

# Merton Bank Primary School

Roper Street, St Helen's, Merseyside, WA9 1EJ

**Inspection dates** 13–14 May 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement.

- Up until the arrival of a new executive head teacher and the formulation of a new senior leadership team in March 2014, leadership and management, including governance, had not been effective enough to ensure consistently good teaching and learning. As a result of this pupils, including children in the early years, have not achieved as well as they should.
- Not enough pupils made more progress than expected in reading and mathematics by the time they left at the end of Year 6 in 2014.
- A below average proportion of pupils was secure in their phonic skills and knowledge (linking letters and sounds) at the end of Year 1 in 2014.
- Pupils' confidence to talk about their learning is not sufficiently well developed.
- Pupils' skills are not always able to explain their calculation methods and how they reach their conclusions in mathematics.
- Teachers' marking is not of a consistently high standard throughout the school. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to make pupils aware of how they can improve their work.
- Too few opportunities are available for pupils to practise their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills across all subjects.
- Teachers do not always make sure that work is set at the right level to ensure that all pupils, especially the most able, make good progress.
- The role of middle leaders in improving the quality of teaching and learning is still developing.
- Early years provision does not stimulate and engage the interests of children fully. Adults sometimes miss opportunities to work with children to take their learning forward.

### The school has the following strengths

- This school is now rapidly improving. Good systems are in place to monitor teachers' performance and assess pupils' progress.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils enjoy school and are safe and well looked after.
- The school works exceptionally well with parents. The work of the parent teacher association in improving parent participation in various fund-raising activities is good.
- Governance is good. Governors hold senior leaders to account and now make an effective contribution to improving teaching and learning.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 have improved and are better than at the time of the previous inspection.
- By the time pupils left school at the end of Year 6 in 2014, their achievement in writing was good.
- Pupils' progress is rapidly improving, particularly in reading.
- Key appointments, including a safeguarding manager and family support worker, have helped to ensure that attendance has improved since the previous inspection.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons in all year groups, as well as the teaching of small groups of pupils and sessions aimed at helping pupils to learn to read. Four lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and held discussions with pupils from across the school. Pupils' work in books was scrutinised during lessons and separately with senior leaders.
- The inspectors considered the 11 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), as well as the school's own surveys of parents' views.
- Inspectors considered responses to a questionnaire completed by 32 members of staff.
- Inspectors held two meetings with five governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. Meetings were also held with school leaders and staff responsible for English, mathematics, provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and children in the early years.
- Informal meetings were held with parents at the beginning of the school day. A meeting was held with six members of the parent and teachers' association.
- A meeting took place with two representatives from the local authority.
- A range of documents was examined. These included the school's reviews of its own performance, information about pupils' progress, the school's checks on the quality of teaching, development plans, various records of pupils' attendance, behaviour records and safeguarding documentation.

## Inspection team

Lenford White, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Melvin Hemmings

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a below average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by pupil premium funding is more than twice the national average. (The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.)
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. A small number is from minority ethnic groups and few speak English as an additional language.
- Children in the early years provision attend a Nursery class on a part-time basis and a Reception class on a full-time basis.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Most teaching staff, including four newly qualified teachers and a recently qualified teacher, are new to the school since the previous inspection. A new executive headteacher has been appointed and the senior leadership team has been reorganised. Three governors, including a new Chair of the Governing Body, have been appointed.
- A breakfast club is available to pupils. This is managed by the governing body.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good and thus raise the achievement of pupils, including children in the early years, by:
  - developing pupils' confidence and ability to talk about their learning
  - developing pupils' skills in explaining their calculation methods and how they reach their conclusions in mathematics
  - making sure that teachers' marking is of a consistently high standard throughout the school and that teachers take every opportunity to make pupils aware of how they can improve their work
  - providing as many opportunities as possible for pupils to practise their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills across all subjects
  - making sure that work is always set at the right level to ensure that all pupils, including the most able, make good progress
  - ensuring that what is provided in the early years in the indoor and outdoor environments stimulates and fully engages the interests of children and that adults take all opportunities to work with children to take their learning forward.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that middle leaders are effective in their work to improve the quality of teaching and learning rapidly.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The quality of the leadership and management of the school has declined since the previous inspection and is no longer outstanding. This has been reflected in the quality of teaching and in the trends in pupils' achievement and behaviour over a number of years. However, this is a school that has made significant improvements over the last year under the new direction of an exceptionally well-focused executive headteacher, an effective and well-trained senior leadership team and a determined and forward-looking governing body.
- The good leadership of the school is helping to galvanise staff, improve the quality of teaching and learning and enlist the full support of parents, all of which are contributing to ensuring pupils' rapid progress across the school.
- Effective systems are in place for managing teachers' performance; these are leading to improvements in the quality of teaching. Senior leaders responsible for English and mathematics have made a good contribution to improving pupils' skills, especially in reading. However, their work has not impacted fully on pupils' performance in all subjects, particularly spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Middle leaders make a valuable contribution to improving teaching and raising achievement, including in mathematics. They are highly skilled and provide excellent mentoring to newly qualified teachers. However, their roles are not fully developed. Senior leaders are well aware of this and have made it a priority for middle leaders to play an integral role in monitoring the quality of teaching and assessing the quality of marking.
- Teachers with responsibilities for subjects other than English and mathematics are developing well in their roles. They have good opportunities to further their skills through training and are helping to ensure that the school's new curriculum is well on its way to being fully implemented.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' academic and personal development well. The school is increasingly making sure that opportunities are available for pupils to develop their reading, writing and mathematics skills across all subjects. Fewer opportunities are available for pupils to develop their skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- The school's work to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, pupils learn about the major world faiths and visit museums and galleries. Pupils play various instruments and perform in the school's brass band. Teachers ensure that British values are promoted well through encouraging pupils to debate topical issues and ensuring that they have a good understanding of life in modern, culturally diverse Britain.
- The school uses its pupil premium funding appropriately to support disadvantaged pupils. It has used the funding to employ additional adults to work with pupils, including a family support worker, and to ensure that eligible pupils participate in all aspects of school life, including school visits and residential opportunities.
- The school's work to challenge discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations is good. Senior leaders are aware of any achievement gaps between groups of pupils, including boys and girls, and these are continuing to narrow.
- The school makes highly effective use of its physical education and sport premium funding to provide sports clubs and activities where previously there were few. Pupils are excited about their competitive 'tournaments'. Participation in dodge-ball, rugby, hockey and volley-ball has increased pupils' physical skills and improved their health and well-being. Funding has also helped to develop teachers' confidence in teaching various physical education activities, such as gymnastics.
- The school has excellent relationships with parents, who are exceedingly active and highly effective in raising funds through the parent teacher association. All parents who talked with inspectors and completed Parent View are satisfied with all aspects of the school's work and would recommend it to others.
- Over the last year, the school has worked very closely with the local authority. In June 2014, the executive headteacher requested a review of pupils' behaviour and safety and, in March 2015, a full review of all school services was carried out.
- The school has thorough systems for keeping pupils safe and its arrangements meet statutory requirements. A safeguarding manager has been appointed recently and excellent systems are now in place to ensure that pupils and children in the early years are safe at all times.

### ■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have worked very well in partnership with senior leaders to oversee the significant changes that have taken place over the last year. They are systematically implementing recommendations from recent reviews in order to improve teaching and learning continuously.
- Governors have a good understanding of how well pupils are performing, because there are now much clearer systems in place for reporting on their progress and data on pupils' performance are accurate. As one governor noted 'we now know exactly what is going on and we can fully challenge the school', and this they do.
- Governors know that more needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching and that it requires improvement. They fully endorse training and professional development to improve teachers' practice and know that the mentoring support available for newly qualified teachers and those new to the school is helping to raise standards. They are prepared to reward teachers only if they meet their targets.
- Governors are actively engaged in school life through their class and curriculum responsibilities and through their work with the parent-teacher association. They know that pupil premium funding is making a difference for eligible pupils and insist on regular updates on their performance to ensure that this remains the case.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Senior leaders' work to improve pupils' behaviour, after a recent review of the quality of behaviour, has been highly effective. All pupils are very familiar with the new 'traffic light' behaviour system and were able to tell inspectors exactly how behaviour might escalate from green to red and what the consequences of this would be. Parents are also familiar with new systems, because these have been communicated effectively to them by their children and the school.
- The school is a calm and orderly place where pupils listen to and respect each other and their teachers. Pupils behave sensibly at all times, including when moving around the school, during play and at lunchtimes.
- Pupils attend breakfast club regularly to catch up with their friends and talk about their learning. This has made a good contribution to their improved punctuality and improving attitudes to learning.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. This is evidenced by their much-improved attendance, which is now average and much better than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Teachers manage behaviour well, including in the early years. They take a consistent approach to helping the small minority of pupils who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour and to understand the consequences of their actions.
- Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy taking on extra responsibilities. Year 6 pupils regularly mentor and 'buddy up' with their younger schoolmates in Reception. Pupils from Years 2 to 6 enjoy their responsibilities on the school council.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils, including in the early years, say that they feel safe and secure and that they are confident in sharing concerns with any adult. The school's highly effective safeguarding procedures and the work of the school's safeguarding manager and family support worker help to ensure that children are safe at all times.
- Parents are very complimentary about the school's work to keep their children safe. Those who completed Parent View, the school's surveys of parents' views and those who spoke with inspectors all said that they were happy that their children were safe and well looked after.
- The school has a 'zero tolerance' approach to poor behaviour and records even the most minor of incidents in class and in central behaviour logs. These show that behaviour is rapidly improving.
- Pupils say that bullying rarely, if ever, happens. Pupils in Key Stage 2 understand that there are different forms of bullying. For example, they know that people can be bullied because of their skin colour or religion, or because of where they come from. Pupils know that this is wrong and say that it never happens in their school.
- Visitors to the school from various police, health, fire, social and children's services all help to develop pupils' understanding of dangers and risks. Pupils' cycling proficiency training helps them to stay safe on the road and their personal, social, health, citizenship and education programme helps them to

understand the dangers associated with drugs and alcohol.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Senior leaders are fully aware of what needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching. They have enlisted the support of English and mathematics specialists and provided a wide range of training and professional development opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants. Teachers now have access to accurate information on pupils' performance, which they are using more effectively to plan activities that match pupils' different abilities more closely. However, teaching requires improvement because these developments have not impacted fully on raising standards of achievement.
- Typically, pupils learn in very orderly classrooms, with information readily available to help them with their reading, writing and mathematical activities. Most teachers explain clearly to pupils what they will be learning and what activities they will be engaged in. This was exemplified in one class, where pupils were eager to explain the different methods they could use to multiply two- and three-digit numbers. Similarly, the most able pupils in another mathematics class were able to explain clearly how to use number lines to divide two-digit numbers. However, not all pupils are this confident. Too often, pupils are not able to explain their calculation methods or how they reach their conclusions in mathematics.
- Where learning is most effective, teachers take every available opportunity to improve pupils' spelling. This was the case in an English class, where pupils were focusing on improving their handwriting and the presentation of their work. Pupils engaged in different activities, all of which related to the text in their class reader. While the most able pupils punctuated paragraphs from a text, lower ability pupils were asked to write out short sentences indicating where speech marks and capital letters should go. However, too few opportunities are provided for pupils to practise their spelling, punctuation, and grammar skills in subjects other than English.
- The quality of teachers' marking is not consistently good. Inspection evidence, including discussions with pupils about their work and a full scrutiny of work in their books, shows that, too frequently, teachers do not indicate to pupils how they can take the next steps in their learning.
- Teachers ensure that pupils have plenty of opportunities to practise the broader range of writing skills across a range of subjects. Opportunities for sustained and extended writing are emerging across all classes, often linked to pupils' many educational visits. This enables pupils to learn how to write in different contexts. This was exemplified in a class where pupils were asked to write a description of a painting called 'The Good Life'. They demonstrated their good descriptive skills as they wrote of 'the silver snow capped mountains' and the 'shimmering of the sun on the winding river', before sharing and assessing the quality of each others' writing. However, teachers do not always check the accuracy of pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation in subjects other than English.
- All pupils from Year 1 to Year 6 visit the local library regularly. They engage in various reading challenges, read widely and often in class and benefit from a well-stocked school library. Pupils have a good understanding of different styles of writing and are familiar with a range of authors. Older pupils enjoy their responsibilities as reading buddies and listen regularly to children read in the Reception class. These initiatives have helped to improve pupils' progress in reading, particularly in Year 2 and Year 6.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement, because over time it has not been good enough. In 2014, at the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment in reading, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling was below average, as was their progress in reading and mathematics. This is because pupils were not able to make up for lost learning due to teaching that was not good enough.
- The school's own data on pupils' progress across the school in reading, writing and mathematics indicates that the vast majority of pupils made good progress in all year groups between 2013 and 2014. However, senior leaders have identified that these data are unreliable as they do not always match either the quality of teaching or work in pupils' books for this period.
- School data for 2014–2015 are accurate and pupils' performance is checked on closely and continuously by the local authority. Inspection evidence, including school data and work in pupils' books, shows that achievement is improving and that pupils in all year groups, including those currently in Year 6, are making good progress. The standards they are attaining are close to those expected for their age. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2014 was average in writing and mathematics, but below average in reading.
- The proportion of pupils identified as secure in their phonics (letters and the sounds they make) skills in the national phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 in 2014 was below average. However, pupils'



skills in phonics are improving rapidly because of better teaching and good staff training. Pupils, especially in Key Stage 2, enjoy reading books from a variety of authors. Younger pupils, including in the early years, are developing their phonics skills well to sound out and read unfamiliar words.

- The school's new systems for assessing pupils' progress show that most pupils are making accelerated progress in writing in all year groups. Pupils engage regularly in extended pieces of writing and are encouraged to develop their persuasive and descriptive writing, whenever possible. However, their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills are not promoted well enough in subjects other than English and teachers do not always offer clear advice on how they can improve in these areas.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics in 2014 was below average at the end of Year 6 for most groups, as was their attainment. However, pupils are making rapid progress this year and are attaining well. Senior leaders have identified mathematics as a priority area for improvement, particularly in Key Stage 2, and have provided training to ensure that teachers' skills in helping pupils to discuss and write down their methods of calculation are rapidly improving.
- There are too few pupils from minority ethnic groups, or who speak English as an additional language, to make any meaningful comparisons between their performance and that of similar groups of pupils nationally. However, their performance is tracked closely and they are now making improving progress, similar to that of their peers.
- The school has an exceptionally high proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. They are cared for well by skilled and well-trained teachers and teaching assistants. At the end of Year 6 in 2014, their attainment and progress compared well to that of similar pupils nationally in writing and mathematics. It was well below average in reading. The progress of these pupils, often from very low starting points, is improving rapidly this year across the school, in all subjects.
- The majority of pupils in the Year 6 group in 2014 were disadvantaged pupils. They were more than two terms behind their peers in school in mathematics and less than a term behind in reading and writing. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment was approximately two terms behind non-disadvantaged pupils nationally in mathematics and reading and about half a term behind in writing. Their progress was below average in relation to other pupils nationally in mathematics and reading and above average in writing. The school's own data show that currently these pupils are making accelerated progress in all subjects across the school and that gaps between their attainment and that of other pupils are closing rapidly.
- The school's work with the most able pupils is improving, with a small minority in Year 6 working at the highest possible Level 6 in reading. Teachers' higher expectations, more challenging work and 'booster' classes are all helping to ensure that the most able pupils are making rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

### The early years provision

### requires improvement

- The early years is staffed with several teaching assistants, a Nursery teacher, and a Reception teacher. The deputy head teacher manages all that is provided. Under her leadership, teaching and children's progress are improving.
- Almost all children enter the Nursery class with skills that are below what is typical for their age in all areas of learning. School data and inspection evidence show that children's language and communication skills are especially weak. Over time, teaching has not been good enough to ensure children's good progress through the Nursery and Reception classes in all areas of learning. As a result, in 2014, the proportion of children entering Year 1 with the skills and knowledge necessary for the next stage of their learning was below average.
- Children learn in two very large classrooms and have access to a generous outdoor area and a small field. Classrooms have clearly defined areas of learning for using technology, painting, writing, cooking, mathematics and construction. There are various displays in both classes, such as the 'phonics wall' and a small gallery of children's work. However, indoor provision does not stimulate children well enough and does not always engage children's interests fully.
- Children conduct themselves sensibly when playing outside with wheeled toys, such as bicycles, and when using various equipment and apparatus. However, outdoor areas are not utilised as well as they should be and adults sometimes miss opportunities to work with children to take their learning forward. Senior leaders are aware of the need to develop outdoor provision further and plans are in hand for imminent improvements.
- Teaching requires improvement. However, there is now an improving picture of teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes. For example, work to develop children's listening, attention and number skills is effective and is supporting children's good progress in these areas. This year, children are making good

progress and attaining well in most areas of learning.

- Children are attentive, enjoy their learning activities, behave well and listen carefully. This was demonstrated when the Reception teacher gained the full attention of children by counting down from five. By the end of the count, all children had put down their toys, stopped playing on apparatus and were ready to come inside to do their mathematics work.
- Children work and play well together in pairs and small groups and quickly become familiar with daily routines in the Nursery and Reception classes. They are inquisitive and keen to engage in conversation with adults about their learning.
- Staff have high expectations of children and take all opportunities to develop their counting, reading and listening skills. This was exemplified during a phonics session, where the teacher worked carefully with children to tease out various sounds. She then captured their interest further by introducing the 'Incy Wincy Spider' song, while constantly reminding them to sit with 'butterfly legs,' and use their 'listening ears', and 'watching eyes'.
- Staff know how well children are performing. They assess children's progress accurately and use information on their performance to plan different activities. This information is now shared with parents.
- Staff ensure that children are safe and well behaved. They are highly skilled at managing the behaviour of any children who find it difficult to manage their own feelings and actions. This helps to ensure that the early years provision is calm and orderly. Parents feel that their children are safe and secure here.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	104784
<b>Local authority</b>	St. Helens
<b>Inspection number</b>	461588

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	186
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	William Roberts
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Nicola Kearney
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	16 June 2011
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