessons, such as looking at report writing in Year 3, or work connected with The Second World War, pupils sometimes spent a long time on preparatory tasks before getting down to writing at length. New whole-school 'once a week' writing sessions are starting to make a

difference in raising the quality of pupils' writing, although the presentation of written and other work varies in quality between classes.

- Although teaching provides well for children's welfare and social development in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the activities devised to promote deeper or more sustained learning in their language, number skills or physical development are not consistently of high quality. There are missed opportunities in developing classroom environments to stimulate children's interests.
- Teachers' marking is usually regular and helpful and a new marking policy is aiding consistent practice. There is increasing evidence of pupils responding to teachers' comments for improvement, but this sometimes varies between classes.
- There are good relationships between pupils, because teachers skilfully weave moral, social and cultural principles into lessons where they can. Nearly all pupils are willing to learn and settle down to work quickly.
- Opportunities are sometimes missed for pupils to use or plan mathematical activities which enable pupils to apply their skills in investigative or 'real-life'-based activities. In some lessons, teachers do not always set higher expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Where teaching is more effective, pupils are enthusiastic and enjoy practical activities. For example, in a well-taught mathematics lesson in Year 4, the teacher's high level of subject expertise helped pupils understand, investigate and solve problems associated with time.
- The role of teaching assistants is increasingly effective for pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs. One-to-one support helps them keep pace with classmates, but along with pupils eligible for extra pupil premium funding and those at the earlier stages of learning English, they do not always make quick enough gains in their learning to help them achieve well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour and sense of safety have remained good since the last inspection. Pupils enjoy attending and most behave well, with a majority of parents and carers agreeing that the school cares well for its pupils. A few pupils become inattentive only when teachers' explanations are too long, and pupils themselves say others' behaviour sometimes dips. Therefore their behaviour is not outstanding. Some pupils feel they could have more independence in their learning. Many pupils say they like the new headteacher and the staff.
- Around the school, at lunchtimes, pupils play happily together. They make good use of the large playground and accept that different classes use equipment on certain days. They say that they feel safe, and know about simple safeguards when using computers or talking to strangers.
- The maturity of pupils is evident through the school, shown by their willingness to help others and in being enthusiastic members of the school council. They are particularly proud of putting forward successful proposals to have more equipment available at lunchtimes.
- Parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, 'Parent View', indicated with some small reservations that they thought pupils' behaviour was typically good. The ways the school cares for its pupils and develops their spiritual, moral and social awareness are strengths, and result in pupils whose attitudes to learning and the school are positive strengths which are not always capitalised upon by staff.

The leadership and management require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because over time, consistently good quality teaching to raise pupils' achievement has not yet been secured. The new headteacher and deputy headteacher provide clear direction in tackling weaknesses. They are determined to raise expectations and have started several initiatives, but these have not yet had enough time to ensure improvements are fully embedded.
- Senior leaders have reviewed roles and responsibilities and these are now beginning to take effect in influencing improvements. The roles of the assistant headteachers were earmarked for

improvement to increase their profile and influence through the school, but these changes are in their infancy. Most staff are appreciative of the support they receive, although a small number would like even more help with their professional development.

- Better use of the information on pupils' progress is helping to reduce past slower progress and help pinpoint gaps in pupils' learning. Clearer leadership on how the school supports pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs is beginning to ensure that they make quicker progress.
- Senior leaders have improved systems to gauge the quality of teaching to identify where stronger and weaker teaching exists. These revised systems have not yet been fully effective in raising the quality of all teaching to consistently good levels, but the teaching of phonics and writing has improved. Senior leaders are now making it clear that salary levels and progression are linked to measurable improvements in pupils' learning.
- Pupils say they enjoy their learning and are looking forward to better outdoor learning through a 'Forest school' initiative just starting. Topics and themes, ranging from the Great Fire of London to the Second World War, are planned to make learning more fun. While dedicated ICT activities take place within the computer suite, activities in day-to-day lessons are difficult as resources are too few. Planning in the Reception and Nursery classes does not always help promote children's learning more quickly.
- The local authority, recognising that there were weaknesses in the school's effectiveness, carried out an in-depth review of the school last term and identified a number of areas to improve or refine, such as enhancing governors' knowledge and awareness of how to analyse information from national testing.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are supportive, particularly in the way they visit informally to support events, individual staff and in meeting with pupils. The recently appointed Chair of the Governing Body, along with fellow governors, recognises that the school's effectiveness has remained static, and governors were quick to appoint a new headteacher and subsequently a new deputy headteacher to re-energise the leadership in the school. Clearer reporting to governors along with regular visits to the school to gauge progress has helped them understand where improvements are needed. Recent training on how to analyse information from national testing has enabled them to be more aware of how the school's performance compares with that of others, both locally and nationally. They recognise, however, that they need to build more confidence in tackling this area. Governors ensure that those pupils eligible for the pupil premium are monitored closely to ensure they make better progress. They also ensure that discrimination of any sort is not tolerated and that pupils have equal opportunities to take part in activities and events. Safeguarding arrangements, such as the vetting of staff, are completed carefully.

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	124989
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	426506

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	264
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ed Tomlin
Headteacher	Nina Saunders
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 March 2012
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