

The Merton Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119970
Local Authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	327167
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2009
Reporting inspector	John Eadie

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	315
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Fox
Headteacher	Miss Shelagh Thomson
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 May 2006
School address	Cherry Drive Syston Leicester LE7 2PT
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 lessons, and held meetings with the headteacher and senior managers, a governor, staff, groups of pupils and some parents. They observed the school's work and looked at data showing the progress that pupils are making now, school improvement planning, pupils' work, a range of policies and other documentation, and 62 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress made by the pupils currently in Year 6 during their time in school
- the levels of challenge offered for more able pupils
- whether pupils are now engaged as active learners.

Information about the school

The Merton Primary School is larger than average. A very large majority of pupils are White British, the remainder representing a wide range of other ethnicities. Few do not speak English as their first language. More pupils than one might expect are identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is provided in two Reception classes.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It has made considerable progress since its last inspection. For instance, the school identified that too many pupils were passive learners. A great deal of work has been carried out to ensure that lessons are more engaging and interesting and lots of active, lively learning was observed during this inspection. Particularly impressive was the degree of concentration and enthusiasm for learning during the hot afternoons at the end of the academic year. A major strength of the school is the outstanding quality of care and guidance provided for pupils. Care and attention for each individual is at the heart of its ethos. This is recognised by parents, who say such things as, 'There is a welcoming, happy atmosphere and I am at ease knowing that my child is being well cared for.' All staff know the pupils and their circumstances extremely well and, to quote another parent, 'go above and beyond the call of duty for the children'.

This high-quality care results in pupils' excellent behaviour. They show high levels of consideration and support for each other, both at playtimes and in class. Younger and older pupils were seen playing happily together in the lunch breaks and pupils support their classmates well, both in lessons and at other times. For example, a pupil who finds concentration difficult was being supported very sensitively by his friends at lunchtime to focus him on eating his lunch. Pupils feel extremely safe in school. They are very confident that incidents of conflict are rare and minor, and dealt with very effectively by staff. The school runs a very good programme to raise awareness of the dangers when using the internet and this is extremely effective, leading to pupils' great awareness of potential problems. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the smooth running of the school and to the local and wider community. They willingly take on responsibilities, such as being food buddies, and all pupils spoken to felt that they had a voice through the very effective school council. Pupils are heavily involved in the local community, for instance younger pupils collected and hung materials for birds to build their nests in the local park.

Pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to reach average standards in the national tests. They have made good progress from their starting points, which were below expectations for their age, and standards are average overall. The school has worked hard and successfully to raise standards and has sensibly started improvements with the younger pupils. Older pupils have not been neglected though, as a number of effective initiatives have helped those in danger of falling behind. Evidence of this is that at the last inspection, pupils were making satisfactory progress and this has now

improved to good progress and achievement for pupils in all year groups. A particular strength in pupils' progress, shown by the school's very detailed tracking, is that gaps between the achievement of different groups have been virtually eliminated. These solid foundations are beginning to bear fruit and pupils in the current Year 4 are on track to exceed national averages when they reach the top of the school. Standards in writing have been a focus for the school but, although improving they are still some way behind those in reading. The two key areas for improvement here are in pupils' technical ability to structure sentences correctly and in the presentation of their work. Although the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in the national tests and assessments is improving, there is still room for improvement. These pupils are not challenged consistently. There are too many occasions when the target for their learning in a lesson is insufficiently demanding and they are expected to complete easier tasks, or listen to teachers' straightforward instructions to the whole class, before they go on to more difficult work. Some more able pupils said to inspectors that they would like to be able to take lessons a bit further so that they could follow subjects to greater depth.

The school has rigorous monitoring systems which have built a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. This, along with the improvements made over recent years, combined with the shared sense of ambition to provide the best for the pupils and continue to build on their successes, shows that the school is well placed to continue on the upward path.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in writing by:
 - improving pupils' skills in structuring sentences
 - improving the presentation of pupils' work.
- Increase the levels of challenge for the most able pupils in lessons by:
 - moving these pupils on to difficult work more quickly
 - ensuring that the objectives for learning for these pupils are better linked to their abilities
 - giving these pupils more opportunities to develop their studies in greater depth.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Although standards are currently average by the time pupils leave the school, they are improving due to the initiatives taken by leaders. These are leading to solid progress building through the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same good progress as their peers. The provisional national assessment results for Year 2 this year show a considerable advance and are likely to be significantly above the national average.

Pupils' learning shows a considerable improvement since the last inspection. The school has introduced such initiatives as 'talk partners' to ensure that pupils are more actively involved and can learn through discussion. The curriculum has also been developed to make it more interesting and relevant for pupils. These have been effective and pupils were observed in lessons as active and enthusiastic learners.

They thoroughly enjoy their learning and their time in school. Parents appreciate this, saying such things as, 'Both our children have had a very happy and positive experience.' Pupils feel they have a voice in the school as the school council is proactive in seeking their views. There are also many opportunities around the school, including in the headteacher's office, for them to add to notices with their ideas and opinions. The school is working hard to improve attendance, which although getting better, is still only average.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

How effective is the provision?

The school makes strenuous efforts to ensure that all are included and able to play a full part in the school. This has particularly been the case for some who experience difficulties in conforming. Sensitive care and working very closely with their parents has enabled these pupils to fit in and work happily alongside their classmates. Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They are supported well and are therefore making the same good progress as other pupils.

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is the key reason for pupils' improved progress. Teachers generally plan a good range of activities to suit the abilities of their pupils. However, they sometimes have pupils sitting on the carpet for too long and this hinders faster progress, particularly for the more able. Relationships are very good at all levels and the mutual respect between pupils and adults leads pupils to try hard and take a pride in what they are doing. Very good systems of marking have been developed which clearly indicate to pupils what they have achieved and what they need to learn next. However, these are relatively new and are not yet being used consistently by all teachers.

The school has developed the curriculum well and, in collaboration with a group of

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

local schools, is adopting a more creative curriculum to suit the needs of the pupils. The curriculum is enhanced well by a good range of visits and visitors. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, including a variety of sporting clubs and a very large majority of pupils take part in at least one of these during the week, adding to their adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, very ably supported by the senior management team, has a clear drive and ambition for the school. This has been communicated well and the vision is shared by all staff and governors. This vision has equality of opportunity at its centre and this is one of the key reasons for the school's progress, as strenuous efforts have been made to identify and eliminate differences in performance between groups. For instance, the school's detailed analysis of data showed that in one year, boys performed very much better than girls. Initiatives were put in place and girls' progress was accelerated and they have now caught up.

At the time of the inspection, all safeguarding and health and safety requirements were met. Risk assessments are routinely carried out and those for off-site visits are exemplary. Governors are supportive and their monitoring role, and therefore their ability to challenge the school, is developing well. The school has good plans to further promote community cohesion. While this is very good within the local community and in building understanding of the global community, pupils' first-hand knowledge of diversity is not so well developed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision in Reception is good and children thrive in a stimulating and thoroughly enjoyable environment. Very strong liaison with parents and the local pre-school means that children settle in quickly. Children start school with skills that are below those expected for their age, particularly in language and communication. Good teaching and a very strong, well-organised curriculum ensure that they make consistently good progress and by the time they join Year 1, they reach national averages in all areas of learning.

Thorough assessment ensures that individual children can be tracked very regularly and targeted support given to help them all make good progress. The stimulating environment enables children to have plenty of fun while they investigate for themselves and follow up their ideas. The pirate theme, for example, meant that children were busy making treasure chests, building pirate boats and developing good language skills by discussing and eating exotic fruit. Good-quality, skilled teaching by all staff ensures that children develop their basic skills well. Learning flows naturally between indoors and outside as children move between their chosen activities. High-quality support promotes children's welfare very well and they feel safe and secure. Children are helped to become very responsible and exceptionally well behaved. For example, they demonstrate good development of their social skills by taking care of each other, working amicably together and tidying up responsibly.

Good leadership is focused strongly on continuous improvement. This year, a concentration on writing and spelling has resulted in improved skills in these areas. Leaders recognise, however, that they do not have a clear picture of relative strengths and weaknesses in the way different groups of children progress over time.

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents who returned the questionnaires were almost universally positive about the school and none expressed any significant concerns. A very few who were spoken to expressed some concerns, but the inspection did not find evidence to support these concerns.

Questionnaire responses showed particular support for the school's work in keeping pupils safe. They were also positive about the school's leadership and management and about how well the school prepares their children for their futures. For instance, two comments were 'the school is exceptionally well run' and, 'This is an excellent school which is strongly led. The headteacher is always very professional and every child is valued by all staff.' Many others commented on the welcoming and friendly

nature of the school and the way that they are encouraged to become involved in the school. They particularly appreciate the regular 'look in on learning' sessions, which happen at the end of the school day when children can share their work with their parents or carers.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Merton Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspection team received 62 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 242 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	51	11	0	0

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



25 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Merton Primary School, Syston, Leicester, LE7 2PT

Thank you so much for welcoming us when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you, looking at your work and talking to you. We particularly enjoyed seeing how well you all get on together and how much you enjoy your time at school. We were not surprised as The Merton is a good school.

These are the best things we found about your school.

- You behave exceptionally well and are developing into mature and responsible young people. You have great ideas yourselves to improve the school and you are pleased that these ideas are listened to.
- All adults look after you extremely well and so you feel safe and secure in school.
- All of you are treated equally by the adults in the school and they work very hard to make sure that all of you can make the same progress.
- You are making good progress because you are being taught well.
- There are lots of interesting things planned for you in lessons and lots of extra things such as sports clubs and trips out of school
- Your headteacher, staff and the governors have really good plans to make your school even better.

We have suggested two things that could help you make even better progress.

- We have asked your teachers to help you to write effective sentences and present your work more neatly to improve your progress in writing.
- Some of you who find the work easy could do better and we have asked your teachers to give you more difficult work more often and to make it possible for you to carry on your learning in greater depth.

I know you will help your headteacher and teachers to carry on improving the school by continuing to work hard and helping your teachers.

Yours faithfully

John D Eadie
Lead inspector

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