

Merton Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116004
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	312142
Inspection dates	6–7 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Keith Williams

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr George Hood
Headteacher	Mrs Larissa James
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 2004
School address	Romsey Close Popley Way Popley Basingstoke RG24 9HB
Telephone number	01256 324507
Fax number	01256 324507

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Almost all of the pupils at this small school are of White British heritage. An above average proportion is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties is much higher than usually found. The school has the enhanced Healthy Schools award and the Active Sports Mark. The headteacher joined in an acting capacity in September 2007 and became substantive headteacher in October.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Merton Infant School provides a satisfactory standard of education. After a dip, standards are now rising and, although they remain below average, this represents a satisfactory level of achievement.

Recognising that standards were too low, particularly in literacy and numeracy, the new headteacher has led a full and rigorous review of the school's approaches to teaching, planning and assessing pupils' work. A number of the new initiatives are already helping to improve teaching, engage pupils in their learning and keep a much closer check on their progress. Some inconsistencies remain, however. Detailed assessment information is used well to arrange pupils into groups of similar ability, identify those pupils at risk of underachieving and set challenging targets. Teachers also use this information to plan the next steps for pupils. For example, in a session for more able writers, the teacher's high expectations and knowledge of the pupils' capabilities ensured that pupils built well on their previous learning and made good progress. In some lessons, however, insufficient challenge for more able pupils means that their progress slows. Teachers' planning is usually clear about what pupils are expected to learn in lessons and how their success will be measured. Known to the pupils as WALT and WILF, these objectives are usually shared at the beginning of lessons and they are reflected upon at the end. Occasionally, however, this review of learning is too hurried.

Despite these inconsistencies, good strides have been taken to improve teaching and this is helping to accelerate pupils' progress. The school's focus has, rightly, been on improving literacy and numeracy and, in particular, reading and writing. It is in these areas where improvement has been greatest. Raised expectations are evident in the much higher targets set for the current Year 2. Although these targets are challenging, pupils are on track to reach them, and many more are likely to reach the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics than in recent years. There is still room for improvement, particularly to secure a consistent approach across the school and to extend improvement across other subjects. The co-ordinators for English and mathematics have supported the headteacher well in securing improvement although they, and the leaders of other subjects, have had only limited opportunities to monitor, first hand, the work in lessons.

One of the reasons why there is an improving picture is that the school takes good care of pupils and promotes their personal development well. Pupils appreciate the kindness they are shown by their teachers. As a result, pupils enjoy school, behave well and are eager to learn. They have a good understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Pupils are becoming increasingly involved in their learning. For example, in some lessons, they are given the opportunity to evaluate how well they have understood their work. Teachers provide regular written and verbal feedback, too, although this is more detailed and effective in English than in other subjects.

Good leadership from the headteacher is ensuring that there is an accurate and realistic view of the school's effectiveness and what can be improved. This has had a significant impact on improving the provision. Staff and governors share the drive to raise standards, but recognise that there is more still to do. Most parents are supportive of the school, some noting the recent improvements, and are pleased with their children's progress. 'He has come on leaps and bounds,' wrote one about her child, while others recorded, 'She is progressing very well' and

'He has made great progress in many things.' Given their recent track record, the leaders are well placed to secure further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Improved planning and assessment in Reception are ensuring that children are making adequate progress. Standards are well below average and there is still more to do. Children's activities are planned in all of the areas of learning. A strong emphasis on their personal development means that children are happy, behave well and wait patiently for their turn. Outdoor facilities are inadequate. To compensate, staff provide regular physical education lessons in the hall and on the main playground. In addition, they provide opportunities for children to learn outside, such as the teddy bear trail. However, the lack of a designated area means that such activities have to be timetabled, and there is no opportunity for children to choose to work or play outside. Planning is usually clear about what children will do, but is often less precise about what they are expected to learn. This makes it difficult for staff to identify the next steps that children have to make and provide activities that consistently meet their needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly by increasing the challenge for more able pupils.
- Improve planning and outdoor provision in Reception.
- Sharpen the role of subject leaders in monitoring standards and achievement in their subjects.

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

Pupils join the school with attainment that is well below average. The school's performance in the Year 2 national assessments fell considerably in 2006 and 2007, particularly in writing and mathematics, and standards were exceptionally low. While a much higher than usual proportion of pupils - almost two-thirds - were identified with learning difficulties, the leaders recognised that standards were too low. The school's accurate assessment and tracking systems, and pupils' work, show that the current Year 2 are on track to meet their challenging targets. Standards are rising, although they remain below average. These pupils had higher starting points than previous groups and this represents a satisfactory level of achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties, including those with behavioural, emotional and social and speech, language and communication difficulties, achieve as well as their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good and reflects the high priority this is given by the school. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and this, and their spiritual awareness, is promoted well in assemblies. They report that they feel safe and well looked after and, for their part, they play safely and sensibly and behave well in and out of lessons. Some present challenging behaviour on occasions, but

this is usually managed well by staff. Pupils' good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and exercise is not always reflected in their lunchboxes, a few of which contain crisps and chocolate. Attendance is broadly average. Pupils enjoy the satisfactory range of opportunities for them to be involved in school life and the wider community. Although school councillors have been elected, they do not yet meet regularly. Pupils' satisfactory progress in the basic skills means that they are adequately prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The elimination of inadequate teaching has been identified as a priority by the school. Their work is bearing fruit, but there are still some inconsistencies. At its best, teaching is clearly focused on what pupils will learn, and learning is reviewed well at the end of lessons. Sometimes, the learning objectives are too vague, or are focused too much on what pupils will do, rather than learn. Good questioning in many lessons helps teachers to keep track of pupils' understanding. Occasionally, the review at the end of lessons is too hurried to enable any real evaluation of the learning. Expectations are not always high enough and this is borne out in the lack of specific planning for more able pupils in some lessons. Work is marked conscientiously and, at best, offers suggestions of where pupils can improve. In subjects other than English the comments are often focused on providing praise rather than evaluating the learning. Relationships with pupils are positive; most pupils are keen to learn and this helps lessons to run smoothly.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Improvements to planning in literacy and numeracy are helping to accelerate pupils' progress. For example, reading is taught in regular dedicated sessions, where teachers can keep a closer check on how pupils are doing. This is working well. Similarly, the grouping of pupils into sets of similar ability for literacy and numeracy is helping teachers to ensure that the work meets pupils' differing needs, although there are some missed opportunities for providing increased challenge for the more able pupils in each ability set. Planning for topics has improved. Staff identify clearly the key skills that will be covered in each topic and this is helping to ensure that the work builds on previous learning. The school provides a good range of enrichment activities, including visits and visitors, and these add to pupils' enjoyment. Opportunities for pupils to extend their skills and interests outside of lessons are more limited. Good planning to promote pupils' personal and social development is a strength of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school takes good care of its pupils and gives them good pastoral support. Academic support and guidance are satisfactory. Systems to check on the suitability of adults to work with children, and to protect those who are potentially vulnerable, are robust. Regular checks are made of the school premises and the risks presented by school trips are analysed carefully. Parents appreciate the support given to their children, one noting, 'When problems do arise they are dealt with promptly.' New systems to support pupils who find learning difficult are helping to accelerate their progress. Outside agencies make a good contribution to their

all-round development and individual education plans are of good quality. Those with physical disability are fully integrated and achieve as well as their classmates. Academic guidance has improved, but has not yet had full impact on pupils' learning. Consequently, while some pupils have a clear understanding of how well they are learning, and how they should improve, for others their knowledge is patchy.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is providing good leadership that is strongly focused on improving the quality of provision and raising standards. Many of the initiatives introduced since the beginning of the year are bearing fruit. Standards dipped in the last two years, but good progress has been made in tackling this and ensuring that pupils' achievement is satisfactory. There is still more to do, however, particularly to ensure a consistent approach. The headteacher has a very clear and accurate understanding of the impact of new initiatives and knows what needs to be done to improve further. The co-ordinators for English and mathematics support the headteacher well although, to date, opportunities for them to monitor the work in lessons have been limited. Governors and staff share the headteacher's determination to improve the school's provision and the judicious use of challenging targets is helping to raise expectations and standards. Governors intend to place their monitoring activities on a more formal footing but this is at an early stage.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 disabilities make progress	3

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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 the 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

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?	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

18 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merton Infant School, Basingstoke, RG24 9HB

Thank you for being so friendly when I visited your school and a special thank you to those of you who came to talk to me. You gave me lots of helpful information. I am writing to tell you what I found out.

Your school is satisfactory. This means that there are some things your school does well and some things that it needs to do better. Your headteacher and teachers have been working improving your reading, writing and numeracy. I was pleased to see that your work in your books, and in the lessons I saw, is getting better. Well done, because you have been working hard. I agree with your teachers that it needs to get even better and I know you will want to help them. One of the reasons why your work is improving is because you are keen to do your best and I was pleased to see that you behave well in lessons and on the playground. Please keep it up. I really enjoyed your assemblies and hearing about the good work you have been doing.

As well as making your work better, there are three other things that I have asked your teachers to do. Firstly, I want them to make more lessons good ones. They can do this by making sure that your work is always hard enough to stretch you. Secondly, I would like them to improve their planning for Reception children and improve the outdoor area, so that the children can do more of their learning outside. Thirdly, some of your teachers look after different subjects. I would like them to have more chance to check on what is happening in lessons in their subjects.

Thank you for behaving well and trying hard. I want you to keep doing these things, because it will help your teachers to make your learning even better. I wish you good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Keith Williams

Lead Inspector