

Mersea Island School

Barfield Road, West Mersea, Colchester, CO5 8QX

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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

- The quality of teaching is too variable. Teachers do not always make sure that the work they set pupils is at the right level of difficulty.
- The progress made by pupils in writing is not as good as that in other subjects.
- The current progress of boys is slower than that of girls.
- The most able pupils are not always given the opportunity early enough in lessons to tackle tasks that are suitably challenging.
- Improvements made in literacy have not had an impact on pupils' achievement as quickly as those in mathematics.
- Leaders do not use all the information they gather to accurately assess the impact of their work. As a result, although they are working to improve the quality of teaching, not enough teaching is good or better.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has eliminated weak teaching. Leaders have successfully secured some key improvements.
- Pupils in Year 6 and Early Years Foundation Stage are making good progress.
- Pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding are good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They feel safe, secure and happy in school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons, four of which were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body, the local authority adviser and staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at policies, self-evaluation and development planning, monitoring records, safeguarding documents, information about pupils' progress and samples of pupils' work. They heard pupils reading books.
- The views of 50 parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey (Parent View) were taken into account. Inspectors took into account the 39 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Christopher Cheswright, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Liz Kissane	Additional Inspector
John Greevy	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for looked after children and those known to be eligible for free school meals) is below the national average.
- Almost all of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring:
 - work is not too easy or too hard so that all pupils make good or better progress, particularly in Key Stage 2
 - the most able pupils have more opportunities to tackle harder mathematical problems much sooner in lessons
 - pupils are given more opportunities to practise and develop their writing skills in other subjects
 - pupils are clear about what they are going to learn in lessons so that they are always fully engaged in their learning
 - activities are interesting and have relevance so that all pupils, especially boys, want to write more and make faster progress
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring:
 - all available information is used to secure an accurate picture of the effectiveness of the school's work, based on pupils' achievement in all year groups
 - the leadership of English secures faster rates of progress in writing by improving the quality of teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement is not good because pupils are currently making slower progress in writing than in reading and mathematics. This is because the quality of teaching is variable and not enough is good or better to enable pupils to achieve well in all year groups.
- The most able pupils make slower progress in mathematics, because activities which make them think deeply about their work and to problem solve are not provided soon enough in lessons.
- Pupils' standards by the end of Year 6 have been broadly average over time in reading and writing, but have been below average in mathematics. More consistent approaches to teaching mean that pupils presently in Year 6 are now making good progress in reading and mathematics.
- In 2013 boys in Key Stage 1 outperformed the girls. However, boys are currently making slower progress than other groups of pupils, particularly in writing because activities do not always engage them fully in their learning.
- In Year 2, standards have been broadly average each year since the previous inspection. However, teachers now plan activities which secures better learning and progress for all ability groups.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress that is at least in line with other pupils. Their needs are identified at an early stage and they receive tailored support from teaching assistants. The school is investing wisely in training teaching assistants to improve their subject knowledge so that they can develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills at a faster rate.
- In 2013 the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in phonics (the sound that letters make) in Year 1 was below average. However, most pupils are now making secure progress in recognising letters and groups of letters, improving their pronunciation and accuracy in spelling.
- The allocation of pupil premium funding is used effectively. The attainment gap between those pupils supported by the pupil premium and other pupils has been reduced significantly in reading and mathematics, from over two years to two terms. Nevertheless, the gap in writing remains at just over a year. These pupils work in small groups with an experienced teacher and have additional mentoring from their teacher. Year 6 pupils are on track to narrow the gap further, demonstrating success of the school's promotion of equal opportunities.
- Children join Reception with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. The children make good progress and a higher proportion of children reach a good level of development than the national average by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Boys have previously made slower progress than girls in writing but the current focus on improving their pencil skills is encouraging them to have a go at writing for themselves.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although teaching is good in some classes, more so in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the quality of teaching varies too much and results in variable rates of progress.

- There is inconsistency in the quality of work provided for pupils. For the most able pupils, work does not always encourage them to think hard or broaden their knowledge and understanding so that they learn at a faster pace.
- In some lessons, teachers' explanations do not always help the less able pupils to be able to engage in discussions, particularly when these involve the whole class.
- Writing skills, such as handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar, developed in English lessons are not always transferred when pupils are writing at other times.
- Pupils are given time to improve their work, as a result of their teachers' marking at specific times during the week. This is proving useful to pupils, particularly in Year 6 because it helps them to know exactly what they need to do next to improve. One pupil said, 'I now know what to do to improve, in previous years I just did the work.'
- Pupils, sometimes lose concentration when the teacher has not made it clear what they are expected to learn at the end of the lesson. For example, in some Key Stage 2 mathematics lessons the most able pupils did not make the progress they were capable of because the task was too easy and they were unsure of what they were expected to have achieved at the end of the lesson.
- Pupils' engagement in the wider curriculum, such as music and geography, is enlivened through the links made with the local and wider community. In a geography lesson in Year 2, for example, members of the local community provided pupils with a good opportunity to develop their skills in asking high-quality questions.
- In Reception, children are developing excellent working habits because the staff provide good role models and they are developing their knowledge and understanding well through the expert questioning skills of the teachers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Interruptions to learning due to inappropriate behaviour are rare because all staff apply the behaviour policy throughout the school. Both in lessons and around the school, pupils behave sensibly and politely. They come to school ready to learn and usually try their best. They wear their uniform with pride.
- At lunchtime and break time, pupils engage in a range of activities in the school grounds respecting what others are doing. Pupils are polite and respectful and will engage confidently in conversation with adults. There is no litter anywhere in the school.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The pupils feel supported by the staff to keep them safe in school. There are few incidents of bullying and they know who to go to for help. The pupils are aware of the types of bullying and how to keep safe on-line.
- Pupils' attendance has been below average in recent years and is now rising. The school checks attendance regularly and contact with parents and carers is made on the first day of absence which is rigorously followed up.
- The school's system of sanctions and rewards is fully understood by all pupils and it is consistently applied across the school. They are keen to receive ship tokens and value the

individual and class rewards achieved.

- Close links with the local community allow pupils to develop good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Adults come into school regularly to listen to pupils read, participate in sporting activities, such as the school's sailing club, and help in lessons. Some teaching takes place on the beach and trips are arranged, such as to the British Museum, to develop their cultural understanding.
- The school promotes pupils' personal development well. The school council representatives feel they are listened to and that they have helped in improving the school.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders evaluate the work of the school and are able to demonstrate the impact of improvement initiatives have not yet impacted fully on pupils' achievement in all year groups. As a result, although the quality of teaching is improving there are still too many inconsistencies, and groups of pupils do not make the progress they are capable of.
- The leadership team has introduced a whole-school development plan during this academic year. This is focused on the right priorities and has had a measurable impact on behaviour. It is beginning to raise the achievement of pupils, especially in Year 6 and the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Although teaching requires improvement, it is improving. Leaders have made sure that teachers have higher expectations for their pupils. Teachers regularly check the progress pupils make. The school has a robust system to ensure that assessments are accurate by checking assessments in school and with other local schools.
- The teacher responsible for the raising the quality of teaching in mathematics and improving pupil progress is achieving some success. For example those pupils who are not making sufficient progress are identified and have specific support. Likewise, staff receive relevant training to develop their teaching skills in order to address the needs of these pupils.
- Improvements in writing have not been as rapid as those in mathematics because leaders have not focussed as closely enough on improving the quality of teaching. Furthermore, they have not ensured that pupils have more opportunities to improve their writing skills in different subjects.
- The headteacher has dealt with ineffective teaching well and strengthened the quality of teaching in some classes. Teachers' classroom practice is now assessed robustly and targets are set to raise performance.
- The curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to learn, and there is a strong focus on using the local community and environment. The range of subjects studied uses these links principally through reading and writing.
- Allocated sports funding is used effectively to extend the range of sports available to pupils and to enhance their physical well-being. The skills of staff have been developed through the use of specialist sports coaches who work alongside them providing more challenge to the pupils.
- The school has received timely support from the local authority. The school now works more closely with other local schools and a consortium which is helping the school to bring about

improvements in teaching and developing leadership skills.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Members of the governing body are highly supportive of the school and have developed a suitable set of skills to provide more robust challenge and support to the headteacher. Governors visit the school and meet with staff and discuss the areas they lead on. They are well informed about the quality of teaching, and decisions made on teachers' salary progression are strictly related to teachers meeting the pupils' progress targets set for them. They are fully aware of the areas that the school needs to develop because they are kept well informed by the headteacher and are able to interpret data well. Governors ensure that the pupil premium funding is spent wisely to support those pupils eligible for the funding. They know that this is having a positive impact on their achievement. The governing body understands its statutory responsibilities and makes sure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

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	115311
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	442624

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	452
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Blacklock
Headteacher	Nicky Sirett
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2009
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