

# Merley First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113707
<b>Local Authority</b>	Poole
<b>Inspection number</b>	311344
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 July 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Janet Simms

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	300
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nigel Paton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sally Birley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 January 2005
<b>School address</b>	Oakley Straight Merley Wimborne BH21 1SD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01202 888455
<b>Fax number</b>	01202 840351

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school is larger than average, serving a relatively advantaged area outside Wimborne. A very small proportion of families are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak languages other than English at home. Numbers claiming free school meals are very low. The school has Healthy Schools, Active Mark and Investor in People awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has some outstanding features, amongst which is the excellent start children get in the Reception classes. A stimulating curriculum is another strength, providing an exciting range of opportunities for pupils to develop their good entry skills levels. A high proportion of parents comment very positively on the 'friendly, caring atmosphere' that surrounds their children, so they have 'lots of fun and achieve excellent results', as one put it. The track record of significant progress since the last inspection three years ago shows excellent capacity to improve further. Except for some areas of early literacy and mathematics which are at the levels expected, entry skills are generally above expectations. From the start, children benefit from strong support from home and are very keen to learn. By the time pupils enter Year 1, standards exceed those expected, often by a considerable margin. Good progress continues through the school, a significant improvement since the last inspection. By the age of nine, a high proportion of pupils reach exceptionally high standards, often matching those expected of eleven year olds in English and mathematics. This is because of good teaching, effective target-setting and monitoring, and staff commitment to making sure that pupils are happy and achieve well throughout their time at school. Standards in subjects such as music and art are higher than expected, with many parents commenting on excellent musical performances, instrumental work and singing. These achievements contribute greatly to pupils' good social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. Children's enjoyment recurs frequently in parents' comments about the school. Pupils perceptively identify that, very occasionally, spending too long sitting inactive on the carpet spoils this a little, and would appreciate more opportunity for independent learning in lessons. Personal development is good. Again, there are outstanding aspects, amongst which are a bubbling enthusiasm for learning and excellent relationships. Attendance is exceptionally high because pupils love coming to school and 'don't want to miss anything' as one parent said. Almost all pupils behave very well, with much exemplary behaviour in many different contexts. A handful of pupils, mostly boys in Years 1 and 3, are the exception, however. A significant minority of parents recognise that the good level of support provided is not always successful in improving less appropriate behaviour, which affects others. Pastoral care is generally good and the school is tightening up the recording in areas such as risk assessments and fire drills. Good, accurate academic assessment now forms the basis for setting pupils challenging targets, but everyday marking does not consistently give enough information for older pupils to know how to reach these. Work to improve the school has been very effective because it has been led and managed well. Significant improvement in the effectiveness of subject leaders and other middle managers has resulted in a cohesive senior team, strongly resolved to move the school forward even further. The headteacher's energy and determination have led to notable improvement in standards and achievement, particularly amongst more able pupils, and has reduced the gap between girls' and boys' performance. Improvement in writing is a particular success. Governors challenge and support the school well, analysing strengths and weaknesses. They tackle weaker areas resolutely and plans to reorganise their roles are well focused on getting all governors further involved in improving the school. The school uses excellent partnerships well to support vulnerable pupils and to enhance learning across a huge range of activities.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 1

Parents particularly appreciate the outstanding start their children experience in Reception. Excellent liaison with pre-schools ensures a smooth transition, so children settle very happily. Excellent teaching provides an enjoyable balance between child-selected and adult-led learning. All children develop high levels of independence and maturity, together with excellent social skills and relationships. Progress is excellent, with achievement in all areas of learning exceeding expectations. As a result, children enter Year 1 with strong skills underpinning later literacy and numeracy development, and show exceptionally positive attitudes towards learning. The indoor environment is stimulating and creative, and adjacent outdoor provision is used well, though it is not big enough, or sufficiently sheltered, to be used in all weathers. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are excellent.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching to extend the time in lessons for independent learning and to provide more informative written guidance for older pupils to improve their work.
- Improve recording systems so that risk assessments, incident logs and fire drill records are complete, and that these are monitored.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Standards are well above average by Year 4 and achievement is good. Consistently good progress through the school means that pupils develop academic and other skills very effectively throughout their time at Merley. This now capitalises on good entry skills levels, so that by Year 2 standards are well above average, with more able pupils doing increasingly well. In a few lessons, however, pace and attention flag, so progress is slower because abler pupils have too little time to develop work in depth. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive well targeted support which ensures they achieve as well as others. In the absence of statutory targets, the school sets very challenging academic expectations for all pupils. Standards and achievement in art and design, which were unsatisfactory at the last inspection, have improved significantly because teaching and other provision are much better.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

When they leave the school, pupils' high levels of academic skill, their confidence and maturity, both in independent learning and in cooperative teamwork, provide excellent foundations for their future studies and work. The buzz of activity and excellent learning in literacy 'workshops' early each day exemplify these traits extremely well. Understanding of the school and other communities is strong, with pupils eagerly taking on responsibilities, for example as school counsellors, play leaders and sports leaders, with pride and success. They are keen to contribute to school life and are good at their jobs, so the school rightly plans to provide more such opportunities. Pupils understand elements of health and fitness well, describing graphically, for instance, what happens to smokers' health. They feel safe and well looked after. The challenging behaviour of a very few pupils, which is of concern to some parents, exists within an otherwise exemplary picture. Unresolved incidents at lunchtime sometimes carry over into class, where learning can be compromised. Good additional provision to support and help these

pupils is in place, with timely plans to extend this next year so that other pupils can better understand and deal with emotional or behavioural difficulties that they face. Pupils have little experience or understanding of cultural diversity within British society, but do know about circumstances in other countries, contributing well to fundraising for those in crisis or less fortunate than themselves.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Senior managers properly evaluate the quality of teaching, accurately identifying some regularly outstanding practice. Pupils value learning and work hard, enjoying their efforts and successes. Pupils enjoy warm, responsive relationships with adults who give them excellent support and praise, which make them feel valued, and sensitive challenges to push them on. Staff explain learning objectives clearly, so pupils know what is expected and are keen to get on. Occasionally, lesson introductions go on too long, so pupils sit on the carpet listening when they already understand. They then have too little time to develop work independently. Most pupils understand their targets and what teachers' marking means, but older ones do not have enough written guidance about the next steps to improve their work. This is rightly prioritised as an area for school development.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The outstanding curriculum is carefully orchestrated to account for the needs of all pupils. More able ones, who were not achieving well enough three years ago, progress much faster now because they are challenged increasingly well and often reach exceptional levels. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities remain well supported, so they progress as well as others. Pupils of all abilities take an active part in the extensive range of extra-curricular clubs and other activities as diverse as dance and tag-rugby. Many and varied visits, visitors, sports coaching, and residential all add to pupils' very rich experiences. Year 4 pupils' rehearsal for their leaving performance showed high levels of commitment, musical skill, teamwork and cooperation, as well as huge enjoyment on their part as well as their audience's. Parents comment enthusiastically on their children's delight in contributing to themed days such as the Global Family Day or to Arts Week events.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. Academic guidance is now based on good, accurate assessment, which has improved well from an unsatisfactory position at the last inspection. Progress is closely monitored and effective action taken if pupils fall behind, or require extra challenge. Older and more able pupils are mature enough to respond well to the school's priority to involve them in judging their own learning. This is achieved through peer and self-assessment. The school is aware of the need to improve logging of the actions that they take on health and safety matters. Safeguarding procedures are secure and parents value greatly the quality of care which they feel lies at the heart of their children's enjoyment and success. The school strives hard to include all pupils, including those with behavioural or learning difficulties and

disabilities, in every aspect of its work. Strong partnerships with outside agencies are used to improve matters as problems are identified or worsen.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher has led the school well in raising standards and improving achievement in a short time. Success has resulted from all adults sharing her vision and keeping these key objectives constantly in mind in their planning and practice. Several long serving members of staff are about to leave and succession planning is secure. Governors are sensitively aware of staff's work/life balance, so appointments and other resources are carefully targeted to secure this equilibrium. Self-evaluation is excellent, and judgements accurate, so development plans are based on the right information and result in improvements. Pupils themselves feel well prepared for the move to middle schools, though a few parents disagree. Pupils feel they have enough homework, but these parents feel that more would help prepare their children better.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

### 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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
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**

24 July 2008 Dear Pupils Inspection of Merley First School, Merley, BH21 1SD Thank you so much for making us welcome in your school. We really enjoyed being there and seeing your work, talking to some of you and being in your lessons. I am writing to tell you what we found out. Yours is a good school and it has some excellent things about it. We think that children get a really good start in Reception and do very well there. The school has improved a lot lately, especially in the standards of your work and in the progress you make. We think all of you in all years work very hard and deserve this success. It was really nice to see you enjoying yourselves so much. We agree with most of your parents who tell us that you make such good progress because you love coming to school and don't want to miss anything. That's why your attendance is so good too. We think your teaching is good and that's the main reason why you learn well. We found that almost all of you behave very well indeed. We saw lots of excellent behaviour. You help each other really well and have lots of fun in learning. We think the literacy workshops at the start of the day are brilliant – it was a real pleasure to see all of you working in so many different groups or pairs, by yourselves or with adults and having such fun. We know that some of you and your parents are worried about the few pupils who often misbehave, but adults are trying really hard to improve this. We feel sure you will try to help them to make this better if you can. Other really good things about the school are all the exciting experiences you have in lessons, clubs and other activities. We really enjoyed hearing Year 4's rehearsal. We have asked the school to do a few things to make your learning even better. Some of you told us that you often spend a long time sitting on the carpet listening, when you understand what to do and could be getting on with your work – we agree. We have asked teachers to shorten this time for those of you who don't need so long. We have also asked them to mark older pupils' work with clearer information about how you can help to improve it by yourselves. Adults are also going to be checking safety procedures more often, but we were impressed with how quickly and how well you got out of the building when the fire alarm went off. Thank you again for your welcome. We hope you have a good summer holiday. Yours sincerely Janet Simms  
Lead inspector



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