

Merebrook Infant School

Dulverton Drive, Milton Keynes, MK4 1EZ

Inspection dates 4–5 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Leaders and managers have not secured sufficient improvement in pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching since the previous inspection.
- The support given to teachers has not been effective enough to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good.
- Pupils' achievement requires improvement because progress is not consistently strong across the school.
- In Year 1, teachers do not manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. Pupils sometimes misbehave and are inattentive in lessons; consequently, they do not learn quickly.
- There are occasions in both Years 1 and 2 where teachers give work that is too easy for the most able pupils.
- Pupils make slower progress in writing than in reading because teachers do not always expect enough of pupils. Too little time is allowed for the teaching of writing.
- Middle leaders are insufficiently involved in checking the quality of teaching. As a result, they do not play a big enough part in driving improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Children get off to a good start in the early years provision. Teaching is good and children rapidly acquire new skills and knowledge. They behave well.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs learn well and are supported effectively.
- Across the school, pupils make good progress in learning about letters and the sounds they make (phonics). This helps reading skills to improve quickly.
- Pupils are happy and feel safe. They especially enjoy the wide range of clubs and visits that enrich learning.
- Although staffing issues have slowed the pace of change, the headteacher and governing body have a good understanding of the priorities and are doing the right things to tackle them.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in 15 lessons, six of which were observed jointly with the headteacher or acting assistant headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made some short visits to lessons.
- Discussions were held with pupils, staff, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the views of 24 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also analysed the school's own surveys of parental views and talked to parents at the start of the school day.
- The inspectors observed the school's work, heard pupils read, and looked at a number of documents, including: the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress; planning and monitoring documents; the school development plan; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information; and health and safety documentation.
- The inspectors analysed 18 questionnaires from staff.

Inspection team

Mike Capper, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

James Hollinsley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average-sized school.
- Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, with around half being White British. Around a quarter of pupils speak English as an additional language with a wide range of home languages represented in this group.
- Children in the early years provision are taught full time in one of two Reception classes.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is close to the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium is slightly higher than the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided to give extra support to pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and to children who are looked after.
- A higher than average number of pupils join or leave school during each year.
- The school is receiving support from the headteacher of Loughton First School, who is a local leader of education.
- The headteacher took up post shortly after the previous inspection. There have been several other staffing changes in Key Stage 1 since then.
- The breakfast and after-school club is not managed by the school. It was inspected separately in February 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching, especially in Year 1, by ensuring that:
 - teachers in Year 1 set clear expectations for pupils' behaviour and manage it more effectively
 - teachers give the most-able pupils work that consistently challenges them.
- Improve pupils' progress in writing by:
 - ensuring that teachers expect more of pupils in both the quality and quantity of written work
 - allowing more time for the teaching of writing in literacy lessons and other subjects.
- Strengthen and accelerate the impact of leaders on raising standards by:
 - ensuring that the support and challenge given to teachers secure more rapid improvement in the quality of teaching
 - developing the role of middle leaders in driving improvement, especially in the quality of teaching.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leaders and managers have not secured sufficient school improvement since the previous inspection. While the headteacher has a good understanding of the priorities and has secured improvement in some aspects of the school's work, the pace of change has not been fast enough. It has been adversely affected by staffing issues, especially in Key Stage 1. This means that past improvements, including in pupils' attainment, have not all been sustained into the current year.
- The leadership of teaching and learning requires improvement. The headteacher and other leaders have not been successful in ensuring that teaching is consistently good. The headteacher has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and sets clear and challenging targets for teachers, but this has not been enough to iron out inconsistencies in quality.
- The school has few experienced teachers. This means that responsibility for driving improvement is not shared widely. Where there are middle leaders, such as teachers who are in charge of subjects, they are not sufficiently involved in checking the quality of teaching so that they can play a full part in securing the needed improvements.
- The local authority is providing the right level of support to the school. It has recently brokered additional support from a local leader of education to help the headteacher in the absence of key staff. It is too early to see the impact of this.
- Leaders do not ensure equality of opportunity because pupils' progress is uneven. However, they successfully foster good relationships and tackle discrimination. They work closely with parents and are constantly striving to involve them fully in their children's education. Most parents are happy with the school. They are particularly positive about the way that leaders provide a secure and happy environment for pupils from often challenging circumstances.
- The leadership and management of early years provision and of provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are good. Leaders of these aspects track the progress of pupils closely to check that all are doing well enough.
- Additional government funding is used to good effect to help disadvantaged pupils fulfil their potential. Funding provides additional support both in and out of lessons and helps pupils to have full access to activities such as breakfast club and out-of-school visits.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils make steady progress in developing skills in literacy and numeracy. It is enriched well by an exciting range of lunchtime clubs and visits which help pupils to enjoy school. A focus since the previous inspection on improving phonics teaching has been successful. A start has now been made to improving pupils' writing skills. Leaders know that not enough time is allowed for the teaching of writing so pupils have greater opportunity to write at length and their skills improve more quickly. They are already making adjustments to how literacy is taught to get a better balance of the time given to reading and writing.
- Activities both in and out of lessons successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school teaches a 'Value of the Month' and these are well understood by pupils. Older pupils show initiative by helping others without being asked to. Pupils are kind to each other, and by Year 2 are sociable and articulate. All leaders, including governors, successfully model respectful attitudes and tolerance for others. Pupils from different backgrounds get on well together. They understand that differences are to be celebrated rather than feared. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school makes good use of additional funding for physical education to promote healthy lifestyles and pupils' well-being. The use of specialist coaches to provide lunchtime activities, as well as additional training for teachers, is resulting in an increased number of pupils taking part in sporting activities. Governors carefully check that funding is being used to good effect.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Leaders, including governors, carry out regular checks to ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well organised and checks the school's provision for pupils systematically. It has offered appropriate challenge to leaders since the last inspection although this has not been sufficient to secure good achievement for all pupils. Governors receive a good amount of information from the headteacher and they do the right things to find out things for themselves. They have a good understanding of how well the school is performing in comparison with others because they compare the school's assessment information with national figures. The governing body knows that teaching is weaker in Year 1 and how this is being tackled. It ensures through performance management that only

good teaching is rewarded financially. It is supporting the headteacher well in challenging weaker teachers to improve. Governors monitor closely the use of additional government funding to ensure that it is used to good effect to support eligible pupils. Governors have good systems for ensuring that the school promotes British values.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Parents and staff are clear that while pupils behave well for much of the time this is not always the case. Inspectors confirm this view. Pupils in Year 1 do not always behave well enough in lessons because teachers and teaching assistants do not make expectations clear. Consequently, there are occasions when pupils are inattentive and naughty, which hinders their learning.
- Pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties are generally supported well across the school. Consequently, their occasionally challenging behaviour only rarely disturbs the learning of others.
- In early years provision and Year 2, pupils' behaviour is good most of the time. In these classes, pupils are keen to learn and are well motivated. They have positive attitudes towards learning and work together happily, supporting each other sensitively when needed.
- Pupils enjoy school and play together happily. Across the school, pupils keenly talk to visitors. Their conduct at break times and when moving around school is sensible and responsible. Pupils who arrive during the school year are very clear that they settle quickly because 'everyone is so friendly'.
- Older pupils keenly take responsibility. The school council has a beneficial effect on school life. It helps pupils to contribute their own ideas to school improvement.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Parents agree that their children are well cared for. One pupil summed this up by saying, 'The grown-ups look after us really well.'
- Pupils have a good understanding for their age of staying safe online. They can explain how to avoid dangers when outside school. For example, pupils in Year 2 are very clear about 'Stranger Danger' and what to do if they have a concern.
- School records show that there is very little bullying. Pupils say that they occasionally 'fall out' but they are very confident that when this does occur it is dealt with immediately.
- School leaders have been thorough in ensuring pupils and their families understand the importance of attending school regularly. This has resulted in attendance being above the national average.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching has not enabled enough pupils to make at least good progress over time. The effectiveness of teaching is too variable across year groups, being stronger in early years provision and Year 2 than in Year 1.
- In Year 1, teachers and other adults do not always manage pupils' behaviour well enough. They do not make their expectations clear and they allow pupils to be inattentive without tackling the problem. Teachers too willingly accept work from pupils that is not their best; moreover, they do not engage and motivate them fully.
- Across the school, teachers do not give the most able pupils work that enables them to achieve consistently well. In writing, teachers in both Years 1 and 2 do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Consequently, the quality of work is patchy and the rate at which writing skills improve is not rapid enough.
- The teaching of reading and mathematics is more effective. Teachers are successful at meeting pupils' differing needs, especially in Year 2; this helps them to make faster progress. The teaching of phonics is particularly strong. Skills are introduced systematically and pupils improve skills quickly. All staff, including teaching assistants, have been well trained in teaching phonics, and do so effectively most of the time.
- In Year 2, teachers typically take account of what pupils already know to help with planning what to teach next. Teachers provide more demanding work than in Year 1. They make good use of resources such as interactive whiteboards to bring subjects alive and to help pupils understand what is being taught. Pupils'

behaviour is managed well in Year 2. Teachers make effective use of praise to motivate pupils to try their best and to do well.

- Teachers give useful support to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs both in and out of lessons. Again, progress is better in Year 2 than Year 1 because learning is not disturbed by misbehaviour. A skilled teaching assistant works well with pupils who speak English as an additional language, helping them to improve their spoken English quickly. New arrivals are quickly assessed and supported.
- While most parents are happy with the quality of teaching, this is not true of all who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Parents support the school well by hearing their children read and helping them with homework.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement because progress, including for pupils who arrive during the school year, is not consistently strong across the school.
- While attainment has been rising and is broadly average by the end of Year 2, in Year 1, work does not build well on the good start made in the early years provision. Pupils' skills and knowledge improve too slowly in Year 1 because teaching is not good enough. Consequently, the school is over-reliant on securing more rapid progress in Year 2 to ensure that all pupils fulfil their potential before they move on to their next school.
- Pupils' attainment is higher in reading and mathematics than in writing. Pupils achieve less well in writing because teachers do not always expect enough of the pupils. In addition, pupils do not write at length regularly enough in English lessons or to support learning in other subjects.
- In both Year 1 and Year 2, the most able pupils make uneven progress. This is because they are not always given work that challenges them fully.
- Some aspects of pupils' achievement are strong. Reading skills improve quickly because pupils develop a secure understanding of phonics. Attainment in the national phonics screening checks at the end of Year 1 has been improving. A broadly average proportion of pupils reached or exceeded the expected level in phonics in 2014.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language reach the same levels of attainment as others by the end of Year 2 in English and mathematics. They make good progress in learning spoken English, even if they have been in school for only a short time.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs generally achieve well. Teaching effectively meets their needs and helps them to make good progress.
- The school has a good track record for closing the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others. In 2014, the gap was much smaller than that found nationally, with disadvantaged pupils reaching higher attainment in mathematics than other pupils in the school and all pupils nationally. In 2014, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils was broadly similar to that of all pupils nationally and in the school in reading and writing. However, as with other pupils, the progress of disadvantaged pupils in the current year is uneven because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in Key Stage 1.

The early years provision

is good

- Effective leadership of the early years provision ensures that children's achievement and the quality of teaching are good. One reason that achievement is stronger than elsewhere in the school is because the early years has been unaffected by staff turnover.
- When children start school, only a minority are working at a level of development that is typical for their age. From these comparatively low starting points, children quickly acquire new skills and knowledge. By the end of the Reception year, attainment is broadly average.
- Teaching is successful at meeting differing needs. Work is engaging and fun and it motivates children to try hard and do well. Children are given calm and sensitive support, with work taking good account of what they already know so that there is generally good challenge, including for the most able.
- Early reading and mathematical skills are taught effectively. This is reflected in the good progress children make in their understanding of phonics. Progress in writing is not quite as rapid as children do not write enough in, for example, phonics lessons.
- Teachers give good support to disabled children and those who have special educational needs and they make good progress. Children who speak English as an additional language also achieve well. Daily

opportunities to talk with and listen to each other, and to discuss ideas, make a significant contribution to children's language development.

- Both the indoor and outdoor spaces are used well to support learning. Resources are easily accessible to the children and are well chosen to stimulate interest. They contribute well to children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by, for example, helping them to celebrate different cultures or the wonders of nature. This is seen to good effect in the children's delightful and thoughtful responses to newly hatched chickens.
- Children behave well and are keen to learn. They feel safe and get on well together. There is a happy atmosphere in class, with children supporting each other sensibly and sharing ideas.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the main priorities for improvement. They are tackling them well by, for example, building in more opportunities for children to write throughout the day. Information on children's progress is recorded diligently in books and folders and is shared regularly with parents so that they can play a full part in supporting their children.

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	453594

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	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Denise Kelly
Headteacher	Cheryl Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	28 February – 1 March 2013
Telephone number	01908 522876
Fax number	01908 521534
Email address	office@merebrookschool.co.uk

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