

Mersham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118377
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326817
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Richard Blackmore

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	187
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	Richard Morris
Headteacher	Mark Brooks
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Church Road Mersham Ashford TN25 6NU
Telephone number	01233 720449
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils in this smaller than average size school are from White British backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. These pupils' needs include speech, language and communication needs. The Early Years Foundation Stage provides for four- and five-year-old children, taught in a Reception class. The school has gained the Sportsmark Award and Healthy School status. Mobility is above the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has improved since the last inspection and enables all pupils to achieve well. Pupils leave at the end of Year 6 as well-rounded individuals, well equipped with skills and qualities to face their next challenges. The school has taken action to raise standards through the development of teachers' skills in challenging more able pupils and making lessons exciting by using technology. The school is held in high regard by the majority of parents, who speak favourably of the opportunities it provides. A parent, reflecting a typical view, commented, 'Mersham is a wonderfully kind, nurturing school where all children are valued.'

When children start at the school, their attainment is broadly at the level expected, though it fluctuates from year to year. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start and quickly develop a love of school and learning. They develop warm relationships with one another and adults, and this helps them to make good progress. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average, although the school is aware there is more to be done to raise attainment further in writing. Pupils' good progress owes much to the quality of teaching and pupils' desire to do well. In order to set the bar of expectation even higher, the school has accurately identified the need to plan more opportunities for extended writing for different purposes. Good behaviour and enjoyment of school are evident from the way pupils enthusiastically talk about the activities they do and how staff help them. Pupils are thoughtful and sensitive about others. Attendance is satisfactory, the school having worked hard to improve the poor attendance of a minority of pupils.

Tasks in lessons are well matched to pupils' needs and interests. This moves learning on quickly and has contributed, along with better systems for tracking pupils' progress, to improved achievement. Planning reflects the needs of different groups of pupils, and the organised and well-resourced classrooms successfully motivate pupils. Input from support staff is effective, especially for less confident pupils. Where teaching is less effective, the pace is too slow and pupils do not listen carefully enough to instructions or explanations. The curriculum is interesting and suitably varied for different year and ability groups, so pupils are challenged effectively. Provision for extra-curricular and enrichment activities is good, offering an extensive range of opportunities, including residential visits and trips, for example to a town in France.

Staff work effectively and sensitively to meet the needs of individual pupils. This effective care, guidance and support contributes to the pupils' confidence in lessons and to their good personal development and well-being. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are carried out in detail and staff training is regular and up to date.

The headteacher has successfully focused all staff on raising standards and creating an inclusive school. The school satisfactorily promotes community cohesion and pupils' awareness of cultural diversity in modern Britain. It acknowledges the need to develop pupils' knowledge of people from different backgrounds and to create more sustained links beyond the local community in order to extend pupils' knowledge of the wider world.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and reach above average standards in all areas of learning. This is because effective teaching ensures that they are given a good range of opportunities to learn through both child-initiated and adult-led activities.

This contributes to high levels of independence, curiosity and concentration in outdoor and indoor learning, of which there is a good balance. Children relished the chance to draw mini-beasts from first-hand observation and developed their creative skills well when making a spider's web from paper. The Early Years Foundation Stage is well managed so that children's welfare is successfully promoted and their well-being is maintained at all times. As a result, children settle very quickly into the secure and welcoming environment provided for them. There is scope for a sharper focus on developing writing skills, although the school has set this as a priority for improvement. All staff promote children's personal, social and emotional development exceptionally well, with the result that children show considerable ability to sit and concentrate on tasks to completion. Staff accurately record children's participation, work and practical involvement to assess their progress. This helps them to plan future activities that challenge children to develop new skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase opportunities for pupils to write at length for a variety of purposes across the curriculum.
- Promote community cohesion more thoroughly so pupils have a greater understanding of the diversity of the UK and the world.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress and attain above average standards throughout the school. They make most progress in reading, mathematics and science as a result of the improved systems for checking how well pupils are doing and the carefully planned action to support those pupils at risk of falling behind. This targeted approach is now being used more effectively to improve pupils' writing skills. The school is increasing opportunities for pupils to write at length for a variety of purposes across the curriculum and is beginning to use a variety of resources to raise pupils' interest and skill levels, while maintaining improved performance in other subjects. Pupils have good ICT skills and these are being used well to further support writing across the school. Focussed guidance from teaching assistants and effective support from programmes tailored to their individual needs enable pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have a secure grasp of spiritual, moral and social issues. They are keenly aware of how to keep themselves safe and healthy and demonstrate this in the way they move around the school and talk about the healthy choices they make, for example at lunchtime. Pupils readily take on responsibility, including being elected members of the school council, and report that they are able to influence school life. Important and valued contributions to the local community show that pupils are developing into reliable and thoughtful young people. While pupils know a lot about the lives of people in the local community, their awareness of the lives and cultures of people from around the world is less well developed. Improvements in basic skills, together with positive attitudes to learning and a willingness to work together, prepare the pupils well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Typically teachers use their good subject knowledge and a range of approaches effectively to engage and motivate pupils. For example, a teacher very successfully used a police officer puppet and siren to check pupils' understanding of how information texts can be used. From this pupils knew exactly what was expected of them and progress was outstanding. Resources, including interactive whiteboards, are used well to capture pupils' imagination and develop ideas, resulting in high calibre work. Relationships are good and throughout lessons teaching assistants ensure that pupils remain attentive and achieve well. They maintain effective notes of pupils' responses to inform the teacher of which pupils might need extra support. However, there are occasions where teachers do not push the lesson on at a sufficiently fast pace and some pupils lose concentration.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, balanced and carefully structured to build on what pupils already know, and helps pupils to enjoy lessons. It provides pupils with opportunities to understand moral and social issues, such as responsibility for the environment. For example, pupils are encouraged to make a 'pledge' to be energy efficient both in school and at home. A good emphasis is placed on teaching and applying basic skills, although there are missed opportunities, especially in writing, for pupils to practise what they have learnt in one subject in other curriculum areas. Subject coverage is good, including strong attention to computer work, physical education and modern foreign languages. Extra-curricular activities such as netball and gardening clubs help enrich the pupils' classroom experiences well and broaden their knowledge.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's recognition of each pupil's individuality is reflected in the strong pastoral care it provides. Staff quickly assess the learning needs of pupils who are new to the school and ease them sensitively into school life. This assists with 'seamless transition', as one parent wrote, and the understanding of pupils' differing circumstances. Good academic guidance is provided through effective marking that helps pupils know how to improve their work and teachers' knowledge of pupils' abilities from regular assessments. This ensures that activities during lessons are challenging. However, some pupils do not confidently know all their targets for improvement and therefore do not use them to attain higher standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good leadership and has effectively created a context in which pupils at all levels are able to progress well, both academically and personally. Self-evaluation is accurate and an important tool in the school's improvement process. However, subject leaders do not evaluate lessons frequently enough to fully gauge their effectiveness in raising the rate

of progress made by pupils. Governance is good because it is both challenging and supportive. Regular governor visits to the school ensure a good understanding of the priorities for future improvement. Effective steps have been taken to secure improvements since the last inspection, including the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress, and this demonstrates that the school has good capacity for further improvement.

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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?	2
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	2
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	2
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?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

19 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mersham Primary School, Mersham TN25 6NU

I want to thank you all so much for making our visit a very enjoyable one.

Here are some of the things we found out:

- Children in the Reception class settle quickly to school and learn well.
- You said you feel safe and well cared for.
- Teaching is good and you like the way teachers make lessons interesting by using different resources, especially computers.
- You know who to talk to if you have a worry.
- You really know how to keep yourselves healthy and how to save energy and help the environment.
- You behave well and enjoy taking on responsible jobs like being members of the school council.
- You make good progress in your work and reach above average standards by the time you leave.
- You make many good contributions to the life of the village, like organising concerts.

Here are the two things we would like to see improved.

- The opportunities you have to write longer pieces of work and to produce different types of writing in a variety of subjects.
- Your knowledge of other places, people and cultures in the UK and around the world.

Yours faithfully

Richard Blackmore

Lead inspector