

Meredith Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116186
Local Authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	326342
Inspection dates	15–16 January 2009
Reporting inspector	John Carnaghan

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	198
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	Miss Marie Ottley
Headteacher	Mrs Lynn Counsell
Date of previous school inspection	14 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Portchester Road Northend Portsmouth PO2 7JB
Telephone number	023 9266 3846
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Meredith Infant School is smaller than average. Approximately one third of pupils are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The on-site childcare provision is not managed by the governing body. Most pupils are of White British origin. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average; the majority of these have moderate learning difficulties. The school holds the Healthy Schools and Activemark awards. The current headteacher took up her post in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Meredith Infant School provides a satisfactory standard of education. The new headteacher, supported by her senior colleagues, has initiated a number of reforms and other improvements are planned, such as to devolve management more widely. These have been put into place comparatively recently and have yet to have a significant impact on improving standards. Children enter school with skills and aptitudes which are below those expected for their age. They leave with below-average standards. Over their time at school, their achievement is satisfactory. However, better teaching in the EYFS means that they make faster progress in the Reception Year than they do in Years 1 and 2. Writing standards lag behind those in other areas because the majority of children start at school with very low standards in language and communication, but the school has effective plans to tackle this. Good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities means these pupils achieve well.

Parents are very supportive of the school and very few express any concerns. Many are delighted that their children like school so much and praise the approachability of the teachers. One typical comment was, '...the school...has always been supportive and helpful and this has been reflected in how well our son has progressed at school and generally'.

Pupils are happy at school. They relate well to their teachers and one another and behave well. They understand the value of healthy eating and how to keep fit through exercise, showing a good understanding of the factors that help you grow up healthily. Attendance is well below average and punctuality is a continuing concern, despite the school's considerable efforts. Low attendance is hampering the school's efforts to raise standards and achievement. Care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory. The safety and pastoral care of pupils are of paramount importance to the school but academic support and guidance is inconsistent and does not always promote effective learning. The curriculum is satisfactory, offering interesting learning experiences by combining subjects, and pupils enjoy the varied experiences afforded by visits and visitors to the school.

The quality of teaching and learning varies, but the overall picture is a satisfactory one. There is good practice in teaching pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, where teachers maintain a strong emphasis on what must be learned. Where this is less of a focus, teaching and learning are inconsistent and some lessons proceed at too slow a pace and do not cater well for the full ability range.

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The new headteacher has quickly developed an accurate picture of areas that need improving and has energetically set about improvements, fully supported by senior managers. Other staff are currently less involved in important areas like monitoring. Governors offer strong support but do not have the independent knowledge of the school required to enable them to challenge it sufficiently.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good provision ensures that children make a good start in the Reception classes and settle quickly into classroom routines. Children enter Reception classes with skills and levels of understanding below those expected for their age. They achieve well and by the time they move into Year 1, most reach standards that are similar to national expectations, although many fall short in writing.

Teaching is good overall and some is outstanding. There is a good focus on developing children's social skills and they interact well with one another. As a result, children are happy and develop growing confidence in choosing their own learning activities. Although indoor and outdoor areas are used well, outdoor areas are very small and have no cover to enable them to be utilised in all weathers. Good use is made of the school's playground for physical activities.

Leadership and management of the EYFS are good. Adults plan together as a team and have a clear understanding of how young children learn. A major success of the curriculum is the 'Letters and Sounds' programme. Staff observe, record and track children's progress carefully, providing a helpful picture of what they need to learn next. Welfare arrangements are very good and close links with local playgroups and pre-schools mean that a precise picture of each child's background and potential emerges. The environment is safe and relationships between adults and children are warm and sensitive. Staff have positive relationships with parents and carers. One parent commented 'If I have any problems I find the teachers to be approachable and the problem always gets sorted out'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' achievement, particularly in writing.
- Ensure that all lessons are planned so that pupils understand what they have to do and are fully challenged.
- Improve attendance and punctuality by raising parents' awareness of the school's high expectations.

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' rate of progress slows a little in Key Stage 1, where their achievement is satisfactory. The main impediment to good achievement in Years 1 and 2 is pupils' slower progress in writing. Their difficulties in this area hold back their achievement in other subjects.

Improved teaching and assessment has meant that the fall in Key Stage 1 standards of 2007 and 2008 has been halted and pupils' current achievement is satisfactory. The school's strong work on inclusion means that those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language achieve well. Current standards in Year 2 remain below average, although the school's use of challenging targets and its convincing projections, based on thorough assessment, indicate they are currently higher than in the previous two years.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

This is a happy school, where pupils say they feel safe and secure because adults take good care of them and they know who to turn to for help. They enjoy good relationships, and behaviour is consistently good. Most children enjoy school life but their attendance remains well below the national average. The punctuality of some pupils is also not as good as it should be and this affects their learning and progress. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Through assemblies and celebrations of different events, pupils develop a sound understanding of their own culture and are learning to respect that of others.

Members of the school council enjoy their responsibilities in school and speak proudly about their role as 'playground leaders'. Pupils enjoy charity fundraising and environmental action such as, 'the big tidy' when they collect litter from streets around the school. Although the good grounding pupils receive in their social skills and their growing independence prepares them well for the future, this is hindered by their below-average standards in literacy and numeracy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

While there are a number of strengths, the teaching in Years 1 and 2 is inconsistent and generally less effective at promoting learning than in the EYFS. In particular, teachers do not always emphasise what should be gained from each lesson. Generally, the endings of sessions do not review progress or indicate what comes next. Planning sometimes does not offer enough challenge to keep all pupils at full stretch and pupils occasionally remain too long on one activity.

Pupils are managed with kindness and assurance by teachers and they respond with good behaviour and positive attitudes. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are very good and pupils react positively to the numerous opportunities to work independently. Teaching assistants work in harmony with class teachers and provide helpful guidance for those who might otherwise struggle.

The headteacher recently introduced more frequent assessment of pupils' progress and the school is starting to gather very useful data, enabling teachers to provide interventions for those in difficulties. These recent reforms are just starting to have a positive impact on the way pupils achieve. Marking is inconsistent and so does not always help pupils fully understand which areas need improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is planned to maximise links between subjects and to provide attractive opportunities to learn. Surveys of pupils and teachers indicate that the curriculum is popular and enjoyable. However, the school acknowledges that some adjustments are required to ensure that the balance of time spent on each subject is the same in each year group. Pupils benefit from a variety of visitors to the school and make a number of trips appropriate to their age. Both visits and visitors provide stimulating opportunities for pupils to develop their writing.

There are a number of after-school clubs, which are popular and enjoyed by pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is strongly committed to caring for pupils. Policies and procedures to protect pupils are rigorous, ensuring arrangements for safety, care and welfare are secure. Staff know pupils well and relationships are good. The inclusion manager ensures that teachers and teaching assistants meet the needs of individual pupils. Sensitive, well-focused support is provided for vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who do not speak English as their first language.

The school has become more active in its efforts to reduce absence, but there remain a number of families who fail to ensure their children attend regularly and punctually. Academic guidance and support for pupils is satisfactory. The school carefully tracks pupils' progress but teachers do not always use the information well enough to challenge all pupils. Much of the school's work on assessment is too recent for its impact to be clear. The use of individual and group targets for literacy and numeracy is not yet having a significant impact on raising standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher quickly recognised the significant issues facing the school and has hurried to bring about improvements. The underlying theme has been to raise standards and achievement. For example, teaching and learning have been more thoroughly monitored and the quality and quantity of assessment have been improved. The school has begun to promote attendance with greater rigour. These and other initiatives have given the staff greater confidence and the headteacher is strongly supported by enthusiastic senior managers and staff. The school recognises that monitoring of the school's performance should be undertaken by a wider range of staff. Middle leaders are not sufficiently involved in raising achievement and improving teaching and learning.

The school has long-standing links with local churches. Provision for sports and music is enhanced by liaisons with local schools and clubs. The school plans to improve its currently satisfactory contribution to community cohesion by utilising an unused classroom as a community room to engage parents more fully in education.

Governors are very supportive of the school and worked hard to ensure recognition of its good financial arrangements through the Financial Management Standard in Schools award. However, they do not monitor the school systematically and this means that they are insufficiently challenging or proactive in planning for the future.

The headteacher has initiated impressive new improvement plans since her appointment. These identify the most significant priorities, when and where actions are required and their resource implications. While achievement has fallen in the three years since the previous inspection, recent reforms are starting to have a positive impact on standards and other areas, and the school's capacity for improvement in the future is satisfactory.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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?	2
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?	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/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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
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

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?	No

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

27 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meredith Infant School, Portsmouth, PO2 7JB

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school recently. It was nice meeting you and good to find out that you are happy at school.

Meredith Infant School gives you a satisfactory education. Your work, when you leave, is not quite at the same standard as seven-year-olds across the country, especially in writing, but things are improving and you are starting to do much better and make satisfactory progress. Teaching and learning are also satisfactory and they are good in the Reception classes where the children make good progress. The mixture of subjects (called the curriculum) is also satisfactory.

Your behaviour is good and you know a lot about how to live healthy lives. Your learning and development are being let down because some of you do not come to school every day and some do not arrive on time. You are well cared for in many ways but your teachers could improve the advice they give you to help you learn.

The headteacher, staff and governors are working hard to improve things and are starting to run the school better so that you can do much better. The changes made are so new they have not yet made a lot of difference, but your teachers are now doing the right things to improve your school.

We have asked the school to focus on three areas that need to be improved.

- Improve the standards of your work, especially in writing. You can help in this by working your hardest.
- Lessons should all be clear about what you should learn, have more short activities and keep you all at full stretch.
- Improve attendance and punctuality by working more with your parents. You should also make extra efforts to attend on time.

Once again, thanks for your help during the inspection. It was nice meeting you.

Yours faithfully

John Carnaghan

Lead Inspector