

Inspection of Merlin School

4 Carlton Drive, Putney, London SW15 2BZ

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 October 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils come to school eager to learn. Each day starts with time for pupils to work and play together. Teaching staff use this time to listen to pupils read, address misconceptions and help pupils to go over prior learning. This routine approach creates a constructive, positive start to the day.

Pupils talked about feeling safe and happy here. They enjoy the school's warm and caring environment. Pupils behave well. They know that they can trust adults to help them sort out any problems. Pupils are confident that adults would deal with any instances of bullying.

There have been changes to leadership recently, including a new headteacher. The commitment to providing a high-quality education for pupils remains strong. Leaders have high expectations for every pupil. They meet weekly to talk about how to support each pupil in their learning. Pupils achieve highly. Pupils and staff spoke about the importance of demonstrating the 'Merlin spirit', such as having a go at things you might find hard.

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

The curriculum is ambitious. Pupils learn a broad range of subjects. These include drama, computing and French. Pupils also have individual music lessons. Leaders consider what they want pupils to know and how to sequence this learning. In most subjects, content is sequenced well from the early years onwards. For example, in computing, leaders have thought about the knowledge children need to learn in the early years foundation stage (EYFS) that will help them understand algorithms later on. Staff have not received regular subject-specific training in some areas, such as geography. As a result, they do not implement the curriculum as well as they should. Leaders are aware and have plans in place to improve this.

Reading is given high priority. Pupils have many opportunities to read with adults. Pupils listen attentively to stories and read high-quality texts. Pupils enjoy reading in school and at home. Leaders have worked with experts from the local authority to develop their approach to teaching reading and phonics. As soon as children join the school, teachers check what sounds they know. Staff use this information to match their teaching accordingly. The approach is helping most pupils to become confident readers, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, a few pupils who are not fluent readers read books which are not matched well enough to all the sounds they know. They do not have enough opportunities to practise familiar sounds in their reading.

Pupils with SEND are well supported. Leaders have a clear process for identifying pupils who need extra support. They work closely with external agencies when required. This helps them to provide tailored support for pupils, including in their reading, mathematics and social skills. Staff ensure they know pupils' needs and put in strategies to support them.

Leaders are dedicated to supporting pupils' personal development. They use assemblies as opportunities to teach pupils, for example about equality and how to challenge stereotypes. Leaders make sure personal development is integral across all subjects. For example, pupils visit places of worship as part of their learning about different religions. This helps pupils to appreciate and understand a range of cultures, faiths and beliefs. Leaders want pupils to have a clear understanding of their place and responsibilities as a British citizen. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education plans are sequenced to build pupils' knowledge about responsibility. This starts with children taking class responsibilities in the early years, and in Year 3, for example, pupils are taught about responsibilities as a citizen and democratic processes. This is further strengthened through wider opportunities. For example, leaders make sure pupils are taught about the impact of their fundraising and charitable endeavours.

Relationships between pupils are positive. They play well together at breaktimes. Pupils are enthusiastic and motivated in lessons. In lessons where adults have high expectations of behaviour, any low-level disruption is quickly addressed. However, where adults' expectations are not as high, pupils occasionally lose focus. On these few occasions, this disrupts the learning of others.

The proprietor knows the school well and challenges and supports leaders effectively. Leaders support and manage the well-being and workload of staff. Leaders make sure that the school complies with the independent school standards, schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the statutory requirement of the EYFS.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff create a safe environment. As a result, pupils feel confident to share any concerns. Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe, including online. All staff receive appropriate safeguarding training. They know and follow the systems for reporting concerns well. Staff meet regularly to discuss the welfare of pupils. This helps them identify pupils who may need help and support. Leaders refer any concerns to appropriate external services. Leaders maintain robust records and carry out appropriate checks on staff. The safeguarding policy is appropriate and published on the school website.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some staff have not received recent subject-specific training. As a result, they do not have the subject knowledge to implement the curriculum effectively. Leaders should ensure leaders and teachers receive appropriate training to teach all subjects to a consistently high standard.
- Some pupils read books that are not matched to the sounds they have learned. As a result, they do not have enough opportunities to practise reading and embed

these known sounds before they are exposed to new ones. Leaders need to make sure that weaker readers, who are still learning to decode, read books matched to the sounds they have learned. This will help these pupils become fluent readers more quickly.

- Occasionally pupils lose focus when teachers' expectations of behaviour are not as demanding as they could be. When this happens, the learning of those pupils and others is disrupted. Leaders should ensure that behaviour expectations are equally high throughout the school.

How can I feed back my views?

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

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

School details

Unique reference number	101065
DfE registration number	212/6144
Local authority	Wandsworth
Inspection number	10204270
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	4 to 8
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Alford Houstoun-Boswall
Chair	Alford Houstoun-Boswall
Headteacher	Violet McConville
Annual fees (day pupils)	£14,550
Telephone number	0208 788 2769
Website	www.merlinschool.net
Email address	secretary@merlinschool.net
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 November 2017

Information about this school

- The school's last inspection took place on 7 November 2017.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.
- The new headteacher took up post in September 2021. The previous headteacher has taken on the role of principal and continues to work closely with leaders.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the proprietor, principal, headteacher and other senior leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography and PSHE. Inspectors met with curriculum leaders, reviewed curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspectors considered all other subjects as well.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders and staff about safeguarding arrangements. Inspectors analysed safeguarding records and other documentation, including the single central record.

Inspection team

Andrea Bedeau, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Noeman Anwar

Her Majesty's Inspector

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