

Merton Junior School

Romsey Close, Basingstoke, RG24 9HB

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Overall standards by the end of Year 6 have been below average in the last two years.
- Weaknesses in the teaching in the past have affected the continuity of pupils' learning.
- Not all teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Lesson activities do not consistently challenge the full range of pupils.
- Teachers' questioning does not always enable pupils to extend their understanding.
- Leaders, managers and governors have not been successful in maintaining achievement as good.
- Not enough emphasis is placed upon the progressive development of pupils' writing skills when they enter Year 3.
- Monitoring by subject leaders does not always pinpoint the key areas for improvement with sufficient precision.
- The school's own evaluation of achievement over time is over-generous.
- Due to the number of staff changes, not all subject leaders are experienced enough to make a timely and significant impact on their areas of responsibility.

The school has the following strengths

- Older pupils are making more rapid progress than in the recent past. Standards are rising, particularly in reading and writing. Improvements in the teaching of mathematics are evident across the school.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning, feel safe and behave well.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress. Consequently, the gaps between their attainment and that of their peers, both in school and nationally, are closing.
- The school provides good-quality care, particularly in supporting vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils' written work is marked thoroughly, with clear guidance as to possible improvements.
- Governance has improved since 2013. Governors have thorough systems in place to ensure that they are well informed about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. They actively challenge the school's leaders to increase the rate of improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 15 lessons, six of which were seen jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked closely at pupils' written work for the current school year. They listened to some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors, a representative of the local authority and the school's senior and subject leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the 22 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 51 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of school documents, including plans for improvement and records of checks on the quality of teaching. They also considered records of governing body meetings and those relating to behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and the systems used to check pupils' progress.

Inspection team

George Logan, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Westall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Merton Junior School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is well above the national average. This is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school shares a site with its partner infant school. Both schools are expanding to meet the local demand for additional school places. Current levels of inward mobility are higher than are normally found, as pupils take up available places in all year groups. Extensive building work is under way to provide sufficient accommodation for three classes in each year group. Mixed-year classes, with pupils from more than one year group, have been discontinued.
- There have been extensive staff changes since the last inspection. Very few teaching staff, support staff or school leaders currently in post were in the school at the last inspection. The deputy headteacher was appointed in April 2015, having acted in that capacity for the previous two terms.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching and enable pupils to make rapid and sustained progress in all subjects across the school so that standards are raised further by the end of Year 6, by:
 - ensuring that teachers across the school have consistently high expectations of what pupils can potentially achieve
 - improving the quality and effectiveness of teachers' questioning of pupils to extend their understanding
 - ensuring that tasks set for pupils are always at the right level of difficulty for pupils
 - securing a greater focus on literacy skills and more effective practice in the progressive development of pupils' writing skills from when they enter the school in Year 3.
- Improve the leadership of the school further by ensuring that:
 - there is more rigorous monitoring which more precisely pinpoints the key areas for improvement
 - school self-evaluation is consistently rigorous, challenging and realistic
 - all staff with leadership responsibilities, particularly at subject leader level, have a clear view of what they need to achieve, so that they have a demonstrable, timely and positive impact upon school improvement.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leaders and managers have not ensured that good standards of teaching and achievement have been maintained since the previous inspection. The school's self-evaluation of some aspects of its performance is over-generous.
- Rapid staff turnover has had an impact upon the availability of experienced subject leaders. Subject leaders' monitoring does not always identify with sufficient precision exactly what pupils need to do better or exactly how the teaching needs to improve. Consequently, planned actions do not always pinpoint the most important areas for improvement. This restricts the impact achieved.
- The headteacher has shown commitment and determination in tackling challenging staffing issues in the recent past. As a result, achievement is improving. However, in the absence, until recently, of other effective leaders, too much responsibility has rested, over time, on the shoulders of the headteacher.
- The school is a cohesive community in which both pupils and staff take a great pride. For the many vulnerable pupils, the school represents a calm centre in otherwise turbulent lives. With more stable staffing and more effective governance, the pace of change has accelerated recently.
- All staff work hard for the pupils and staff morale is high. Senior leaders promote positive behaviour, attitudes and strong values, a culture which prioritises increasingly effective teaching, drives higher achievement and ensures that pupils behave well. Information about pupils' performance is rigorously analysed, so that school leaders have detailed information about how well pupils are progressing.
- The leadership of the provision for pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is good.
- Mostly effective leadership and monitoring of teaching is contributing to the emerging improvements in achievement. The school invests heavily in the development of its staff.
- The curriculum (the subjects taught) has been reorganised, in line with the new National Curriculum. The topic-based approach captures pupils' interest well and provides them with imaginative learning opportunities. However, while there have been good improvements in the teaching of mathematics, a recent weakness, the progressive development of pupils' writing skills is not fully secure, especially in the younger classes. These pupils do not do enough extended writing, or to a sufficiently high standard.
- The school has continued to use its existing assessment system to provide information about pupils' progress. It is identifying a manageable approach to evaluating pupils' progress, for implementation by the beginning of the next school year.
- School leaders review the impact of pupil premium expenditure closely. They are aware that eligible pupils are now making increasingly rapid progress. The funding is used effectively and significant gaps in attainment are narrowing.
- The primary physical education and sport funding is used well to improve staff training and specialist sports coaching. More pupils are involved in after-school sports clubs. Participation in competitive sport involving other schools remains limited, although there are many in-school competitions.
- The local authority has provided good support to improve teaching and boost achievement in the last two years.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school promotes British values effectively through visits to raise awareness of local history and through involvement with charitable activities. Pupils are made aware of their obligations towards the wider school community. School leaders are attentive to pupils' views. As a result, pupils begin to understand their rights and responsibilities as British citizens and are prepared increasingly well for life in modern Britain.
- The school endeavours to ensure equality of opportunity for all. Discrimination of any type is not condoned.
- The school has secured good links with parents. Parents are supportive of the school. Good links with other schools, including the infant school, facilitate the sharing of good practice and greater consistency in the evaluation of standards. Statutory safeguarding arrangements are up to date, meet requirements and are effective. All staff are appropriately trained.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors feel that the poor outcomes for Year 6 pupils in 2013 were, for them, a 'wake-up call', prompting significant organisational changes and a fresh determination that this would not happen again. New governors with relevant specialist skills were recruited and additional training undertaken to enhance their skills in evaluating teaching and achievement. Governors have subsequently maintained an intensive focus on welfare and standards. Governance is now effective. Governors feel, and their minutes confirm, that they are now considerably more challenging. They are strongly committed to ensuring that improvements happen at the pace agreed. Governors are closely involved in school

improvement, monitor progress carefully and hold school leaders to account.

- Governors evaluate the school's performance in relation to schools nationally and have a thorough understanding of the quality of teaching. They are familiar with the data relating to the performance of all groups of pupils. The management of teachers' performance is thorough. Underperformance is not acceptable. Pay increases are securely linked to the outcomes of this process. Salary levels and teachers' impact on achievement are closely aligned.
- The governing body and senior leaders, together, ensure that statutory duties are met, including those for keeping pupils safe.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Disruptive behaviour around the school is rare. Pupils enjoy their learning, have excellent relationships with their teachers and work hard.
- Pupils' behaviour is well managed. Although a significant number of pupils enter Year 3 with previously identified behavioural issues, the school's good behaviour management systems quickly enable pupils to manage their own behaviour more effectively. Consequently, the number of pupils whose behaviour gives cause for concern rapidly reduces during Year 3. The school's records indicate that there are few behavioural incidents of consequence or recent exclusions. Incidents of racist behaviour are rare.
- Pupils are keen to take on duties as junior road safety officers, play leaders, book monitors, lunchtime helpers and young interpreters.
- Occasionally, when teachers' expectations are not high enough, a few pupils find it difficult to sustain attention. Learning slows as a result.
- Attendance is broadly average. While there is a small group of pupils with persistently low attendance, these absences almost always relate to health or family matters and are closely monitored to achieve improvement.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe and are certain that staff will always support them promptly. Staff are fully checked prior to appointment.
- The school helps pupils to protect themselves from a range of risks. Staff ensure that pupils are well informed about road safety and fire safety. They focus particularly on the risks arising from internet abuse and cyber-bullying through social media.
- Pupils are aware that bullying may take many different forms, but are adamant that bullying does not happen. School records endorse that view.
- The quality of pastoral care is a major strength. The school is tireless in its support for the educational, social and personal needs of the significant number of vulnerable pupils and those with complex needs. Nurture groups are used well to support pupils who find it difficult to adapt to the demands of the school community.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, over time, there has not been enough good teaching of reading, writing and mathematics for pupils to make consistently good progress. Weak teaching in the past has contributed to some groups of pupils making slower progress.
- Some teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils might achieve. Work is not always challenging enough. Activities occasionally lack a clear purpose. Teachers' questioning does not always promote more rapid learning.
- The teaching of writing, although effective in Years 5 and 6, is not currently given sufficient priority in Years 3 and 4.
- Following key staff changes, the overall pace of learning is improving rapidly, particularly in Years 5 and 6. In those year groups, expectations are higher, as is seen in the good quality of pupils' recorded work.
- Teaching assistants and support staff, many of whom are relatively new, are well trained, committed and keen to develop their skills. They now make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning.
- As the overall quality of teaching improves, the support for disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils has become increasingly effective. These pupils make progress at least in line with their classmates.

- Pupils enjoy being challenged. Pupils in a Year 6 mathematics lesson were learning to calculate volume. Pupils showed a high level of commitment to the tasks provided. They worked together well in pairs. The good subject knowledge of the teacher successfully extended pupils' learning. Pupils were interested and enthusiastic. However, the same level of challenge is not consistently evident in all other year groups.
- The teaching of reading is generally effective. This enables pupils to make at least the progress expected. Those who enter the school with less secure reading skills are given additional help to improve.
- The marking of pupils' work is effective. Work is generally marked thoroughly, although this is driving more rapid improvement in some classes than in others. Teachers mostly give pupils clear guidance as to what they need to do to improve. Pupils are encouraged to respond to teachers' comments, and most do so, often at length.
- Homework supports pupils' learning well. Tasks set extend pupils' skills in reading, writing and numeracy.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress. Pupils' books, and their learning in lessons, indicate that pupils in Years 3 and 4 make slower progress than those in Years 5 and 6. Weaker teaching in the past has had an adverse impact upon pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6, especially in mathematics.
- The support for the systematic and progressive development of pupils' writing skills is not sufficiently effective when pupils enter the school.
- Patterns of achievement are complex. Published data indicate that pupils typically enter Year 3 with broadly average prior attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. The progress pupils make against the school's own evaluation of their skills and knowledge when they enter Year 3 is judged by the school to be more rapid than is the case when measured against the published data. Also, the inward movement of pupils to years other than Year 3 has been significant as the school is in a period of growth. For example, six pupils joined Year 6 late in 2014. While this had only a marginal impact upon the Year 6 attainment figures, it had an arguably greater impact upon pupils' overall progress figures.
- The school accepts that achievement by the end of Year 6 fell significantly in 2013 as a consequence of identified weak teaching and poor assessment practice. Mixed-year classes at that time meant that the Year 5 pupils were also adversely affected. Better teaching in 2014 went some way to address these issues, enabling pupils to make expected progress in reading and writing. However, some weaknesses remained by the end of the year, particularly in mathematics and in English grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- The overall attainment of Year 6 pupils in 2013 and 2014 was significantly below average, but with marked improvements, and broadly average standards, in reading and writing in 2014. Standards are on an upward trend. Actions to improve mathematics have had a positive impact and progress is improving.
- Current projections suggest that attainment in Year 6 in 2015 will be at least similar to the national average last year. An increased proportion of pupils in the current Year 6 are making accelerated progress because of good teaching in Year 6. Pupils' written work suggests that current progress is best from Year 5 on. Overall, while achievement is not yet consistently good, it is not inadequate.
- The most-able pupils typically make expected progress. The most-able pupils in Year 6 in 2014 attained at levels only marginally below similar pupils nationally. Their progress in the current year has improved with strong teaching in Year 6, although this is not consistently the case across the school. The most-able Year 6 pupils are now attempting the challenging Level 6 mathematics test.
- In 2014, the gap in attainment between disadvantaged Year 6 pupils and others in the school was around three terms in mathematics and almost six terms in English grammar, punctuation and spelling. In reading and writing, disadvantaged pupils attained marginally higher standards than the others. Their attainment was behind all pupils nationally in mathematics by five terms, and in English grammar, punctuation and spelling, by around seven terms, and their progress was less rapid. They attained at similar levels to all pupils nationally in reading and writing. Although gaps in attainment in 2014 were narrowing in relation to all pupils nationally, they increased slightly in relation to other pupils in the school. School data show that, with a much greater focus on meeting their needs, disadvantaged pupils are currently making equally rapid progress to the others, so that the gaps in attainment have narrowed significantly in those areas which were weak in 2014. Overall, the gap is now narrowing.
- New pupils who enter the school during the key stage mostly make good progress, so that past gaps in their learning are resolved by the end of Year 6.
- The school accurately identifies the needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Many of those pupils have complex social and educational needs. They receive good support, particularly for their social and emotional needs. The appointment of several new support staff is ensuring

that academic progress of these pupils is at least similar to that of the others.

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	116001
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	456201

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Strawson
Headteacher	Helen Palmer
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2012
Telephone number	01256 326573
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