

Merebrook Infant School

Dulverton Drive, Furzton, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK4 1EZ

Inspection dates

19–20 April 2017

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

- Following a period of instability, there is a renewed sense of purpose across the school.
- Inclusion is central to the school's values. This is evident, not least, in the frequent admission of pupils with complex needs from other schools.
- Leaders, with the support of governors, have worked successfully to improve the quality of teaching. Consequently, pupils are achieving well.
- As a result of effective teaching, all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress.
- Pupils' progress in phonics is improving and leaders are, rightly, seeking to further increase pupils' confidence in reading unfamiliar words.
- Pupils enjoy learning because the curriculum appeals to them. They take pride in their work.
- Pupils have ample opportunities to use their literacy skills in a variety of subjects. However, there are limited opportunities for them to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- Staff keep a close eye on pupils' progress and provide them with clear guidance on how they can improve.
- Children in the early years enjoy learning and make good headway due to the nurturing, engaging and challenging environment.
- Pupils' personal development has a high priority. Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds learn and play together harmoniously.
- Pupils behave well during lessons and around the school. They are friendly, polite, and welcoming.
- The support for pupils with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties is commendable, and extends to their families.
- Governors' improvement plans include a range of thoughtfully devised strategies. The goals are appropriate but some do not include specific targets to enable leaders to evaluate the impact of the initiatives.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils who attain well above the expected standard scores in the Year 1 phonics screening check by providing further opportunities for pupils to improve their skills, including the most able.
- Provide further opportunities for pupils to apply, consolidate and extend their mathematical skills across the curriculum.
- Include specific, quantifiable outcomes in development plans so that leaders and governors can fully evaluate the success of initiatives.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Governors and senior leaders have successfully created a positive, ambitious ethos and sense of purpose. There are high expectations for all pupils and a strong team spirit among the staff.
- Leaders have refined the tracking of pupils' achievement. Governors regularly receive summaries of pupils' performance which provide an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The headteacher keeps a close eye on the quality of teaching and, together with subject leaders, identifies where teaching and learning are most effective and where improvement is needed. Teachers new to the profession are well supported.
- Teachers and support staff benefit from clear guidelines. This supports consistency and continuity as pupils move from class to class. Recent changes to phonics teaching have resulted in improvement, although the way pupils are currently grouped for phonics sessions means that some of the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged.
- Staff feel valued. They have good opportunities for professional development, such as training in how to develop pupils' ability to reason in mathematics. Leaders use the performance management system effectively to raise standards.
- Leaders track pupils' progress at regular intervals and keep detailed records. This means that any anomalies are quickly identified and addressed.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities across the curriculum. In addition to an appropriate focus on basic skills, practical activities in science, computing, art, and music add a creative dimension to learning. Lunchtime and after-school activities make a significant contribution to pupils' personal and physical development, and their academic progress. Singing is a particular strength, as recognised by the school's 'Sing Up' award.
- The curriculum successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. Work on 'special places' and learning about human and animal offspring, for example, elicit personal, reflective responses from the pupils.
- Through assemblies, the activities of the school council and 'circle time' pupils gain a secure and age-appropriate understanding of fundamental British values, such as tolerance and fairness. These are included in the school's central values, which are promoted systematically and continuously throughout the year.
- Pupils have good opportunities to practise, consolidate and extend their reading and writing skills during topic work. For example, when comparing Milton Keynes to Rio de Janeiro, they consult books, write descriptions and complete charts. Pupils do some measuring and use Venn diagrams in their studies, but there are limited opportunities for them to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- The school makes good use of the additional funding it receives. Pupils who are disadvantaged receive effective support to ensure that they make strong progress and have similar opportunities to learn as others.

- Support for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties is managed extremely well. The special educational needs coordinator and learning mentor use specialist assessment systems to track improvements in pupils' attitudes and behaviour, their ability to communicate socially and to sustain relationships. Additional funding is used effectively.
- Physical education (PE) and sports funding is used effectively. Specialist coaches run lunchtime and after-school clubs, and lead playtime activities. They support teachers in developing their PE skills to enable such activities to be sustained.
- Parents are positive about the school. Their comments included: 'It's a great little community – friendly and welcoming'; 'My daughter is thriving at the school'; and, 'This school has massively helped my son since he moved there mid-term.'
- The school's leadership has been supported effectively by the local authority, and a national leader in education. Governors and leaders now have the ability to drive the school's improvement without such support.

Governance of the school

- Governance has improved. Under the effective leadership of the new chair of the governing body, the committee structure has been modified. This provides opportunities for all governors to gain a good idea of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Governors gain a secure grasp of the school's performance from leaders' clear assessment information and their own focused visits. These now provide increased opportunities for all governors to develop a fuller understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors' minutes indicate that members increasingly ask insightful questions in holding leaders to account.
- Governors seek assurance that pupil premium funding has a positive impact on improving the experiences for disadvantaged pupils. They are well informed about how well these pupils achieve compared to other pupils.
- School improvement plans and subject action plans are securely based on systematic self-evaluation. They identify what is to be done to move the school forward. Some targets, however, are not specific enough to enable governors and leaders to evaluate the impact of initiatives.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils are taught how to keep safe. They understand how to look after themselves in a variety of situations, including taking care when near the lake close to the school. They are aware of the importance of keeping personal information and passwords to themselves when using the internet.
- Governors ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust. All adults working in the school are well informed about keeping pupils safe. They are well trained on how to care for pupils, and how to respond appropriately if they have concerns. Record-keeping is comprehensive and systematic. Recruitment procedures are secure. The school works effectively with parents to keep children safe.

- The special educational needs coordinator, learning mentor and child protection lead meet regularly to review support for pupils, including for those who are looked after. Child protection plans are reviewed regularly. The school ensures that all local agencies dedicated to keeping pupils safe respond promptly to any concerns raised.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers involve pupils in a variety of engaging activities. Pupils have lots of opportunities to work in different ways that maintain high levels of interest. There is a purposeful atmosphere in classes, where everyone works hard and is happy.
- Pupils make good progress because teachers set tasks that build on their previous learning. For example, after a brief revision in using symbols for 'greater than', 'less than' and 'equal to' (>, < and =) pupils enthusiastically tackled mathematical problems incorporating these symbols.
- Teachers are adept in introducing new ideas and ensure that while all pupils cover similar work, there is a good level of challenge for different ability groups. The most able pupils routinely tackle work that requires a greater depth of understanding.
- The systematic teaching of phonics enables pupils to move from recognising individual letter sounds to reading and writing unfamiliar words. The most able pupils in Year 1 have recently begun to be stretched further, although this has not yet meant that they are fully challenged.
- Teachers use a range of methods to develop pupils' writing skills. Pupils respond well to tasks which interest and challenge them. For example, they enthusiastically write their own versions of familiar stories and enjoy making lists of instructions, such as recipes. Teachers' secure knowledge of the requirements of the English curriculum enables them to introduce technical terms, such as 'expanded noun phrases'. Occasionally, pupils lose concentration when too long is spent on explanations and analysis.
- Staff assess pupils' needs carefully. They routinely modify plans, taking account of pupils' responses. Teachers make every effort to ensure that pupils joining the school mid-term settle in quickly. They establish newcomers' levels of attainment so they can build on these pupils' prior learning as seamlessly as possible.
- Teaching assistants have a shared understanding of how individual pupils are getting on because they routinely help in assessing their progress. They make a significant contribution to pupils' learning and achievement.
- Staff teach reading well. They frequently hear pupils read and successfully engage parents in supporting their children. Home-school reading journals include regular dialogue between staff and parents. Pupils are keen to move on to the next stage in the colour-coded sequence of reading books.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. Their needs are assessed accurately and interventions, both during lessons and in withdrawal groups, help them to make good progress from their starting points. Pupils with complex social, emotional, and mental health difficulties benefit from highly skilled support.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are very well cared for. Pupils respond to the school's caring ethos, showing respect and care for each other.
- Staff know individual pupils well. Adults are quick to spot any pupil who appears to be unhappy or listless. Small changes in pupils' behaviour are regularly discussed in meetings and very careful consideration is given to the root cause.
- Staff have very good relationships with parents, who say their children are very well looked after. The special educational needs coordinator and learning mentor, working closely with the headteacher, play a key role in ensuring that pupils are looked after and flourish.
- The school provides individual assistance or small-group work for pupils who need to learn about other people's feelings, how to resolve conflicts, how to express themselves and sustaining friendships.
- Staff regularly refer to the school's core values and this help pupils develop a moral code. Pupils' leadership skills are developed through responsibilities, from acting as class monitors to playing a leading part in the school council and eco-committee.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils work well together and respond well to adults during lessons and around the school. Pupils who spoke to the inspector were very clear that behaviour is good. They said that everyone gets along with one another. This is evident during lessons and during breaktimes when pupils from a wide range of backgrounds play happily together.
- Older pupils recognise that bullying is different from occasional squabbles and disputes. The school council, with the help of an adult, developed the school anti-bullying charter. Pupils say that bullying is very rare.
- Pupils are positive and interested in their learning, and demonstrate a good degree of self-discipline. The number of behaviour incidents is low. Pupils look after each other and demonstrate high levels of care and friendship.
- Attendance has increased and is now just above the national average. Rates of persistent absence and punctuality are also improving due to the concerted effort of school leaders and the learning mentor.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' performance has been better than average in recent years. As pupils enter Year 1, their attainment is typically below average. In recent years, their attainment at the end of Year 2 has matched or exceeded national averages in reading, writing and mathematics, indicating good progress through key stage 1.

- In 2016, all groups of pupils made very good progress – reaching above-average standards. This included pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils achieving a greater depth in their learning was also above the national average.
- The attainment of disadvantaged pupils was above that of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics, indicating the success of the school in reducing differences between these groups.
- The school’s assessment records indicate that current pupils are doing well across the board. This is evident from pupils’ books, which show good and sometimes rapid progress from a range of starting points. Pupils’ presentation, depth of writing skills and vocabulary are generally good. They tackle mathematical problems with enthusiasm and interest.
- Pupils make good progress in phonics. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has improved and this, in turn, is helping to accelerate pupils’ progress in reading and writing. The proportion of pupils reaching above-expected standards in the Year 1 phonics screening check is typically a little below average, although most pupils catch up during Year 2.
- Pupils’ attainment in reading typically exceeds national averages. Pupils demonstrate a love of and interest in books. The most confident pupils use punctuation well to read fluently and expressively.
- Pupils make good headway in science. From a low start, all except a small number of disadvantaged pupils reached the expected standards in 2016.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. They are supported well throughout the school by the teachers and experienced, well-trained teaching assistants. The same strong provision provides pupils who speak English as an additional language with opportunities to gain confidence and fluency.
- The progress of pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties is hard-won. The commendable work of the support staff helps these pupils to make headway in their personal development, and this has a positive impact on their academic progress.
- Pupils’ positive attitudes to learning, social skills and a firm foundation across the whole curriculum prepare them well for their next steps in education beyond Year 2.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years area provides an inviting and stimulating place for children to learn. Well-planned activities follow the children’s interests and ensure that they successfully acquire early reading, writing and number skills. Consequently, from low levels on entry, children make good progress. Additional funding for disadvantaged children is used effectively to support their learning. By the end of Reception, an increasing number of children are meeting and exceeding national standards.
- Adults take every opportunity to promote children’s personal development, increase their communication skills and broaden their vocabulary. A wide range of information is collected to support each child. There is a mix of observation, to plan for the next steps in learning, and working alongside children, to assess what each child can do. Staff know the children very well.

- Children thoroughly enjoy learning. They enthusiastically participate in the wide range of stimulating activities provided indoors and outdoors. Children enjoy finding things out for themselves and are always ready to have a go. This was evident, for example, as children were learning to direct a programmable toy to follow a specific path. They showed resilience as they kept on trying, despite frequently having to start again from the beginning.
- Standards of teaching and assessment are good due to skilled teaching staff. All adults are confident in contributing to the development of the whole child as an individual. Staff have good relationships with parents and home–school communication is well established.
- Safeguarding is effective. Children are extremely well looked after and staff ensure that statutory requirements are met.
- The early years is led very well. The leader demonstrates the determination, expertise and skills to sustain and further improve the provision. Staff work together as an effective team to ensure that children are well prepared for the transition to Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	131670
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10024499

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	135
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Fisher
Headteacher	Cheryl Johnson
Telephone number	01908 522876
Website	www.merebrookschool.co.uk
Email address	headteacher@merebrookschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 March 2015

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average infant school.
- Pupils come from a number of backgrounds. Just under half are White British. The largest minority ethnic group, around 18%, is Black or Black British with the remainder from Asian and mixed backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language is considerably higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. These needs relate mainly to speech, language and communication, social, emotional and mental health, and moderate learning difficulties.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium, is broadly average.
- The number of pupils joining or leaving the school outside the usual times is well above average.

- Children in the early years attend full time in one of two Reception classes.
- When the school was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to require improvement. Until recently, the school received support from a national leader of education, brokered by the local authority.
- The privately run before-school and after-school care was not visited during the inspection.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed activities in all classes. Observations were undertaken with the headteacher.
- The inspector met with members of the governing body and a member of the local authority.
- Meetings were also held with pupils to discuss their views on their learning and well-being, and with parents to gain their views about the school.
- The inspector heard pupils from Years 1 and 2 read. He talked to pupils at breaktimes and in the lunch hall, in lessons, and as they moved around the school.
- The inspector examined a range of school documents including information on pupils' performance, improvement plans, the evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment, governors' minutes and curriculum plans.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of books to see what progress had been made across a range of subjects.
- The inspector took account of 28 responses to the Ofsted parent survey, Parent View. In addition, he evaluated 13 returns to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Rob Crompton, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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