

Mere Green Combined School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 103389 |
| Local Authority | Birmingham |
| Inspection number | 323814 |
| Inspection dates | 7–8 July 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Rodney Braithwaite |

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 205 |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 0 |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Paul Eeles |
| Headteacher | Anna Balson |
| Date of previous school inspection | 24 May 2006 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Mere Green Road Sutton Coldfield B75 5BL |
| Telephone number | 01213 081384 |
| Fax number | 01213 232644 |

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|--------------------------|---------------|
| Age group | 3–11 |
| Inspection dates | 7–8 July 2009 |
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Mere Green Combined Primary is slightly smaller than the average primary school. It makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Reception Year and in a governing body-funded Nursery. The school also offers a breakfast club and after-school club. The school has a much higher number of pupils with statements of special educational needs than found nationally. Many of these pupils attend the four Speech and Language Resource bases. The school has a higher percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than found nationally. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is higher than average. Fewer than average pupils come from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than average. A new headteacher took up her post in January 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13[3] of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the standards and achievement in writing and mathematics, especially for those pupils of lower and middle ability.

The overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate. Although the school has a warm and lively ethos, and pupils greatly enjoy their education, standards in writing and mathematics are too low and have been for some years throughout the school. Standards in science and reading have also been below average for some time. Pupils make inadequate progress from their starting points. This is because expectations have been too low and a significant number of pupils, mostly those of middle or lower ability, have not reached the standards of which they are capable. The school has not set challenging enough targets and although pupils reached their targets, they could still achieve more. In contrast, the significant number of pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided for well and they make satisfactory progress against their individual targets. Pupils in the speech and language units make good progress.

The school is well aware of its low standards, and has established a clear priority to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The new headteacher has implemented a rigorous monitoring strategy which has led to regular and accurate guidance to teachers on how to improve their practice. Checks on the success of the strategies are made frequently. Teachers receive good support, and there is now more stability in the staffing. Consequently, teaching and learning are now satisfactory and continue to improve. Planning for pupils' needs is consistent and clearly identifies what pupils are expected to learn, and how they will do it. Lessons are more focused on challenge, combined with enjoyment and practical activities. Better assessment procedures and tracking of pupils' progress are giving a clearer guide to teachers on the next steps in learning for all pupils. This has led to a rise in standards this year at the end of Year 2, although standards remain very low at the end of Year 6. Children entering the school in the Nursery start with below the expected level of skills and knowledge and make good progress. Children make satisfactory progress in Reception and reach average standards by the time they join Year 1.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Attendance is satisfactory, and pupils have good attitudes to learning and they behave well. Although they can be boisterous, they look after each other very well, and are very conscious of the needs of others. The curriculum is satisfactory, and is planned so that pupils have a wide range of activities, including practical, thus broadening their knowledge and improving their basic skills. Pastoral care for pupils is good, and it is of high quality for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff care very much for pupils, and there are good links and partnerships with many support agencies to meet the needs of all, especially the most vulnerable. Many parents express great appreciation of the care their children receive, epitomised by one who wrote, 'the school has wonderful teachers, support and care...'. Academic guidance is developing steadily, but is still in its early stages. Although more needs to be done to improve basic skills, pupils are given regular opportunities to develop independence and teamwork.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new headteacher is praised highly by the school community for her positive impact on school improvement, which has been significant in many areas. Other leaders are increasingly involved in managing the school, which is helping to give the school a satisfactory capacity for improvement which can be sustained. A recently elected chair of governors is enabling the governing body to make a satisfactory contribution to the management of the school. All leaders are aware that their recent improved contributions to management must be continued and strengthened at a rapid rate. Middle managers realise their accountability for pupils' progress is not yet complete.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the Nursery with skills below and, in some cases well below, those expected for children of a similar age. Parents are rightly pleased with the induction arrangements that ensure children settle quickly and soon become confident in playing and sharing with others. Effective early assessment enables those children identified with speech, language and associated learning difficulties to get the support they need from external services. Progress over time is good in the Nursery class and satisfactory in the Reception class. Throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage, progress is particularly good in children's personal and social development because the staff make good provision for their pastoral needs. Children enjoy school, behave well and try hard. They show respect for each other and adults, and they are keen to support one another. Progress in physical development is improving because of the good outdoor play facilities, which staff use increasingly to promote children's learning and development. Progress is improving in speaking and listening because of the emphasis being given to this area of children's development and the resources available. However, in some lessons, there are missed opportunities to promote writing skills. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with examples of good teaching in the Nursery class. In the best lessons, teachers plan an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities based on secure assessment which enables children to learn, explore and gain independence. Sometimes, however, short-term planning does not identify carefully enough the small steps which help children learn well. The curriculum is satisfactory and covers all the required areas of learning. There are good arrangements to ensure children's health and safety.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards and achievement of writing and mathematics throughout the school, especially those of lower and middle ability pupils.
- Ensure that all senior and middle managers understand their roles and responsibilities, and are held to account for improving pupils' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Writing standards have been particularly low for a number of years, and although standards in mathematics have occasionally improved, this has not been sustained. Standards have also been exceptionally low in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 since 2004. There is clear evidence that there has been an improvement in standards at the end of Year 2 this year, especially in mathematics. This has been confirmed by accurate teacher assessment, although the school recognises that standards remain far too low. While few pupils attain higher than average levels at present, the main weakness lies with the standards of lower and middle

ability pupils. They have been underachieving for some time because expectations of them were too low, and their individual targets were either not known or set at too low a level. There is good evidence that the school is taking effective steps, mainly through improving teaching, to improve attainment. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress, and pupils in the speech and language units often make good progress. This is because their needs have been better understood and followed up than those of pupils in the main school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have very positive attitudes to the school, describing it as 'fantastic, exciting and excellent'. Pupils in Year 6 are encouraged to try hard because they say they are noticed, and 'rewarded for our good work'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and benefits from the close relationships and understanding pupils have of each other's needs. It is also enhanced by the close relationship the school has with the local church. Behaviour is good because pupils like coming to school, and trust and respect all the staff. Pupils have a good understanding of, and say they practise, healthy lifestyles. The school holds the Healthy Schools award. Pupils join many clubs and sporting activities such as keyboard, 'the girl club', and pyramid 'for shy children'. The 'Badgers' breakfast and after-school club enables a good number of pupils to enjoy a wide range of experiences, which contribute well to their personal development. Pupils know how to keep safe. They feel that they have adults to whom they can turn when they have personal difficulties and say 'we can put them in the worry box'. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community, offering suggestions from the school council, and involving themselves in charity fundraising activities. Although their basic skills are low, pupils are developing other skills well which will contribute to their future well-being. These include developing independence, involvement in business enterprise, running simple budgets, and taking on challenges resulting in several awards from the local Rotary club.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Robust and accurate monitoring, especially by the headteacher, better understanding and use of assessment data, and increased good quality support and coaching have resulted in recent improvements in teaching and learning. Teaching in Years 1 to 6 is satisfactory now, and occasionally good. This enables pupils, across the whole range of ability, to make better progress. Pupils in the speech and language bases learn well because their needs are closely matched to their learning targets and they have a good range of effective adult support. Teachers ensure that they are well integrated into all aspects of school life. Teachers' planning is consistent across the school, and includes clear learning objectives, activities matched to all abilities, and measurable success criteria, which are regularly shared with pupils. There are good relationships in all classes, and teachers are developing many more opportunities for pupils to improve their speaking and listening skills. Pupils are gaining a much better idea of what they have to do to improve, although this is not yet consistent throughout the school. Some teachers remain uncertain about their expectations for pupils, and so the pace of learning is sometimes too slow, and some pupils are not challenged quickly enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Pupils feel that they have a 'fun' curriculum and give many examples of their opportunities for exciting and varied learning experiences. These include cluster activities with other schools, visits to 'Farmer Plum' and Villa Park, and the challenge of changing 'Sleeping Beauty' into an Indian version. Drama, music and dance are appreciated strongly by pupils, and opportunities to develop artistic skills are a strength of the curriculum. The school is developing a more structured cross-curricular approach to learning, incorporating far more use of writing in other subjects. An example was seen in Year 4, where pupils made clay pots, and also talked and wrote enthusiastically about Greek gods. However, there remains inconsistency in the use of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology across the curriculum. The focus on basic skills has not been strong enough to ensure that standards in English and mathematics are sufficiently high. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory, and the school uses partnerships with other schools to support this aspect. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and they are fully included in all activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides good pastoral care for all pupils. The good induction procedures help vulnerable pupils to settle quickly into the school's friendly environment. The assessments of the needs of pupils in the resource base and throughout the school are accurate, and used appropriately to provide them with personal learning programmes that closely match their needs. As a result, these pupils make particularly good progress with their speech and language development, and in their personal and social development. Health and safety procedures and safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements. The care for vulnerable pupils is well planned, and enhanced by the effective links with external agencies. Suitable attention is given to providing language support for pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Academic guidance for pupils is satisfactory but inconsistent. Target setting has been introduced and it is used well by some teachers to help pupils improve their work. However, in other classes, pupils do not know their targets or, in some cases, they do not understand them well enough to raise the standard of their work. Marking of pupils' work is also improving, although this is not used effectively enough by all teachers. Older pupils are now given effective opportunities for self and peer evaluation of their work and improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has come through a difficult period in trying to determine why the standards and achievement of many pupils have been inadequate for several years. The headteacher has been largely instrumental in introducing a raft of measures and initiatives which are leading to improvement. All leaders, managers, staff and governors share the same desire to promote a better standard of education that is more in line with the fine quality of care already provided. Consequently, targets for pupils' progress are becoming more challenging, and the school's self-evaluation is accurate in its analysis of performance and the impact of measures taken for improvement. All managers have been playing a bigger role recently in leading staff to understand the needs of all groups of pupils in the school. Their roles are still developing, and

their responsibility for pupils' achievement requires strengthening in order to raise standards. The governing body, under the vigorous leadership of a newly elected chair, is both challenging and supportive, and has a clear picture of the school's strengths and urgent areas for development. Staff are suitably deployed and they cope well with the widely varying needs of pupils. Value for money is satisfactory and improving. Community cohesion is also satisfactory, and there is ample evidence of many local community links, and developing global links, such as with Malawi, through the local church.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

| | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 4 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | No |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being? | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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|---|---|
| How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS? | 3 |
| How well do children in the EYFS achieve? | 3 |
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS? | 2 |
| How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop? | 3 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted? | 2 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 3 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 4 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 4 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 4 |
| 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? | 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 |
| The extent to which 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 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

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| 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? | Yes |

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

9 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mere Green Combined Primary School, Sutton Coldfield B75 5BL

Many thanks to you for the way you welcomed us to your school when we visited you. We were very pleased that you told us how much you enjoyed school, even though one of you said it 'had been an up and down year'. We thought you were polite and friendly and took great care of everyone. Although there are many things that we liked about your school, at the moment it is not as good as it could be. This is because for a long time many of you have not done as well as we think you can, especially in your writing and mathematics. We have given the school a 'notice to improve' which means that inspectors will come back in about six months time to check how well standards are rising. We ask you to work as hard as you can with your teachers so that you reach higher standards.

Here are the things we liked in school.

- You are very well cared for by all the staff, and you know how to keep safe and healthy. You contribute good ideas to the running of the school, and enjoy being part of a team, trying to win community awards, and charity work.
- You have good attitudes to your work, like all the exciting extra learning opportunities you have, and behave well, especially on educational trips.
- Those of you who have difficulties with your learning or speech are achieving as we hoped you could, and are helped well by the staff.
- You have a good start in your lovely Nursery, which has that super outside activity area.
- Your headteacher has shown already that she leads the school well, but needs lots of help from everyone to make sure the school improves.

This is what we are suggesting the school needs to do to improve.

- Help you to improve your writing and mathematics in all classes.
- Help all the managers in the school to make sure that you get the best education possible.

Yours faithfully

Rod Braithwaite

Lead inspector