

Meridian Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110626
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325184
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Dr Anna Coyle

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 (total)	257
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Christine Westgarth
Headteacher	Ms Glennis Virgo
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 February 2006
School address	Harbour Avenue Comberton Cambridge CB23 7DD
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons and held meetings with the headteacher, senior leadership team, chair of governors, groups of children and parents, and the local authority's consultant inspector. They observed the school's work and looked at policies and documentation on teaching and learning, the curriculum, the procedures for assessing and tracking children's progress, individual education plans for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, minutes of governors' meetings, the school development plan and information about the Early Years Foundation Stage. They analysed a total of 62 parents' questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- equality of opportunity for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- progress in writing at Key Stage 1, especially amongst boys
- the school's procedures and use of assessment, particularly for the most able and the youngest children
- the effectiveness of subject leadership.

Information about the school

The school has experienced significant staffing changes in the last six years. Since the last inspection it has worked closely with the local authority's advisors and consultants to help it overcome a number of difficulties. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2008. Attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is typical for the children's age. The school has received the Activemark award and is part of the local sports partnership. It hosts a privately run after-school club five days a week.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school is at the beginning of a new era in its history. It has been through difficult times in recent years but has turned the corner and begun to improve. It provides a satisfactory education for the pupils and some elements of its work are good.

Standards of attainment are above average overall by the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6. They are highest in mathematics, as shown by the well above average standards in the 2008 standardised tests. However, at Key Stage 1, standards in reading and writing have been falling unchecked in recent years. The latest results show that standards have now steadied and are broadly average by the end of Year 2. The majority of children currently in Years 1 and 2 achieve satisfactorily. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory and children achieve satisfactorily by the time they leave the Reception year. The majority of pupils in all year groups enjoy coming to school and attend regularly. They behave well and make safe and healthy lifestyle choices. They contribute well to the work of the school by taking on roles that benefit others, as shown in the work of the school council and the play leaders.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The best teaching is in the upper part of Key Stage 2 where pupils are challenged well. Where this is not the case, learning slows and progress is limited. Teaching is satisfactory overall in the Reception classes and in Years 1 to 4. There are appropriate systems in place to check how well pupils are doing and to set targets for them. However, pupils do not always know their targets well enough and teachers' marking is too inconsistent to help them improve their work. The school provides good pastoral support and guidance for pupils. Staff know them well and take good care of them. They make sure that they feel welcome and are included in all activities.

Under the careful guidance of the new headteacher, staff are beginning to pull together as a cohesive team to improve the school. The new senior leadership team is instrumental in helping to focus the school on raising the achievement of specific groups such as boys. Subject leadership is being restructured and the school is aware that staff are not involved sufficiently in monitoring. Self-evaluation is satisfactory overall but not yet wholly accurate. Nevertheless, the changes, together with a high level of commitment and energy amongst senior leaders, are having a positive impact on developments and helping to provide a satisfactory capacity for

improvement.

The governing body provides satisfactory governance and individual governors are supportive of the school. They have ensured that the provision for the youngest pupils is more balanced than it was in 2006 in order to improve equality of opportunity. However, their role as critical friends is not sufficiently developed.

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 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress for the following groups:
 - children in the Reception class and in Years 1 to 4, by improving teaching so that at least half is consistently good or better by the end of the autumn term 2009
 - by increasing boys' achievement in writing through activities that are well matched to their needs.

- Build on the work already undertaken to embed the use of assessment by:
 - ensuring that work is sufficiently challenging for all groups of pupils, including the most able
 - improving the quality of teachers' marking to help pupils know how well they are doing and how to do better
 - involving pupils in knowing their targets in literacy and numeracy.

- Strengthen school leadership by:
 - ensuring greater involvement of the subject leaders in monitoring lessons so that they can identify the best features in teaching and spread good practice
 - increasing the extent to which governors act as critical friends to oversee the school's provision and hold it to account.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3

Pupils enjoy learning and achieve satisfactorily in Years 1 to 4. They achieve well in Years 5 and 6. From average attainment on entry to Year 1, standards are currently broadly average in Year 2. School leaders recognise that some pupils have not achieved well enough in recent years. Effective measures are being taken to begin to improve the provision and to eradicate any underachievement. However, attainment in writing is still an issue for the school to address, especially among boys. Teachers

are currently adapting their lessons to take account of the interests of boys and consequently, progress is beginning to quicken. Despite there being some catching up to do in the upper part of Key Stage 2, a good number of pupils in Years 5 and 6 reach the expected Level 4 by the time they leave, and a significant proportion are already on target to attain Level 5.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils work and play well together and are keen to take part in the range of school activities offered. Levels of attendance are above average. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe and adopt healthy lifestyles by taking part in a range of physical activities in lessons and after-school clubs. Pupils contribute well to the school community by taking on responsibilities in the classroom and around the school such as monitors, 'maths buddies' and play leaders. They participate well in local community events such as the Comberton Village Show and raise funds for charities such as the local hospice. Through the school council and the Eco club, pupils learn about teamwork, making financial decisions and conserving the environment. They are satisfactorily prepared for their future well-being because their skills are suitably developed in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is satisfactory overall. Pupils have a good moral understanding of right and wrong and have good social skills. The 'Meridian Manners' strategy has had a positive impact on pupils willingness to be courteous and helpful to visitors and each other. They form good relationships and are tolerant individuals, although their knowledge of other faiths and cultures is not well developed.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	3
Pupils' attendance	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	3

The quality of the school's work

Satisfactory teaching and learning predominate in the school, although the picture is very variable. Good achievement in Years 5 and 6 is reflected in the substantial

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

amount of good or better teaching. However, a significant minority of lessons in other year groups are ordinary and occasionally inadequate which impairs pupil's progress, especially in literacy and numeracy. The best lessons feature knowledgeable and confident teaching of lively, imaginative lessons in which pupils make rapid progress. For example, in Year 5, the teacher's good use of humour, excellent subject knowledge and brisk pace kept pupils enthralled when learning about 'powerful' adjectives. The skilled use of questioning is a good feature of teaching throughout the school, as seen in an outstanding mathematics lesson in Year 6. However, in weaker lessons, planning does not take account of the need to increase pupil's basic skills in small achievable steps. Teaching assistants are often deployed well to provide good support for those with language needs and learning difficulties.

Most lesson plans have clear objectives and are detailed. However, assessment is not used effectively to match work to challenge the most able. A formal system for tracking pupil's progress is now in place and is being used to identify any underachievement. However, teachers' marking is inconsistent across the school and does not offer enough helpful advice on the next steps in learning.

The school has rightly identified the need to review and develop its curriculum, which is satisfactory overall. Aspects of health and citizenship are dealt with suitably to contribute to pupil's personal development. A good range of visits and visitors enhance pupil's learning well and the wide range of after school clubs are enjoyed by many. Pupils enjoy gardening and taking part in annual performances, choir and sports. They also learn Spanish.

Pupils are cared for well. Vulnerable pupils are supported and guided sensitively to help them integrate with others. The pupils appreciate the good support that the teachers give them and respond well. The learning environment is being improved effectively and displays around the school are becoming increasingly colourful and stimulating.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	3
Support, guidance and care	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is leading the school with ambitious determination and vision, with the help of her very capable deputy headteacher, so that the staff are all effectively pulling together to help the school move forward. The senior leadership team has accurately identified areas for improvement and is addressing them energetically. It has begun to set clear strategic direction to ensure that issues are tackled and that

pupils achieve increasingly challenging targets. Leaders recognise that there is still a way to go to raise achievement in writing at Key Stage 1 and that subject leaders have not yet developed their roles sufficiently. The new teaching and learning policy is beginning to have a positive impact but the procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching are not yet rigorous enough.

At the time of the inspection, safeguarding arrangements met the legal requirements and there are suitable arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity. Leaders foster satisfactory partnerships with parents and local services to ensure satisfactory community cohesion. For example, the school works closely with the 'Locality Team', parent support advisor and social care staff to provide support for families. Parents are mainly positive about the school, appreciating the care given to their children, and many support them at home in their learning. A group of governors, staff and parents, known as the 'Link Group' meets regularly to discuss aspects of the school's provision. However, the governing body does not act swiftly enough to deal with concerns and is not an effective critical friend to the school. The effective deployment of staff and appropriate use of resources result in satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	3
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	3
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	3
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	3
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	3
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points. Almost all reach the goals set for this age group in the six areas of learning, although boys do less well in communication, language and literacy because of weaknesses in writing. Following improvements in the accuracy of assessment, more is now being done to help children practise writing letters and numbers. Activities are suitably planned around broad themes to provide children with a reasonable balance of adult-led tasks and free-choices. Children settle quickly and are given equal opportunities to encounter a wide range of experiences in both classes, which is an improvement since the last inspection. Children become absorbed in role play and they use a wide range of materials and tools in cutting, sticking and making pictures. They enjoy

choosing their own activities in the classrooms and in the outdoor area. Teachers and teaching assistants work together to support the children effectively in small groups and they closely observe their progress. However, children are often kept sitting on the carpet too long, and the purpose of some sessions is not explained clearly enough. Assessment is not used sufficiently to measure progress on a regular basis and identify the next steps in learning. The provision is managed satisfactorily by the acting leader in the absence of the substantive leader who has been seconded to work in another school.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	3
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3

Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents are satisfied with the education provided by the school and say that their children are happy and enjoy lessons. A number of parents expressed concern about the lack of homework and they say that there is insufficient communication between the home and the school on topics such as the curriculum and children's progress. Parents are mainly satisfied with the recent changes in leadership and are hopeful for the future.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



12 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meridian Primary School, Comberton, Cambridge CB23 7DD

Thank you for being so helpful and making us feel welcome when we visited your school. I am writing to let you know what we found out.

It was good to hear how much you like coming to school and enjoy learning. It was also good to hear about how happy you feel in school and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried. You behave well and you know a lot about keeping healthy and safe. Those of you involved in the school council take your responsibilities seriously and try hard to look after the school environment.

We think that you go to a satisfactory school. Your teachers and other staff help you to achieve satisfactorily, although some of you could do better. The school takes good care of you and helps you to get on well together. The curriculum is satisfactory and you have some good opportunities for after-school activities.

The headteacher and the senior leaders want the school to become even better and so we have recommended they do several things to improve the quality of provision.

- We have asked them to make sure that there is more good teaching in the school so that you all to make better progress in the Reception classes and in Years 1 to 4, especially the boys in writing.
- We have also asked the teachers to improve their marking to help you know how well you are doing and what to do next to improve your work, and to help you know your targets for literacy and numeracy.
- We also want the subject leaders and governors to be more involved in checking how well the school is doing.

We hope you will play your part by continuing to work hard and do your best.

I wish you every success in the future.

Best wishes

Dr Anna Coyle
Lead inspector

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