

Mersea Island School

Barfield Road, West Mersea, Essex CO5 8QX

Inspection dates	12–13 July 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors have quickly improved the school by making sure that all staff are focused on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Leaders continue to drive improvement with considerable success.
- Leaders know the school well and have paid particular attention to key areas requiring improvement, including pupils' literacy and their mathematical skills.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers set demanding and interesting work in most subjects for pupils of different abilities, who are learning well as a result.
- Leaders and teachers make regular, accurate checks on pupils' progress. As a result, teachers are able to adjust their teaching where needed and help all pupils to learn well.
- Pupils' progress is good in all year groups and most subjects, including mathematics and English. There are no significant gaps between the progress of different pupil groups at the school.
- Pupils are well cared for and respect their teachers. Their behaviour and attitudes are good and their attendance is above average.
- Governors are highly committed to the school and use their accurate views about its performance to support leaders and hold them to account.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength because of a well-designed curriculum. The school also prepares pupils well for British citizenship.
- The progress of children in the early years is good because of effective leadership, accurate assessment and stimulating activities. They are looked after very well and their personal development is good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In Year 5 and Year 6, a small number of the most able pupils do not thoroughly apply their knowledge when completing the most challenging written work. As a result, the quality of work they produce does not reach the highest standard of which they are capable.
- Occasionally, pupils' progress is held back in mathematics when they spend too long on activities they have mastered, and are provided with less time to apply their knowledge to more challenging, higher-level work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Teachers should support the most able pupils in key stage 2 to improve the standard of their written work, by ensuring that they thoroughly apply the full range of their knowledge and skills to their writing.
- In mathematics lessons, when pupils are secure in their knowledge, teachers should make sure that they are provided with new and more challenging work, so they can apply what they have learned skilfully and achieve a greater depth of understanding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and governors have secured significant improvements in the quality of education since the previous inspection. The headteacher and her determined senior team have brought about rapid improvements by setting high expectations for pupils' learning, personal development and the quality of teaching. Teachers are thoroughly committed to this vision and share the same ambition shown by leaders. The vast majority of parents also agree that the school has improved.
- Leaders' self-evaluation work is perceptive and accurate. As a result, they have a clear view about the school's effectiveness and those areas which can still be improved. Improvement planning concentrates on these priorities, which are carefully organised. Leaders' expectations are realistic and timely. Arrangements for checking on the progress are well established and involve all leaders and governors.
- Leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching is effective. They review pupils' work, meet with teachers to check on their progress and pay regular visits to lessons. They use the findings to ensure that all teachers and teaching assistants receive effective training. For example, all teachers have been supported to improve their subject knowledge in order to deliver more-challenging literacy and numeracy teaching, suitable for the new national curriculum. Equally, leaders challenge any teaching which is not effective.
- Performance management arrangements are thorough and teachers are set clear targets which must be reached before an increase in pay is agreed. Leaders make sure that teachers' salary progression is dependent on the quality of their teaching and the progress made by pupils. Increases in teachers' pay since the previous inspection are consistent with the improvements made to teaching within the school.
- Arrangements for setting pupils' academic targets are highly effective. Targets set by leaders are demanding and based on accurate teacher assessments. Procedures for monitoring pupils' progress and their learning are precise and checks are carried out regularly. Parents and pupils are closely involved in these arrangements and assessment information about every pupil in the school is very detailed and precise. Reporting arrangements are also well organised. As a result of these strengths, any pupil who is at risk of falling behind is quickly identified and helped.
- Teachers' feedback to pupils and the marking of work are carried out consistently and pupils act on the advice they are given in order to improve their work and clear any misunderstandings.
- Subject leaders are effective and committed to their roles. They are well trained and have worked with colleagues from other schools in order to build up their subject knowledge and skills and develop the new curriculum. They accurately monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment alongside senior leaders and provide useful advice to teachers. They also work closely with governors.
- Leaders' use of the pupil premium funding is effective and as a result disadvantaged pupils are making the same progress as other pupils. Leaders make sure that disadvantaged pupils receive challenging targets and additional support and resources where required. Their progress is tracked closely so that leaders can be confident that they are succeeding and provide extra help when they experience any difficulty.
- Leaders make effective use of the primary schools physical education and sports premium funding. Leaders have set challenging targets for pupils' participation in competitive sports, school clubs and physical activity. They have made effective use of the large school site to develop field sports and have invested in new equipment and high-quality sports coaching. As a result, far more pupils are now involved in competitive sports and are performing at higher levels of competition.
- The curriculum is carefully organised to support pupils' achievement and personal development. There is a wide range of subjects and they are taught to sufficient depth. Subject leaders make sure that numeracy and literacy skills are well developed across the performing arts, history, geography, computing, religious education and sciences. As a result, pupils are making good progress in English skills and mathematics. The curriculum is also planned to allow pupils to study the unique island location where they live. Extra-curricular activities are well developed through trips, daily clubs and sporting activities.
- The school's work to promote the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school owing to the quality of the curriculum and the wide range of extra-curricular activities, assemblies and clubs. Pupils are proud of their island heritage and embrace the wider world owing to effective teaching about the different cultures and religions of the world. Effective project work fires their curiosity for the sciences and modern languages and they are successful in their musical education.
- Preparation for living in modern Britain is effective. The school's values teach children to strive to 'be the best we can' and respect each other and the differences between people. Some pupils say that, 'while

people may look different to each other, they are still all members of the human race.’ Pupils’ participation as elected representatives on the school council provides them with effective experience in democratic activities and decision-making and many older pupils have an accurate awareness of modern politics.

- Leaders at all levels cooperate effectively with local schools, in order to share ideas and improve their work. They have also received highly effective support from the local authority’s ‘standards and excellence commissioner’, who has helped them to improve arrangements for checking on the quality of teaching and the accuracy of assessment.
- The great majority of parents are positive about the quality of education now provided by the school. However, a very small number do not agree that their children are making good progress or that the school responds well to concerns they may have. Inspectors met with many parents and reviewed a wide range of evidence about parental views, and did not find evidence to support these concerns.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors offer effective leadership. They are highly experienced and come from many different backgrounds, including education. They are deeply committed to the life and work of the school, visit regularly and have clear roles and responsibilities which they take seriously. Governors are linked to different departments and subjects and work with leaders when they visit. They also contribute to the school improvement plan and monitor its progress. Governors are also trained in the use of school performance information. They use their accurate knowledge of the school to hold leaders to account through their well-considered questions.
 - Governors are effective in fulfilling their statutory duties including those for safeguarding. They ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met, including training and creation of effective policies.
 - Governors are clear about how the school uses additional funding including the pupil premium, in order to support disadvantaged pupils. They are also able to explain how performance management arrangements work and how pay awards reflect improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils’ progress.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. As a result of effective training, all staff know how to act upon any concerns they may have about pupils. Thorough checks are made on the suitability of staff to be employed and visitors’ access into the school is carefully managed and supervised. Senior leaders who work as designated safeguarding leads are thorough in their record-keeping and liaise effectively with other professionals and organisations. This work ensures that pupils who are at risk receive effective support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching is now good, following significant improvements made since the previous inspection.
- Teachers and pupils have very positive relationships which make an important contribution to learning. Pupils strive to succeed because of the encouragement and personal attention they receive.
- Teachers’ subject knowledge is well developed to meet the demands of the new curriculum. They assess pupils very accurately and organise activities which interest and engage pupils’ curiosity. Work is also suitably challenging for pupils of different abilities. For example, in a Year 2 lesson about adverbs and adjectives, the teacher had carefully assessed pupils’ progress in spelling and then planned work which supported all pupils to skilfully change words for different purposes by accurately selecting the correct suffixes.
- Activities and new knowledge are introduced very well. Teachers explain difficult concepts clearly and prepare helpful resources so that children understand what they are learning about. As a result, most pupils are able to apply their knowledge well and make good progress during lessons.
- Questioning is used effectively in order to help pupils think deeply and use their knowledge. For example, in a Year 5 writing lesson about relative clauses, the teacher took time to question pupils about earlier work of this type which was shared around the class. As a result, pupils were able to use what had been discussed in order to write more effective and complex sentences.
- Reading is taught very well. Younger pupils’ knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) is very well developed and older children are taught to read skilfully across a rich variety of stories, plays and books covering many different subjects. As a result, they are able to analyse the plot of a story, evaluate characters and interpret information accurately. For example, Year 5 pupils were able to explain the meaning of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ from a range of different characters’ opinions, drawing on their

effective knowledge of the play. Pupils are encouraged to read often. As a result, they visit the library regularly, attend the reading club and are provided with interesting books which are well suited to their ability.

- Writing skills are developed effectively from an early age. In older years there have been significant improvements in pupils' knowledge, and accurate use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils are highly committed to correcting spelling mistakes and develop their vocabulary through reading and accurate use of thesauruses. Effective teaching supports pupils to write balanced arguments, detailed explanations, persuasive pieces and high-quality reports. For example, a Year 3 class imitated sports journalists during the school sports day and effective teaching helped them use a range of convincing language and well-structured paragraphs in order to complete convincing reports. Teaching ensures that effective written skills are developed across many subjects, including geography, history, science and religious education.
- Mathematics is taught well. Teaching supports younger pupils to confidently secure their understanding of number knowledge, place value, basic operations and multiplication tables. Older pupils are helped to secure their calculation skills and conceptual knowledge and are supported to move on to increasingly difficult mathematical problems which help them to develop their reasoning skills.
- Teaching assistants are highly effective in their work. They are well trained and cooperate closely with teachers in order to support different groups of pupils and individuals. They are especially effective when explaining work, asking questions of pupils and checking on pupils' understanding of work. As a result, the pupils they support make good progress.
- Teaching is effective across a range of subjects. Pupils develop effective knowledge and skills in history, geography, computer work, design and technology, art, religious education, performing arts and sciences. There is a focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in all of these subjects and pupils are provided with effective opportunities to study different topics to sufficient depth.
- Homework is set regularly using a range of resources, for grammar, spelling, reading and mathematics. The work set supports pupils to reinforce their learning and the online arrangements allow parents to be closely involved and understand how well their children are doing.
- When setting challenging written work for older pupils, some teachers fail to check that the most able pupils are thoroughly applying their knowledge. As a result, their finished work does not contain the best features of writing they are capable of. In addition, in some mathematics lessons, teachers sometimes allow pupils to continue to work on activities when they have thoroughly secured their knowledge. As a result, they do not move onto more challenging work when they are ready and their progress is not as fast as it could be.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are friendly, welcoming and caring. They relate well to teachers and visitors and they respect each other. All pupils are able to explain the school's values, which encourage them to strive to be their best and to respect other people.
- Pupils make a highly effective contribution to the life of their school. They serve their school well as elected councillors, sports captains and heads of house. Older pupils help younger readers and they also help organise successful fundraising for charitable causes, including the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.
- Pupils support each other well. They are patient with each other, cooperate well when working together and value what others say. One example was seen in a Year 6 English lesson, where pupils helped each other to understand Cockney rhyming slang in order to create convincing character dialogue, delivered in full East End dialect.
- Pupils are provided with effective opportunities to develop their confidence in performing arts, music and sport. As a result, many are able to participate in higher-level competitions and events, including regional sports leagues and the Colchester Music Festival.
- Pupils report that they feel safe at all times and in all places while attending school. Parents agree. Pupils feel able to report any concerns to staff and are fully confident that they will be helped.
- Pupils report that all forms of bullying are rare and, should it be reported, the school takes swift and effective action to bring it to an end. Parents agree that the school is effective in this area.
- The school's work to educate the children in how to reduce different types of risks is effective. Pupils and

parents receive helpful guidance about road safety, swimming, contact with strangers and how to avoid risks when using the internet, communication technology and age-appropriate social media.

- The school's work to promote healthy living, including respectful relationships, a balanced diet and physical exercise, is effective. Pupils enjoy the attractive school menu, which is carefully planned to be healthy, and their participation rates in sports and exercise activities are high.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils respond very positively to the high expectations for behaviour which are set by staff. They report that their teachers guide them to think hard about what good behaviour actually means and that all adults encourage them to act well.
- During lessons, pupils' attitudes towards learning are positive. They respect and enjoy learning and are committed to working hard and trying their best. They are thoughtful when tackling the hardest work and don't give up easily. Conduct in lessons is also positive. Pupils respect their teachers and listen courteously to them as they introduce work. Occasional instances of off-task behaviour are quickly managed by teachers.
- Pupils' conduct around school is positive and they manage themselves well. They are sensible when moving around the site and behave safely. They show respect for school property, equipment and the displays which decorate corridors and spaces. They do not drop litter. When dining in the hall, they queue patiently and eat their food sensibly. They also behave well during assemblies.
- Pupils' attendance is above the national average and they are punctual for school. The numbers who are persistently absent has been reduced, including disadvantaged pupils whose attendance has previously been lower than others. Leaders communicate the need for high attendance to all parents, and their work to support families to ensure good attendance is effective.
- Permanent exclusions have not happened for several years and the number of fixed-term exclusions is very low.
- The great majority of parents agree that the behaviour of pupils is good and that the school works effectively to keep it so.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- There has been a significant improvement in pupils' progress since the previous inspection. As a result pupils are making good progress in a wide range of subjects as well as in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are securing their subject knowledge and skills in all areas. The school's accurate assessment information, pupils' work and lesson visits show that there are no significant differences in the progress of different groups of pupils who currently attend the school.
- Children in the early years make good progress taking account of their different starting points and their knowledge and skills when they join the school. Most girls currently in the school joined with skills that were typical for their age in most areas, especially in reading, writing and numbers, while boys were lower. However, all pupils have made good progress and the large majority are achieving a good level of development by the end of their time in the early years.
- The proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics reading check at the end of Year 1 have risen steadily since 2014 and were above the national average in 2015. Teaching has been highly effective and pupils use their phonics knowledge to read words confidently and accurately. Current test results, visits to lessons and listening to pupils read show that the standards reached in 2016 are very high and there are no significant gaps between different groups of pupils.
- Pupils' progress has steadily improved in key stage 1. In 2015, pupils' standards were above the national average and this represented good progress from their starting points in early years. Current work and assessment information shows that pupils are continuing to make good progress in Year 1 and Year 2.
- Progress in key stage 2 is good in all year groups, and this represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection. In 2014 and 2015, attainment rose and was above average overall, but improvements in writing and mathematics were more secure than reading and English grammar, punctuation and spelling, which improved more slowly. The school's current tracking information and pupils' work in Years 3 to 6 show that pupils are making good progress, and reviews of pupils' work show decisive improvements in reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, pupils' work and visits to lessons show that occasionally pupils in key stage 2 are not deepening their mathematical reasoning skills, which sometimes limits the progress they can make.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils has significantly improved. They are making good progress

from their different starting points when compared with others nationally and within school, in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2015, the progress of those with lower prior attainment was behind others nationally and those within school, while Year 6 results showed that their attainment was approximately three terms behind other pupils nationally. Pupils' work, assessment records and visits to lessons show that these gaps have closed for these pupils owing to effective teaching and monitoring arrangements, which prevent them falling behind.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress compared to pupils with similar starting points. Teachers assess them accurately and organise well-planned support for them in lessons. They are provided with challenging targets and teachers monitor their progress carefully. Parents are closely involved in assessment arrangements and report that their children are well supported.
- The work and assessment information for pupils who enter the school with lower than average levels of knowledge and skills show they are making good progress. They are assessed accurately and teachers have the same high expectations for them as they have of other pupils. Teaching activities are carefully planned to help them succeed in literacy and numeracy and as a result, they are able to access the wider curriculum and learn well.
- The most able pupils are making good progress in reading, writing, mathematics and most other subjects. Pupils' work and lesson visits show their progress has improved, particularly in reading where it was lower than writing and mathematics in the Year 6 results of 2015. Teaching has developed their higher-level mathematical skills and improved the subject knowledge they require for higher-level written work. However, some pupils do not thoroughly apply this knowledge when completing the most challenging written tasks and this slows their progress.
- Pupils' work and tracking information show that their progress is good in a wide range of subjects, including history, geography, computing, design and technology, science, music, singing, religious education and science.

Early years provision

is good

- Good leadership ensures that all children are making good progress in all areas of learning from their different starting points. Leaders' accurate assessment information shows that boys entered the Reception Year with skills and knowledge lower than those typical for their ages, while girls were typical. Leaders ensure that teaching and learning activities are supporting all pupils to achieve equally well. As a result, boys, girls, disadvantaged children, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well prepared for learning in key stage 1.
- Children make an effective start to Reception Year. Assessment arrangements are thorough. Early years leaders take account of their progress in nursery education or local pre-schools. They also encourage parents to contribute to initial assessments of their child. As a result, leaders have very accurate views about pupils' starting points and are able to make arrangements to help children settle into school quickly and confidently.
- Teachers monitor children's progress accurately and organise work which supports pupils of different abilities to learn effectively. Teachers quickly adapt activities when required. For example, children have made good progress with handwriting skills because all adults support them to achieve accurate letter formation.
- Teachers provide a wide range of interesting and exciting activities to motivate children to learn well. The classroom and outdoor environments are attractive and well designed to support productive play and formal learning. Children make good use of both areas to develop their curiosity and imagination.
- Children's behaviour and social development are both good. Children are cooperative with each other, sensibly follow the guidance of their teachers and behave considerately. For example, in a mathematics lesson about counting and number knowledge, children were very enthusiastic when asked to sing the order of particular numbers in the patterns selected by their teacher and eagerly helped each other when they were asked to check on their counting partners' answers.
- Arrangements for parents to access the early years area in order to deliver children and collect them at the end of school are well organised and safe.
- Parents report that they are very pleased with the quality of education their children receive in Reception Year. They approve of the arrangements for reporting progress, the care their children receive and the steps taken by the school to keep each child safe.

School details

Unique reference number	115311
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10006992

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	452
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Martin
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Miss N Sirett
Telephone number	01206 382736
Website	www.merseaschool.org
Email address	office@merseaschool.org
Date of previous inspection	14–15 May 2014

Information about this school

- Mersea Island School is larger than the average-sized primary school. Pupils attend classes of single age groups and of different abilities.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British and the proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities is very low.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very low.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average, and the proportion supported by a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by additional funding known as the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 20 lessons and part lessons, one of which was undertaken jointly with the headteacher.
- During the two days of the inspection, the number of lessons being taught was greatly reduced as a result of a scheduled sports day and the annual school show.
- Inspectors examined samples of pupils' work from all ages and abilities, in a range of subjects including mathematics, writing, reading, science, geography, religious education and history. They also listened to some pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation document and improvement plan, safeguarding policies and procedures, records of attendance and behaviour, staff training and curriculum plans. They also looked at the school's procedures for checking on the quality of teaching, records of governors' work and visit notes from education advisors.
- They held meetings with the headteacher and senior leaders, subject leaders and governors. They also met with the leaders responsible for early years provision and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Inspectors met with pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 and representatives of the school council and club leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with 37 parents at the beginning or end of school, during the inspection. Inspectors took account of 49 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 23 parental comments. They also looked at the school's own parental survey results and took account of 37 responses to questionnaires completed by staff.
- Concerns raised by one parent during the inspection are being examined by the appropriate bodies.

Inspection team

David Turner, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Sutton	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Hookway	Ofsted Inspector

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