

# Meredale Independent Primary School

Solomon Road, Rainham, Kent ME8 8EB

## Inspection dates

7–9 November 2017

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across the school is variable and not enough is securely good. Teachers do not consistently use assessment information to plan tasks that build on pupils' prior learning well enough.
- Not all teachers have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. In some classes, pupils are given work that is too easy. Teachers do not realise this quickly enough.
- Teachers do not consistently provide feedback in accordance with the school's assessment policy. As a result, pupils do not always know what they need to do to progress in their learning.
- When teaching does not engage pupils well, some pupils lose interest, become distracted and do not participate in learning as well as they could.

### The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is outstanding. Relationships between pupils and staff are strong, and pupils are respectful and tolerant of one another.
- The recently appointed senior leadership team has identified the correct priorities to improve the school and is working hard to address them. It has a clear vision and ambition for staff and pupils.
- Provision in the early years is good. Children make a strong start to their learning and are ready for Year 1.
- Most pupils take pride in their school. They behave extremely well and are respectful to one another and to adults. Pupils enjoy school and attend regularly.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective and ensure that pupils feel safe and secure in the school.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They are developing a good understanding of those from other faiths and cultures and of democracy.
- Pupils' attainment is strong, particularly in mathematics.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## **Full report**

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, by:
  - making sure that teachers plan activities that challenge all pupils, particularly those who are the most able
  - developing strategies to extend the thinking of pupils further in lessons and enable them to make even better progress
  - ironing out any inconsistencies in teaching across year groups.
- Strengthen leadership and management, by:
  - refining the identification process for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and evaluating the impact of provision on pupils' outcomes
  - sharpening the checks that are made on the quality of teaching and assessment to ensure that there is a greater focus on evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' progress
  - improving the impact of subject leadership so that teaching is consistently good and outcomes for pupils are further improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The proprietor and the headteacher know the school's strengths and areas for development well and are determined that pupils will leave the school well equipped for their next stage in their education.
- Leaders have been highly efficient in revising systems and policies to ensure that the school fully complies with all of the independent school standards. Information is readily available and clearly presented.
- The headteacher has developed a strong leadership team that has changed significantly since the last inspection. The recently appointed assistant headteachers have blossomed in their roles and are beginning to see the impact of their work across the school.
- The newly appointed senior leadership team successfully communicates the school's core values based on kindness, honesty, hard work and respect. These 'golden rules' contribute effectively towards developing pupils' understanding of fundamental British values and ensuring that all pupils are treated equally and with respect.
- Leaders have continued to move the school forward since the last inspection. The headteacher has successfully developed the curriculum so that it spans a wide range of subjects at an appropriate depth. Pupils benefit from a number of opportunities to study interesting and engaging topics in a wide range of subjects, such as French, science, physical education and humanities, alongside English and mathematics.
- Senior leaders work well collaboratively. They are becoming more able to spot areas within the school that need improving quickly and intervene straight away. Senior leaders are also alert to finding professional development opportunities for teachers who need to expand their skills or improve other aspects of their practice.
- Most staff and pupils are proud to be a part of the school. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to celebrate their success and for staff to acknowledge this. The 'positive point' system has been highly effective in recognising pupils' efforts and as a result, pupils enjoy learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development improves throughout their time at the school. The rich curriculum provides varied and interesting experiences tailored to meet each pupil's needs. The school's assembly calendar celebrates festivals and events from different faiths. Pupils are encouraged to think about their behaviour during periods of 'reflection' and are heavily involved in the community magistrates' scheme. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- Performance management systems have improved greatly since the last inspection. Robust systems are in place to hold teachers to account for pupils' outcomes, and objectives link explicitly with the school development plan.
- Leaders' regular checks on teaching and pupils' work successfully enable them to identify the school's priorities for improvement. However, leaders do not always ensure that these checks pay enough attention to the progress of current pupils in the school. As a result, the most able pupils are not consistently making the rapid progress that they are capable of in all subjects.

- The assistant headteacher provides thoughtful support for the relatively small proportion of pupils in the school who have SEN and/or disabilities. She has helped to direct teaching assistants' work and to support teachers to improve pupils' access to the curriculum. Her priority is now to ensure that teachers and teaching assistants are appropriately skilled to deliver it.
- Middle leadership is in the early stages of development. Subject leaders have shown initiative by developing their own action plans, and these effectively feed into the school development plan. However, the impact of their work is not clear, as the strategies that subject leaders have introduced have not had sufficient time to embed.

## **Governance**

- Governance arrangements are delivered through the structure of Busy Bees Holdings Ltd. The executive schools lead has supported the senior leadership team to oversee performance management arrangements. This has led to improvements in the quality of professional development that teachers now receive.
- The proprietorial body demonstrates their commitment to the school through their recognition of the need to improve the school environment. They have continued to invest in the facilities at the school to better suit the needs of pupils. The carefully planned playground ensures that pupils benefit from a range of activities during break and lunchtimes that encourage their social and physical development.
- Representatives of the proprietor regularly ask searching questions of leaders to understand how the school is progressing, particularly in terms of the school's financial position. They often carry out visits to the school to see if leaders' work is making the difference that is needed. However, sometimes these visits do not focus sufficiently enough on current pupils' achievement in relation to their starting points.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Detailed policies and procedures are followed consistently by staff and this contributes to the successful safeguarding culture seen in the school.
- Staff receive thorough training on a broad range of safeguarding topics, including honour-based violence, preventing radicalisation, and children missing in education. Staff carefully maintain appropriate risk assessments, and arrangements for checking the suitability of staff are comprehensive.
- Health and safety measures, including the arrangements for fire safety, ensure that the school environment remains safe and secure at all times. Staff consistently follow the school's procedure for administering pupils' medication.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Requires improvement**

- Several changes in teaching staff since the last inspection have meant that the changes introduced by leaders to improve the quality of teaching across the school are not yet embedded.

- Teachers' expectations of pupils vary across the different year groups and key stages. In some classes, teachers set challenging work that deepens pupils' thinking. In other classes, expectations are too low and pupils spend time completing work that is too easy for them.
- Teachers do not use the information they have about what pupils can do, know and understand, to plan work that challenges them. As a result, the most able pupils do not always make the progress that they are capable of achieving.
- Teaching assistants provide good-quality pastoral guidance and care for pupils. However, they do not consistently focus closely enough on pupils' learning. Consequently, the impact of their work on pupils' academic outcomes is limited.
- Teachers do not routinely follow the school's assessment and feedback policy. They provide positive feedback to acknowledge pupils' good efforts but guidance on how to improve or move pupils' learning on is variable across year groups and subjects. As a result, some pupils do not learn as rapidly as they could.
- Some teachers and teaching assistants use skilful questioning to help pupils reflect on and reshape their work. In these classes and groups, there are high expectations of the quality of work that pupils produce and progress is stronger as a result.
- Elements of stronger teaching are evident across the school, for example where teachers have created a highly focused, challenging and stimulating learning environment. In these classes, pupils speak confidently about their learning and tackle demanding activities independently. Evidence of this was seen in a Year 6 mathematics class where pupils were developing their justification and reasoning skills through strong questioning from the teacher that probed pupils' thinking.
- Positive learning attitudes are apparent across the school and this contributes to the purposeful learning environment seen in most classes. Where teaching does not meet the needs of individual pupils, learning is not as focused and low-level disruption is evident.
- Teachers set homework to support pupils' key reading, mathematical and spelling skills. Pupils complete this conscientiously, and parents are positive about the impact that this has on their children's learning.
- Helpfully, parents receive regular information from the school about their children's progress in all areas of the curriculum. Parents appreciate this and are confident about how to support their children's learning at home.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils feel very safe and well looked after by staff, a view shared by the overwhelming majority of parents. One parent commented, 'My child is happy and very secure in the school environment.'
- Pupils say that there is no bullying and any name-calling is dealt with very quickly by staff. The large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, have confidence in the school's systems to tackle such behaviour. Pupils have total confidence in staff to help and support them should they have any concerns.

- Pupils are resilient and self-confident. They feel secure to say that they do not understand something in lessons because this is not viewed by staff or pupils as a weakness. Parents who spoke to an inspector felt their children's confidence and self-esteem have improved greatly since they started the school.
- The systematic and thorough approach to managing educational visits and trips contributes to pupils' safety and well-being, while ensuring they receive a broad range of opportunities to learn in different ways. One parent commented: 'The residential trips each year allow the children to become more independent and increase their confidence. The children have many opportunities at this school that are simply not available at other similar schools.'
- Pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe online because of effective teaching about potential risks communicated effectively through assemblies and the personal, social, and health education curriculum at the school.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Inside and outside of the school, pupils demonstrate their good manners and respectful behaviour towards each other and visitors. They line up quietly and quickly when asked, for example when going out to the playground.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are typically positive. They move quickly to start work and rarely need reminding to focus their attention. However, not all pupils display consistently positive attitudes in lessons; some lose focus and concentration because of poor teaching that does not consistently challenge them.
- Most pupils want to come to school and attend well. Leaders have worked effectively to secure overall attendance rates that are in line with national standards. However, the proportion of current pupils who are persistently absent is high.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Due to the extra tuition that pupils receive outside of the school and elements of strong teaching within the school that help pupils to catch up by the time they leave, pupils' outcomes are good. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The school's internal information for 2016 shows that pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average on leaving the school. However, pupils' progress from their different starting points in writing did not replicate this strength.
- At key stage 1, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is broadly in line with the national average, although the most able pupils attained scores that exceeded age-related expectations in mathematics.
- Outcomes in phonics for pupils in Year 1 vary from year to year. This is partly due to the small cohorts and the number of pupils that join the school throughout the academic year. Pupils currently in the school are making secure progress in phonics.

- The most able pupils show a higher level of knowledge, understanding and skills. However, the level of challenge these pupils receive from teachers is inconsistent. This means that the most able pupils do not consistently make rapid progress from their starting points.
- Pupils currently in the school, and in the upper school in particular, are making strong progress in mathematics due to the strong teaching they receive in Years 5 and 6. Pupils' attainment in mathematics is not yet as strong as it is in reading and writing but this is improving quickly.
- The school promotes reading regularly and effectively. Pupils read with enjoyment and they do so both at home and in school. Most pupils use their phonics skills well to decode unfamiliar words.
- Most parents are positive about the progress and attainment of pupils. They appreciate the support that staff offer pupils to help them reach their potential.

### Early years provision

**Good**

- The early years provision is good because teaching is among the strongest in the school. Children flourish in their development and settle down to well-established routines, enjoying their learning in a secure, encouraging and cultivating environment.
- Children get off to a fine start to school life in the Reception class. Most children transfer to the school from the nursery provision on the same site. The early years leader works closely with parents and staff from the nursery to ease children's transition into the setting. As a result, the move from nursery to Reception is seamless.
- Children enter Reception with skills and abilities that are above those that are typical for their age. Leaders track children's achievements closely and use this information to plan appropriate activities that meet most pupils' needs. Consequently, children's outcomes are above those of other children nationally and they are well prepared for Year 1.
- Good teaching helps children to secure the skills they need to develop their knowledge of pure sounds. The consistent and systematic approach to teaching phonics is highly effective and children make strong progress in reading over time as a result.
- Staff have developed strong partnerships with parents. All the parents who spoke to inspectors were very positive about their children's experiences and progress through Reception. Reflecting the views of many, one parent commented: 'My child has settled in well to Reception and he is learning and developing faster than I expected.'
- All staff are trained appropriately to check that children are well-cared-for and safe. They work closely with parents and other agencies to support the welfare of children both at home and at school.
- Children benefit from a high-quality environment that develops their curiosity and imagination. They play happily together for the most part and communicate well with adults and other children. However, the activities available to children in the outdoor area are not always used sufficiently to develop children's learning across a range of areas.



## School details

Unique reference number	134858
DfE registration number	887/6007
Inspection number	10039161

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	77
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Busy Bees Holdings Ltd
Chair	Karen Mackay
Headteacher	Michelle Homer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,615–£7,443
Telephone number	01634 231405
Website	<a href="http://www.meredale.kent.sch.uk">www.meredale.kent.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:schooloffice@meredaleindependent.com">schooloffice@meredaleindependent.com</a>
Date of previous inspection	2–4 December 2014

## Information about this school

- Meredale Independent School is an independent co-educational day school. There are currently 77 pupils on roll aged from four to 11. The school is owned by Busy Bees Holdings Ltd.
- The school was first registered with the Department for Education in September 2004. The school's last standard inspection was in December 2014, when the school was judged to provide a good standard of education. The school was subject to an emergency inspection in December 2016 as the result of a complaint against the school.
- The school shares its site with a separately registered nursery, operated by the same



provider.

- Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing at both senior- and middle-leadership levels. The current headteacher is now also responsible for overseeing the nursery provision on the same site.
- The school is non-selective. It aims to provide a rich and engaging school experience where pupils reach their full potential, enabling them to gain entry into grammar schools in Medway or Kent.
- There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made visits to observe learning in 22 lessons. The majority of these visits were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- When visiting classrooms, inspectors observed aspects of the lessons that were taking place, but focused particularly on gathering evidence about what teaching and learning is typically like over time. This included scrutinising the work in pupils' books and on display, talking with pupils about their learning and hearing them read.
- Inspectors took the school's assessments of pupils' progress into account and considered leaders' evaluations about the quality of teaching over time.
- Inspectors met formally and informally with a wide range of people to gather further evidence. This included pupils, parents, staff, school leaders and a representative of the proprietorial body.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of the school's documentation and records, including particular scrutiny of those relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of responses to the Ofsted surveys of pupils' and staff's views. There were 26 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, which included 24 written comments. Views from parents, staff and pupils were also gathered informally and formally throughout the inspection and considered alongside this evidence.

## Inspection team

Emma Sanderson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Teresa Davies

Ofsted Inspector

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