

Merrylands Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132262
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	315997
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	410
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Eileen Patching
Headteacher	Mr Sean Tobin
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Cumberland Drive Laindon Basildon Essex SS15 6QS
Telephone number	01268 417893
Fax number	01268 491664

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large primary school serves a community that includes some areas with high levels of social deprivation. It experiences slightly greater pupil mobility than most schools. An above average proportion of pupils need additional learning support. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average, and virtually all pupils speak English as their first language.

The school gained the Healthy Schools Award in November 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The headteacher and governors are realistic when judging the school's effectiveness as satisfactory. It is going through a period of major changes in leadership with a new headteacher and deputy head this year along with a new chair of governors. This has given a renewed impetus to school development as all members of staff strive to improve their performance and the achievement of pupils. Leadership and management are satisfactory, but staff changes have limited the contribution subject leaders make to school improvement.

Merrylands is a calm and happy school where pupils feel safe and secure. Pupils very much enjoy school, particularly the additional activities and clubs provided in what is a satisfactory curriculum. Their personal development is good. Parents are very much in support of the school, particularly the way it cares for their children. Strengths in the care provided for pupils and the way it promotes their personal qualities have continued since the last inspection. Attendance has improved, behaviour is good and older pupils take their increased responsibilities seriously. Pupils make a significant contribution to school life through the school council.

Achievement is satisfactory but in recent years has varied from year to year. Within a profile of satisfactory teaching, there is a wide range of quality from some lessons with outstanding features to some with shortcomings. This is mainly because assessment is not used effectively by all teachers to plan lessons that tackle the individual learning needs of pupils. One effect of this is that potentially high attaining pupils are not consistently challenged and comparatively few are working above levels expected for their age. From below average attainment on entry, pupils make satisfactory progress and standards are below average by Year 6.

Pupils receiving additional literacy support make satisfactory progress as do the few learning English as an additional language. Links with specialist providers such as for outdoor education, make a valuable and much enjoyed contribution to personal development. Pupils learn how to stay safe, and understand the importance of diet and exercise on a healthy lifestyle. Pupils have a sound platform for their future, but do not always know what they need to do to improve, because marking is inconsistent and is not clearly linked to their improvement targets.

Self-evaluation is largely undertaken by the headteacher with recent input from the deputy and other subject leaders. It gives a reasonably accurate view of the school's qualities. The new headteacher has quickly identified the inconsistencies in teaching that are holding back pupil progress. Initiatives introduced such as increasing the number of teaching groups for mathematics in Year 6 are starting to bear fruit and standards are rising. This places the school in a sound position from which to tackle its future challenges.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Foundation Stage leadership is another area going through a period of change. The attainment of children when they first enter Reception is below that expected of four-year-olds. They make satisfactory progress, but writing and calculating remain relatively weak by the start of Year 1. Adults are using assessment procedures soundly to build up a record of what each child can do. Children enjoy school because of the strong emphasis on the development of personal and social skills. They soon settle in because of well-developed links between home and school. The school ensures that they stay safe, and introduces them to healthy life-styles. Teaching and the curriculum are sound, but there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between

classes that limit the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage. The curriculum is carefully planned to ensure a balance between the children following their teachers' instructions and finding out for themselves. Good use is made of the well resourced outside activity area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Bring greater consistency to teaching, particularly by improving assessment so that lessons focus more closely on individual learning needs.
- Use targets and marking more effectively to help pupils see clearly the next steps to take in their learning.
- Ensure that leadership at all levels supports the drive to raise pupil achievement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall performance 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 make satisfactory progress during their time at the school, but this has fluctuated considerably in recent years by subject and key stage. The results of Year 2 assessments rose in 2007 having followed a downward trend over the previous four years. These results represented at least satisfactory progress for this cohort given their starting points, but were below average in reading and mathematics and well below average in writing. Progress has also varied at Key Stage 2 in recent years. Having improved to be good in 2006, progress fell back to satisfactory in 2007. Year 6 test results have varied with fluctuations in progress. They were below average in 2007. The more able pupils did not do as well in mathematics as in English and science. The headteacher's action this year means that pupils currently in Year 6 are now on track to meet quite challenging targets in all subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their good and much improved attendance, positive attitudes and considerate behaviour. When asked what they like about the school, more than one child said, 'Everything!' Pupils try hard and are keen to do well. They help and support each other, and feel that the school is a safe place where they can be certain to find someone to help them. Pupils get on well together, regardless of gender or race. Because adults provide good examples of how to treat others with courtesy and respect, pupils do the same. They reflect on their own beliefs and ideas in assemblies, and develop an understanding of the customs and cultures of others. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility and are proud of their input into school life, gaining confidence and new skills through involvement in the good number of extra-curricular activities offered.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching quality varies. Lessons lack challenge at times because assessment is not rigorous enough to enable teachers to plan lessons focusing sharply on individual need. Teachers in the best lessons show they have high expectations of work and behaviour and are skilled at engaging

the pupils in their learning. Pupils learn to co-operate and show interest when they have opportunities to work in groups and pairs. They enjoy these lessons and can see how their learning is building, when teachers share clear lesson objectives with the pupils so that they understand the purpose of what they are doing and how to judge they have been successful. Teaching assistants are effective in ensuring that pupils can participate fully in class and provide a valuable input to withdrawal sessions. Interactive whiteboards are adding interest to lessons but do not always have enough impact on learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The strengths of the curriculum are the way it promotes personal development and broadens the pupils' experiences. Sport plays a prominent role in school life, supported well by links with external agencies and specialist providers. Outdoor education is much enjoyed by older pupils and is planned creatively to support their learning in other areas, such as science and geography. While this generates interest and broadens experiences, the headteacher has identified the potential to be gained by a greater contribution from music and foreign languages. The pupils also enjoy the many clubs on offer and Year 6 talk vividly about their residential trip. While attention has been paid to improving writing, the handwriting policy is not consistently applied and so standards vary.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school cares well for all pupils. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are firmly in place and, along with health and safety measures, meet requirements. Parents are confident that their children are secure and well looked after, and feel that the school is friendly and welcoming. Pupils say that they feel safe and they are confident that they know where to turn if they need help. Clear behaviour procedures give pupils security and create a good working atmosphere in which they can learn confidently. The school uses its good links with outside agencies to support pupils' particular learning needs. Pupils have generally appropriate learning targets, although these are not always sufficiently challenging for the more able pupils.

They are often involved in reviewing their progress and some benefit from helpful marking, although this is inconsistent. Guidance from teachers is not always linked to pupils' improvement targets, and so their progress slows.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Since his recent appointment, the headteacher has quickly identified the school's main strengths and areas for improvement. He has already undertaken a useful audit of teaching and learning and has introduced successful initiatives to focus on improving achievement in mathematics. Changes are introduced sensitively and purposefully. The contribution of other staff to the improvement of subject areas is changing under the guidance of the new headteacher. Their work has been re-focused and their roles and responsibilities defined more clearly alongside the newly appointed deputy. The revised school development plan is sharply centred on the need to raise standards and to improve the quality of teaching. Governors have provided effective strategic leadership through recent appointments of head and deputy, but they do

not have sufficiently systematic procedures to enable them to challenge the school and rigorously monitor its performance.

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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	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 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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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

01 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merrylands Primary School, Laindon, SS15 6QS

I am writing to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to us when we visited your school. You were all very helpful. We enjoyed talking to you and your teachers and watching you learn.

The youngest of you have a sound start in Reception. The rest of you make satisfactory progress during your time at school. You enjoy school, attend regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. You clearly enjoy the clubs, trips and visits provided for you. I know how much the older pupils enjoy their outdoor education activities. You have a good understanding of the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle, and make a valuable contribution to school life.

Your new headteacher, teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school better. We think that there are things that can be even better so we have asked your teachers to:

- push your learning forward more rapidly in all classrooms by improving the assessment of your progress
- use targets and marking more effectively to help you understand the next steps to take in your learning
- take a greater part in helping the headteacher to move the school forward.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector