

Merton Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116001
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	312141
Inspection dates	22–23 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Pritiben Patel

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr George Hood
Headteacher	Miss Helen Palmer
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2005
School address	Romsey Close Popley Way Basingstoke RG24 9HB
Telephone number	01256 326573
Fax number	01256 462491

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Merton Junior is a smaller than average junior school. Pupils are predominantly of White British origin and a small proportion are from a range of different minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils claiming free school meals is above average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties such as moderate, emotional, behavioural, speech and language, including those with a statement is more than twice the national picture. The school has attained the Healthy Schools Award, Activemark, Naacemmark for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and BECTA ICT mark. A new headteacher has been in post since September.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Merton Junior is a satisfactory and improving school. A typical comment made by a parent is a good reflection of the present status of the school; 'Merton Junior School is improving very quickly this year.' Parents are also rightly happy with the pastoral care that pupils receive here. For example, one wrote, 'My son is treated fairly and has gained much confidence with his new teachers'. However, some parents raised concerns about behaviour. The inspection team have investigated this and have found that behaviour is satisfactory, and improving due to the new system of behaviour management that has been put into place. When incidents of poor behaviour occur, they are dealt with effectively by staff.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory and is developed through visits to the church and celebration of 'World Peace Day', for example. Pupils' adoption of healthy lifestyles is good because they readily choose to eat fruit and salad at lunch times and participate well in a range of physical activities after school. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding about how to keep themselves safe, for example, from fire. Their contribution to the school and community is satisfactory through their work on the school council and raising money for charities.

Staffing is now stable after some years of turbulence. The leadership of the new headteacher is strong. However, many leaders and managers are new to their posts and it will take time before their impact on pupils' progress can be measured. The headteacher has worked hard to earn the respect of all staff and has identified relevant and appropriate priorities which have recently been introduced. These include a marking policy, a behaviour management system, curricular targets for pupils and assessment and tracking systems. As a result, the school is calm and purposeful, and staff are supportive and work as a team. The school has established good links with other schools in order to share best practice and improve the outcomes for pupils. The headteacher has provided a solid foundation for future improvement. This indicates that capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

Pupils enter school with broadly average standards. Their attainment at the end of Year 6 has been consistently broadly average in English, mathematics and science. However, results from national tests show that standards in 2008 have dipped in all areas. Reasons for this include a high turnover of staff, and the fact that assessment and tracking systems were not robust enough to identify pupils who fell behind. The school's information about pupils' progress shows that standards are rising for the present Year 6 pupils. This demonstrates that pupils are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage in their schooling.

Pupils make satisfactory progress because teaching and learning are satisfactory. Strengths include good relationships between staff and pupils. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to engage pupils and classroom management and organisation are good. Support staff are effective when they work in small groups with pupils with specific needs such as moderate learning difficulties, or those who have emotional, behavioural, or speech and language problems. Pupils' enjoyment is satisfactory overall. They enjoy much of their time in school, but sometimes, when teachers spend too long talking in lessons, this has a negative impact on their concentration and enthusiasm. Not all pupils of high ability are sufficiently challenged in all lessons and they sometimes find the work set too easy. Teachers' marking, although improving due to the school's recent focus, does not consistently inform pupils about their next steps for development.

The curriculum is satisfactory. The school has identified that not enough is done to make links between subjects, or to give pupils opportunities to practise their basic skills across the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pastoral care and support are strengths. Safeguarding requirements are in place. Pupils say they feel safe and are able to talk to an adult at school if they have any problems. Improved tracking systems are enabling the school to provide support for pupils with specific needs. As a result, they make satisfactory progress in line with their peers. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Although curricular targets for pupils have recently been introduced, they have not had much impact so far, and will take time before pupils fully understand them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils of high ability are challenged and all pupils know their next steps for development.
- Develop and embed the roles of leaders and managers so that they have greater impact on the progress that pupils make.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards, as shown by the results of national tests, have been broadly average over time but dipped in 2008 in English, mathematics and science. However, new assessment and tracking systems have been introduced which provide a clearer picture of pupils' progress. Current information produced by these systems shows that pupils in Year 6 are on track to attain higher standards in 2009.

Pupils make satisfactory progress. Information from national tests in 2007 showed that the progress of girls was weaker than that of boys. However, results from national tests in 2008 show that this is no longer the case. Improved assessment and tracking systems are now enabling the school to provide intervention to help pupils with a range of learning difficulties. As a result, they make satisfactory progress in line with their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this emanates from the caring ethos. They enjoy the opportunity to attend Breakfast club which provides a healthy and varied breakfast. Attendance is satisfactory and the headteacher has plans in place to improve it further. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They visit the church and learn about different cultures in religious education. Pupils understand the need for exercise and enjoy the opportunity to take part in the fifteen minute slot for exercise which is on offer throughout the day. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of how to keep themselves safe, and those in Year 6 particularly enjoyed the Junior Citizen Day where they learnt about fire safety from the, 'fire challenge crew.' Some bullying does take place, but pupils say it is dealt with quickly and appropriately. Pupils demonstrate that they are part of a caring community through

fundraising for various charities. Their economic development is demonstrated through their satisfactory basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Lessons have clear learning objectives which are shared with the children at the start of the lesson so they know what they are going to learn. In most lessons, teachers manage behaviour well, and this enables pupils to work in a purposeful atmosphere, where they know what is expected of them and are motivated to take part. In some lessons, opportunities are missed to extend learning through more challenging questioning and activities, particularly for pupils of high ability. Some marking clearly shows pupils how to improve their work, but this is not consistent enough throughout the school and has not yet been embedded. Teachers vary in how well they deploy support staff to meet the needs of individual pupils. This is more effective when pupils work in groups, but when teachers work with the whole class, support staff often make only a limited contribution to pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is currently being reviewed so that pupils have better opportunities to practise their basic skills across subjects, this is currently a weakness. Topics are used to make learning meaningful for pupils such as the Tudors and Victorians. Other topics are also being introduced to ensure links between subjects are made such as 'Managing the Environment', which is linked to geography, literacy and mathematics. A range of clubs such as football, rugby and tennis have a good impact on pupils' adoption of healthy lifestyles. Visitors who help pupils to have a better understanding of their external environment include the local recycling group, community warden and 'Basingstoke in Bloom'. Visits to the cinema and pantomime have a positive impact on pupils' enjoyment.

ICT facilities are rightly being updated so that pupils' access to computers in other subjects is improved. Pupils with specific needs have had much success with their reading due to the positive impact of extra support. Their progress overall is satisfactory and in line with their peers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral support is a strength of the school. Clear guidance on how to behave well and improve behaviour is starting to take effect throughout the school. Pupils feel safe. Procedures for the safe recruitment of staff are in place and child protection procedures are clear and understood by staff. Risk assessments are carried out for educational visits and for science lessons. Staff are trained in basic first aid. Good use is made of external agencies to provide additional support, ensuring vulnerable pupils and those with specific difficulties have their needs effectively met. The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant has proved to be a worthwhile appointment and has done much to improve pupils' emotional development.

The academic guidance provided for pupils is at the early stages of development. Pupils have very recently been given curricular targets which will require time in order for pupils to benefit from them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher has provided much needed direction for the school. She has assessed the school accurately in the short time that she has been here, and introduced relevant systems and initiatives, some of which are already beginning to show positive impact. For example, the behaviour management system with zero tolerance of negative behaviours is allowing teachers to focus on teaching. It will take time before other strategies such as marking and curricular targets for pupils have a positive impact on pupils' progress.

English and science leaders are new to their posts and the mathematics leader has very recently returned to post. As a result, they have not had much opportunity to develop their roles, or to make an impact on pupils' progress. They have an overview of their areas and have identified key priorities for development. They have accurately identified that their monitoring roles do not yet make enough impact on teaching and learning within their areas.

Self-evaluation is primarily carried out by senior leaders but plans are in place to involve all staff. The impact of governors is satisfactory. They are experienced, well trained and play an important role in staff recruitment. They are developing their roles so that they are able to hold the school to account, particularly about the progress that pupils make.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

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

07 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merton Junior School, Basingstoke, RG24 9HB

Thank you for being so welcoming and helping us when we came to inspect your school to find out how well you are getting on. We enjoyed visiting your lessons, and talking to some of you at break and lunch time.

You go to a satisfactory and improving school. Here is a list of some of the most important things about your school.

- You make satisfactory progress and attain broadly average standards because teaching and learning are satisfactory. You have recently been given targets in English and mathematics and some of you are beginning to understand them well.
- All the adults in your school show good care for you, including for those of you with specific needs such as moderate, emotional, behavioural, speech and language, so that you all feel included.
- You have a good understanding about how to be healthy and you take part in a range of clubs such as football and tennis. You have a satisfactory enjoyment of school and your behaviour is satisfactory and improving because you have clear rules to follow.
- The curriculum is satisfactory and you enjoy the visits that you make for example, to the cinema. You are given a satisfactory range of opportunities to take responsibility and make decisions for example through the School Council and by raising money for charities.
- Your headteacher, governors and all staff are working hard to make things better for you.

We have asked your school to improve standards in English, mathematics and science. The teachers also need to give those of you who find learning easy the hard work you are capable of. Your teachers should also help you to understand what you need to do next to improve your work. Finally, the new leaders and managers at your school need some time to improve things for you.

Yours sincerely

Pritiben Patel

Lead Inspector