

Merry Hill Infant School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117090
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326522
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Joy Richardson

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	3–7
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	Mr Paul Abrahams
Headteacher	Mrs Pauline Hannibal
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Lane Bushey Hertfordshire WD23 1ST

Age group	3–7
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2009
Inspection number	326522

Telephone number
Fax number

020 8950 2166
020 8950 6338

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors

Description of the school

The school serves the surrounding area of Bushey and is oversubscribed. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage join the Nursery, for morning or after afternoon sessions, from the September after their third birthday. They move into Reception in the September when they are four. Around two thirds of children progress from the Nursery into Reception, and about a third join the school at this point. At the age of seven, most pupils transfer to Ashfield Junior School. Four-fifths of pupils are white British, and a fifth are from a diversity of other ethnic heritages. Eighteen pupils speak English as an additional language but none is at an early stage. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. Children often start school with skills that are well developed for their age, although this is not always the case. The school's Active Mark and Investors in People awards were renewed in 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school gives pupils an outstanding education. This broadly confirms the school's view that its effectiveness is good and outstanding in many aspects. The exceptional quality of the school's provision is underpinned by its commitment to reviewing and improving its practice. It is strongly focused on achieving the highest possible standards in the context of a rich all-round education for every pupil. Parents are extremely satisfied with the school and warmly appreciate the excellent partnership that is cultivated between home and school.

Children make rapid progress from the start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and achieve exceptionally well, with substantial numbers exceeding the early learning goals in all the areas of learning. They continue to make excellent progress in Years 1 and 2, working towards challenging targets that set sights high. As a result, almost all pupils, whatever their starting point, reach at least the level expected for their age in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Many achieve well beyond this, and the extent of this higher attainment is increasing. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities are identified early and supported with great skill so that they, too, make excellent progress.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They develop an excellent understanding of how to look after themselves and others. Pupils relish responsibilities such as being a 'play leader' in Year 2. They enjoy helping others in lessons as 'the expert' within a group. They readily contribute ideas for making the school better, as in a questionnaire about improving the dining room. Pupils understand and try hard to keep to the 'Golden Rules', including being truthful when in the wrong. They are extremely alert to the importance of healthy eating and exercise and relish many opportunities to be physically active.

Pupils reach high standards because of outstanding teaching that is lively, thorough, imaginative and interesting. As one pupil said: 'It is exciting to learn something new every day'. Skills, such as handwriting, and building words from the sounds of letters, are taught systematically using methods that make learning fun. Pupils greatly enjoy reading and writing though they do not always fully apply their knowledge of spelling to all their writing. Teachers engage pupils in practical activities that spark their curiosity and challenge their thinking, for example in exploring number patterns. The school offers an exceptionally rich and well-balanced curriculum. Special events, such as the recent 'Victorian School' week in which the whole school community participated, are vividly remembered.

The quality of care for pupils is excellent and every effort is made to meet pupils' individual needs. Teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff work extremely well as a team to provide a safe and happy environment where children thrive. The school has been extensively refurbished and provides an attractive and stimulating environment for learning, indoors and outdoors.

The school's leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher sets a clear direction for improvement, inspiring, supporting and empowering the whole staff team. The leadership team is highly effective in monitoring the progress of pupils and the effectiveness of teaching and this gives the school excellent capacity to continue to improve. Governors provide excellent support for the school and are fully involved in evaluating its work.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children make an excellent start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of outstanding teaching and care. They make rapid strides in their learning and development, whatever their starting point, so that they reach and usually exceed the goals set nationally for the end of Reception. Children's personal, social and emotional development is extremely good because of excellent guidance from adults, clear routines and high expectations. Children become confident and independent from the start in the Nursery as they learn, for example, to change clothes quickly and to leave them tidily. Children share and cooperate well and they persist in activities to ensure they are completed. Excellent foundations are laid in communication, language and literacy so that children achieve extremely well in starting to read. Activities are planned very effectively to secure progress in each area of learning. Teaching is highly effective in making learning active, for example, using songs and actions to reinforce learning. Children greatly enjoy the activities that extend their learning in the excellent outdoor area. Attention to children's physical development is excellent, as seen when children were shown pictures of themselves climbing and balancing to help them gain control. They have a strong awareness of how to be healthy and to keep safe, as seen, for example, on a visit to the local allotment. The Early Years Foundation Stage is extremely well led and managed. As a result, relationships are excellent and teamwork is strong in taking account of children's individual needs. The home/school link book is used to excellent effect in support of children's learning and well-being.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils consistently apply their knowledge of spelling when writing independently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children start school with skills that are generally well developed for their age, although this varies from year to year. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities, make excellent progress through the school in building on their different starting points. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, almost all children reach, and a high proportion exceed, the goals set for this age in all the areas of learning. They achieve particularly well in communication, language and literacy because children gain great confidence in building words from sounds. This lays an excellent foundation for reading and writing. Pupils achieve extremely well in Years 1 and 2 reaching standards that are consistently high and significantly above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. They also do exceptionally well in science. The quality of handwriting is extremely good. The work of pupils in Years 1 and 2 shows that standards are continuing to rise. Pupils are making rapid progress and the extent of higher attainment is increasing. Pupils are on course to meet challenging targets because the school is highly effective in identifying areas for improvement and taking action.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. They show high levels of respect for the views, values and beliefs of others, and proudly talk about their understanding of other faiths. They are very responsive to stories in assemblies that explore moral themes

and they have a strong understanding of how they should behave towards others. Pupils are fully aware of the benefits of eating healthily and of exercising regularly. Pupils say that they feel safe at school and they know precisely what to do if they feel sad or worried, fully confident that their concerns will be resolved. They thoroughly enjoy school life because learning is fun and they rise to the challenge of doing their best. Attendance rates are above the national average. Behaviour is good and often exemplary, though reminders are needed about listening quietly in a few lessons. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the community. They raise money for charities, thoroughly entering into the spirit of the recent Red Nose Day. Year 2 pupils willingly take on responsibilities for caring for others including being 'play leaders' in the playground. Pupils show great sensitivity to the needs of others. They make outstanding progress in acquiring skills that will support them in later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Pupils learn exceptionally well because of teaching that is consistently good and frequently outstanding. Relationships between staff and pupils are extremely good so that pupils want to please by achieving well. Teachers make excellent use of resources, including interactive whiteboards, to engage pupils' thinking. They promote active learning. As a result, pupils are confident in working independently, investigating and solving problems, for example, when working with number patterns. Pupils readily take on a challenge as when, in Year 2, they used their own ideas to make a winding device and critically evaluated what they had made. Teachers make very clear what pupils are intended to learn, and help them to take stock of how well they have achieved this. Tasks are carefully planned to build on pupils' prior learning and to take account of their individual needs. This is particularly the case for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils who find learning easy are challenged to go further. Teachers and teaching assistants work seamlessly together and make an extremely positive contribution to pupils' learning. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They are extremely thorough in assessing pupils' progress and identifying areas for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets the full range of pupils' interests and capabilities extremely well and effectively promotes outstanding personal development. Consequently, pupils are enthralled by their education and achieve exceptionally well. The curriculum is organised to take full account of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as well as the more able. The library, improved since the last inspection, provides an inviting setting where pupils can enjoy books and develop reading skills. The new computer suite is also extending opportunities for pupils. The curriculum is brought to life through links between subjects that draw on children's own experiences, and a strong focus on learning through 'doing'. Pupils benefit from a broad range of clubs, activities and visits. Visitors, including parents from different countries, extend learning about the community and the wider world. Education for safety, health and well-being is outstanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff are extremely successful in ensuring pupils' enjoyment and achievement. They place a strong emphasis on promoting pupils' health and safety. Strategies for developing pupils' social well-being and equality of opportunity are highly effective. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are in firmly in place and regularly reviewed. In this safe and supportive setting pupils reach challenging targets. Pupils are helped to understand, through marking and discussion, how well they are doing and how to improve. Parents are kept very well informed about the progress their children are making. A highly-qualified special educational needs coordinator helps to ensure that difficulties with learning are identified early. These pupils are provided with well-structured support, and their progress is rigorously monitored. The school has formed extremely effective links with other agencies to support pupils with specific learning needs, and the whole staff is well informed about how to help them learn. Links with parents are excellent. The headteacher has open meetings regularly with parents to respond to questions and to explain aspects of the school's work. The two-way flow of information between school and home is exceptional. As one parent said, 'It really makes parenting our children a lot easier knowing that the staff and parents are working together.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides extremely clear guidance and direction for the school while harnessing the efforts of the whole staff team in working together to raise standards. The school is rigorous in evaluating what it does well and what it could do better, and in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress. It actively seeks the views of parents in pursuit of improvement. Leadership is broadly based and the school is highly committed to the continuing professional development of staff, seeing it as an investment in the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff work together extremely well and everyone's contribution is valued. The day to day management of the school is excellent. The school runs smoothly and communication between home and school is highly effective in supporting children's learning. Each child is welcomed and included as an individual. The school contributes much to the local sense of community and to pupils' awareness of different faiths and customs. The school has excellent capacity to continue to improve, building on significant improvement since the last inspection in the quality of teaching and learning and the monitoring of pupils' progress. Many improvements have been made to the school environment, and this is extremely well maintained and welcoming. Governors are highly supportive of the staff and closely involved in evaluating the school's effectiveness.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
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	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
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?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

18 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Merry Hill Nursery and Infant School, Bushey, WD23 1ST

We enjoyed meeting you when we visited Merry Hill. We were sorry that we missed Red Nose Day when you wore your pyjamas, and the Victorian School week when you learned what it was like in Victorian times, but we were interested to hear all about them.

You are lucky to go to such an excellent school where you learn so much and in such interesting ways. You do very well in reading and your handwriting is splendid. You think hard too. It was good to see you working things out for yourselves and enjoying a wide range of interesting activities.

We are pleased that you understand the Golden Rules and try hard to keep them. You like to help other people and the play leaders in Year 2 are doing a really good job. We hope that all your ideas for improving the dining room will help to make lunchtime even better.

Mrs Hannibal and the staff have been doing lots of things to improve the school and they have plenty more ideas to help you learn as well as possible. We think you could make your writing even better by remembering how to spell the words you have learned to read.

We hope you go on enjoying school and all the wonderful things you do there.

Yours sincerely

Joy Richardson

Lead inspector