

# Inspection of Merley First School

Oakley Straight, Merley, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 1SD

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Inspection dates: 29 and 30 November 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Outstanding</b>

The executive headteacher of this school is Katharine Anstey. This school is part of Initio Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Liz West, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Kingstone, OBE.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Merley First School as an academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection of the predecessor school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

The school's curriculum and carefully planned experiences ensure pupils grow to become respectful and thoughtful citizens. Pupils are enthusiastic about these opportunities. Pupils are kind and care for each other. They are encouraged to take responsibility within the school. Pupils are enthusiastic 'voice champions' and eco-warriors. As peer mediators and play leaders, pupils help to create successful playtimes for all. Pupils are proud to have a positive impact on school life.

Pupils know how to be a successful 'Merley Learner'. Staff help pupils to develop the skills to be ready to learn. This begins in the early years when children develop the life skills of resilience, determination and independence. Regular opportunities to learn outdoors, build pupils' confidence and ability to communicate effectively. Pupils apply their positive attitudes, skills and knowledge well in many subjects.

The school ensures pupils' mental health and well-being is a priority. Pupils learn to appreciate people's lives different from their own. They reflect on their feelings regularly. Staff use pupils' reflections to provide individual support for those pupils who need extra help. Most pupils behave well and are eager to learn.

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

The trust has devised a well-sequenced curriculum. The school has broken down the curriculum content further into small and logical steps in most subjects. Trust and school leaders support staff to develop their knowledge of agreed teaching techniques. For example, the use of questions to check pupils' knowledge and understanding. Before children begin Reception Year, staff work with parents and pre-schools to accurately identify the children's strengths and areas for development. When teachers know pupils' prior knowledge, they use this information to plan appropriate learning activities, such as in mathematics. This enables pupils to learn successfully.

The early years curriculum and provision are ambitious for all. Staff effectively adapt their teaching to meet the needs of children very well. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND). Children regularly practise their skills to build secure knowledge in the seven areas of learning. Outdoor learning sessions provide a wealth of opportunities for children to develop strong personal, social and emotional knowledge. For example, children follow rules to safely and patiently wait their turn to light fires with flints. Learning activities such as this purposefully support children's communication development. Children thrive in the early years.

Nevertheless, there are a few wider subject curriculums for pupils in Years 1 to 4 that are not as well developed. Teaching does not make effective use of assessment to plan and check what pupils must know and remember. Learning activities are sometimes unnecessarily repeated. This does not help pupils to build on prior

knowledge or make connections between important concepts. Pupils do not secure and deepen their knowledge sufficiently well in these subjects.

Staff model and support children to use social and technical language extremely well. The sharp focus on effectively developing children's communication and language prepares them to listen to and recall letter sounds correctly. Staff use their secure phonic knowledge to successfully check and ensure pupils pronounce phonemes accurately. Pupils' reading books match their phonic knowledge. Staff quickly identify pupils who need additional keep-up sessions. These extra sessions are implemented swiftly to ensure pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, stay on track with the school's high expectations.

Pupils' reading fluency and comprehension are developed well through regular practice and targeted activities. Class reading books are purposefully chosen to introduce pupils to a wide range of authors and genres. Older pupils know how reading helps them to improve their writing and spelling. Leaders have correctly identified the need to improve pupils' spelling. The school has recently implemented a phonics-based spelling curriculum for Years 3 and 4. It is too soon to know the impact of this work.

The school has taken care to ensure library books support pupils' understanding of different cultures, religions and fundamental British values. Pupils talk confidently about what British values mean and how they relate to their own lives and world events.

Pupils are supported to make positive behaviour choices. Many choose to focus and engage in their learning without reminders from staff. A very small number of pupils receive additional support to help them recognise their emotions and manage their own behaviour. This leads to a calm and orderly environment around the school. Most pupils attend school regularly. Leaders work with families to help them overcome difficulties that prevent their children from attending school.

Staff appreciate the support of leaders, including governors and trustees, to manage their workload. For example, staff value and appreciate the quick response time from the trust's technical support team.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In a few wider curriculum subjects, assessment is not used well. Teaching does not use assessment to reflect on and adapt the curriculum sufficiently well. This

means sometimes pupils cannot build on prior learning. The school needs to ensure teachers use assessment to reflect on and adapt the curriculum so that pupils know and remember the curriculum's essential knowledge.

## 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 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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	141794
<b>Local authority</b>	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole
<b>Inspection number</b>	10288203
<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	282
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	John Kingstone, OBE
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Liz West
<b>Headteacher</b>	Katharine Anstey (Executive headteacher)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.merleyfirstschool.com">www.merleyfirstschool.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- Merley first school became an academy converter in March 2015.
- The school is part of the Initio Learning Trust.
- Pupils attend on-site outdoor learning sessions and after-school provision organised by Outdoor Adventurers (URN 2649768).

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, staff, the chief executive officer, the chair of trustees and members of the local board of governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science physical education and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also looked at geography books, discussed the school's curriculum and assessment records, the early years curriculum and provision with leaders.
- The inspectors observed pupils during break times and spoke with pupils and leaders about personal, social and health education and opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. She also took into consideration the responses to the surveys for staff and pupils.

### **Inspection team**

Marie Thomas, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Marcus West	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Williams	His Majesty's Inspector

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