



Merridale Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104334
LEA Wolverhampton
Inspection number 277134
Inspection dates 2 May 2006 to 3 May 2006
Reporting inspector David Carrington AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Aspen Way
School category	Community		Wolverhampton
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		West Midlands WV3 0UP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01902 558760
Number on roll	225	Fax number	01902 558761
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Dr Rev Melanie Clayton
Date of previous inspection	13 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr Simon Lane

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 11	2 May 2006 - 3 May 2006	277134

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Merridale is about the same size as most primary schools. The pupils come from many ethnic backgrounds. The largest group come from Indian families, though there are also many from White British and Pakistani backgrounds. More than half of the pupils have English as an additional language. Over a quarter of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above average. A below average number of pupils have learning difficulties. When children start in the Nursery they have significantly below-average levels of skills and knowledge.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Merridale is a good and improving school that is increasingly making sure that all pupils achieve as well as possible. Standards, although still below average are rising and pupils' progress is accelerating. Expectations of the standards pupils are capable of attaining are generally high. Teaching and learning are good. Pupils are set challenging targets that they work hard to achieve and the quality of teaching is now much more consistent across the school. Lesson planning and marking is insufficiently robust. Children in the Nursery and Reception Year are taught well and they build skills and knowledge steadily. This good start is now built on steadily as pupils move up through the rest of the school. Behaviour is exceptionally good and pupils of all backgrounds play and work together happily and in harmony.

The key improvement since the last inspection has been to the target-setting and tracking process. Weaker-performing groups are identified quickly and effective steps are taken to increase their progress. This is particularly evident amongst the more capable pupils and those from Indian family backgrounds. Good improvement has also been made to the process of checking and evaluating the quality of teaching, which is well focused on strengths and areas for improvement.

Most of these improvements have occurred over the past 18 months, since the headteacher took up post. He provides strong, sure leadership and has a sharp understanding of the school's performance. The involvement in leadership and management of other staff and the governors is developing well. However, the time is ripe for staff and governors to pause and review the total impact of recent major change in order to plan the next cycle of school improvement. School self-evaluation is accurate and generally matches the judgements of this inspection. Prospects for continuing advance are good, as is the value for money provided by the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that lesson planning includes precise identification of the skills and knowledge pupils in different ability groups are to learn.
- Develop marking to indicate consistently the next steps pupils must take in order to reach their targets.
- Involve all staff and governors in a timely review of the impact of recent innovations in order to assist the next cycle of school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are below average, but rising, and achievement is good. Last year the weakest results were in mathematics but the school has put in place an effective programme to raise achievement and this has had good effect in all three core subjects, but especially mathematics.

The pattern of good progress is consistent from the start of the Nursery through to the end of Year 6. Children start Nursery with significantly below- average standards

and they build skills and knowledge well in their first two years of school. By the time they join Year 1 most children have achieved or are close to their targets. This is due to the careful match of work to their needs.

Progress has improved considerably in Years 1 and 2 this year. The school is setting more ambitious targets that provide good challenge for the pupils. Year 1 and 2 pupils are enthusiastic workers and they try very hard to reach their individual targets. Most of them do this successfully. About a quarter of Year 2 pupils have learning difficulties and they are progressing well, though overall standards are below average in this year group.

Pupils in Years 3 to 6 also progress well. As in other parts of the school, improvements in teaching quality have led to increased achievement. Pupils from Indian family backgrounds achieve well and generally reach standards that are higher than the other pupils. The Year 3 Indian pupils have not shared this same good progress in the past, though their achievement is now tracked much more thoroughly and they have been provided with effective additional support that is enabling them to improve their performance well.

Standards in Years 4 and 5 are close to average, and higher than those in Year 6. However, standards in Year 6 are above those of last year, though still a little below average overall. The evident improvements to achievement are due largely to the school's much-improved target-setting and tracking system, higher expectations and better quality of teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good throughout the school; pupils treat each other with respect and they operate as a team. Children in the Nursery and Reception Year enjoy school and work happily and safely together with much self-esteem and confidence.

Pupils are given many opportunities to reflect on spiritual, moral and social issues, and they show good understanding of different cultures. They are keen learners, enthusiastic and take pride in their work. Pupils are insistent that they like coming to school. Attendance has improved this year, and is now average. Behaviour is outstanding; pupils are very polite and courteous.

The school successfully encourages pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. Even the youngest ones know that water is necessary for health. Pupils keep fit by using the 'Zone Parc' at playtime and joining the many team games. Pupils told inspectors they feel safe because everyone follows the school rules. The school council makes a positive contribution to the school by fund raising, which enhances the quality of life for everyone. Pupils run a stationery shop and organise school discos, which helps to prepare them for life and work outside school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The school's mission statement, to 'create a happy caring school within a pleasant and stimulating environment,' is evident throughout and impacts strongly on teaching and learning. This was particularly evident in a good Year 1 lesson in which pupils investigated plant growth in groups and enthusiastically sowed nasturtium seeds.

Teaching is good for children in the Nursery and Reception Year, where children learn in an exciting environment. They have a variety of diverse experiences, which are planned well to ensure they build skills and knowledge steadily.

Across the school, teaching is thorough, constructive and engaging. Teachers have high expectations of the standards all pupils are capable of attaining and provide good opportunities for pupils to work as a class, in groups and independently. They continually explain to the pupils what more they must do to improve. Pupils have fun in their learning and enjoy their work. This leads to good achievement.

At present, lesson planning does not always sufficiently identify the knowledge and skills to be learned by different groups. Where this is the case, learning is less effective than in other lessons. There are also inconsistencies in the quality of marking across the school, especially in indicating the next steps pupils must take in order to reach their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a rich and varied curriculum. Support for pupils who have English as an additional language is good. Children in the Nursery and Reception Year enjoy a stimulating programme of activities that is well focussed on all six areas of learning, especially their language and personal and emotional development. The children enjoy their work and they talk enthusiastically, if briefly of their investigations. Pupils with learning difficulties are provided with tailor-made programmes that are focused on their individual targets. However, planning is not always precise enough in the identification of the skills and knowledge to be learned by each ability group, and this reduces achievement.

The school participates in the 'Forest School' project that is linked to ecological matters. Merridale has an outstanding outdoor environment that provides safe opportunities for pupils to explore the school wood, bird hide, pond and peat bog. Pupils learn science, geography and mathematics through experimentation in this exciting outdoor classroom. Children in the Reception Year, for example, were thrilled to discover about spring by finding daffodils and counting rooks' nests. Pupils say they really enjoy learning like this.

The school offers a wide range of out-of-school activities. Pupils from Year 2 onward take part in residential trips where they learn good team-building and problem-solving skills.

One parent wrote that the school makes learning fun and that 'the Curriculum Newsletter has been a very good resource to see what is happening, so we can help to reinforce learning'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for and there are good procedures for health and safety. The behaviour policy works very effectively to promote outstanding conduct. Attendance is improving well because the school works successfully to encourage pupils to come to school regularly.

All staff know their pupils well, and social development is promoted sensitively. Vulnerable pupils and those who have learning difficulties are identified quickly and supported carefully. They gain in confidence and know they are well looked after. This enables them to achieve well.

Assessment information is used to provide good quality guidance for pupils. The marking of pupils' work does not consistently tell them about ways to reach their targets but the new target-setting and tracking system has good potential in monitoring pupils' progress and raising achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher leads the school with clear vision and high expectations. He introduced a number of important changes to management systems when he joined the school 18 months ago. These have proved very beneficial for the pupils, especially in the progress that they make. Now there are rigorous systems to check and evaluate the school's effectiveness, particularly in the monitoring of learning and tracking of progress.

About half the staff are new to the school. They and the other staff are well supported professionally, with the result that teaching quality has improved, with a parallel increase in pupils' progress. Senior leaders and staff form a strong team that shares the headteacher's insistence on good standards and provision.

Governors are increasingly involved in checking that the school is doing well. They manage the budget effectively and are aware that the results of important decisions, such as the extension of the buildings, benefit pupils' learning. The next step is for all staff and governors to take stock of recent improvement before taking the next step in raising achievement.

There is much innovative thinking and practice at Merridale, such as the new system to share with parents ways to help their children move up a level. Parents have good

opportunities to explain their thoughts and concerns and school leaders take these views seriously. The school knows its performance well and leaders' judgements about this are accurate. Past improvement has been good and it is very clear that the school has the capacity to continue this rate of advance.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school. You told us a lot about the school and asked us lots of questions about our work, which we were pleased to answer. It soon became obvious that you really like your school and that you think your teachers make your work fun and take good care of you. We found many good things in your school; the main ones are:

- You do well in your work and most of you reach your targets.
- You are well taught and this means you learn new things quickly.
- Your behaviour is something to be proud of.
- You play and work happily together and help each other when you have difficulties.
- Your headteacher wants you to do well and he has made some important and successful changes to your school.

We think that there are three things that can be improved:

- There could be more variation in the work for the different groups in class.
- When they mark your work, your teachers could tell you more about how to improve.
- All the adults in school should talk together about the changes made to the school and how successful they are, and then decide what to do next to make sure you all reach your targets.

You can help your teachers by continuing to play and work well together and by telling them how well you think you are doing.

A copy of our report will be sent to your homes. Some of you may want to have a look at it as it tells more about the fun you have at school. There is a bit about the Forest School. Why do you think we say this is important?