

Merridale Junior and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104334
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	324022
Inspection dates	26–27 February 2009
Reporting inspector	John Mason

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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	232
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	Amanda Costello
Headteacher	Simon Lane
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Aspen Way Wolverhampton WV3 0UP
Telephone number	01902 558760
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Merridale is an average-sized primary school. Pupils come from many different ethnic backgrounds. The largest group come from families of Indian heritage, but there are also many pupils of Pakistani and White British heritage. About one tenth is from other ethnic groups. The school serves an area that has relatively high levels of disadvantage. Over one quarter of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above average. A below average proportion of pupils have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its Nursery and Reception classes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Merridale is a good school. Parents and pupils hold the school in very high regard. It has continued to improve since the last inspection and has now developed an outstanding curriculum which has a strong impact on the children's excellent personal development and is leading to rising standards.

Pupils are proud of the friendly and supportive climate in the school. They feel very safe and enjoy their learning very much. It is a school 'where everyone respects each other and supports one another', they say. Behaviour is outstanding and contributes significantly to the quality of learning. A strong ethos for collaborative learning starts in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is fostered particularly well by the wide range of opportunities for children to learn and play in the school's carefully structured outdoor environment. Consequently, young children make good progress in securing their spoken and written English and grow to be confident learners.

In the main school, pupils make good progress, particularly in Years 3 to 6. Progress in Years 1 and 2 is more variable because standards in English of different ethnic groups improve at unsteady rates. For example, pupils of Pakistani heritage do less well than others at this stage, but by the end of Year 6 they have caught up well. The school has developed more robust assessment and tracking systems since the previous inspection and is now able to identify and act upon any underachievement. The recent introduction of a new reading scheme is successfully addressing weaknesses identified in pupils' language skills and this has been supplemented by special extension classes for the more able as the school strives to boost the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 in English.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Less experienced teachers are well supported by senior staff and are given responsibility to contribute fully to school development. This results in a good level of consistency in teaching between the different classes, facilitating steady progress. Teachers, however, do not encourage enough use of joined-up writing in day-to-day work, slowing the pace of learning for some pupils.

The school is well led and managed with a collaborative approach to school development which is very well focused on improving opportunity and standards. It provides good care, guidance and support for its pupils, working well in partnership with external agencies. Initiatives to support families in learning English and to involve them in the life of the school are proving very successful. However, the school does not review and ratify policies with sufficient rigour. Attendance, for example, was above average in the last school year, but this is not yet a securely established pattern, as too many parents take children on long-term leave and a policy to address this problem has not yet been agreed by management and governors. The school has good capacity to improve and provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter Nursery with skills and capabilities below those expected for their age, particularly in language and communication skills. Standards have been improving in recent years and by the end of Reception children now work securely in all areas of learning, making good progress overall. Children's personal, social and emotional development is outstanding. 'Our child's confidence has grown together with his independence,' was a typical view expressed by one

parent. Because teaching is good and there is a rich and interesting curriculum, which particularly promotes excellent learning outdoors, children learn to share, take turns, speak and listen. This prepares them very effectively for their future education. Close engagement with nature facilitates particularly good progress for children in understanding the world around them and in their physical development. Good attention is given to children's welfare. Adults create a happy, nurturing environment with high standards of care. The provision is well led and managed with detailed planning for adult-led activities. However, planning does not identify the learning that is to take place in activities initiated by the children. The rigour of assessment has improved, but the school still recognises the need to ensure that all areas of learning are adequately and systematically covered.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that managers and governors adopt a more rigorous approach to monitoring and reviewing key policies and procedures, including strategies to improve attendance and punctuality.
- Develop a more systematic approach to the teaching of joined-up handwriting to aid fluency in recording, and the quality of pupils' responses to the challenges of writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter Year 1 with standards in line with those expected for their age, showing an improving trend in recent years. Pupils achieve well, but progress is stronger in Years 3 to 6 than in Years 1 and 2. Standards at the end of Year 2 are broadly average, but there is some variation between subjects from year to year. By the end of Year 6, standards are at least average in all key areas of learning. In mathematics and science, standards are a little above average, but in English they are a little lower because the proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 in reading is below average. In Years 3 to 6, pupils' progress in mathematics and science is particularly good. The most evident variation in achievement is shown in the progress of pupils of Pakistani heritage who do less well than others in Years 1 and 2, but make this up by the end of Year 6. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language, also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils show excellent development of their spiritual, social, moral and cultural awareness. As they go through the school, they grow in self-confidence, respecting the rich diversity of cultures, faiths and languages in the school. They openly enjoy school and respond very well to the good provision of cultural visits, special focus days and celebrations of faith. Behaviour is excellent both in class and at play, where pupils mix very happily as they exploit the wide range of activities available to them. Pupils have a good understanding of what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle. They feel safe in the knowledge that adults and playground buddies care for their welfare. The school council represents pupils' views well and is active in seeing its schemes through. Pupils play an equally active role in the community, supporting the many environmental projects hosted by the school and involving themselves in 'clean up' projects in the vicinity. They use information and communication technology (ICT) with increasing assurance, preparing themselves well for the next stages in their education. Attendance in 2008

was above average. However, the attendance and punctuality of some pupils this year has not been as good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching are leading to a good level of consistency in planning, assessment and expectations of behaviour, which helps pupils to develop very positive attitudes to their learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and communicate this well to pupils, using a good range of stimulating activities. Relationships in the classroom are excellent. Pupils collaborate well and know when to ask for help without disturbing the flow of lessons. Assessment techniques have improved since the previous inspection and good use of 'marking ladders' and openly displayed targets help pupils reflect well on the next steps in their learning. In some lessons, weaknesses in the pace and timing of activities and in using joined-up writing in day-to-day work limits learning. Teaching assistants support identified pupils well, but their deployment is not sufficiently flexible to fully support teachers in matching tasks to pupils' different abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The statutory curriculum is enhanced with a range of excellent initiatives which influence pupils' learning and personal development significantly. The well established 'Forest School' initiative and the focus on learning outdoors has a strong impact on investigative work and is a key factor in pupils' good science, mathematics and creative writing. Pupils identify well with the special quality of this environment and provision, giving them a pride in their school. ICT has improved with the development of a 'learning platform' which promotes responsible use of computers and provides a good route for pupils to gain greater independence in the way they learn. The reading scheme introduced to address identified needs has been very well adapted and extended to ensure that the more able remain well challenged. Well planned intervention supports identified groups to achieve well, including pupils with special gifts and talents. The strong curriculum for personal, social and health education is very effective in helping pupils make sound and inclusive lifestyle choices. A good range of visits and activities, including the opportunity for all pupils to learn a musical instrument, enhance opportunities for pupils to excel.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are highly committed to encouraging pupils' achievement and well-being. They understand their individual needs and circumstances very well, guiding them effectively in their comments for improvement, marking and setting learning targets. Good partnerships with external agencies benefit pupils' learning and attitudes to school. Safeguarding procedures and attention to matters of health and safety awareness are good. Great care has been put into the 'Zone Parc' scheme to ensure play is always varied, active and harmonious. Support for families is well established and includes English language programmes and sessions for parents whose children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A good and popular breakfast club helps children get in the right frame of mind for learning. The school recognises the need to review its

attendance policy in order to address extended holidays which impact on the continuity of learning for some pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a very clear picture of the school's strengths and identifies areas for improvement astutely. The school has a robust and consensual approach to school development which empowers all staff to play a full role and motivates less experienced teachers to aspire to high professional standards well. Challenging targets are well used in raising standards. A well coordinated range of strategies to monitor the quality of teaching and learning is helping to effectively identify the next steps in improving provision. However, formal recording of the school's self-evaluation lacks rigour and this constrains the way all stakeholders are able to make a contribution. Similarly, the school promotes equality of opportunity well and gives high priority to creating a cohesive and inclusive community in and around the school, but formal review of the impact of its policies for promoting community cohesion and equal opportunity is not yet regularly established. Governance is satisfactory. Governors support the school well, but do not monitor policy reviews with enough rigour.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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**

2 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Merridale Junior and Infant School

Thank you so much for welcoming Mrs Hughes and me so warmly when we visited your school at the end of last week. We really enjoyed our visit because it was clear to us that you all enjoy school very much. That is something very special. Many of your parents sent back the questionnaires, too, and told us very strongly that they believe you are very lucky to go to such a good school. We agree with them. We judged the school to be a good school which has several outstanding features.

Your behaviour and your enjoyment of school are outstanding. Well done! This reflects very well on you, but it also reflects very well on the adults in the school who provide the good teaching and care which you appreciate so much. It also reflects well on your headteacher and other senior teachers for improving the range of activities available to you in recent years. We were particularly impressed by the way you use the school grounds for learning almost as much as the classrooms. Your discoveries in the Forest School, your play in the Zone Parc and your investigations in the environment around you really help you to learn well. In class, you are attentive and learn well from one another as well as from your teachers. You are all benefiting from the new scheme to improve reading and older pupils are excited by the 'learning platform' which helps you use computers to learn more in your own time.

We know that many of you do not speak English at home, so we were very impressed by how quickly you learn to express yourselves and make friends using English. By the time you reach Year 6, you are beginning to overtake pupils from other schools in mathematics and science, in particular. We hope that you will rise to the challenge of doing even better, so that when the school is inspected again you can proudly say that you have helped your teachers to make Merridale even more successful. With this aim in mind, we have asked the school to do two things:

- to make sure that that your attendance stays good and is not spoilt by long- term absences, in particular
- to help you use joined-up writing better and more regularly, so that you can work on written projects with greater ease.

You can play your part, too, by continuing to respond so well to all the excellent activities your teachers organise for you.

With best wishes to each and every one of you for happy and successful futures Yours sincerely

John Mason

Lead inspector