

St Merryn School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111920
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	289102
Inspection date	9 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Alexander Paul Baxter

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	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Clifford
Headteacher	Simon Pollard
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2002
School address	St Merryn Padstow PL28 8NP
Telephone number	01841 520683
Fax number	01841 520683

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small primary school accepts pupils from the village and surrounding rural area. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds or have English as an additional language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and is very high in some year groups. For example, just under a half of the pupils currently in Year 5 have a learning need. Children's attainment on entry varies significantly, but generally it is below the level expected for their age. A significant number of pupils, some with learning difficulties, enter the school other than at the normal time of entry, particularly in Years 3 to 6. The school holds 'Healthy Schools' status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Merryn School is a good school. Despite varying numbers of pupils entering the school other than at the normal time of entry, often with learning needs, the school continues to improve. Standards are above average at the end of Year 6 and show the pupils' good achievement. The school reflects a small, tightly knit but welcoming and caring community where pupils' enjoyment of learning flourishes. The relatively new but well-respected headteacher has boosted parental confidence in the school and has nurtured a united and effective team of staff and governors. More than one parent wrote, 'The school seems to be going from strength to strength'. Leadership and management and teaching and learning are good and underpin the pupils' good academic achievements. The school's excellent partnership with parents is a key factor supporting the pupils' good personal development and well-being. Attendance is satisfactory but, despite the school's best efforts, too many holidays are taken during term time.

The staff, with good support from governors and outside agencies, sustain outstanding care, support and guidance. This is evident in the pupils' exceptional politeness, healthy living and contributions to the school and local community. Parents are extremely appreciative of the strengthened sense of community evident in the school. One parent wrote, 'I am thrilled with the progress and confidence the school has given to my children.'

Children are taught well and make good progress in Reception. Consistent teaching of phonics and mental mathematics and the pupils' good attitudes towards learning ensure that good progress continues through the school. As a result, standards are rising and are above average in English, mathematics and science. Across the school, many pupils demonstrate above-average speaking and listening skills. But teachers do not always give pupils enough time or opportunity to learn by finding things out for themselves. Sometimes pupils' investigative skills are not sufficiently extended in science.

Teachers know their pupils well and plan effectively to build on previous learning. The use of interactive whiteboards and the involvement of pupils in evaluating their own work are good features that are improving pupils' progress. The curriculum is good and it is enriched by an interesting range of activities. This has promoted the pupils' personal qualities, especially their good behaviour and preparation for the future. Children in Reception enjoy a good balance of adult-led and independent activity. Currently, they do not have ready access to outdoors and this limits their choice of learning activities. Self-evaluation is effective and is increasingly supported by carefully shared and accurate information. This is evident in the strengthened consistency in teaching and learning and in pupils' consistently good achievement in mathematics and their improved performance in speaking and listening and writing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more opportunities to learn through enquiry and investigation, especially in science and through outdoor learning activities for Reception children.
- Improve pupils' attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In response to improved and now consistently effective teaching and learning, pupils across the range of abilities achieve well by the time they leave the school. Standards are above average

in Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. Children make a good start in Reception, especially in communication, language and literacy and numeracy. Pupils make good progress through Years 1 and 2. The present Year 2, which contains a high proportion of pupils with learning needs, has done well to attain average standards in writing and reading, and above-average standards in mathematics. Improved and mostly good teaching continues through Years 3 to 6 and has enabled more pupils, especially higher attainers, to achieve well. Across the school, pupils' speaking and listening skills are good, but independent learning skills, including investigative skills in science, are not always developed to a sufficiently high level.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are very polite and show exceptionally high levels of enjoyment when at school. They are proud of their school, their friends, their teachers and their excellent healthy, safe lifestyles. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about their 'Huff and Puff' play equipment and the beautiful art work on display. One parent wrote, 'There is a lovely family atmosphere and my children are very happy here'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is nurtured by the school's friendly family ethos. Pupils have a strong awareness of the local community. Their understanding of Britain's diverse community is less secure. Attendance is satisfactory, but there are too many holidays taken in term time. Pupils take their responsibilities seriously. On the school council, for example, they are careful to suggest sensible and perceptive ideas. A regular Friday cake stall, supervised by pupils, raises much-needed funds for school equipment. The pupils are equally generous in their support of the community, raising funds for charities or singing carols at the local church and superstore. The pupils' self-confidence and above-average skills prepare them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers co-operate well to ensure increasingly consistent and effective teaching and learning styles throughout the school. In all classes good teaching is typified by sharp questioning and warm relationships between adults and pupils. Pupils say, 'Our teachers are very kind and fair'. Teachers use interactive whiteboards effectively to bring a visual stimulus to pupils' learning. Teachers plan effectively to ensure that all pupils are challenged at appropriate levels and are enabled to build on previous learning. In Reception and in Years 1 and 2, for example, a precise emphasis on phonics and on using words in a meaningful way is promoting speaking and listening skills successfully. In Years 3 to 6, higher expectations, which also involve pupils in evaluating their own work, have improved the quality of pupils' writing. As a result, more-able pupils, in particular, have improved their rate of progress. Teaching in mathematics is an established strength. Sometimes whole-class teaching continues for too long. This limits the time available for other forms of learning, particularly independent research.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs. A good range of clubs and visits enriches pupils' academic and personal development, especially their excellent adoption of healthy living. Close links with the community also extend pupils' learning opportunities, for example, through

visiting a local seafood restaurant to study and partake of local delicacies. Pupils have their confidence boosted by paired working exercises throughout the curriculum. Their excellent enjoyment of school is clearly promoted, especially in their acclaimed 'Wake and Shake' physical exercise routines. Children in Reception enjoy a good curriculum where imaginative role play in the 'undersea area' typifies their rich learning experiences. The curriculum is adapted effectively to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to challenge higher attainers. Currently the youngest children can only use the outdoor learning facilities when taken there by an adult and this limits their ability to choose activities for themselves. Across the school, other pupils do not always have enough opportunities to learn by initiating and following their own lines of enquiry, including at times in science.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The excellent pastoral care of the pupils is typical of the warm relationships shared by all those associated with the school. For example, the school's excellent partnership with parents and close links with outside agencies and the local community strongly support the pupils' well-being and personal development. One parent wrote, 'The school has an excellent community spirit and the children are part of an extended family'. The school safeguards the pupils' well-being very securely. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good support and progress as well as their peers. The school has established accurate and effective strategies for assessing pupils' skills and is monitoring their progress very carefully. Teachers use these assessments very effectively to inform teaching and to give pupils targets to help them improve. Pupils know their targets and how to improve their work and evaluate their own progress. This is helping them to progress even more quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is giving clear direction to the school and has increased the momentum of improvement in the school over the past 18 months. His collaborative and inclusive style of leadership has helped staff to improve their skills and to contribute more effectively to the day-to-day running of the school. The headteacher has introduced and continues to develop effective strategies to monitor teaching and to track pupils' progress. Self-evaluation is effective. Pupils' achievements have been lifted, their improved writing skills being a notable example. However, the school is somewhat modest in evaluating its own effectiveness. Initiatives are well considered and implemented, but their positive impact is not always appreciated early enough to promote even more improvement. The headteacher is well supported by staff and governors and together they have promoted an excellent partnership with parents. The friendly, welcoming ethos and the pupils' good achievements, both academically and personally, reflect the unity of purpose in doing the very best for the pupils. This increasingly effective team approach has brought good improvement since the last inspection and underpins a good capacity to improve in the future.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 July 2007

Dear Pupils,

St Merryn Primary School, St Merryn, Padstow, Cornwall PL28 8NP

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. I really enjoyed talking with you and observing your lessons. I particularly liked your delightful 'Wake and Shake' exercise routines. You were all very polite and helpful. Your school is a friendly community where you feel very safe and well looked after. I agree with you and with many of your parents that St Merryn is a good school that continues to improve. These are the main things I found:

- The standards you reach in Year 6 are better than in most schools. This is because you are taught well and make good progress as you move through the school.
- You really enjoy your time at school because you know that the headteacher and staff care for you extremely well. As a result, you have an excellent understanding of how to live healthily and safely.
- The headteacher, staff and governors are a good team. They work very closely with your parents and give you a good range of learning activities.

I have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to do these things to help your school to become even better:

- Give you more opportunities to learn by trying to find answers to your own questions and by following your own ideas, including in science, and for those of you in Reception by learning outdoors.
- Help some of you to improve your attendance.

Keep enjoying school and good luck in the future.

With best wishes,

Alexander Baxter Lead Inspector