



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Merton Abbey Primary School

Merton Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 24 and 25 November 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Merton Abbey Primary School
Type of school:	Primary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mrs M Talbot
Address of school:	High Path Merton London SW19 2JY
Telephone:	020 8542 7129
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mrs J Finch-Taylor
Local education authority area:	Merton
Unique reference number:	102638
Name of reporting inspector:	Mrs G Oldham, Additional Inspector
Dates of inspection:	24 and 25 November 2004

Introduction

1. Merton Abbey Primary School is situated in Merton, south west London. There are 178 pupils on roll, including 35 nursery-age pupils who attend part time. The school was previously a first school and 2003-2004 was the first year that the age range included pupils in Year 6. The school serves a culturally diverse area. Almost 40 per cent of the pupils speak English as an additional language and many of them are at the early stages of learning English. These figures are much higher than those found nationally. Twenty two per cent of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Nearly 16 per cent of the pupils have been identified by the school as having special educational needs, including five pupils who have a Statement of Special Educational Need. The attainment of the pupils on entry is below average, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

2. The school was inspected in February 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of February 2003. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on three occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In November 2004, two Additional Inspectors inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2003.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- over the last two years standards have risen steadily in Key Stage 1, particularly in reading and mathematics; this is reflected in the school's national test results. In Key Stage 2, the pupils' progress has increased as a result of more effective teaching but this improvement does not show in the school's National Curriculum test results, which were low in all three subjects. Throughout the school, standards in writing are taking longer to improve than other aspects of English. Although standards in science are lower than they should be, improvements are evident and the rate of progress is increasing;
- the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. They have improved in response to the higher demands in lessons and the teachers' raised expectations. Relationships at all levels are positive and the adults present a good role model for the pupils;
- the attendance rate is rising, albeit slowly, but remains below the national figure for primary schools. The percentage of unauthorised absence is above the national average;

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- provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is sound. Assemblies promote the school as a community and provide opportunities for the pupils to consider a range of social and moral issues. The cultural diversity of the pupils is being used more effectively to enrich aspects of the curriculum;
 - the quality of teaching has improved significantly since February 2003, particularly in Key Stage 2. This is the result of some re-deployment of staff, professional training, and increasingly rigorous monitoring. In all 17 lessons, the teaching was satisfactory or better; it was good in six and very good in three. The pupils' progress was at least satisfactory and was good or very good in those lessons where the teaching was strongest;
 - the provision for pupils in the Foundation Stage has improved, especially the planning of indoor activities and tasks led by the adults. However, some of the outdoor work lacks a clear focus. The recently appointed Foundation Stage leader is working hard to address the weaknesses;
 - in Key Stages 1 and 2, the quality and range of the curriculum are satisfactory. Due emphasis is given to the development of the basic skills in literacy and numeracy, and previous weaknesses in subjects such as information and communication technology (ICT) and design and technology (DT) are being addressed. There is greater consistency in the way the work is planned and the teachers use assessment information more effectively to match the work to the pupils' learning needs. The pupils who have special educational needs were generally well supported in the lessons but in some of the work, greater demands could have been made of those who are more able;
 - leadership and management are satisfactory with a number of good features, in particular the way the members of the senior management team work together to drive up standards, improve the teaching and plan strategically. There is more to be done to develop the leadership skills of the subject and aspect managers. Governance has improved significantly and the governors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in monitoring the school's work.
 - since the school became subject to special measures, the local education authority (LEA) has provided a range of effective, well-focused support that has helped to strengthen aspects of the leadership and management and improve the teaching and planning of the curriculum.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards, especially in writing and science;
- improve the quality of the teaching by increasing the proportion of good and very good lessons;

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- strengthen the roles of the subject and aspect leaders in planning and monitoring the school's work;
 - improve attendance.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. In Key Stage 1, standards have risen steadily over the last two years, particularly in reading and mathematics, and this is reflected in the school's national test results. In Key Stage 2, standards are generally higher in the lower years than they are in Years 5 and 6. Many of the older pupils have significant gaps in their skills, knowledge and understanding but their progress is accelerating as a result of effective teaching. Throughout the school, standards in writing and science are lower than they should be but improvements are evident and in the lessons, the pupils made sound and often good progress in these subjects.

8. The school's results in the 2004 national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 improved on the previous year in the percentage of pupils achieving the expected Level 2 and above in reading and mathematics, with an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 3. In writing, although the overall percentage of pupils achieving the expected level remained the same as the previous year, no pupil achieved the higher Level 3; a decline since 2003. When compared with schools nationally, the results were well above average in reading and mathematics and below average in writing. When compared with schools in similar contexts, the results were very high in reading, well above average in mathematics and broadly in line with the average in writing.

9. The school's national test results at the end of Key Stage 2 did not reflect the increased progress the pupils had made during their lessons. When compared with schools nationally, the results were well below average in English and science and very low in mathematics. When compared with schools in similar contexts, the results in all three were well below average. Following the school's re-organisation from a first school to a primary school, 2004 was the first time that the national tests were taken by Year 6 pupils, therefore no comparison with previous years' test results is possible.

10. In the Foundation Stage, the quality of the provision has improved and is satisfactory: the pupils are making sound progress towards the nationally set Early Learning Goals. Many enter the nursery with limited language and communication skills; a significant proportion is at the early stages of learning English. During the focused activity times, the staff work productively with the pupils. They introduce new vocabulary and use activities such as role-play to encourage them to communicate their ideas. In the reception class, aspects of reading, writing and mathematics are taught systematically. The pupils are developing an understanding of phonics and punctuation and some use this knowledge in their independent writing. Early attempts at writing sentences, for example, contained recognisable letters and full stops. In mathematics, a range of activities is used to consolidate the pupils' knowledge of number. Some of the more-able pupils count accurately and are developing a secure understanding of addition. The pupils throughout the Foundation Stage understand the class routines and generally work well together. They concentrate appropriately when they are engaged on tasks with an adult, but in some of the independent

activities, particularly those out of doors, many flit from task to task without sufficient purpose.

11. In Key Stages 1 and 2, standards in speaking and listening have improved and are broadly satisfactory. In the lessons, strategies such as “talking partners” are used more consistently and this enables the pupils to rehearse their ideas and to gain confidence in talking to larger audiences. The range of vocabulary the pupils use is increasing because the teachers introduce key words that are specific to different subjects and use open questions to encourage the pupils to give more extended answers.

12. By the end of Key Stage 1, standards in reading are at least satisfactory, and some of the more-able pupils read well. Phonics are taught systematically and the pupils use their skills and knowledge to tackle unknown words. The pupils enjoy reading, they understand the differences between fiction and non-fiction texts and some are starting to use more intonation when they read aloud. In Key Stage 2, the pupils’ knowledge of different types of texts and authors is improving. The older pupils read with greater understanding and in the lessons, some drew inferences about the context of the stories and the personalities of the different characters.

13. The school has continued to focus on raising standards in writing and although some improvements are evident, the quality of the work lags behind other aspects of English. The extended literacy sessions are helping to develop stronger links between reading, writing, speaking and listening. As a result, the range of the pupils’ writing is increasing and in some of the work, for example, play scripts written by Year 6 pupils, more imaginative vocabulary and complex sentence structures were used. In many of the lessons, the introduction of a variety of supporting strategies, such as individual white boards, enabled the pupils to draft their ideas. As a result, the structure of much of the writing is improving and the pupils are starting to apply their skills to the work in other subjects. However, weaknesses remain in spelling, punctuation and grammar and some pupils still lack confidence as writers.

14. Overall, standards in mathematics are rising slowly but the improvement has not yet been reflected in the national test results at the end of Key Stage 2. Number work is taught well, although some investigations do not always inspire the oldest pupils. In Key Stage 1, standards match those expected of pupils of the same age nationally. The pupils count accurately in tens and know how to partition numbers to 100. Many are developing a secure understanding of number sequences and place value, although in one lesson, some of the pupils of lower ability struggled to recognise simple patterns despite the support of an adult and the use of resources such as number squares.

15. The standards in Key Stage 2 are generally lower than expected, but are improving slowly. In many of the classes, the attainment of the more-able pupils is approaching that expected nationally. In Year 3, for example, the pupils are building well on the skills and knowledge they acquired in Key Stage 1 and achieve good standards. Throughout Key Stage 2, number is taught systematically and the pupils’ understanding is developing well. By the end of the key stage, for example, the pupils calculate quickly and accurately using strategies such as doubling and halving. They have a secure knowledge of place value, the properties of shapes such as quadrilaterals and can work out simple written problems involving length and time. Although mathematical investigations are planned, the opportunities for the pupils to use their skills in other subjects are not always fully exploited.

There are exceptions however; for example, when the pupils in Year 6 recognised that their knowledge of plotting co-ordinates would be useful in map reading.

16. The pupils' attainment in science is below that expected for their age in both key stages, but improvements are evident, particularly in the work of the oldest pupils. There is greater continuity and progression in the way the work is planned. In the reception class, the pupils experiment using different materials and this work is built on in Key Stage 1 when the pupils investigate how materials can change. In lessons, key vocabulary is introduced to help the pupils to explain different scientific principles and by Key Stage 2, they are learning how to record their investigations more systematically. Some of the work of the older pupils shows that they are developing a more secure understanding of the concept of fair testing and that they are able to draw conclusions from the results of their investigations.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is sound. Assemblies promote the aims of the school appropriately. The pupils are reminded about how their words and actions can affect others and how forgiving their peers is a powerful way to mend relationships. The pupils have opportunities to develop an understanding of right and wrong and to appreciate their responsibilities towards each other. The school council is effective in giving the pupils an opportunity to take responsibility. The council has made suggestions that the teachers have taken seriously and implemented where appropriate.

18. The teaching and support staff provide good role models for the pupils and there are positive relationships at all levels in most classes. The pupils' social development is satisfactory and the school's personal, social and health education programme contributes to the development of their skills. An additional programme of work called 'I can do it' is used appropriately alongside the existing activities to raise the pupils' self esteem and confidence further. The rich cultural diversity of the pupils is being used positively to enrich the curriculum and events such as Black History Month help to extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding of issues outside their immediate experience.

19. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. The school has clear expectations of the pupils and uses a good range of strategies to promote positive behaviour. School and class rules are displayed prominently and the pupils respond well to the system of rewards and sanctions. At playtimes and around the school, the pupils are well behaved, courteous and relate well to each other and to the staff. In the lessons, the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were never less than satisfactory; in just over three quarters they were good or very good. The improved quality of teaching is having a positive effect on the pupils' behaviour in nearly all classes, although a few of the oldest pupils do not consistently behave well. In the lessons, the timely intervention of the support assistant helped these pupils to refocus quickly on their work.

20. The attendance rate is below the national and LEA average, but is slowly improving and is currently 93 per cent. The school has set a target of 94 per cent and the pupils know how each class is contributing to this target. The rate of unauthorised absence has increased to 1.6 per cent which is well above the national figure. The increase is largely due to a change in the policy for granting permission to parents taking pupils on holiday in term time. The pupils' attendance is regularly monitored by the educational welfare officer and followed up where necessary by health visitors. The governors also monitor absence and lateness each

term. They carry out spot checks to see if punctuality is improving and contact the parents of children who are persistently late. The school awards a cup for the best-attending class and is devising new ways of motivating the youngest pupils to attend regularly.

The quality of education

21. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since February 2003, particularly in Key Stage 2. This is the result of the recruitment of new teachers, some re-deployment of existing staff, effective professional training and rigorous monitoring. The teachers work well together, providing support for each other and sharing their expertise. The learning support staff work productively alongside the class teachers and give well-focused help to specific groups of pupils, particularly those who have special educational needs or behavioural difficulties.

22. In all 17 lessons the teaching was satisfactory or better; it was good in six and very good in three. There was a direct relationship between the quality of the teaching and the learning. In the lessons where the teaching was strongest, the pupils made the most rapid progress. The essential features of effective teaching were: well planned interesting work; clear learning objectives for the lessons that were shared with the pupils in ways they could understand; a brisk pace; use of a good range of strategies that enabled the pupils to work with others to share ideas; appropriate use of a variety of resources to support the learning; and opportunities for the pupils to organise aspects of their own work. In Key Stage 2, the recently acquired interactive white boards were used well in the lessons and the pupils responded with increasing enthusiasm, interest and concentration.

23. In some of the lessons, while the pupils who have special educational needs were well catered for through appropriately planned activities, some of the more-able pupils could have achieved higher standards if more had been demanded of them.

24. Good use is made of the accommodation. The classrooms and public areas are well organised. Displays are used successfully to celebrate the pupils' achievements and as a focus for subsequent learning. The inclusion of examples of work from pupils across the age range in a single display helps to illustrate continuity and progression in the curriculum. There is an increasing number of displays that celebrate the cultural diversity of the pupils.

25. Overall, curriculum planning is detailed and thorough. In the Foundation Stage, significant improvements have been made to the way the indoor activities and the adult-focused tasks are planned but there is still more to be done to ensure that all the outdoor work is purposeful and that the pupils are helped to understand what they are expected to learn. The recently appointed co-ordinator for the Foundation Stage has a good grasp of what needs to be done to improve the curriculum. In Key Stages 1 and 2, due emphasis is given to the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and more opportunities are planned for the pupils to use their skills in other subjects. Previous weakness in the breadth of work in ICT and DT are being addressed systematically and the co-ordinators for these subjects provide the rest of the staff with useful portfolios of pupils' work that help to inform the planning.

26. The systems for recording the pupils' attainment and tracking their progress are bedding down well. The data is analysed more systematically by the senior staff to identify gaps in the pupils' learning, to set targets for improvement and to focus additional support. All teachers were given time at the end of the summer term to analyse the end-of year

assessment information and provide a detailed report for the receiving teacher, which was a positive development for ensuring greater continuity in the pupils' learning.

27. The provision for the pupils who speak English as an additional language is improving following the appointment of a new co-ordinator. She is working enthusiastically to identify the range of support the pupils need, to develop resources and to help the class teachers to plan the work. The placement of a bilingual classroom assistant in the nursery is proving effective in helping the pupils who speak little or no English to settle in quickly. It is reported that the outreach class to help some parents to learn English is proving successful.

Leadership and management

28. The leadership and management of the school have improved significantly since the inspection of February 2003 and are satisfactory with several good features. The headteacher has an appropriate focus on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. She is well supported by a highly effective deputy headteacher who provides a very good model for the rest of the staff through the quality of her teaching. These two senior staff, together with the recently appointed subject leader for numeracy, form a strong leadership team and are working well together to drive the school's work forward.

29. Other subject leaders are taking on more responsibility, for example by running professional development meetings and producing portfolios of the pupils' work to support planning. Some also contribute to the senior management team meetings. The school realises that there is still more to be done to develop the skills of the middle managers, particularly in monitoring aspects of the work and contributing to strategic planning.

30. The school has benefited from the effective, well-focused input from the LEA and links that have been made with other schools. As a result, aspects of leadership and management, curriculum planning and teaching have been strengthened.

31. A comprehensive range of monitoring activities is undertaken. The outcomes are charted systematically and are used to identify the strengths and weakness in the teaching and learning and to inform the way the professional training and support are planned and targeted. The implementation of the action plan is kept under close review and subsequent planning builds appropriately on what has already been achieved.

32. Governance has improved significantly. The governing body is committed to improving the quality of education for the pupils and is working productively with the headteacher and senior staff to take the work forward. The governors have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are kept well informed by the headteacher and other staff about the school's progress.

Implementation of the action plan

33. The inspection report of February 2003 required the school to address seven key issues. Good progress has been made on improving strategic leadership and management, the quality of teaching and curriculum planning. Reasonable progress has been made in raising standards, improving the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language, improving the quality of information to parents about their children's progress and improving attendance and punctuality.

34. The pupils' progress is accelerating as a result of the improvements in the teaching and curriculum planning. As a result, standards are rising, albeit more rapidly in Key Stage 1 than elsewhere.

35. Strategic planning by the senior staff and the governors has improved significantly and there is a clear sense of purpose and direction that is focused on raising attainment.

36. The school works hard to keep the parents well informed about their children's progress, but attempts to encourage them to become more involved in a range of school activities are taking longer to succeed. The staff and the governors continue to implement a range of strategies to improve attendance. They have met with some measure of success although there is still more to be done to raise the school's attendance rate and reduce the amount of unauthorised absence.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in February 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in September 2003 and in March and June 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of February 2003.

In November 2004, two Additional Inspectors returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Seventeen lessons or parts of lessons, two assemblies and three registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.