

Inspection of a good school: Merryfields School

Hoon Avenue, Newcastle, Staffordshire ST5 9NY

Inspection dates:

14–15 January 2020

Outcome

Merryfields School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Merryfields School is a very special place, where pupils and staff work well together. Pupils thrive, because cheerful staff provide good-quality care and well-planned lessons. Pupils get the support they need so that barriers to learning are overcome quickly. Developing communication skills is a priority. Pupils find their 'voice' quickly, while staff listen to make sure pupils are heard and valued.

Pupils behave well in classes, around the school and at playtimes. This is because staff understand the individual needs of the pupils well. They create a calm, inclusive atmosphere which helps pupils to feel safe and secure. Bullying is very rare. Any that does happen is dealt with quickly by leaders.

The school's new motto of 'Nurturing a love of learning for life' is the cornerstone of everything they do. Pupils are valued as individuals, and this inspires learning. The choir is a strength of the school. Here pupils find their voice, sign clearly and sing tunefully.

Staff go the extra mile to make sure learning makes a difference out of the school as well as in the school. Parents and carers feel that Merryfields is an 'excellent family'. We agree.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Children get off to a great start at Merryfields. This is because staff in the early years get to know the children's individual needs well. Quality individual care means that children feel safe and are safe. Play sessions nurture early friendships between children. Children learn the communication, physical and personal skills they need to be successful later in the school.

All pupils have lessons in a range of different subjects. Leaders make sure not only that these lessons teach the right skills, but that pupils can apply these in the world outside the school. Regular visits to the local shops, library and park provide opportunities for the pupils to practise their new-found skills.

Making sure pupils are able to communicate is a priority for all staff. Skilled staff work with speech and language therapists to make sure pupils have the right communication systems to give them their 'voice'. This might include picture exchange systems, signing or using technology. Leaders have now identified that more needs to be done to ensure that more-able pupils develop a greater understanding and use of language.

When pupils are ready to do so, they learn to read. Before this, teachers work hard to make sure pupils have right skills to be ready to enjoy books. This includes developing attention and listening for sounds. Teachers inspire pupils by reading to them each day. This enthuses pupils to read themselves. Regular planned visits to the community library provide opportunities for the pupils to choose books. While most staff are experts in teaching the pupils how to read, others are not yet as skilful.

In mathematics, pupils achieve well, because teachers carefully match learning to what the pupils already know. Carefully planned opportunities to revisit previous learning help pupils to remember more. In addition, lessons provide lots of real-life opportunities to apply knowledge and skills, so pupils can use their mathematics skills outside of the classroom. However, some more-able pupils find the work too easy. Leaders are now looking at ways that these pupils could be challenged more.

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a strength. Carefully planned lessons make sure pupils learn how to be safe, healthy and active. Lunchtimes are used to teach pupils about healthy choices and socialising with others. They are taught about different types of bullying and what to do if it happens. Lessons on online safety and road safety are common.

Staff work hard to make sure pupils are ready for the world around them. Events such as enterprise week, 'odd sock' day and charity fundraising prompt pupils to try new things and broaden their outlook on life. An impressive range of clubs provide pupils with opportunities to dance, cook and become champion table cricketers.

Pupils behave well and are keen to learn. The school is calm and orderly throughout the day. This is because leaders make sure the reasons for behaviour are understood and the right plan is put in place. Therapies such as nurture groups and drawing and talking therapy support pupils to manage their own behaviour.

Strong leaders inspire the staff. Staff feel supported by leaders who are mindful of their well-being, while also being ambitious for all pupils. They are proud to be members of staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff know that keeping pupils safe is their top priority. Leaders have trained staff well. As a result, staff know the signs that pupils might not be safe. Staff pass on to leaders

any concerns they have. Leaders deal with these appropriately, bringing in external help when required. Pupils and families therefore get the high-quality support they need.

All safeguarding policies and procedures are clear and well understood by staff. Staff keep secure and detailed records relating to child protection. Leaders and governors make sure that all required pre-employment checks are in place.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Overall, the teaching of phonics and reading is effective. The teaching of phonics and reading has been rightly prioritised by leaders. As a result, some skilled staff make sure that pupils learn to read and develop their comprehension and fluency. However, not all staff are as proficient as others in using the right strategies to develop reading. To improve reading further, leaders should ensure that all staff are equally expert in making use of the good-quality training they have received.
- While all pupils are making progress, some of the more able could be challenged to achieve greater progress. Leaders have made sure that the individual needs of pupils are well met, and that learning is accurately based on what the pupils already know. However, a small group of the most able pupils do not move on quickly enough to achieve even greater progress. Leaders need to ensure that the work given to the more able pupils is suitably ambitious.

Background

When we have judged a special school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 27 March 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	143897
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10111819
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	106
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of the local academy board	David Humphries
Headteacher	Neil Brannigan
Website	www.merryfields.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- A new headteacher took up post in September 2018.
- A new governing body has been formed from September 2018, and a new chair of governors was elected at this time.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, we focused on the following subjects: reading, communication and language, mathematics and PSHE. In these subjects, we visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, examined teachers' plans and talked with pupils and staff about the way these subjects were taught. We also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- We examined external performance data about the school and looked at school documents. These included information about behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum and improvement planning. We also checked the school website.
- We asked pupils, staff, leaders and trustees about safeguarding arrangements. We examined the record of employment checks on school staff and looked at other school records. We also found out about safety procedures and routines.

- We observed informal times of the day, to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, we had formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, governors, teachers and pupils. We also talked informally with parents, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life. One inspector spoke to a representative from the Multi Academy Trust.

Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Martin Pye

Her Majesty's Inspector

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