

Merton Bank Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104784
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	287034
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Janette Corlett

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	244
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr S Sykes
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Wilkinson
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2002
School address	Roper Street St Helens Merseyside WA9 1EJ
Telephone number	01744 22104
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Merton Bank Primary is situated in an area of high social and economic disadvantage. Most of the pupils come from local authority (LA) housing, near the school. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above the national average and the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is above average. Almost all pupils are White British and very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Standards and achievement are inadequate, with particularly low standards in English by the end of Year 6. In 2006, only 56% of Year 6 pupils reached Level 4, the standard expected for their age, in the national tests in English. Although standards in mathematics and science are better, progress is poor. Despite the support given by the LA, school leaders have not acted quickly enough to bring about improvement. Whilst they collect information about pupils' standards and progress, they do not use this effectively to tackle areas of weakness systematically and set appropriately challenging targets. Plans to improve the school are not sufficiently focused on raising standards. There are no clear systems for checking that plans translate into actions that improve pupils' progress. Governors are supportive, but do not hold the school to account for its performance. There are uncertainties as to the leadership structure of the school from September 2007. The school does not demonstrate the capacity to bring about the improvements necessary and provides unsatisfactory value for money.

Most children start school with standards below those expected for their age. They make satisfactory progress in all areas of learning in the Foundation Stage. Progress throughout the rest of the school is erratic due to weaknesses in the quality of teaching, which is inadequate overall. There are some examples of good teaching and, where this occurs, pupils make good progress. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, teachers' expectations of acceptable standards of behaviour and the quantity and quality of pupils' work are too low. There are too few opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills. Too little is demanded of pupils in terms of progress and their standards in handwriting and presentation of work. Higher ability pupils, in particular, are not challenged enough. The school has failed to address the legacy of underachievement.

The school demonstrates a caring approach to pupils. Pupils' personal development, however, is inadequate. Although their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory and they know how to live a healthy lifestyle, not enough is done to develop pupils' social and moral awareness. This results in poor standards of behaviour for a small but significant number of pupils in some lessons, and in and around the school. Pupils generally enjoy coming to school. Many show positive attitudes to learning and contribute to lessons when given the opportunity to do so, but learning is too often disrupted by the minority who find it hard to behave acceptably. Attendance is below the national average, but has improved over the last year. The school has implemented national guidance for safeguarding pupils, but some parents express concerns over incidents of bullying, where they feel the school has not taken swift and appropriate action to prevent recurrence.

Leadership and management are inadequate. The acting headteacher has quickly gained an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but, due to the very short time since taking up the post, the impact of her leadership is not measurable in terms of pupils' progress. The day-to-day management of the school is satisfactory and the school has worked hard to ensure disruption for pupils' education is kept to a minimum, despite the current extensive building work and classroom refurbishments. School leaders and middle managers

recognise their responsibilities, but do not have the skills and experience to carry out their roles effectively. They have had insufficient opportunity to improve matters and thus their work is not well targeted or effective in bringing about the improvements needed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and increase the pupils' rate of progress, particularly in English.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Make better use of assessment to set more challenging targets for pupils that are closely matched to their needs.
- Improve behaviour in Key Stage 2.
- Establish robust systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school to better inform planning for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement and standards are inadequate. Pupils enter the Foundation Stage with standards which are below those expected for their age. By the end of Year 6, standards are well below the national average in English and below average in mathematics and science. Children make satisfactory progress in Nursery and Reception. This is because provision has improved, due largely to the good quality support provided by the LA. In Years 1 to 6 the rate of progress varies according to the quality of teaching and is unsatisfactory overall. Too few pupils reach the nationally expected Level 4 at the end of Year 6 in English and mathematics and the proportion of more able pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in English, mathematics and science is too small. Work seen in pupils' books during the inspection, especially in English, indicates most pupils are working at levels well below those that would be expected. Pupils with LDD reach the standards which might be expected of them given their starting points and this means their progress is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

Pupils' personal development and well-being are inadequate. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. However, whilst pupils have satisfactory opportunities to develop spiritual and cultural awareness, their social and moral development is hampered by low expectations of behaviour in lessons and around the school. Behaviour at lunchtimes is unacceptable and pupils are not always adequately supervised. A small number of pupils were observed fighting and behaving inappropriately in lessons and this disrupted learning so that other pupils were unable to make progress. Parents have expressed their concerns about behaviour in lessons and bullying. One parent notes the distress caused to a child by repeated incidents of bullying and comments that this is, 'a shame when she loves to learn new things'. The school holds the Healthy School Award. The many curricular and extra-curricular sporting activities and the availability of drinking water, fruit and healthy eating options at lunchtimes ensure that pupils know and understand how to keep themselves fit and healthy. Through the Eco-Warriors project, bulb-planting and making nest boxes, pupils make a positive contribution to the community and the school council offers some opportunities for pupils to express their views. Pupils are not prepared well enough to ensure their future economic well-being, because they have poor basic skills in English and not enough opportunities to develop them in other areas of the curriculum.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching has significant weaknesses in too many lessons and is inadequate overall. Where teaching is good, lessons are planned carefully and the pupils understand clearly what they are expected to learn. Teachers capture pupils' interest and expect them to work hard. An example of this was a Year 6 lesson where the teacher worked with a group in guided reading whilst the rest of the class worked independently focusing well on the set task. Where teaching has weaknesses or is inadequate, whole-class sessions last too long and teachers do not involve the pupils sufficiently in the activities set: this often leads to poor behaviour. Work is not pitched at the right level to get the best from all pupils so many do not make enough progress. Pupils' writing skills are particularly weak and the poor spelling skills of many older pupils reflect a legacy of poor development of their phonic skills earlier in the school. Teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils with LDD when working with them individually or in small groups. This helps these pupils make sound progress. However, in whole-class lessons, the assistants sometimes spend too long passively listening to teachers' introductions rather than actively supporting learning. This means that opportunities to work intensively on developing basic skills with individuals or groups of pupils are lost. Most teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give good praise and encouragement. However, teachers do not provide enough comments to indicate how pupils can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets requirements. However, it is overly dependent on national schemes of work, none of which is adapted to the needs and priorities of the school. For example, opportunities to raise achievement in writing are missed because pupils do not write frequently enough in all subjects and for a variety of different purposes. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory. Teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards in lessons and there are opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support other areas of learning and improve their skills in this subject. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. It gives them well-structured activities to help them learn while they play. Similarly, detailed individual education plans ensure that pupils with LDD are given focused support, particularly in small groups, to meet their individual learning needs. The curriculum is appropriately enriched by outside visits and visitors to the school. A range of extra-curricular clubs is well attended and pupils benefit from taking part in sporting events with other local schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

The school's care, guidance and support for pupils are inadequate. Most routines for health and safety are appropriately established and the school complies with statutory procedures for safeguarding pupils. However, there is sometimes not enough supervision during breaks and no activities are provided for older pupils during wet playtimes. This means that there are incidents involving rough or aggressive behaviour, which make some pupils feel unsafe. Support and guidance for pupils' academic progress are inadequate. Their academic progress is monitored, but teachers do not use the information effectively to plan lessons and ensure that pupils are

achieving as well as they should. Pupils are not given enough guidance about their current level of attainment and what they need to do to reach a higher level. Many pupils need extra support because of difficulties in their lives and the learning mentor plays a strong role in providing effective help for these vulnerable pupils. The school has good links with a range of outside support agencies and uses these effectively to provide support for those with LDD and their families. This is a strong factor in the satisfactory progress these pupils make.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate. The acting headteacher has an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is introducing an appropriate range of systems to bring about improvements. However, because of the very short time she has been in post, the impact of these is not yet evident in improvements in pupils' progress or in the standards they reach. The school's self-evaluation is inaccurate and its judgements are overgenerous. Although a great deal of information is collected, there is insufficient rigorous and systematic analysis to inform improvement planning and to prioritise actions correctly. The school has not taken effective steps to improve since the last inspection in 2002 and standards and achievement in English have declined. The governors are supportive, but do not hold the school to account for its performance. They have insufficient knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses and lack the expertise to tackle inadequacies. There is uncertainty as to the management arrangements that will be in place in September 2007, given that the acting headteacher's tenure will end in July. In addition, a number of key staff are on long-term leave of absence. This uncertainty makes it difficult for the school to plan strategically for how it will bring about the improvements needed.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	4
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for being so helpful when I visited your school with Mrs Henderson and Mrs Kenna. You made us feel very welcome and we enjoyed meeting and talking to you.

I am sorry to tell you that we think there are some things that need to be improved in your school very quickly. We have to make sure you learn as much as you can while you are at school and at the moment you are not doing as well as you might. This is because the work you are given is sometimes too easy or too difficult for you and some teachers do not tell you what you need to do to improve. I am also sad to say that some of you do not behave as well as you should in lessons and playtimes. You told us that you want to work hard and to enjoy playing with one another. It is a great pity that a small group of children interrupt your learning and spoil your playtimes. We want to make sure that things get better and have identified that your school needs 'special measures'. This means that your teachers will get some extra help to improve your school and that inspectors will visit the school every term to make sure that things are going well for you.

Your teachers will be working very hard and learning new things to make your lessons more exciting. You can help your teachers by listening to them carefully and always doing what they tell you quickly and without making a fuss. If you do not understand something, please ask for extra help. Try your best in every lesson and make sure your handwriting and presentation are always neat and tidy. Above all work hard and enjoy your learning, be kind to each other and behave sensibly.

We noticed that in some classes children are already making good progress, because teachers expect a lot from them. We want this to happen in every class, as we believe you are all capable of doing well.