

Merdon Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115873
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	326279
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Pritiben Patel

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nigel Lewis
Headteacher	Mr Duncan Sergeant
Date of previous school inspection	13 July 2006
School address	Merdon Avenue Chandler's Ford Eastleigh SO53 1EJ
Telephone number	02380 265255
Fax number	02380 270238

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The vast majority of pupils at Merton are of White British origin and small proportions are from Asian and other backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. An average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as speech, language, communication, behavioural and social needs. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The school has attained the Artsmark Silver Award for providing pupils with a creative curriculum and the Advanced Healthy Schools Award for promoting healthy lifestyles.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Merton is a satisfactory school, with strengths in pupils' personal development, care and support. Pupils make satisfactory progress. They arrive at the school with above-average standards and attain above-average standards by the time they leave in Year 6. However, there are variations in standards year on year linked to the growing proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. National test information for 2008 shows that standards were average in all areas but better in mathematics. The reason for this dip in standards was due to the increased proportion of pupils, particularly boys, with learning difficulties. The school has identified that standards in writing for all pupils requires improvement. As a result, various strategies to raise attainment have been employed, such as 'Talk Topics' to encourage pupils to think through their ideas before they write. Attainment in science, too, is a focus area. Consequently, pupils are given increased opportunities to carry out investigations. These strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Pupils make satisfactory progress because teaching and learning are satisfactory. Positive features of teaching include relationships between staff and pupils, questioning and the setting of independent learning activities that actively engage pupils. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils showed much resilience while busily trying to sort out a range of real life problems. Teachers' marking although regular, does not consistently inform pupils about what they need to do next to improve their work. In some lessons, pupils are not given prompts about time and, consequently, some pupils complete less work than they should. The school recognises that the overall quality of teaching and learning needs to improve in order for pupils to make better progress. The curriculum is good. Enrichment opportunities, such as Arts Week, where pupils paint murals, participate in miming activities and learn dance skills from specialists, have a good impact on enjoyment of their learning. The school has been awarded the Artsmark Silver in recognition of its development of pupils' creative skills.

Care, guidance and support are good. Pastoral care is a strong feature. Safeguarding procedures are securely in place. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support, which enables them to make good progress in mathematics and reading. Pupils know their targets and are being helped to learn different ways of assessing their own work. There are good whole-school assessment systems in place that are now being embedded into teachers' practice.

Most parents are happy with the school and praise the caring and nurturing ethos that has been created. Comments such as 'Merton is good at producing happy and confident children' and 'My daughter has spent many happy years at Merton' were typical. Pupils' personal development is good. They are sensible, mature and behave well. Their adoption of healthy lifestyles is outstanding: they have a very good understanding about healthy diets, eat healthy lunches and participate in a wide range of sports activities such as football, netball and cricket. In recognition of this, the school has been awarded Advanced Healthy School Status. Pupils' adoption of safe practices is outstanding: they have a very clear understanding about fire drill procedures and internet safety, and work safely in lessons when using different materials, for example in mathematics. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Social and moral development are strengths as pupils work in pairs and teams in lessons and help each other in the playground as junior sports leaders. Pupils' contribution is outstanding as they participate in highly successful musical theatre productions, such as 'Seussical', and contribute very well through the school council and the house system. Due to the good

development of pupils' independent skills and the above-average standards they attain, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their schooling.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is supported well by an able deputy. Together, they have established good links with other stakeholders in order to improve outcomes for pupils, for example by collaborating with a cluster of schools offering before- and after-school provision. The senior leadership team has recently been restructured and senior leaders have identified that it will take time before the impact of these key people can be fully measured. Thus, capacity to move forward is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the overall quality and consistency of teaching to enhance pupils' progress.
- Embed the consistent use of the good whole-school assessment systems that are in place.
- Embed the roles of senior leaders so that they have a greater impact on pupils' achievement.

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' achievement is satisfactory over time. Where the quality of teaching and learning are better, the rate of pupil progress accelerates. Standards in 2008 dipped to average because of a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties in the cohort, some of whom were absent from school owing to appointments and external assessments. Progress information provided by the school shows that these pupils are making good progress in reading and mathematics. This is the result of better and more regular tracking, which is then used to provide appropriate support programmes.

Pupils' attainment in writing, including that of the more able, was not as strong as that in mathematics in 2008. Senior leaders are implementing plans to ensure that pupils are given more opportunities to write across the curriculum, in order to raise attainment. Raising attainment in science, too, is a focus and, as a result, a recent Science Week was organised in order to provide pupils with opportunities to develop their scientific enquiry skills. Such strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Across the school, pupils enjoy learning, have a strong work ethic and are confident in their own abilities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with the moral and social aspects being particularly strong. Behaviour is good throughout school and pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Through the personal, social and health education programme, as well as the wide range of sports and physical activities, pupils are developing an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. Year 6 pupils were very enthusiastic when talking to inspectors about the healthy eating presentation they put together for the rest of the school. Pupils' contribution through the school council and the house system, as well as by raising money for charity, is excellent. Pupils feel their views are taken seriously because of changes to the school library and playground as well as to the lunchtime provision. Pupils' enjoyment of school is demonstrated by their good attendance. Their above-average standards

in basic skills, positive attitude to work and strengths in interpersonal skills prepares them well for their future development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although teaching is satisfactory overall, some good lessons were observed in both the upper and lower school. Throughout the school, teachers plan interesting activities and engage pupils' attention and interest successfully by using the interactive whiteboards, giving pupils opportunities to talk and reflect on their work, as well as by using interesting resources. Relationships are strong and pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of their behaviour. Teachers plan different activities for pupils of different abilities. However, in some lessons assessment information is not used well to extend the skills and knowledge of all pupils, especially the more able ones. On these occasions, the rate of progress slows. Although teachers mark pupils' work regularly with comments of encouragement, they do not always provide pupils with information about how they could improve their work. Support staff make valuable contributions to lessons and they are deployed effectively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum contributes well to pupils' personal development and their positive attitudes to learning. Links between subjects are being further developed and are enabling pupils to learn in meaningful contexts and to transfer skills learnt in one subject to other areas of the curriculum. A range of visitors, such as authors and outside speakers, helps enrich the curriculum. Music is a strong feature and almost half the school population are learning to play musical instruments such as the keyboard, the recorder or woodwind or brass instruments. A wide range of extra-curricular clubs meet the differing interests of pupils well, such as chess, gardening and athletics. In addition, pupils also benefit from the specialist sports coaching they receive. French is taught throughout school and is contributing to pupils' understanding of different cultures. Improving attainment in writing is a current focus and, as a result, pupils are given more opportunities to write across the curriculum.

Information and communication technology is used effectively across the curriculum, for example, to solve mathematical problems, design menus and produce autobiographical writing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

'This school is like a big family. It is a caring school. There is always someone there to help you when you are upset and it treats everybody the same.' This comment from one of the pupils sums up the school's good pastoral provision. Procedures to protect and safeguard pupils are robust and meet statutory requirements. Particular care and guidance are readily available for those who have emotional and behaviour difficulties from the 'Friends Group'. As a result, they are able to access the full curriculum and develop good personal skills. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good. They make good progress towards their targets, especially in reading and mathematics, because their progress is monitored regularly and actions are taken to improve it further. The school uses its links with other schools and agencies well to provide good support and guidance for both pupils and their parents.

Individual targets for pupils are set to guide learning in English and mathematics and they have a good understanding of them. Pupils are beginning to be involved in evaluating their work against these targets. Good whole-school assessment systems are in place which teachers are starting to use increasingly well in their practice.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Senior leaders have worked hard to create a happy and caring environment in which pupils flourish in their personal development. Subject leaders, some of whom are new to their role, are beginning to develop a good understanding about the areas they lead and to carry out monitoring activities, such as observing teaching and learning, and pupil conferencing, as well as evaluating teachers' planning.

Self-evaluation is satisfactory. Relevant and appropriate priorities have been identified but have not yet been addressed with sufficient rigour. Governors provide good support to the school. They interview staff, visit lessons, help with reading activities and contribute to the school development plan. Community cohesion is satisfactory. Senior leaders have carried out a detailed audit of present provision, which promotes community cohesion and have put in place plans to address gaps, for example by planning a World Culture Day.

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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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which 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	1
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	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	2
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**

25 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merton Junior School, Eastleigh, SO53 1EJ

On behalf of the inspectors, I would like to thank you for helping us when we came to find out how well you are getting on. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking to some of you.

Your school provides a satisfactory level of education for you. Personal development and care are good.

Here is a list of some of the things that we found out about your school.

- You make satisfactory progress, and attain above-average standards by the time you leave in Year 6.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers organise activities that engage and interest you in learning. You all spoke very highly of your teachers and told inspectors you enjoy coming to school.
- You behave well and show good care for each other.
- The curriculum is good because of all the different visits, visitors and themed weeks, such as Arts Week and Science Week. It is really good to find that at least half of you are learning to play a musical instrument.
- All the adults in your school show good care for you and, as a result, you feel well looked after.

We have asked senior leaders to improve some areas in your school. The quality of teaching and learning should be improved so that you make better progress. Assessment information should be better used to help improve your progress. Some senior leaders are new to their roles and it will take time before their work has a good impact on your learning. I am sure that you will continue to enjoy school and work hard!

Yours faithfully

Pritiben Patel

Lead Inspector