

Merton Bank Primary School

Roper Street, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 1EJ

Inspection dates

20–21 June 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

- The executive headteacher has communicated her high expectations for the school to all staff and pupils and has ensured that the school has improved since the last inspection.
- Teaching and learning in writing is driving improvements. Pupils respond well to opportunities to write across the curriculum and use their literacy skills across a broad range of subjects.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection, resulting in an improvement to pupils' outcomes.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective. There are rigorous systems in place to ensure that pupils receive the support that they need.
- Current pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects including reading, writing and mathematics because teaching is good. However, the most able pupils do not always make the progress that they are capable of in mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils, particularly those with low and middle prior attainment, are making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Mathematics teaching provides appropriate challenge for low-ability and middle-ability pupils. However, provision for most-able pupils is not as strong.
- Provision in early years is good. The youngest children make strong progress from low starting points.
- The school's procedures for keeping pupils safe and responding to their concerns are effective. All staff understand their duty of care and act quickly and efficiently when necessary.
- Staff reward good behaviour and challenge poor behaviour. Expectations for pupils' behaviour in the school are high.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils' attendance continues to improve but is not yet at the national average.
- The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of mathematics teaching in order to boost the progress of pupils, especially the most able and most able disadvantaged, by:
 - ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills and knowledge in other curriculum areas ensuring that teachers use ongoing assessment in lessons more effectively to increase the challenge for pupils when they already understand an activity.
- Maintain the recent improvement in the teaching of phonics so that more pupils reach the standards they are capable of.
- Continue to work closely with families to further improve attendance so that pupils benefit from the good education that the school provides.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a very good understanding of the school. They have high expectations, are ambitious for learning and have driven improvement through rigour and determination. This has resulted in a shared passion and commitment from all staff and governors and improved outcomes for pupils.
- The headteacher has gained the confidence of her staff and governors. They rightly recognise and celebrate the rapidity of the improvements that have been made. All members of the school community are proud to be a part of a team which continues to improve the school.
- All leaders set high expectations for staff. The performance of staff is well managed. Areas for staff training are suitably identified and provided for and success is celebrated. The impact of this can be seen in improving outcomes for pupils.
- The headteacher recognises talented staff and supports them to become good leaders. Leaders regularly check how well pupils are learning in lessons and use this information well to review how things are going and where more support is needed. The senior leadership team and middle leaders are making a real impact on improving teaching and learning across the school.
- The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum to support pupils' academic and emotional development. However, the curriculum does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects. Leaders have made a commitment to provide creative teaching for music and performing arts. Pupils benefit from high-quality teaching in these areas, which shows in pupils' enjoyment and engagement in lessons and has improved their language and communication skills.
- A wide range of extra-curricular activities are on offer and are very popular with pupils. The school works in close partnership with a local university and local schools. In addition, the curriculum steers pupils to reflect on society's shared values. For example, pupils recently developed links with a school in Sierra Leone and have donated old uniform to this school.
- Any additional government funds, such as the pupil premium and sport premium, are directed carefully to support pupils' engagement in learning and the progress they make. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress. The impact of this money is carefully monitored by governors. The use of the sports premium has resulted in more opportunities to take part in a wider variety of sports and an improvement in teacher subject knowledge that has improved the quality of PE provision.
- Leaders ensure that pupils feel a strong sense of pride in their school. Values and connections to fundamental British values are highly visible throughout the school, are clearly depicted in the photograph display in the school hall and are lived out by pupils. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning (SMSC) is a well-integrated strand throughout the school curriculum and is threaded through the additional creative and cultural experiences provided. Opportunities are taken to promote SMSC through

assemblies, wall displays and the curriculum.

- The designated leader ensures that those who have special education needs and/or disabilities are very well supported and as a result they make strong progress. Leaders' monitoring ensures that pupils are not placed incorrectly on the special educational needs register. Teaching assistants work very effectively with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, ensuring that they are given both the support and challenge needed to complete the demanding tasks they are set.
- Additional funds to provide support within classrooms for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are used effectively. As a result, these pupils receive effective support and make good progress from their starting points. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds also make good progress from their starting points.
- The local authority has supported the school well by helping to strengthen teaching and leadership by regularly reviewing the school's provision.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective. Governors hold leaders to account because they are well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are proud to be governors at Merton Bank and are passionate about the school's contribution to the local community.
- Governors keep themselves well informed about the school's work and performance. They meet regularly with leaders to analyse information and evaluate the impact of teaching and other aspects of the school's provision.
- They carry out annual performance reviews of the headteacher's work and also assure themselves that appraisal routines within the school operate with sufficient rigour.
- Governors make a significant contribution to improving the school. Many have local knowledge, using this to help the school overcome the many obstacles to learning that pupils face. Governors rigorously evaluate actions aimed at supporting those most in need. They often challenge leaders to do even more to improve outcomes while maintaining the high-quality pastoral care the school offers.
- Governors ensure that there is sufficient funding available to employ the specialist staff required in the school. They have made a commitment to improve the school's contribution to pupils' creative, health and educational needs. Governors oversee the disbursement of pupil premium funding well, holding leaders to account for the impact of additional activities and projects on pupils' outcomes.
- Governors use their knowledge to hold leaders to account and check the school's systems are sufficiently robust. This includes procedures for keeping pupils safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The designated safeguarding lead provides strong leadership and is a champion for the pupils and their needs. There is a high level of commitment from staff and this helps to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

- There is a direct link between policies and practice and the curriculum. Safeguarding practice is well organised and reflects the most up-to-date government legislation.
- The leadership team has clearly prioritised pupils' safety. Staff, parents, pupils and visitors know what to do should a concern arise.
- Designated staff have the necessary expertise and training to help keep pupils safe and ensure that welfare needs are well met. A large proportion of pupils in the school require additional support and they are very effectively supported by all staff.
- Leaders complete all of the statutory checks on staff, governors and visitors and all who work or volunteer at the school understand their duty of care. There is a very active culture of safeguarding at this school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Well-targeted and effective training for teachers and support staff has improved the quality of teaching so that it is now good. The deployment of support staff and other adults in all classes is effective. Teachers and support staff mark and plan work together, resulting in more-focused learning for all pupils.
- The quality of teaching is consistently strong across the school. There is a shared ambition from all staff for pupils to achieve well. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and they use their good subject knowledge effectively. Much of the teaching is interesting and lively. This helps pupils to concentrate well in their lessons and rise to the challenges that they are given. As a result, most pupils make strong progress.
- In all classes, there is a consistent structure for using assessment to inform teaching. No time is wasted in lessons. For example, when taking part in the 'mile walk' during the day, pupils discuss lessons and chant times tables.
- There are short, sharp routines in lessons, which means that pupils who have already mastered a skill or understood a concept are directed to a higher level of challenge. This enables pupils to learn new concepts at a good pace. For middle-ability and less-able pupils, this assessment system works efficiently. For the most able in mathematics, however, this approach at times does not provide sufficient challenge.
- The application of writing across the curriculum is a strength and has resulted in accelerated progress due to the range of activities that pupils experience. For example, when pupils wrote a letter of application to be a centurion in their history topic, this improved writing skills as well as using new knowledge gained in history lessons.
- There is a consistent approach to teaching and learning across the school. Problem-solving is a focus across every year group in mathematics, target-setting is consistent and writing is promoted in a way that pupils respond well to across the school. For example, pupils in Year 3 working on newspaper articles were enthused by writing their own version of 'The boy who cried wolf'.
- Work is well matched to the abilities of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, pupils in Year 6 worked hard to complete work on multiples and factors, showing the perseverance and resilience inherent in pupils at the school.
- Leaders have focused teaching on basic skills and these skills are now taught well,

allowing pupils to make stronger progress. The assessment of pupils' learning is now more accurate, robust and secure. Teachers' assessments of pupils' learning are monitored diligently and moderated attentively to ensure greater accuracy.

- The teaching of reading is good. The curriculum allows pupils to experience a wide of range of opportunities to read. The majority of pupils read appropriate books individually several times every week and there is an evident enthusiasm for reading. However, in a small number of instances some pupils have books that are not suited to their ability.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) has not been as effective as it could be despite new strategies being introduced. The new leader of phonics teaching has introduced new practices and the teaching of phonics is now having a greater impact on pupils' achievement.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- Leaders' work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils have positive attitudes to staying fit and healthy. They enjoy healthy snacks and exercise during the school day, including a daily mile walk. The school's breakfast club is very popular and after-school clubs are oversubscribed due to popularity and the wide range of clubs available.
- Pupils have opportunities to be role models. There is a 'buddy system' which allows pupils to give support to other pupils who join the school at different times during the school year. This scheme helps to ensure that pupils who are new to the school feel welcome.
- Pupils are exceptionally proud of their school and show high levels of respect to staff, pupils and visitors alike. However, a minority of pupils do not always show the same high level of pride in their work.
- The school's safe, caring and nurturing environment ensures that pupils' well-being needs are met effectively. Pupils say that bullying is rare and, if it does happen, it is dealt with fairly and effectively. As a result, pupils feel safe at school.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe. They talk about ways in which they can stay safe. As a result of the high priority that internet safety has across the school, pupils understand how to stay safe when they are online.
- The school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, pupils are eager to discuss their recent den-building to promote awareness for Save the Children.
- Pupils are highly involved in shaping the ethos of the school, through involvement in developing the 'never less than our best' vision to having a voice in the school behaviour system.
- There are well-understood pastoral care and other systems in place which build positive attitudes in school such as kindness and team-building. Pupils are adamant that they can go to any staff and raise concerns. Staying safe and anti-bullying work

are intrinsic within the curriculum and pupils are given opportunities for reflecting on their own behaviour and the behaviour of others.

- Pupils consider their role in society. They have donated old uniform to support a school in Sierra Leone and now have links with the school through a governor. Assembly topics also promote citizenship. For example, pupils took part in a powerful assembly about showing empathy in difficult circumstances. Across the curriculum, pupils have many opportunities to discuss different faiths and diversity.
- Leaders also give a high priority to young carers. As well as a 'young carers awareness' display in the entrance area, the school held a young carers awareness event to raise the profile of this issue across the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Behaviour at playtimes is calm and pupils are well mannered and considerate.
- The reward system provides opportunities for rewards for pupils that behave well and pupil behaviour is celebrated in the school newsletter. Pupils are proud of the school behaviour system as they seek peer-to-peer support first then seek teaching staff if needed. Pupils feel the 'traffic light' system is good and enjoy being part of a 'planet group' from across the school.
- The behaviour policies and procedures are embedded across the curriculum. The school recognises pupils who need additional support and the school's behaviour lead closely monitors systems in school. As a result, previous incidents of poor behaviour have ceased and expectations have been raised. The school has dealt successfully with behavioural issues through the curriculum, which has had a positive effect on learning in the classroom.
- Attendance is below the national average but is improving. Leaders are relentless in improving attendance for groups of pupils and this is beginning to have an impact. Many pupils join and leave the school during the school year and this has a negative impact on attendance figures.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2016, pupils did not make the progress they were capable of. However, current pupils are making strong progress from their starting points. A large majority of pupils are not working at the standards expected for their age when they start key stage 2. The school's performance information and work in pupils' books shows that more pupils are now attaining greater depth across all year groups.
- The effective use of assessment now ensures that pupils' specific and individual needs are identified early, and effective support enables pupils to make stronger progress. Many pupils join and leave the school during the school year. Weaknesses in assessment for mobile pupils affected their progress in the past because accurate starting points were not used to match work to needs. Leaders now have robust assessments in place for these pupils that ensures that they progress at the same rate as other pupils.

- Progress for all groups of pupils across the curriculum and key stages is good overall. Progress in writing is strong across the school. Progress in reading and mathematics is strong overall for most pupils. However, leaders acknowledge there is still more to do in mathematics, especially for the most able mathematicians.
- Additional funds to provide support within classrooms for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are used effectively. As a result, these pupils receive effective support and make good progress from their starting points. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds also make good progress from their starting points.
- Around two thirds of pupils are disadvantaged. Like other pupils, their recent progress in writing is strong compared to the national average. However, progress in reading and mathematics has recently lagged behind that of other pupils nationally. Through the targeted use of pupil premium funding, the school has successfully boosted progress for disadvantaged pupils in reading, but there is still more to do in mathematics in some year groups, especially for most able pupils.
- The proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in the national phonics screening check in 2016 was low. The teaching of phonics has improved this year and more pupils are working at the standard expected for their age. Pupils who do not attain the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 are supported well so that most go on to reach the expected standard in Year 2. However, leaders understand that the legacy of weaker teaching in the past means that a minority of pupils are not able to draw on their phonic knowledge to help them to read as well as they should.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years foundation stage leader is well organised and focused on improvement, especially for outdoor learning. There is an effective action plan in place and priorities are agreed with senior leaders and governors. The plan includes increasing the proportion of children who achieve a good level of development so more are ready for learning in Year 1. Areas for improvement from the last inspection relating to the early years such as improving staff training and outdoor provision have been dealt with well by leaders.
- Questioning enhances children's learning in the setting. Adults take every opportunity to move learning on. Questions such as 'How do you know that car is the fastest?' encourage thinking and communication skills for pupils investigating toy cars travelling down a tunnel. Pupils are given opportunities to solve number problems with apparatus when sorting numbers to 10 and there are well-organised literacy activities such as discussing a storybook about sharing.
- Workshops have been offered by the school to involve parents. These have included mathematics and craft workshops for jewellery-making. As workshops run before class assemblies, more parents than in previous years have been able to attend. As a result, there is more parental involvement in children's learning.
- The starting points for children in the early years are variable because not all children who attend the school Nursery move to the Reception class. However, early years children, including disadvantaged children, make good progress from their starting

points. The gap between disadvantaged and other children has closed.

- The Nursery and Reception classes are dynamic and well-organised settings. Children have the same, effective learning opportunities outdoors as they do within the classroom. Children enjoy learning in the outdoor environment and this has a positive effect of their learning and outcomes.
- The calm atmosphere in the Nursery and Reception classes enable children to gain confidence and behave well. Children are clear about school routines and are enthused by their learning. Children cooperate well with each other, for example when taking turns in using construction equipment.
- Children's activities are varied and focus on learning. Children in the setting are keen to show their work. There are many opportunities for pupils to practise mark-making and counting, such as when recording how many children are present for the register. In the Nursery, children enjoy tallying how many laps of the outdoor bike circuit other children complete.
- Support staff are clear on their roles and are effective in supporting and challenging children in their learning. All adults in the early years ask questions that promote thinking and develop children's language skills.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective and there are no breaches of statutory requirements.

School details

Unique reference number	104784
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10032189

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	220
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Mr William Roberts
Headteacher	Mrs Nicola Kearney
Telephone number	01744 22104
Website	www.mertonbank.st-helens.sch.uk
Email address	mertonbank@sthelens.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 May 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- This is a below average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by pupil premium funding is more than twice the national average.
- Almost all pupils are of white British heritage. There are a small number of pupils 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 set the minimum

expectations for attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.

- A breakfast club is available to pupils. This is managed by the governing body.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons accompanied by members of the leadership team to observe pupils' learning. Shorter visits to classrooms were undertaken to gather evidence about the school's curriculum.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, members of staff, pupils, a group of parents, members of the local governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including that relating to attendance and behaviour, school improvement planning, assessment information, monitoring of teaching, minutes of governing body meetings and local authority reports.
- Inspectors listened to a range of pupils read and met formally with a group of pupils to discuss their learning, behaviour and safety.
- Inspectors looked closely at pupils' work for the current year to inform their judgements about pupils' progress, attainment and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- A review of safeguarding records and procedures was also carried out.

Inspection team

Simon Hunter, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ann Gill

Ofsted Inspector

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