



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Merland Rise Community Primary School

Surrey Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 29 and 30 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:	Merland Rise Community Primary School
Type of school:	Community
Status:	Primary
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mrs S Leach
Address of school:	St Leonards Road Epsom Surrey KT18 5RJ
Telephone:	01737 354 313
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Reverend R Welch
Local education authority area:	Surrey
Unique reference number:	125127
Name of reporting inspector:	Mrs C Munt HMI
Dates of inspection:	29 and 30 November 2004

Introduction

1. Merland Rise Community Primary School is situated in Epsom Downs. The number of pupils on roll has risen steadily over the last four years. The school is bigger than the average for primary schools, with 358 pupils, 38 of whom attend the nursery on a part-time basis. Most of the pupils live in rented property and social housing on a nearby estate, where the level of social deprivation is above average. This is reflected in the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, which is also above average. Although only a small proportion of the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds, the proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is higher than in most schools. The percentage of the pupils identified as having special educational needs is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils entering and leaving the school after the usual start date is slightly greater than for primary schools generally. The pupils' attainment on entry is generally lower than average for the age group, particularly in speech and communication skills. The school's awards include Investors in People and Surrey Parent Friendly School Award. The school is fully staffed, but there has been considerable turbulence in the staffing, as a result of difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers.

2. The school was inspected in September 2002. 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 September 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on five occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In November 2004, two HMI 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 September 2002.

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:

- the pupils make good progress in the Foundation Stage classes. Most of the older pupils are on course to achieve at least the expected standards in all the required areas of learning by the time they enter Year 1. Many of the older pupils were working at a high level in language, mathematics and creative and physical development;
- in the 2004 national tests for seven-year-olds, the school's results were close to the national average in English and mathematics. The results in reading and writing were better than in 2003, and assessments in science remained above average. This represents a substantial improvement since the last inspection in September 2002;

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- the school's results in the 2004 national test for 11-year-olds were below average, although the proportions of pupils who attained the expected level in mathematics and science were higher than in the previous year; fewer pupils achieved the expected level in English than in 2003. The proportion of pupils who attained the expected Level 4 was comparable to those in schools where the pupils' prior attainment was similar, and was better overall than in schools with the same entitlement to free school meals;
 - standards are rising steadily in Key Stage 1 and are in line with expectations in reading, mathematics and science. Standards in writing require further improvement;
 - standards are rising more slowly in Key Stage 2. In English, mathematics and science the higher attaining pupils' work is at the expected level although there is too little work at the higher levels, particularly in writing;
 - standards in the foundation subjects are more variable. They are satisfactory in music, history and religious education but below the level expected in art and design and technology, where skills have not been taught systematically;
 - the pupils, including those who have special educational needs and those for whom English is not their mother tongue, make good progress in the Foundation Stage classes, in Key Stage 1 and in Year 6 but progress is more variable in Key Stage 2, where learning is sound overall;
 - the pupils' attitude to their work and their behaviour in lessons and around the school are good. Adults manage behaviour well and their good relationships with each other provide positive role models for the pupils;
 - the attendance figure for last year was well below the national average. The school works well with other agencies and is doing a great deal to improve attendance;
 - overall, the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is sound, with particular strengths in the moral and social elements;
 - the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. It is good in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 classes, and satisfactory overall in Key Stage 2. The improvement in the quality of teaching has been a major factor in raising standards;
 - the curriculum is good overall; it is suitably broad and balanced, soundly planned and is based on national guidance. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is very good;
 - assessment has improved and is good overall. It is a strength of the Foundation Stage where a careful check is kept on all aspects of the pupils' learning. In English, mathematics and science, there is effective tracking of the pupils' progress. As a result of more accurate assessments, the school has set increasingly challenging targets;
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- the headteacher provides very good leadership and management. She has engaged the staff and the community in the drive to raise standards, and brought about great improvements to the learning environment. The newly structured senior management team supports the headteacher and the staff effectively;
- the Foundation Stage is led well, and the co-ordinators for the core subjects have adopted suitable strategies to raise standards. The school's self-evaluation has improved. However, the use of data to evaluate the school's overall effectiveness is at an early stage of development and staff and governors are receiving further training in this;
- the governing body is fulfilling its role effectively, ably led by the chair of governors. Governors are aware of their roles and responsibilities. They have established secure procedures for monitoring standards and for holding the school to account for the quality of education;
- the local education authority (LEA) has provided appropriate support for the improvement of management and the curriculum, particularly through the work of the school's link adviser.

Key issues

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

- improve standards overall in Key Stage 2, and improve the quality of writing throughout the school;
- continue to develop the assessment and evaluation skills of senior managers, subject managers and governors;
- continue to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of the pupils.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards are rising steadily in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 and the pupils' work is in line with national expectations in these classes. Standards are rising more slowly in Key Stage 2, where the pupils have had to overcome greater gaps in their learning.

8. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below average; a significant proportion of the pupils have language and numeracy skills that are lower than their attainment in other areas of learning. However, the work of all the adults in the Foundation Stage enables the pupils quickly to master basic literacy and numeracy skills and to develop their confidence and independence. The pupils make good progress, and most of the older pupils are on course to achieve at least the expected standards in the required areas of learning by the time they enter Year 1.

9. In the 2004 national tests for seven-year-olds the school's results overall were higher than those for the previous year. They were close to the national average in reading and mathematics, but below average in writing. The average points scores for reading and mathematics were higher than in 2003 because more of the pupils attained the higher grades. The results in science assessments remained above the national average. This is a substantial improvement since the last inspection.

10. The school's results in the 2004 national tests for 11-year-olds were below average. However, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected Level 4 was comparable to that in schools where the pupils' prior attainment was similar, and was better overall than in schools with the same entitlement to free school meals. Seventy one per cent of the pupils achieved Level 4 in English; this was lower than in 2003, as was the proportion who achieved the higher Level 5. The proportion of the pupils who attained Level 4 in mathematics increased over 20 percentage points this year to 81 per cent; however, the proportion achieving the higher Level 5 was lower than in 2003. Science results were similar to the previous year, with 94 per cent reaching at least Level 4; almost a half of the pupils achieved Level 5, an improvement of 13 percentage points on the previous year. Although the school's average points scores were higher in mathematics and science this year, the overall trend in average points over the last four years has been below the national trend.

11. Pupils make good progress in the Foundation Stage classes and in Key Stage 1. Progress is more variable in Key Stage 2, where learning is sound overall. In Years 4 and 6, many of the pupils have made rapid progress because of consistently effective teaching.

12. Most of the older pupils in the Foundation Stage achieved the higher levels in communication, language and literacy, mathematical, creative and physical development. The pupils also achieved well in many aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world and personal, social and emotional development. In Key Stages 1 and 2 a significant proportion of the pupils' work was in line with the expectations for their ages in English, mathematics and science. The work of some pupils is occasionally at a higher level. This is a substantial improvement since the last inspection.

13. Standards in English are improving. They are mainly in line with national expectations in Key Stage 1 but are generally below average at the end of Key Stage 2.

14. The pupils in the Foundation Stage have made good progress in their literacy skills. They listened attentively to the adults and to each other. They spoke clearly and used language effectively to imagine and re-create roles and experiences. They are given very good support to develop their vocabulary and correct sentence structures. The older pupils linked sounds to letters, and used their phonic knowledge to write simple regular words. They made phonetically plausible attempts to spell more complex words.

15. The pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 spoke reasonably clearly and listened attentively in class. Year 6 pupils discussed the differences between filmed and written stories knowledgeably. Their answers in another session showed that the higher attaining pupils understood how an author had used personification to strengthen the imagery in a poem. In all classes the pupils were given sufficient opportunities to discuss their work with a partner and this improved the quality of their responses. Most pupils read aloud accurately but a considerable number had difficulty in appreciating implied meanings in the text. However, in one class, the teacher's very good knowledge of the text, together with the challenging work

that she set in the guided reading session, enabled the pupils to deepen their skills of inference and deduction.

16. The higher attaining pupils in Years 2 and 6 wrote at suitable length, using mainly correct punctuation and an appropriate range of connectives. However, too many of the oldest pupils are hampered by limitations in their vocabulary and weaknesses in their spelling. Presentation and handwriting are improving in literacy work but this does not transfer consistently to other subjects. However, the pupils write for a wide range of purposes and they use their reading and writing skills suitably across the curriculum. For example, work in the Year 1 pupils' science folders was set out neatly and findings were recorded clearly; Year 5 pupils' design and technology folders included lists, instructions and descriptions for making and decorating articles; and Year 6 pupils recorded their science experiments accurately using the correct technical terms.

17. Standards in mathematics are satisfactory overall. The attainment of pupils on entry to the Foundation Stage is low but they make good progress because practical activities are well designed and adults model vocabulary and help the pupils to see patterns and sequences in everyday materials. The youngest pupils counted confidently to ten and beyond, they named two-dimensional shapes and solved simple problems using appropriate mathematical terms and methods.

18. Mental and oral mathematical work is covered appropriately in most classes. Year 1 pupils quickly guessed mystery numbers by asking logical questions. They added single-digit numbers accurately, sometimes with practical help, estimated amounts of cubes well and gave thoughtful reasons for their answers. The pupils in Year 2 showed a good understanding of time, counted confidently in fives and tens and knew the place value of two-digit numbers. They recognised the value of coins, totalled amounts correctly up to a pound and calculated change from fifty pence. However, they did not understand a sufficient range of mental strategies to find the answers to written problems and the presentation of their work was untidy.

19. Pupils in Year 3 measured reasonably accurately in centimetres. They ordered and sequenced numbers correctly and used comparative language appropriately. At the end of Key Stage 2 the pupils benefit from the division of the two classes into three ability groups. This has helped the teachers to match the work set to the pupils' needs and has provided a suitable level of challenge for the higher attaining pupils. The work in the Year 6 pupils' books was accurate overall. It was presented well and covered a satisfactory range of topics, including, calculating the perimeters and areas of regular and irregular shapes, converting metric measures, finding equivalent fractions and solving problems phrased in words. The pupils used doubling and halving confidently to solve multiplication and division problems. They also used inverse operations to check their answers.

20. The pupils' attainment in science is in line with national expectations in both key stages. The scheme of work has been reviewed to ensure that topics are not repeated and to give greater challenge for the higher attaining pupils. More attention is also being given to developing the pupils' investigative skills. However, in several year groups the pupils' exercise books contained too little work. This was not the case in Year 6, where the pupils recorded their work methodically. Pupils in Key Stage 1 explained night and day, drawing on their knowledge of light sources and shadows. They identified body parts correctly and knew that the five senses provide humans and animals with an awareness of the world. Older

pupils had an appropriate knowledge of healthy foods and described simple food chains. They asked relevant questions, although the presentation of work varied in quality. Pupils in Year 6 covered a good range of topics at an appropriate level. They used suitable recording methods when undertaking practical activities, such as observing the germination of seeds over time.

21. In Key Stage 2, standards in the foundation subjects were satisfactory in music, history and religious education. Standards in art and in design and technology, where skills have not been taught systematically over time, are improving but are below national expectations and require further development. In recognition of this, the school held a design and technology week, with visiting artists who helped the pupils to explore new skills. The pupils made good advances in their learning when new techniques were taught well.

22. The pupils throughout the school, including those pupils who have special educational needs and those for whom English is not their mother tongue, make good progress in the Foundation Stage classes, in Key Stage 1 and in Years 4 and 6. In the remainder of Key Stage 2 the pace of learning is sound overall. Improvements in the quality of teaching and in the planning for all subjects are helping the pupils to plug the gaps in their knowledge and to consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

23. The pupils' attitude to their work and their behaviour in lessons and around the school are good. The pupils have responded well to the improvements in the quality of the teaching and the higher levels of challenge in many lessons. In the Foundation Stage the pupils played co-operatively without direct supervision. They initiated conversations with each other and with adults, took turns and played imaginatively for considerable lengths of time. Elsewhere, the pupils worked independently in groups with sustained concentration and effort. Adults manage behaviour well. Good behaviour was praised frequently and the pupils were rewarded justly and fairly. The number of exclusions has reduced annually; there have been no exclusions this year.

24. The attendance figure for last year was well below average. However, the school works well with other agencies and is doing a great deal to improve attendance. Lessons began and ended punctually.

25. Overall, the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is sound, with particular strengths in the moral and social elements. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to take part in extracurricular activities, covering the performing and creative arts, and team sports. Visits to museums and other places of interest enrich the curriculum, and residential trips provide the pupils with opportunities to exercise responsibility and to develop their social skills.

26. The pupils work well together in lessons and learn to value other's views and opinions. They raise funds for national charities and donate produce to the local harvest festival. The pupils and their families supported the school well at this year's fireworks display. The pupils understand the need for rules and recognise that their teachers are fair. They know the difference between right and wrong and most follow the school rules without prompting. In personal, social and health education lessons, the pupils discuss themes such as friendship, honesty and caring for the environment. Adults enjoy good relationships with each other, providing a positive role model for the pupils.

27. Assemblies allow the pupils opportunities to reflect on matters of importance, to share their musical talents and to celebrate successes. Although reasonable provision for the pupil's spiritual development is made, within the caring ethos of the school, more could be done in lessons to foster their spirituality.

28. The provision for the pupils' cultural education has improved and is satisfactory. The pupils are developing appropriate insights into the variety of people's beliefs and cultures, in lessons such as geography, music and religious education. Displays illustrated the beliefs and customs associated with Divali, and in the Foundation Stage there was an informative display of saris, together with examples of the pupils' designs for the material.

The quality of education

29. The quality of teaching has improved since the inspection in September 2002. It was satisfactory or better in all lessons; in seven of the 18 lessons it was good and in a further four it was very good. However, a small proportion of the satisfactory teaching had aspects requiring further development. The quality of the teaching was good in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. In Key Stage 2 it was satisfactory overall, although the quality of teaching was good among the established teachers. The improvement in the quality of teaching has been a major factor in raising standards. The school has worked hard to eradicate weak teaching and is now focussing on improving teaching further.

30. Changes to staffing and appropriate training have contributed to improvements in teaching and to the high expectations evident in a significant number of lessons. Common strengths in lessons included, clear learning objectives, a good variety of activities, an emphasis on spoken language, the correct use of vocabulary, and the effective use of teaching assistants. In the best lessons, the final activities challenged the pupils' thinking when reviewing the learning that had taken place; teachers' questions and explanations were succinct and the sequence of activities built productively on the pupils' previous learning.

31. In the few lessons where the teachers had not established clear expectations of the level of work required, the pupils' interest waned, unsupervised groups did not focus on the task they had been set, and some pupils continued to play with equipment when the adults were talking.

32. The Foundation Stage curriculum provides the pupils with a very good start in their education. Work in the Foundation Stage is firmly based on the six required areas of learning, and the recent changes to the planning have resulted in a curriculum that is inclusive, innovative and exciting. All the adults have a clear role and their timely interventions help the pupils to articulate their thinking and to develop their understanding. The team has succeeded in providing the pupils with a richly imaginative learning environment despite the limitations of the building. Plans for a specifically designed Foundation Stage area are at an advanced stage.

33. The curriculum for Key Stages 1 and 2 has been improved; it is good overall. It is suitably broad and balanced, soundly planned and is based on national guidance. Recent plans link themes to bring coherence to the work across different subjects. The use of specialist teachers and other visitors, such as the local fire officers, adds interest and relevance to the pupils' learning.

34. There are appropriate plans to develop the curriculum further. The introduction of a carousel of activities each morning is well established and effective, providing a calm start to the day and a time to address the targets in the pupils' individual education plans. Across the school, regular homework extends the skills learned in class. In the Year 4 class, the parents were provided with helpful information about the tasks set so they could readily support their children's work.

35. Medium and long-term plans provide a coherent and progressive programme across the curriculum. The improvements in planning, together with the use of a commercially produced programme on thinking skills, are enabling the pupils to grasp complex concepts. Pupils imagine wearing different coloured hats to identify the different types of thinking required. Most of the teachers used questioning successfully to stimulate the pupils' ideas, with consequent improvements in their responses. Throughout the school there is more active learning; the use of interactive whiteboards and new software is helping all of the pupils to learn more effectively.

36. Provision for pupils who have special educational needs is good. Initiatives to improve the school's provision for this group of pupils have worked well. In particular, the consistent use of a phonics scheme is helping the pupils to improve their writing and spelling skills. Additional funding has been used well to continue a nationally initiated programme on reading. Teaching assistants provide good support, modelling language well and giving the pupils the confidence to discuss their ideas and to offer answers. The help provided for the pupils with special educational needs, individually and in small groups, is monitored to ensure that the pupils do not miss essential elements of the teaching in their class lessons. Individual education plans are well written and provide suitable targets to guide the pupils' learning. Provision to meet the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also improving, helped by the overall rise in the quality of teaching.

37. Assessment has improved and is good overall. It is a strength of the Foundation Stage, where the careful check kept on all aspects of the pupils' learning is used well to plan the pupils' next activities. Throughout the school, there is effective tracking of the pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science; this information is used to group pupils and to identify those who are underachieving. Suitable steps are being taken to address the learning needs of these pupils. Work is marked regularly and, generally, the teachers' comments are closely matched to the learning objectives. The comments help the pupils to understand what they have to do to improve. As a result of more accurate assessments, the school has set increasingly challenging targets for the end of both key stages.

38. The provision for pastoral care is effective and provides the pupils with secure and responsive attention. A trained member of staff provides respite sessions for vulnerable pupils. She also supports some of their parents. The school has improved the provision at lunchtime for pupils who are causing concern.

39. The quality of the learning environment has improved greatly. The headteacher has led work that has resulted in a pleasant, well-organised and welcoming school, where pupils and staff work harmoniously. There have been particular improvements to the library, the drama studio, the computer suite, classroom book areas, and the provision for the pupils at break and at lunchtimes.

Leadership and management

40. The headteacher provides very good leadership and management. She has engaged the staff and the community in the drive to raise standards, although the rate of progress has been affected by the considerable turnover of teachers. Her high profile in community activities and in a range of educational groups has been beneficial to the school and has attracted additional funding for a wide range of academic and pastoral projects. For example, the school is working successfully with a community action group to provide, among other ventures, a family learning programme. The youth project is also encouraging local teenagers to coach the pupils in football.

41. The newly structured senior management team supports the headteacher and the staff effectively. Roles and responsibilities have been clarified, helping the co-ordinators to manage their subjects. The policy for learning and teaching has been brought up to date, and a new marking scheme takes good account of recent training and guidance. The co-ordinators have a realistic overview of their subjects, and a sound understanding of their responsibilities for improving standards. The impact of the work of the co-ordinator for the core subjects is evident in the number of lessons where standards are now in line with national expectations. The Foundation Stage is led well and provides a very good example for others to emulate.

42. The school's self-evaluation has improved, and takes appropriate account of internal and external monitoring. However, the use of data to evaluate the school's overall effectiveness is at an early stage of development and staff and governors are receiving further training in this.

43. The recently reconstituted governing body is ably led by the chair of governors, who has supported the school very well during the last two years. Governors are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. The governing body has introduced appropriate procedures for monitoring standards and for holding the school to account for the quality of education that it provides. Governors are suitably involved at the strategic level and the chair of governors recognises the school's strengths, weaknesses and priorities for improvement. There has been a significant turnover of governors since the last inspection. The governing body has increased its capacity for further improvement by appointing suitably experienced qualified members.

44. The LEA has provided appropriate support for the improvement of management and the curriculum, particularly through the work of the school's link adviser.

Implementation of the action plan

45. The inspection of September 2002 required the school to address six key issues. These related to: improving standards and the progress of all groups of pupils; improving the quality of teaching and learning; providing a balanced curriculum with worthwhile learning opportunities; improving assessment; providing the school with clear educational direction; and implementing procedures for systematically checking the quality of the school's provision. The school has made good progress on all six issues.

46. Standards are rising across the curriculum but there is still room for improvement. The range of strategies used by the school has particularly raised standards in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of lessons in which the pupils make good progress

in their learning has increased significantly this term because of the overall improvements in the quality of teaching.

47. The teachers have suitable and, often high, expectations of what the pupils can achieve in lessons and over time. Regular monitoring of lessons and of the pupils' work, by the senior management team and by the LEA, is ensuring that the pupils' work is sufficiently challenging.

48. All the National Curriculum subjects and religious education are covered adequately so that worthwhile learning opportunities are provided and statutory requirements are met.

49. Assessment is used effectively to plan work at an appropriate level for classes and groups of pupils. It is also used to check on the progress that the pupils have made.

50. The headteacher has developed the staff into a team which is appropriately informed and well motivated to lead necessary change. She provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge. Responsibilities and accountability are clear. The governing body is fulfilling its role effectively.

51. There are rigorous procedures to check the quality of the school's provision, including monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. The management team is improving its capacity to use self-evaluation to set priorities for improvement but this is an area for further development.

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 September 2002. 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 March, June and October 2003, and in February 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 September 2002.

In November 2004, two HMI 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.

Eighteen lessons or parts of lessons, and four 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, senior staff, the chair of the governing body, the educational welfare officer, the pastoral care worker, the head of Year 7 from the local secondary school, three representatives from local community services and the school's link adviser. 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 September 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.