

Inspection of a good school: Merton Bank Primary School

Roper Street, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 1EJ

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 November 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are happy to belong to this welcoming school community. Many pupils take advantage of the free breakfast club, where they enjoy socialising and playing games with their friends.

Pupils value the strong relationships they have with caring staff who know them well. This helps pupils to feel safe. Pupils have every confidence that staff will quickly sort out any issues they report, including about bullying. Pupils said that they would not stand by if anyone was being treated unkindly.

Generally, pupils behave well around the school and work hard in their lessons. That said, some pupils worry about the behaviour of a few of their classmates, which disrupts their learning and makes them uncomfortable. Added to this, in some subjects, pupils, including children in early years, do not achieve as well as they should. This is because some curriculums are not well thought out by leaders.

Pupils appreciate the range of clubs they can attend and are keen to talk about the sports competitions in which they have taken part. Pupils are eager to contribute to their school by taking on special responsibilities.

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

Leaders place a high priority on pupils learning to read well. Children begin to learn sounds and letters in daily sessions in the Reception class. Regular training is provided for staff to deliver the carefully structured phonics programme effectively. Staff ensure that the books that pupils are given to practise their reading closely match the sounds they know. This helps pupils to gain confidence.

Leaders keep a close eye on how well pupils know and remember the sounds they have learned and provide appropriate support for pupils who fall behind in reading. Most pupils can read fluently and accurately by the end of Year 2.

Older pupils develop a love of reading. They are keen to talk about their favourite books and authors.

In some other subjects, leaders' curriculum thinking is not as far along. In these subjects, leaders' expectations of what pupils, including children in early years, should know are not clear enough. Some subject leaders do not provide sufficient guidance for teachers to develop their subject knowledge. In these subjects, this results in confusion about what pupils need to learn and when it should be taught. Consequently, children and pupils do not gain the key knowledge they need in order to progress well over time.

In early years, staff help children to settle in happily. Children are encouraged to take turns and share with their friends. Staff maintain a sharp focus on developing children's spoken language and communication. Most children make a positive start in early reading and mathematics.

Throughout the school, most pupils behave well. However, not all staff deal with behaviour effectively, which can lead to lessons being disrupted. Recently, staff have been trained to understand, and to develop strategies to better manage, pupils' behaviour. These new approaches are beginning to have a positive effect.

Leaders ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are identified early. Teachers use a range of effective approaches to ensure that pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils are also supported by well-trained teaching assistants when necessary.

Leaders provide a range of opportunities for pupils to understand the importance of staying physically and mentally healthy. Pupils are welcoming towards visitors, but some pupils lack sufficient awareness of people with different backgrounds, religions and families. This hinders their readiness for life in modern Britain.

Members of the governing body are proud of the work of the staff to support vulnerable pupils and their families. However, governors are not well informed about the quality of the curriculum. This hinders them in being able to challenge leaders and hold them to account effectively for school improvement.

Staff, including teachers at the early stage of their careers, appreciate the approachability and support of leaders, who are considerate of their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff have regular training so they remain alert to the signs that indicate that a pupil could be at risk from, or is suffering, harm. Staff are aware of the clear procedures for reporting concerns.

Staff know their community well. They offer a wide range of effective support for parents and carers. Leaders respond swiftly to access appropriate support for pupils when needed.

Leaders ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils learn about online safety and how to avoid risks in the wider community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders' expectations of what pupils should know are not clear enough. This means that teachers lack the guidance they need when designing learning for pupils, and this prevents pupils from achieving well. Leaders should ensure that they clarify the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and remember from early years to Year 6. They should also check that the curriculums in these subjects are delivered effectively so that pupils achieve well.
- Over time, leaders have not ensured that expectations for behaviour are high enough or that staff are trained well to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. This has resulted in disruption to pupils' learning and has caused some pupils to feel ill at ease. Leaders should ensure that behaviour expectations are communicated consistently to staff, pupils and parents. They should continue to provide staff with training so that pupils' behaviour is managed effectively and disruptions to learning are minimised.
- Members of the governing body are not sufficiently informed about some important aspects of the school, including the curriculum. This means that they are unable to fulfil their roles in holding leaders to account effectively. Governors should ensure that they have the information that they need to hold leaders to account for the ongoing improvement of the school and for pupils' achievement in the full range of national curriculum subjects.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2017.

How can I feedback 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 Ofsted 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.

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	104784
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10240674
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	William Roberts
Headteacher	Melanie Clark
Website	www.mertonbank.st-helens.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 and 21 June 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection report, there have been several changes to the leadership team, including the appointment of a new headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. There have also been several changes to the membership of the governing body.
- Several new teachers have been appointed, including four early career teachers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher and other leaders. She also spoke with subject leaders and members of staff.
- The inspector spoke with three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority.

- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, during lunchtimes and at breakfast club, and around the school. She spoke with different groups of pupils to discuss their views of the school, their learning, and their behaviour and safety.
- The inspector checked the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. She reviewed documentation, checked attendance information and spoke to leaders, governors, staff and pupils.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and science. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. The inspector also observed pupils reading to a familiar adult. The inspector also considered some aspects of a number of other subjects on the school's curriculum.
- The inspector considered the views of parents and carers that were shared through Ofsted Parent View. This included the free-text comments received from parents. The inspector also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to the survey for pupils.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation shared by school leaders, including the school development plan, the minutes taken at governors' meetings and leaders' self-evaluation documentation.

Inspection team

Janette Walker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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