

Inspection of Merry Hill Infant School and Nursery

School Lane, Bushey, Hertfordshire WD23 1ST

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 December 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 13 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. 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.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend Merry Hill. Staff warmly welcome pupils each day with a happy face. The school prioritises pupils' well-being. Pupils and families appreciate the support the school provides.

Respect and kindness towards others are key. Pupils learn these values from the moment they set foot in the door. They develop strong relationships with adults and with one another. Pupils trust that staff will listen to them. This helps pupils to feel safe and happy.

Clear routines and high expectations help pupils to succeed. Pupils are motivated. They work hard. They understand the golden rules, such as being gentle and honest. Adults expect pupils to behave well, which most do. Those who find it more difficult to maintain good behaviour get the help they need to improve it. This includes having a reflection space in every classroom.

Pupils learn well, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff support pupils with SEND through well-chosen strategies. This helps all pupils to access the full range of subjects and activities.

New experiences, clubs and outside areas often make learning fun for pupils. Visits from religious leaders instil understanding and acceptance within the community. Consequently, pupils learn to be responsible and compassionate.

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

The school has a carefully designed curriculum that meets the needs of the pupils. In many subjects, pupils learn a range of ambitious vocabulary. This runs successfully through the curriculum from the early years to Year 2. As a result, pupils confidently use subject-specific terminology to explain their ideas. Pupils achieve well, including those who are disadvantaged.

The school has set out a well-considered order to teach new concepts. Teachers explain these concepts well, so pupils develop a rich body of knowledge. In a couple of subjects, the curriculum is not as well implemented. Therefore, in these subjects, pupils do not always learn as well as the school would like.

Inclusion in the curriculum is a priority. Pupils with SEND learn the same broad curriculum as their peers. Teachers use a range of well-developed strategies to support pupils with SEND. Staff have received further training to improve inclusion. This increased expertise helps them to provide adaptations in lessons. Pupils can use equipment such as laptops, or have individualised learning schedules. The school has new systems to identify children's needs in the early years. This is working well. For a few pupils with SEND, however, lesson adaptations are not as specific as they need to be. This means a small number of pupils with SEND do not participate as much as they could because they are not given the most appropriate adaptation.

Reading is a priority. Children in the Nursery experience phonics using toys that help them to learn different letter sounds. This helps them to blend the letters together when they encounter them in later reading activities. Children in the Reception classes gain a firm grasp of reading. Staff expertly deliver the school's chosen phonics programme. Pupils become fluent and confident readers as they move through the school. Those who need extra help with reading catch up quickly. Pupils enjoy reading. Pupils hear varied stories, poems and songs. This helps to improve their vocabulary. Some pupils are read to by the school's 'secret readers' who are members of the community.

The school's clear rules and routines ensure that pupils learn to manage their behaviour, with growing independence. Some need more help. The school teaches children empathy and to appreciate how their behaviour impacts on others. Staff are mindful of the well-being and good mental health of everyone. Pupils can use the safe spaces, trusted adults, breakout opportunities and the well-equipped sensory room. These help pupils to feel safe and ready to learn.

Children in the early years get off to a very strong start. This prepares them well for their later learning. They experience well-planned and purposeful activities. Adults are skilled in expanding children's vocabulary. Knowledgeable staff clearly explain and extend children's activities to enhance their learning. As a result, children learn to express themselves well in harmonious play.

Pupils understand and live up to the school values taught in assemblies. As play leaders, pupils show reliability and responsibility. Teachers ensure that pupils know about various cultures and religions. Pupils have a strong understanding of difference. They actively celebrate diversity. They are being well prepared for life in modern Britain.

There is a knowledgeable governing body. It works closely with the school to help ensure continuous improvement. Support and challenge come through balanced monitoring and diligent checks. Leaders prioritise staff well-being and workload.

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 couple of subjects, the curriculum is not as well implemented as leaders would like. Therefore, pupils do not always learn as well as they might. The school should continue to provide support and guidance to teachers and ensure that the curriculum in all subjects is being implemented as leaders intend.

- For a small number of pupils with SEND, lesson adaptations are not always matched to pupils' needs. This is sometimes because supporting targets are not as precise as they could be. The school should ensure that pupils' supporting targets are precise and that pupils with SEND receive accurate and effective adaptations in their lessons.

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

Unique reference number	117090
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255041
Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jarmo Kesanto
Headteacher	Melissa Adams
Website	www.merryhill.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 March 2009, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up the post in September 2014.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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.
- The inspectors spoke with five members of the governing body, including the chair.
- The headteacher was not on site during the inspection. However, the headteacher joined inspection team meetings via telephone.

- Inspectors also had discussions with senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the early years phase leaders, subject leaders and staff.
- 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 inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and science. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and scrutinised samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors examined a range of documents provided by the school, including leaders' school development plans and policies.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their views of school. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtimes and in lessons.
- The inspectors reviewed 101 responses that were submitted by parents to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the 98 free-text responses from parents. Staff and pupils were spoken with to gather their views of the school.

Inspection team

Pamela Finch, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Simon Harbrow

Ofsted Inspector

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