

Inspection of a good school: Merriott First School

Church Street, Merriott, Somerset TA16 5PT

Inspection date: 9 June 2021

Outcome

Merriott First School continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that one or more areas may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Merriott First School is a welcoming environment where staff and pupils feel valued. Pupils behave well because staff have established routines and have clear expectations. The school's values underpin the positive way in which pupils work together. Pupils say that they know how to be a good friend to others and show genuine consideration for the well-being of their peers.

Staff respond to the rare incidents of poor behaviour sensitively and effectively. Pupils are delighted to receive praise for the things they have done well. Staff also provide opportunities for pupils to have quiet reflection time. This supports pupils' mental well-being further.

Pupils say that they enjoy school and consequently attend regularly. They also say that bullying is not something they worry about. They understand the difference between this and the minor disagreements they might have with their friends.

Pupils make a positive contribution to their community, such as through links with the local farm shop and the church. Leaders value the importance of pupils broadening their horizons. This means that pupils regularly take part in activities which extend their appreciation of the richness and diversity of the world beyond their locality.

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

Leaders and governors share a strong commitment and ambition for the school. Governors understand and fulfil their responsibilities. Leaders are considerate of staff workload. Staff are positive about their experience of working at the school.

Governors meet with leaders regularly to discuss plans to improve the school. However, these plans lack the detail needed to set out precisely what leaders intend to do and by

when, particularly to improve the curriculum. This makes it difficult for governors to check whether leaders are on track to meet their objectives and whether timescales are realistic. When governors visit the school, they do not reflect enough on what they have learned about the impact of leaders' actions.

Subject leadership is developing but leaders have not identified the important things that pupils need to know clearly enough. This work has been stalled by the impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus). There is a lack of clarity about why topics are studied in a particular order and why some activities are selected over others. For example, in history, pupils study disconnected historical episodes that do not build on what they have done before. This means that pupils do not understand important historical ideas fully.

Leaders have made greater headway in the teaching of mathematics and early reading. In mathematics, a well-organised curriculum supports pupils to improve their knowledge in a logical way. Nonetheless, the success with which teachers put the plans into practice is variable. When it is done well, pupils talk confidently about how they go about spotting mathematical patterns and solving problems. Where practice is less secure, teachers do not always get to the root cause of some pupils' mathematical misunderstandings which could then persist in the long term.

Younger pupils learn to read well through a newly introduced and well-structured programme, starting in the Reception Year. Pupils, including those who were previously reluctant, now read books regularly. These are matched well to their understanding of letters and the sounds they represent. Pupils' accuracy and fluency in reading are improving as a result. Older pupils, who have gaps in their understanding of phonics, receive support and are beginning to catch up as a result.

Pupils say that they enjoy reading. Some told us that they are often, 'glued into their book'. Nonetheless, leaders have not built on this enjoyment of reading to encourage pupils to read widely well enough. There is a lack of an understanding and consistent approach to how teachers can develop pupils' reading over time. Therefore, some pupils do not read a wide range of literature or are not confident in their reading knowledge and skills. Leaders have plans in place to address this, but actions have been hindered by the impact of COVID-19.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well using strategies that work for them. Overall, the support is having a positive impact on these pupils, who are able to access the curriculum and achieve success.

Despite the challenges that the national restrictions have presented, staff continue to provide rich and memorable experiences that support pupils' wider development. Pupils participate in activities that support their physical development, encourage a healthy lifestyle, and broaden their cultural understanding.

In discussion with the headteacher, we agreed that the actions that leaders have taken to improve reading and the wider curriculum may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have received training so that they recognise signs that pupils might be at risk of harm. Staff use the school system appropriately to report concerns. Leaders keep detailed records of the actions they have taken as a result and follow up on agreed actions where necessary. Staff keep a close eye on pupils who they know to be vulnerable and are aware of potential risks in the community.

Where necessary, leaders work with specially trained staff and with external professionals to make sure that pupils and families get the support they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Subject leaders have not planned the content and sequencing of the curriculum well enough. Therefore, teachers are not clear about what pupils should know and by when so that pupils can build their knowledge over time. Leaders need to identify, sequence, and prioritise the key knowledge that they expect pupils to remember across the whole curriculum.
- The reading curriculum is not planned well enough to develop pupils' higher-level reading skills. Consequently, pupils do not develop their understanding of comprehension, inference, and analysis in a systematic way. Leaders need to extend their plans to help pupils become more effective readers as they move through key stage 1 and into key stage 2.
- Leaders' strategic plans are not specific enough. Therefore, both leaders and governors are not able to pinpoint distinctly whether actions are working, who is checking this, and whether timescales are realistic. Governors need to ensure that plans are sufficiently precise so that they can support, challenge and question leaders with rigour.

Background

When we have judged a 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 or outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good 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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 1 December 2010.

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 information from Parent View 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 [here](#).

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	123654
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10196700
Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Rosemary Tutchter
Headteacher	Anne Higginbotham
Website	https://merriottfirstschool.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	17 March 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Merriott First School is a local authority maintained school. Currently, it has an intake of pupils from Reception Year to Year 4. From September 2022, the age range will be extended to include pupils in Years 5 and 6.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with representatives from the governing body. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors also met with senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, and a group of staff.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, and history. They discussed the curriculum design with leaders, carried out lesson visits, scrutinised pupils' work, and spoke to pupils and teachers from the lessons visited.

- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding, checked the school's single central register, and scrutinised policies relating to safeguarding and pupils' behaviour. An inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and reviewed a sample of case files.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Furthermore, inspectors spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their school.
- Inspectors considered seven responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 10 responses to the staff survey issued at the time of the inspection. A letter was received from a local childminder during the inspection.

Inspection team

Sarah McGinnis, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tracey Reynolds

Her Majesty's Inspector

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