



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report

MERDON JUNIOR SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 115873

LEA: Hampshire

Inspection Number: 267309

Inspection Dates: 11 – 13 MAY 2004

Reporting Inspector: Susan Gregory HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 12 (3) under the same act

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INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Merdon Junior School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

Description of the school

Merdon, a larger than average junior school for children aged 7 to 11, is close to Eastleigh in Hampshire. Only a few pupils are eligible for free school meals. A small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds and none are at the early stages of learning English. The percentage of pupils with special needs is in line with the national average and one pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The new deputy has been the acting headteacher for the past three months.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

The school judges its performance to be adequate. Inspectors agree that aspects of the provision are adequate. Some are good. The pupils' progress is now adequate, but in the past they have made insufficient progress and their attainment remains lower than it should be. The school is underachieving. The school has established a caring, supportive ethos, underpinned by positive relationships between adults and pupils. The pupils feel safe and well-cared for. Staff are good at promoting their personal development; pupils are polite, well-behaved and keen to learn. These are significant strengths. Most pupils reach average standards in English, mathematics and science and some do better. Teaching has some good features but, as the pupils' work overall shows, it is not adequate. Leadership and management are adequate overall. There are weaknesses in the way some teachers manage their responsibilities. However, the acting headteacher is a very effective leader who has recently introduced improvements which are leading to better teaching.

Grade: 4

Improvement since the last inspection

The school's provision has not improved enough since the last inspection. Two of the three main issues for improvement following the last inspection have been successfully tackled. The school has introduced homework logs which are helping to promote pupils' good attitudes to their work. Governors have addressed the issues about meeting particular statutory requirements. However, shortcomings in assessment remain. Standards in English, mathematics and science are lower than at the time of the last inspection and teaching is not as good.

Grade: 4

Capacity to improve

In a short period, the acting headteacher and senior staff have accurately evaluated the school's main strengths and areas for development. They are taking the right action to bring about improvement and there are positive signs that some inconsistencies in teachers' work have already been addressed. The early successes indicate that the capacity for further improvement is good.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

In order to raise pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science, the school should continue to improve:

- the quality of teaching by evaluating and refining: teachers' plans; the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning; pupils' progress
- the quality of assessment
- the co-ordinators' leadership and management role.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The previous inspection found that pupils made very good progress and reached high standards in English, mathematics and science. The school judges that standards have declined and this is borne out by inspection evidence. The test results and school's evidence shows that although pupils have reached above average standards for their age when they start at the school, by the time they leave, the majority achieve standards that are average. This means that many have not done as well as they could. The school knows this and has successfully started to tackle it. Its efforts are too recent to have had a strong impact yet on the pupils' attainment, but the early signs are good.

The pupils' lack of progress over time in the past was confirmed when inspectors looked at pupils' work and analysed the school's information about the test results and targets. The inspectors also compared progress to that of pupils in similar schools. Year 6 pupils say that they do quite well; they enjoy their lessons most of the time, but sometimes these are not interesting. In discussion, they said they like being in 'set' groups because the work is more challenging.

Grade: 4

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The school considers the overall personal development of pupils to be good and inspection evidence shows this to be accurate.

The previous inspection judged attendance as good; the evidence is that it is now very good. The school works effectively with the education welfare officer to improve the attendance of a small minority of pupils.

At the time of the last inspection, the pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour were very good. The school says these are still as good and the inspectors agree. Pupils' behaviour in the playground and around the school is very good. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and physical education is effective and pupils respond in a very mature way. Cultural education is adequate and improving. Pupils learn about their own and the cultural traditions of others and form their own views on moral issues.

The pupils make a positive contribution to the school community and are becoming responsible citizens. The school council has been involved in the proposals for the building works and its recent survey shows that pupils are pleased with their school. Pupils participate in Civic Awards and local festivals. They are given good opportunities to help others, for example by supporting a range of charitable organisations.

Grade: 2

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION

The school judges that teaching is adequate. Inspectors agree that the teaching is now adequate: recent work from the pupils, teachers' marking and the teaching seen in lessons were adequate overall. However, other evidence such as teachers' plans and pupils' work over the rest of the year, show that previously the teaching did not enable all pupils to make enough progress. Teaching was inadequate, but has improved.

Teaching in lessons ranged from good to not adequate with most being adequate. At the start of all lessons teachers explained to pupils what they were to learn. The teachers made good use of strategies and equipment to enable pupils to communicate with one

another and jot down ideas. The school has worked hard to improve consistency in these aspects of teaching. Where teaching was good, the lessons had a brisk pace, a sharp focus on what pupils' were to learn, teachers knew the subject well and used a good mix of questions to gauge how much pupils had learnt. Here, teaching assistants were deployed well and provided pupils with good levels of support and challenge.

A key weakness in the inadequate teaching is that staff do not find out enough about what pupils know and how fast they are learning in order to plan new work. As a result the work did not always match well enough the different abilities of the pupils. There was too much emphasis on uninspiring worksheets, and the teaching did not fully capture pupils' interest. They did not learn enough.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has some strengths, but also a few weaknesses and is adequate overall. The school invests a high level of resources in supporting these pupils, but the management of SEN is too complex. The school's plan to review this is well-judged.

The way the school follows how well pupils' are doing throughout the year is adequate. The pupils' test results are recorded precisely, but not so their knowledge, skills and understanding. The school has devised, but not yet started new systems to provide clearer, more accurate information to teachers.

The school's approach to setting goals is adequate and improving. In some classes, but not all, pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own work and agree targets for what they need to improve. The marking of pupils' work has improved recently and pupils report that teachers' clear evaluative comments are very helpful and motivate them to improve. Again, this better marking is not seen in all classes.

The school's view is that the range of work that pupils do during the school day is adequate and the activities on offer at lunchtime and after school are very good, with boys and girls taking part in a wide range of sports, arts and musical activities. The inspectors fully agree.

The acting headteacher has led reviews of much of the school's curriculum and is bringing about significant improvements. The work pupils do is sufficiently broad and the time given to subjects is suitably balanced. The ways teachers plan has also improved, but not universally. These improvements are already having a positive impact on the quality of teaching they have not been in place long enough to see an effect on pupils' overall achievement.

The good provision in the information, communication and technology suite gives adequate support to learning across subjects. The school believes that it promotes a healthy lifestyle and that it builds pupils' self-esteem. Inspection evidence shows this to be true. Pupils take part enthusiastically in physical education, they learn about healthy eating, and are encouraged to eat a balanced midday meal. A school governor is actively promoting cycling to school and a safe routes' initiative. The school is taking positive action to reduce environmental health risks and raise pupils' awareness of important issues, for example through recycling a range of materials such as paper, foil and printer cartridges, as well as composting kitchen waste.

Pupils' welfare has a high priority. Child protection and health and safety procedures are conscientiously followed and carefully documented. All staff are sensitive to pupils' well-being and readily deal with their problems or difficulties. During the inspection, parents and pupils spoke consistently of the school's ready response to questions and problems, confirming the open door policy in which it believes. In personal development sessions,

in 'circle time', through the Friends Group, as well as through the buddy system, pupils are able to talk about their feelings and problems. There are good links with parents and carers and the school regularly issues informative newsletters and reports.

In contrast to the pastoral support that the pupils receive, the academic guidance for them is underdeveloped. The setting of targets to help the pupils improve their work is inconsistent and too variable in quality. The feedback provided to the pupils about the quality of their work is adequate.

Grade: 3

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

At the last inspection, leadership and management were judged to be very good. The school's view is that it is now adequate and inspection evidence confirms this. In the absence of the substantive headteacher, the acting headteacher provides very good leadership. Her perceptive analysis of the school's needs and clear, accurate vision have shown what the school should do to improve. She has developed a good working partnership with staff and governors, who share a good sense of collective responsibility and understanding of the school's priorities. She has lost no time in changing practice for the better. Recent initiatives which she has instigated, such as making better use of data, have already identified areas for development. The school's understanding of how it is performing has improved and is now clear. It is hard to imagine what more the acting headteacher could have done to bring about necessary change. Nevertheless it should continue to improve the way in which it gathers evidence to gain a better view of the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

The school recognises that in order to arrest the decline in standards, particularly in English, it needs to provide sharp, focused strategies to raise pupils' achievement. The acting headteacher has taken decisive steps to do this and her actions are having a very good impact on ineffective aspects of middle management. The school's main strategic plan is being revised to include the necessary detail to act as an effective tool to bring about change and improvement. In the interim, the acting headteacher and the senior team have adopted a well documented, logical and systematic approach to setting out priorities and tracking improvement. The effectiveness of the governing body is adequate overall. Governors are supportive and helpful but have not maintained a strategic overview of the school's work and pupils' achievement. The financial management of the school is sound.

Equality of opportunity is promoted adequately throughout the school. The school's good links with outside agencies enables staff to promote the care and well-being of pupils effectively. Pupils are considerate towards each other and adults. There have been no reported racist incidents but the school needs to improve the way it would record any that did occur. The staff check on the comparative progress of girls and boys, but do not have a sufficiently clear view of the progress of minority ethnic groups.

The school meets its statutory requirements with the exception of the way it records racist incidents.

Grade: 3

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