



Merry Hill Infant School and Nursery

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117090
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 279982
Inspection dates 9 May 2006 to 10 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Linda Killman LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	School Lane
School category	Community		WD23 1ST
Age range of pupils	3 to 7		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8950 2166
Number on roll	223	Fax number	020 8950 6338
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Robert Lewis
Date of previous inspection	15 May 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Pauline Hannibal

Age group 3 to 7	Inspection dates 9 May 2006 - 10 May 2006	Inspection number 279982
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized infant school with more boys than girls on roll. The area the school serves is generally affluent with low levels of deprivation. A lower than average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most children are from White British backgrounds. The school is over subscribed and has a good reputation locally. Children start school in the nursery with above average attainments. Most children remain at the school throughout the infant stage. However, a few are from families with parents serving in the forces who move at short notice when posted to other areas. Unusually this year, nearly half of the teachers are new due to maternity leave and the relocation of previous staff. The school has been successful in renewing the Investor in People standard.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree that Merry Hill is a good, effective and improving school. It provides an exceptionally welcoming, well kept environment for the school community. The school is well led and managed and staff have a secure knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher has a clear vision for how the school can be further improved and this is shared by staff and governors. The leadership team effectively works together to drive standards up and improve provision. Leaders and managers systematically and diligently monitor the quality of teaching and learning but their evaluation currently lacks sufficient rigour and points for development. Key issues raised in the previous inspection have been effectively tackled. The capacity to improve is good and the school provides good value for money. Children achieve well in the good Foundation Stage. Most seven year olds leave the school achieving exceptionally high standards of attainment. Children achieve well because teachers keep a close check on their progress and any underachievement is swiftly tackled. Teaching and learning are good. In their planning teachers make meaningful links between subjects. However, in some lessons teachers are insufficiently precise about what they want children to learn. Children's personal development is good and outstanding in the Foundation Stage. The caring ethos generates a positive climate for learning. However, occasionally high levels of noise and a lack of attentiveness in some lessons inhibit learning. Curriculum provision is good with an exceptionally rich outdoor environment for learning. However, the library environment is dull and unwelcoming, which the school is working to improve. There is a lack of new material for readers, and learners are not successfully able to retrieve authors or information.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning through rigorous monitoring and evaluation. - Refine daily lesson plans with improved precision about what teachers intend children to learn in every lesson. - Further develop children's listening skills and attentiveness. - Improve the quality of provision in the library and teach children how to find their choice of stories and information.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From an above average starting point in the nursery, most seven year olds leave the school achieving exceptionally high standards of attainment. All groups of children make good progress. The school keeps a watchful eye on children's academic progress and personal development. Effective use of analysis of assessment information results in swift and appropriate support to tackle underachievement. This is also used to set challenging targets for improvement in literacy and numeracy. The school is not complacent about the high achievement of learners. Evaluation of achievement and standards is used to set whole school priorities for further improvement. For example, the standard of handwriting has significantly improved since the school's previous

inspection. This is because handwriting skills are now explicitly taught and teachers' expectations are higher. It has had a positive impact on the quality of presentation seen in children's workbooks and in displays of work around the school. Children take pride in their written work. All learners observed during the inspection thoroughly enjoy their work. The positive and inclusive ethos created by the school effectively contributes to children's good achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school judged this as outstanding but inspectors find that personal development is good with several outstanding features. Behaviour is good, but there is sometimes unnecessary restlessness and too much noise in some lessons that is not challenged and corrected assertively. This constrains learning. In the Foundation Stage there is very strong emphasis on developing children's self-confidence and independence. Across the school all adults show great respect towards children. In a positive way, staff encourage and remind them to follow the 'Golden Rules'. The children know that they are treated fairly. Children are eager to please and thoroughly enjoy coming to school because lessons are lively and capture their interest. Attendance rates are above the national average. Children are welcoming and polite to visitors. They learn to help others by raising funds for charities. As a result of good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, children respect the views, values and beliefs of others. They make exceptionally good progress in acquiring numeracy and literacy skills that will help them in later life. Since the previous inspection there has been an improvement in the school's resources for information and communication technology (ICT). This has had an impact on improving children's skills in using computers to enhance their learning and life opportunities in the future. There is a good programme of personal, social and health education that helps all children to know how to stay safe and fully understand how to live a healthy lifestyle. They have frequent opportunities for regular exercise, including daily 'Brain Gym' activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall and the children make good progress in their learning. In the best lessons, much is expected of children and tasks are adjusted to match learners' needs and abilities. Strengths in teaching are the very positive relationships that staff have with the children and their effective use of regular praise and encouragement to motivate them. Interactive whiteboards recently introduced in some classrooms are used effectively by staff to capture and sustain the children's interest. All teachers use a good range of methods and resources to inspire the children in lessons. Consequently, children are eager to learn and do their best. However, in some lessons teaching is only satisfactory. This is when teachers are not specific enough in their explanation of what the children are learning and why. When this happens the children

are unsure of the purpose of the lesson, lose concentration and make only adequate progress. The new teachers who have recently joined the school have been introduced well to school procedures and expectations. Teaching assistants are capable, competent and highly valued members of the team. They provide unobtrusive and sensitive support for children who have difficulties with aspects of their work. Teachers have a clear understanding of the standards that children should be reaching and have high expectations of children's performance. They use a good range of systems for measuring and tracking children's progress and attainment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. Recently the school has begun to revise its planning to ensure that stronger links are made between different subjects. Focus weeks, such as those for the arts and for mathematics direct children's attention to these areas which helps to bring the subjects to life. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is good. The exceptionally stimulating outdoor area is used very effectively to excite children and to provide a wide range of enjoyable activities to encourage physical and creative play. The school provides well for children with learning difficulties and disabilities. Children benefit from a broad range of clubs and activities, and their interest and enjoyment in their work is enriched through a wide range of visitors and visits. Attractive displays in classrooms and around the school illustrate children's work in the full range of subjects. The school has identified that the library is dull and is insufficiently inviting as a place to inspire a passion for books and reading and is in the process of improving matters. Throughout the school, the strong emphasis on nurturing personal, social and spiritual development means that the children become very confident learners, keen to explore and find out for themselves.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides an exceptionally welcoming, well kept environment for the school community. Its caring ethos generates a positive climate for learning. This contributes to the good achievement and personal development of all children. There was a good response to the inspection questionnaire and the majority of parental views were very positive. They feel well informed and appreciate opportunities to meet regularly with staff. Emergency and child protection procedures are in place. Health and safety checks are made periodically to ensure children's well-being. Children know that adults will listen to any concerns they might have. The school works very effectively with outside agencies to support pupils with additional needs and there are good links with other schools in the area. Suitable support and challenge is given to children in lessons. Procedures for tracking children's achievements work very well, ensuring that all teachers know their children's capabilities and how to move their learning forward.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management at all levels are good and the school runs smoothly on a daily basis. The headteacher has a clear vision about how the school should move forward with children's enjoyment, well-being and achievement at the forefront of the school's priorities. There is a common sense of purpose amongst staff. The school's information and record keeping systems are well managed. The quality of teaching and learning is regularly monitored but as yet, is not rigorous enough and points for development are insufficiently clear. Subject leaders have a good grasp of standards in their subject and vigilantly monitor them across the school. They are well placed to lead staff development and contribute to the school improvement plan. Governance is good. Governors have their fingers on the pulse of the school and make informed decisions. They visit the school regularly, receive useful, relevant information and provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support. Robust and astute financial management ensures that the budget is spent wisely and impacts on learning. Parents are provided with regular information about the school and are consulted on school matters. Most of them appreciate the open style of the school's leadership. Key issues raised in the previous inspection have been effectively tackled and areas of weakness further improved. The leadership and management effectively contribute to the school's good capacity to improve.

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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	1	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	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	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	1	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	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

We enjoyed our visit to your school. We learned a great deal by talking to you and watching you learn. We thought that you would like to know what we liked about your school and how we thought it could get even better. - You made us both feel very welcome and greeted us with a smile. - You enjoy coming to school because you feel safe and you really like your teachers. - You all get on well together and you know right from wrong. - You work hard. - You are good learners. - Every year that you are at the school, you make good progress. - You have a lovely outdoor space to learn and play in. - You are good at using computers and other technology which will help your learning as you grow up. Your headteacher runs the school well and all of the adults work hard to make sure that you do your best. What we have asked the school to do now to make it even better is to: - Improve the way checks are made on teaching and learning. - Make sure that you know exactly what you are learning in each lesson. - Make sure that you listen carefully and sit quietly when asked. - Make the library a special place where you can enjoy books. We wish you all the best in the future.