

Meryfield Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117184
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326545
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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)	261
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	48
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Cooper
Headteacher	Mrs Rosemarie Alexander
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Theobald Street Borehamwood Hertfordshire WD6 4PA
Telephone number	020 8953 2106
Fax number	020 8953 8768

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupil numbers are rising in this above average size school as the yearly intake increases from one to two classes. Furthermore, the number of pupils who join the school other than at the usual time is high. The community the school serves is becoming increasingly diverse. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds has risen to over a half, with pupils from Black African backgrounds making up the largest group. The proportion of pupils with a mother tongue other than English has also risen to over a third, with 28 languages represented. Free school meal eligibility is above average. The proportion of pupils who need additional support with their learning is average and covers a wide spectrum of needs. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is from pre-Nursery to Reception. The school provides a wide range of extended services, including a lunch club for pre-Nursery and Nursery children, a breakfast club, family learning and a range of after-school clubs. The school has National Healthy School status and Activemark.

The after-school club on the school site was inspected at the same time as the school. However, it is not managed by the school's governing body and the findings are reported separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The headteacher, staff and governors are accurate when they judge Meryfield Primary to be a good and rapidly improving school. It serves its changing community well and makes a very considerable contribution to supporting families through a wide range of extended services. The progress made since the last inspection is due in large measure to the highly effective leadership of the headteacher in the two years since her appointment. Pupils and parents speak very warmly of her and the improvements she has introduced. One parent reflected the views of many when writing, 'The school has come on in leaps and bounds'.

The headteacher greatly values her team of teaching and support staff, deploys them very effectively and focuses sharply on improving everyone's performance. She is ably supported in this by the deputy headteacher and a skilled senior team. Teaching is now having a good impact on the pupils' learning and some lessons are now outstanding. In spite of this, some inconsistencies remain in the effectiveness of teachers' questioning and the pace of learning. Achievement is good from starting points that are well below those expected nationally. There are increasing numbers of pupils at an early stage of learning English. Standards are below average by the end of Year 6, but this represents good and accelerating progress for all pupils. Where weaknesses have been identified in areas such as writing for younger pupils and mathematics in Year 6, robust action has led to much improvement in standards.

Another significant factor in the pupils' academic and personal development is that everyone is committed to removing barriers to their learning. The outstanding early identification of each pupil's specific needs enables the school to direct its resources so that any gaps in their expected performance can be closed rapidly. Pupils needing extra help with their learning or language development receive good support in classrooms and in withdrawal sessions from skilled teaching and bilingual assistants. This also accounts for why newcomers to the school settle very quickly and make good progress once they have gained confidence in the English language. The provision for gifted and talented pupils has not developed to the same extent.

Parents are pleased with the high quality of the care and support which they and their children receive from the school. Pupils of all ages and backgrounds gain confidence because they feel valued as part of a caring community. Many factors account for their good personal development and well-being. The rich curriculum adds much to their enjoyment of school life. Behaviour is managed well across all classes because the pupils clearly understand what their teachers expect of them. Pupils feel safe and happy in school because they have complete trust in the adults and confidently turn to them when problems arise. They speak enthusiastically about the broad range of activities and after-school clubs, which helps them to become fit and healthy. Pupils contribute considerably to school life and participate regularly in local community activities. Pupils make good progress in developing the necessary basic skills to prepare them for secondary education and their subsequent working lives.

The school's reputation is improving, and the headteacher now has a stable staff team on which to build for the future. Governors share in planning and checking how well the school is doing. The record of improvement in recent years and the effectiveness of leadership and management give the school a good foundation for future success.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage at various times between the ages of three and five. The pre-Nursery and Nursery provide the opportunity for their skills to be developed at an early stage. A strength of the provision is the warm and caring ethos which prevails throughout. Children are encouraged from an early age to make their own decisions and to take ownership of their learning. Excellent routines which promote healthy lifestyles and well-being are firmly in place. These include hand washing, eating and drinking healthily and responding appropriately to adults. Close links with home help the children to settle quickly. They enjoy the many and varied activities provided, such as when children in the pre-Nursery were enthralled by a visit from a team of fire fighters with their fire engine. The use of the outside facilities has improved greatly since the last inspection and shelters provide access even on inclement days. By the time children move into Year 1 they have made good progress in all areas, although not all reach the goals expected for their age. Parents are very positive about the progress their children make with one saying, 'I am amazed by the progress made by my son in such a short time. He has developed a wonderful enthusiasm for reading and writing.' The consistent planning and inclusive practice across the whole phase ensure children feel safe and secure within this good provision. Close teamwork across all classes is a significant feature. Assessment is thorough and used to plan the next steps in each child's learning, but is not used as effectively to evaluate the impact of the provision overall.

What the school should do to improve further

- Bring greater consistency to teaching by developing teachers' questioning skills and increasing the pace of pupils' learning.
- Develop a more cohesive approach to extending the achievement of gifted and talented pupils

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils in the main school build well on their good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Their progress has improved and is now good and is getting better all the time. There are no significant differences in the progress of boys and girls or between ethnic groups, and newcomers make equally good progress once they have settled in school. The results of Year 2 assessments in 2008 were well below average overall. Results were broadly average in mathematics, but they were low in writing. Less than a third of the pupils reached nationally expected levels and few exceeded them. The school has taken effective action and the proportion of pupils writing at or above national expectations by the end of Year 2 has increased considerably. Test results in Year 6 rose in 2008, although they were still below average and the number reaching the expected Level 4 in mathematics was low. More pupils this year are on track to reach or exceed the standards expected because the school has brought greater consistency to the development of pupils' calculation and problem-solving skills. The pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are good and they have extensive opportunities to apply these to support learning in a wide range of subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are proud of their school and speak enthusiastically about the many recent changes and improvements. They see the school as a happy and secure place where they enjoy strong relationships with each other and with their teachers. Behaviour is good and often excellent, as was seen during assembly and as pupils moved around the school. They behave well in classrooms because they enjoy lessons and are keen to learn. Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures work and play very happily together, value and celebrate diversity around them and develop a very clear understanding of the nature of our multicultural society. Older pupils confidently take responsibility as play leaders and peer mentors to provide support for younger pupils in the playground. These factors contribute to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn well how to keep themselves healthy and they demonstrate this through the choices they make of healthy food and regular participation in sports. The school council is active and pupils value the opportunity to share their ideas and suggestions for improvements. Despite the school's rigorous procedures to promote regular attendance, it remains below the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use assessment information well to plan and adapt activities to move the learning of pupils forward. In most lessons teaching is lively and interesting and teachers engage the pupils with well-phrased questions and stimulating activities. Interactive whiteboards and other resources are used effectively and pupils understand the purpose of what they are doing because teachers share lesson aims and the criteria by which pupils can judge their success. This is particularly effective when pupils are involved in assessing their progress or giving constructive evaluations of the work of others, although this is not seen in all classes. By providing visual clues, emphasising key vocabulary and the creative use of 'talk partners', teachers help pupils new to learning English to develop their language skills confidently. In a small minority of lessons, the pace is slow and teachers do not use questions to draw out ideas from pupils and check their understanding before moving on.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

By keeping the provision under constant review, the school is quickly able to adapt what it offers to meet individual pupils' needs. The programmes for pupils who would benefit from extra support with their learning or language development are flexible and tailored carefully to meet their needs. Extension opportunities for gifted and talented pupils are less well developed and this is an area identified by the school as a priority for attention. The school pays close attention to the development of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy with initiatives such as the recently introduced literacy programme for younger pupils. The extra focus on problem solving in mathematics has led to improved standards and pupils have plenty of opportunities to develop their ICT skills in many subjects. The school does its utmost to enrich the pupils' experiences through a wide range of additional activities. Many of these focus on keeping the pupils fit and they benefit from the school's close links with other schools and organisations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Members of staff have a very clear understanding of the circumstances and individual needs of the pupils. The school works closely with parents and outside agencies to ensure that children who are vulnerable or require extra help receive the support they need. Safeguarding procedures are in place and the school pays close attention to the protection of children. The weekly family learning provision helps support pupils' personal and academic progress although it is at an early stage of development with only a small number of parents and carers involved. Most pupils know their individual and group targets and have a clear understanding of how they can improve their work. Marking is thorough and in some cases sets up a dialogue between teacher and pupil about the next steps to be taken, although this good practice is not consistently applied in all classes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, increasingly supported by the developing school leadership team, has secured significant improvement since the last inspection. Their high expectations are a factor in this success, with challenging targets set for everyone. The team's excellent deployment of staff has been both flexible and highly responsive so that pupils with, for example, linguistic needs, receive the most effective support and challenge. Self-evaluation is collaborative and accurately reflects the school's strengths and areas for development. The headteacher's commitment to the high achievement of all pupils is central to the school's aims and shared by all staff. The diversity of the school is viewed as a major strength and is frequently celebrated. Community cohesion is promoted through many extended school opportunities, which include the use of the premises during the school holidays by a club for disabled children. As a result of an audit of provision, the school is extending links with the global community by communicating with a town in France. The governing body is well informed and has been supportive and challenging when working with the senior leadership team to bring about the improvements now apparent in the school.

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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?	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?	1
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?	2
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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	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?	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	1
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**

22 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meryfield Primary School, Borehamwood, WD6 4PA

You may remember that inspectors visited your school not too long ago. I am now writing to let you know what we found out. Before I do, I would just like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for being so ready to share your thoughts about your school. We had a chance to talk with many of you, and have told your teachers how you were very helpful and polite. Through our discussions with you, it was great to hear how much you enjoy school. It was also good to hear about how safe you feel and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried. You, your parents and teachers are right in thinking that your school is good and improving.

You make good progress during your time at school. You help newcomers settle quickly and learn English so that they can take part in all school activities. You work hard and behave sensibly. Your teachers make learning interesting and you clearly enjoy extra activities, including clubs and school trips. All members of staff help to make sure you are safe and cared for very well. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a considerable contribution to the life of the school. You have a good understanding of the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle.

Your headteacher, other staff and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. The two things we have asked them to do are:

- to make sure all lessons help everyone to learn more quickly
- to provide more opportunities for talented pupils to have their learning extended.

I am sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make these improvements. You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to show such pride in your school and enthusiasm for learning.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Martin Beale

Lead inspector