

Mendell Primary School

Allport Lane, Bromborough, Wirral, Merseyside CH62 7HN

Inspection dates

14–15 May 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Instability in leadership and staffing and weak teaching in the past mean that there are many gaps in pupils' learning. Although pupils are now making more progress, their attainment is still below average by the end of Year 6.
- In mathematics, the most and least able pupils are not given sufficiently demanding work.
- The quality of writing in subjects other than English does not reflect the standards of which the pupils are capable.
- The standard of pupils' presentation and handwriting is too variable within classes and across the school.
- The additional funding to develop physical education (PE) and sport is leading to improvements. However, the school does not have clear measures to assess the precise impact of the work in this area.

The school has the following strengths

- Since their appointment almost two years ago, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have provided very strong leadership. This has led to clear improvements in most aspects of the school's work.
- The governors are knowledgeable and committed. They have provided continuity during a turbulent period in the school's history. They have recruited strong senior leaders and supported them in eliminating weak teaching and in stabilising staffing.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They plan lessons well, make good use of questioning and present high challenges for most pupils. They work very effectively with teaching assistants to support pupils' learning.
- Safeguarding is effective and pupils are safe at the school. The school provides appropriate support for families who need extra help.
- The curriculum is well organised. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well.
- Pupils behave well in and around the school. In lessons, pupils of all ages work with great concentration.
- The results from the Year 1 phonics screening check have improved dramatically. They are above the national averages.
- Provision in the early years continues to be good and children make good progress during their time there.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that, in mathematics, pupils of all abilities, including the most and least able, are appropriately challenged.
- Ensure that standards of writing in subjects other than English reflect the best which pupils are capable of producing.
- Improve pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work further, so they are consistently good across the school.
- Produce clear measures to assess the precise impact of the physical education and sport funding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Over the past five years, the school has faced considerable upheaval. There have been three changes of senior leadership and a very high turnover of staff. The pupils in key stage 2, for example, have had 12 or more teachers during their time at the school. This lack of continuity has led to many gaps in pupils' learning. As a result, they have not made the progress or reached the standards of which they are capable by the time they leave Year 6.
- Since their appointment nearly two years ago, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked very successfully together to make considerable improvements to the school. As a result, leadership and management and the quality of teaching and learning are now good. At the same time, they have succeeded in maintaining the good provision in the early years while ensuring that pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare continues to be a strength of the school. Leaders have done this by setting high goals and clear priorities for improvement in all aspects of the school's life. They lead by example and place a high emphasis on working with staff to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement. As a result, there is a shared understanding across the school that the main focus now must be on raising expectations and providing pupils of all abilities with high challenges, so that outcomes also become good.
- The senior leaders have placed considerable emphasis on developing the role of subject leaders. They have provided them with a range of relevant training and worked with them on joint observations of lessons and examination of pupils' work. Subject leaders have also been helped to develop their skills in providing focused, rigorous and helpful feedback to their colleagues. As a result, they now have a clear understanding of what the quality of teaching and learning is in their subjects and what needs to be done to bring about further improvements. Through a carefully planned programme, they know precisely which aspects of learning and teaching need to be checked when.
- Side-by-side with the development of middle leaders, the senior leaders have established a very rigorous programme to check the quality of teaching. This provides all teachers with a very clear understanding of how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve their practice further.
- Staff have welcomed this support and direction and morale is high. All those who completed the online questionnaire said that they enjoy working at the school and are proud to do so. They all say that the school is well led and managed and has improved since the last inspection; views that were echoed by several parents and carers.
- To check on the accuracy of their judgements on the school's progress, the senior leaders have commissioned three independent reviews. As a result, they have a secure understanding of how well their plans are being implemented and what further work needs to be done.
- The curriculum is well organised to ensure continuity and development in pupils' learning in each subject of the national curriculum. To support and extend the work completed in lessons, the school has a very carefully planned programme of supplementary activities, such as attendance at a workshop at the local art gallery and

visits from members of the community to share their reminiscences of local life in the past.

- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils study the major world religions and visit places of worship. They have regular opportunities to grapple with challenging moral questions, such as whether it would be right to steal water if they were dying of thirst, or whether one should save one member of one's family as opposed to a large number of strangers. They develop their social awareness by, for example, contributing to the leadership of the school through their membership of the school or eco councils, or as prefects and class representatives. They also have a range of opportunities to visit museums, art galleries and to attend musical concerts.
- The additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used effectively. The school can demonstrate how the extra help provided for particular pupils is leading to measurable improvements in their progress. The physical education and sport funding is also being used imaginatively, not only to increase participation in physical activities but also to increase pupils' confidence and self-esteem. However, leaders do not have specific targets against which the precise impact of this work can be measured.

Governance of the school

- The governors are knowledgeable and committed. They have been closely involved with the school since it was first judged to require improvement and have provided much-needed continuity during a very turbulent time. The governors are ambitious in their aims but realistic in their evaluation of how far the school has progressed. They are very clear about what still remains to be done. They have succeeded in recruiting very strong staff to the senior leadership roles and have supported them in making difficult but necessary decisions to eliminate inadequate teaching in the school. They have also ensured that the school now has an effective, committed and stable workforce.
- The way that the governing body is organised ensures that all members have a high level of shared understanding of the school and the issues that it faces.
- At the start of the inspection, the school's website was not fully compliant. However, this was very promptly rectified.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Parents, teachers and pupils are confident that children are safe at the school. The pupils who met with the lead inspector said that they are happy and safe at the school. Most of them also feel safe on the way to and from school. Pupils are taught about the potential dangers of using the internet and social media and know what to do if they encounter any inappropriate material. All pupils learn to swim, so that that they are safe near water. They are also taught about road and rail safety and what to do in the event of a fire.
- All staff and governors have received the required safeguarding training. The key messages from the training are prominently displayed in posters around the school. All

the staff interviewed by the inspectors knew how to identify possible signs of abuse and what to do if they have any concerns about a child's welfare.

- Leaders take great care over the welfare of staff as well as that of the pupils. The staff who completed the online questionnaire said that leaders are considerate of their well-being and ensure that their workload is manageable.
- The school has stringent systems to check on the suitability of adults to work with children and all visitors are carefully vetted. The site is secure and access to the building is carefully controlled. Leaders are careful to ensure that appropriate risk assessments are conducted. One such assessment relates to a family of foxes that has moved into the school field. An expert was brought in to ensure that there is no danger to the pupils and also to teach them to consider the welfare of the animals. This has developed into an interesting project where, for example, pupils are able to follow the growth and development of the fox cubs through video monitors.
- The school works very closely with external agencies to provide appropriate support for families and children who need additional help. The headteacher is unremitting in ensuring that any cases brought to the attention of social care services are dealt with effectively. However, in the case of children looked after, not all the personal education plans are up to date because the local authority has not provided the necessary information on time.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since their appointment, the senior leaders have worked hard and successfully to stabilise staffing and to eradicate poor teaching. They have done this through a rigorous programme of training and support. In addition, they have established very clear principles that all staff are expected to follow. As a result, there is a good level of consistency in the quality of teaching across the school.
- Lessons are well structured and form part of a coherent sequence of activities which build on pupils' existing knowledge, skills and understanding and extend them further. The teachers have good subject knowledge and they draw effectively on their training to capture pupils' interest and enthusiasm.
- There is a consistent focus on ensuring that pupils extend their general vocabulary as well as their command of technical terminology. In key stage 1, for example, the teacher prepared the pupils carefully for a mathematics activity where they were expected to work together on completing a range of calculations. The teacher ensured that they understood and could apply words such as 'collaboratively', 'cooperation' and 'strategies'. A child who referred to 'take away', was challenged to use alternatives such as 'minus' or 'subtract'. Similar instances were seen elsewhere in the school.
- The teachers make very good use of questioning to help pupils clarify their thinking, identify and correct errors or misconceptions and to extend their understanding.
- The teachers are very adaptable and have the confidence and range of ideas and techniques to enable them to respond quickly and effectively to unexpected interruptions to a lesson while maintaining pupils' concentration and interest.
- Teachers present high challenges for most of their pupils. In key stage 2, for example, pupils worked very effectively alone, in pairs and in groups to identify ways of

developing and improving their writing. They were encouraged to use wider vocabulary and more complex sentence constructions to convey a sense of mood and to capture the reader's attention. In science, pupils worked on tasks of varying levels of difficulty to extend their understanding of the circulatory system.

- Work seen in pupils' books and in classrooms indicates that the same level of challenge is not consistently found in mathematics. There, the most able and least able pupils are not stretched sufficiently. This is reflected in the end of key stage mathematics results which tend to be lower than in other subjects. An impressive element of the teaching in the school is the close collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants. They work flexibly and efficiently together to ensure that pupils receive appropriate help in a timely way.
- The school uses different types of homework to reinforce pupils' learning. These range from weekly spelling and multiplication tests to half-termly projects related to specific themes. In completing these, pupils are encouraged to work with their families. It was clear from displays around the school and electronic records of pupils' work that parents and grandparents are as much enthused by these projects as the pupils themselves.
- Teachers have high expectations in terms of pupils' behaviour. The clear routines they have established ensure that pupils behave very well in lessons. Pupils listen carefully and work with concentration. They move quickly and without fuss from one activity to the next, so that no time is lost. They can be trusted to keep focusing on their work, even when they are not being directly observed by a member of staff. Pupils clearly enjoy learning and several of those who met with the lead inspector said that this was the aspect of school they valued most.
- Since taking up post, the senior leaders have made radical revisions to the assessment process. Now, the senior leaders and class teachers meet regularly to assess how well the pupils in each class are progressing towards their individual targets. These targets have been made more demanding, in order to increase the rate of progress and compensate for the underperformance resulting from weak teaching in the past. The accuracy of the assessments is checked by staff within the school, as well as by external consultants and colleagues from other schools. As a result, leaders have a clear view of how well pupils are performing and which pupils need what type of additional support to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Considerable emphasis is placed on developing pupils' ability to think through issues and develop their own views. As a result, they can debate well and know how to listen to others' opinions, even when they do not necessarily agree with them.
- Pupils of different abilities and ages relate well to each other. This was evident in the meeting with the inspector where younger pupils questioned older pupils and helped each other to clarify their ideas.

- Through work in classrooms and assemblies and through presentations from visitors to the school, pupils are helped to extend their horizons. Recently, for example, a visit by a female doctor and women police and fire officers challenged gender stereotypes about the workplace. Work with the local business community has also helped raise pupils' awareness of how the economy functions, how they benefit from it and how they can eventually contribute to it.
- The school runs a variety of activities to build up pupils' resilience and increase their self-esteem. These have had a positive impact. For example, pupils who previously found it difficult to deal with not always winning now have the strategies to cope with this. At the same time, they maintain their motivation to succeed.
- The school has a stringent system for checking on any allegations of bullying and for combating it when it does occur. The pupils who met with inspectors said that bullying does occasionally happen but is dealt with promptly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school has recently produced a new behaviour policy, based on the three principles of 'Be ready. Be respectful. Be safe.' There is a clear system of rewards and penalties which is well understood by the pupils and applied consistently by staff. Through the electronic communication system, parents receive immediate notification when their children have misbehaved or been complimented for their efforts.
- In the classroom, pupils behave well. They get down to their work promptly and show high levels of concentration. On the playground, they respond quickly to calls to line up or other instructions from staff. They relate well to each other. As well as playing football and other sports, they enjoy making up new games with their own rules.
- The pupils are respectful towards each other. On more than one occasion, pupils were heard thanking each other for help that they had received from their friends. They also relate well to adults and are happy to engage in conversation with them. Pupils hold doors open for others, unprompted.
- In the school dining hall, behaviour is good. However, the volume of noise is high, partly because of the acoustics, and it is difficult for pupils to conduct the calm conversations of which they are capable.
- The school has clear systems for promoting good attendance. The improvements over the past three years are being maintained in the current academic year. The school takes care to monitor not only overall attendance but also the attendance of specific individuals or groups of pupils. As a result, the level of persistent absence in the school has fallen. In addition to monitoring attendance, leaders also check on lateness and prompt action is taken to deal with this.
- In addition to the behaviour policy, the school has introduced a code of conduct for adults as well as pupils. This is prominently displayed around the school and its application clearly contributes to the calm, friendly, respectful atmosphere in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Require improvement

- Leaders have succeeded in making many improvements to the school over the past two years but it is too early to see the full impact of their work. Despite improvements in the quality of teaching and in pupils' progress, the legacy of weak teaching in the past means that outcomes are not yet good.
- One exception to this is the improvement to pupils' phonics knowledge and skills. In 2016 and 2017, the proportion of Year 1 pupils who reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check was below the national average. Last year, however, there was a dramatic improvement and phonics screening check results rose to above the national averages. The school's figures indicate that pupils currently in Year 1 are performing at least as well as their counterparts at this time last year. In the phonics work seen during the inspection, pupils were able to use their skills to read familiar and unfamiliar words accurately. They also worked independently and successfully on writing short sentences to describe the life cycle of the caterpillar.
- Attainment at the end of key stage 1 has generally been below average over the past three years. The proportion of pupils gaining the expected standard in reading and mathematics has been in the lowest 20% of schools nationally. Although there has been some improvement from one year to the next, it has not been enough to bring pupils' attainment up to the national average. The school's figures show that, as a result of better teaching, the progress of pupils currently in key stage 1 is now improving. This is supported by the work seen in pupils' books and in classrooms.
- During the inspection, key stage 1 pupils of all abilities read with ease and confidence, applying their phonics skills successfully to decipher unfamiliar words. Records show that they read a large number of books and online texts. They clearly enjoy this and are very keen to talk about what they have read. In mathematics, current pupils are also making stronger progress, especially when they are given challenges appropriate to their abilities. However, this is not yet a consistent aspect of mathematics teaching.
- From 2017 to 2018, pupils' attainment in writing and mathematics declined from average to below average by the end of Year 6. In reading, it improved to be in line with the national average. However, pupils' progress in all three subjects was below or well below average. Given the frequent changes of teachers, the lack of continuity in pupils' experiences and the resulting gaps in learning, this is not surprising. Leaders are working hard to compensate for the situation. Their figures show that pupils' progress is now increasing but is likely to take some time before results are consistently in line with, or better than, national averages. The impact of improved teaching is, however, evident in the work of current key stage 2 pupils, particularly in reading and writing.
- The key stage 2 pupils who read to the inspectors did so with confidence, clarity and expression. They read widely, enjoy doing so and can talk coherently about the texts that they have read. Written work also shows improvement. For example, prose work produced by Year 4 pupils on a circus theme showed that they could make confident use of a range of grammatical conventions and wide vocabulary to produce vivid and arresting descriptions. The poems written by Year 6 pupils showed effective use of figurative language, rhyme and rhythm to convey great sensitivity of mood.
- The quality of the written work in subjects other than English has improved but does

not yet consistently reflect the standard of which the pupils are capable. This is an area for improvement. Leaders have put increasing focus on improving the presentation of work. However, the full impact of this is still to be seen. Within the same class, handwriting and presentation can range from excellent to scruffy. Too often, the written work in mathematics lacks precision because pupils have not, for example, used rulers to draw diagrams. Presentation is, therefore, also an area for improvement.

Early years provision

Good

- Early years provision was good at the time of the last inspection and continues to be so. The current leader is well qualified and experienced and has well-constructed plans to build on, and develop, the strong performance in this area.
- On entry to the Nursery, many children have knowledge, skills and understanding that are below those typical for their age. The assessments made by staff are independently checked for accuracy. They provide a strong basis for planning activities that strengthen children's progress. As a result, by the time they leave the early years, the majority of children are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The proportion of children gaining a good level of development by the end of Reception has shown consistent improvement since the last inspection, rising from below average in 2016 to above average in 2018. The school's information shows that the children currently in the early years are progressing at least as well as their predecessors at this time last year.
- Staff work very closely with parents, even before their children enter the early years. This ensures that any additional help that a child needs can be identified early and provided in a timely way. Once the children have arrived at school, their parents receive daily updates on their progress. They also receive advice and training on how they can support their children's development at home, for example by helping them to read. Responses to the Ofsted's online questionnaire showed how much parents appreciate this.
- The environment in and outside the classroom is attractive and stimulating and resources are organised well to support learning. The quality of teaching is good. The teachers plan the work very carefully and build on their assessments to help the children develop further. The teachers make very good use of questioning to help children think for themselves and to present them with challenges. The children respond well to this. For example, in the Nursery, they were challenged to order number cubes into a tower. They worked on this independently and with concentration. They counted out the numbers accurately and succeeded in ordering them correctly from one to 12. In Reception, they were able to use their phonics skills to read and write words and simple sentences for themselves.
- Because they enjoy the activities presented to them, the children work hard and behave well.
- Safeguarding in the early years is effective and the statutory welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	105017
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	10057914

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	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Carubia
Headteacher	Catherine O'Neill Edwards
Telephone number	01513 341432
Website	www.mendell.wirral.sch.uk/
Email address	schooloffice@mendell.wirral.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	November 2016

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for SEND is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through pupil premium funding is well above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors carried out observations of learning in all year groups. Some of these were joint observations with the headteacher.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including: the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; records of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning; assessment information; attendance information; and records connected with the safeguarding of children.
- The inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, other members of staff, the chair and other members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, parents and pupils.
- The inspectors listened to pupils read and examined pupils' work in a range of subjects.
- The inspectors evaluated the 43 responses to Parent View and the 20 responses to the online staff survey.

Inspection team

Aelwyn Pugh, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Howard Bousfield

Ofsted Inspector

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