

Merton Bank Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104784
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	331054
Inspection dates	25–26 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Margot D'Arcy

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

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)	195
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 S Sykes
Headteacher	Mrs Kirsty Haw
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2007
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Roper Street St Helens Merseyside WA9 1EJ
Telephone number	01744 22104
Fax number	01744 22104

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

When Merton Bank Primary School was inspected in June 2007, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to provide an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. Subsequently, Ofsted inspectors have made five visits to monitor the school's progress. This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized primary school situated in an area of high social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. There is a small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups but none are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average.

The executive headteacher was appointed in June 2008. An informal federation with the executive headteacher's own school has been agreed, with a timescale of three to five years.

At the time of the inspection, the local authority was undertaking the governing body's delegated powers for staffing and finance. These powers were revoked when the school was made subject to special measures.

The school has gained the National Healthy School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

The school now provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and some aspects of its work are good. Good leadership and management are now firmly established due to the outstanding direction provided by the executive headteacher. This has been key to the school's improvement, the pace of which has been rapid since June 2008. Parents are delighted with the improvements that have occurred.

Achievement is now satisfactory. Although standards at the end of Year 6 remain low, this reflects the legacy of underachievement in previous years and the ability profile of the individual cohort. The standards reached by pupils in other year groups, in relation to what is expected for their age, vary widely. This reflects the varying quality of past learning experiences. However, standards are beginning to rise. In some year groups, such as Reception and Year 2, they are close to what is expected for the pupils' ages.

Children's skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are low in relation to what is typical. This is particularly so in terms of their personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development. The progress of Nursery and Reception children is now good and most Reception children are currently working within the learning goals expected for their age. Throughout Key Stages 1 and 2, the most notable progress is in writing. Initiatives to improve the provision for this aspect of English are resulting in good progress for most pupils.

Progress in mathematics is satisfactory overall, but rarely better. Initiatives to raise standards in mathematics are at an early stage of development. Since last summer, there has been an increased emphasis on improving standards and achievement in science. Pupils' progress in this subject is less well documented than in English and mathematics, but lessons and pupils' work show much better development of key scientific skills and understanding. Whilst all of these improvements are heartening, the school recognises that much work is still needed to overcome the legacy of past underachievement evident in many pupils' below average standards.

Poor quality teaching and learning are now things of the past. The quality of teaching has improved significantly so that it is now good overall, with examples of outstanding teaching in all phases of the school. This has improved pupils' current learning and behaviour and ensured greater enjoyment of lessons. The curriculum is satisfactory, with some significant strengths, not least in promoting pupils' personal development and well-being. Accordingly, pupils have a very astute awareness of how to keep safe. Similarly, they show a real understanding of the school's aims. This enables them to value themselves and others more and instils a true sense of belonging to the school community. Consequently, pupils are very keen to contribute to the school's improvement and are increasingly willing to take on responsibilities. Pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles is reflected in their national award. The significant increase in curriculum enrichment activities, such as visits and after-school clubs, is enabling pupils to enjoy learning more. In the same way, teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well to demonstrate and explain things in lessons. This makes learning more appealing to pupils. However, although ICT resources are much improved, pupils' use of ICT across the curriculum is not yet embedded. The overall quality of care, guidance and support is good, with outstanding pastoral support, particularly for vulnerable pupils, of which there are many. Strong

leadership in the areas of safeguarding and inclusion, together with very effective links with specialist agencies, has led to better behaviour of pupils. It has also ensured good progress for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and is helping to better prepare pupils for the next stage of their education and life beyond school.

The executive headteacher has created a strong leadership and management structure. She has developed the skills of the school's own staff well and has drawn judiciously on the expertise of staff from the federated link school. She has also brokered support from the local authority thoughtfully and has valued the very good support from the local authority's school improvement partner. The effectiveness of the governing body has improved since the last inspection. Its work is now satisfactory and it shows the capability to resume its delegated powers for staffing and finance. However, these powers are still revoked. The significant improvements made since the school became subject to special measures show that it has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The school meets the needs of all children in the Early Years Foundation Stage well and they make good progress. Progress is particularly good in the areas of personal, social and emotional development and children's understanding of letters and their sounds. The current good quality of provision and children's good achievement and personal development reflect the immense improvements that have occurred, particularly since September 2008. The new Early Years Foundation Stage leader has worked tirelessly to secure improvements. She draws well on expertise from the federated link school and continuously extends her own professional development in her drive for excellence. She provides an outstanding model of teaching for the staff around her. The quality of adult interventions to take children's learning forward has improved. However, for some staff this aspect of their work remains satisfactory rather than good, as opportunities are missed to extend children's thinking and language skills. There is a good range of indoor and outdoor learning experiences, which follow the children's needs and interests. The environment is stimulating and there is a wide range of good quality resources that are easily accessible to the children. All of this makes the children eager to come to school. It also promotes very good attitudes to learning and develops confidence and independence. Ongoing assessments provide staff with a good insight into each child's development. Staff promote children's welfare well. This is enhanced by the good partnerships with parents and specialist agencies.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and increase pupils' rate of progress, especially in mathematics.
- Embed the use of ICT across the curriculum.
- Urgently reinstate the governing body's delegated powers for staffing and finance.

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

The gaps in pupils' learning caused by past underachievement are gradually being overcome and pupils are now making satisfactory progress. The results of the Key Stage 1 assessments for 2008 were very low in reading and writing and much worse than in previous years. Standards in mathematics showed improvement but were still well below average. However, these assessments reflect the significant underachievement of that particular group of pupils during most of their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Although not obvious from the 2008 assessment data, these pupils made good progress during the summer term of 2008. This was in response to improved teaching, and they are currently making good progress in Year 3. The provisional Key Stage 2 results for 2008 were below average in English, but not significantly so. They built further on the improved English results of 2007 and reflected the increased emphasis the school was placing on boosting pupils' performance in this subject. Conversely, standards in mathematics and science declined, although recent actions have improved learning in science. Although overall, standards remain well below average, the school's action to improve standards and achievement in all three main subjects has begun to pay off, most noticeably in English. Progress in mathematics and science is less marked, but satisfactory overall. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good quality additional support they receive. The small numbers of pupils who speak English as an additional language also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development has improved significantly since the last inspection. Behaviour is now satisfactory and improving. Most pupils behave sensibly in lessons, at play and when moving around the school. Pupils have gained a much greater awareness of how to stay safe and show good understanding of how to deal with unacceptable behaviour, such as bullying and racism. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They talk knowledgeably about how to avoid everyday dangers, such as those they meet on the roads and at home, for instance, in using electrical equipment or in computer chat rooms. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and are becoming more aware of moral and social issues pertinent to their own lives and in the world. Pupils make a very positive contribution to their school community, for example as school councillors and playground buddies. Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced well in lessons, notably through practical work in science and art and by poignant issues for debate. In assemblies, high aspirations are promoted and the school's motto of 'Believe, Achieve and Shine' is communicated powerfully through themes pupils can relate to. Some pupils' poor past experiences of education still leaves them somewhat disaffected with school, but the school is constantly striving to break down such barriers to learning and many more pupils than previously are beginning to enjoy school. Pupils are beginning to take on board the value of education and are satisfactorily developing skills that will support them in the next stage of their education and in life beyond school. Attendance is broadly average, but punctuality remains an issue.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good, with examples of outstanding teaching across the school. Teachers plan thoughtfully to match work to pupils' needs. They ensure pupils understand what they are expected to learn and involve them well in assessing their own progress. Teachers are very skilled at managing pupils' behaviour and maintaining their interest. This has had a notable impact on reducing previous disruption to learning through misbehaviour. Teachers competently use a variety of strategies and resources, such as film clips, games and group work in which pupils have clearly defined roles, for example as part of an investigation or debate, which keeps them engaged and promotes good teamwork. Questioning skills are very effective and reflect teachers' good subject knowledge and astute awareness of pupils' individual needs. Teachers ensure that all pupils are fully included and contribute in lessons. In outstanding lessons, teachers are particularly adept at maintaining a good pace to the learning whilst still providing time for pupils to reflect and explain their thinking. No teaching is inadequate, but in satisfactory lessons pace is slower and learning dips when pupils are required to sit and listen for too long. Throughout the school, learning assistants are well involved in all stages of lessons and are now making a much better contribution to teaching and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and has some good features. Since the last inspection, there is much better provision for the promotion of basic skills. For instance, pupils now have far more opportunities to write at length and across different subjects. A more structured approach to calculation is enhancing provision in mathematics, and in science, there is better provision for the teaching of key scientific skills through practical work. Pertinent links between subjects are beginning to make learning more meaningful. Citizenship and pupils' personal development are promoted effectively through lessons in personal, social and health education, investigations and themed focus weeks, such a recent one on 'Money'. The school has more ICT resources of better quality and a new system to assess pupils' ICT skills has recently been introduced. However, the use of ICT across the curriculum is not embedded. This limits the opportunities to promote pupils' skills in this subject and to support their economic well-being. There is good additional provision to support the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and good intervention programmes to boost the learning of pupils who are not progressing quickly enough. Good enrichment is seen in lively Spanish lessons for pupils in Years 1 to 6, interesting visits and visitors, and an extensive range of clubs and activities after school and at lunchtime, which a good number of pupils enjoy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is totally dedicated to providing pupils with high quality care. Its commitment to ensuring all have equal opportunities to succeed is evident everywhere. Assessment systems are now rigorous, allowing the school to track pupils individually and by inclusion groups. Any underachievement or slower than expected progress can now be picked up quickly and addressed. Pupils are given clear improvement targets, both personal and academic, and their progress toward these is monitored well. Teachers' marking tells pupils what they have done well and

how to improve. Government safeguarding requirements are met and staff are well trained in child protection. The school identifies pupils at risk or with particular needs quickly and gives them customised support, with very good use made of specialist agencies. Pupils receive excellent emotional and practical support from well-trained staff, including the head of safeguarding and the learning mentor. The nurture unit is providing well-targeted support for some pupils in Reception and Year 1. The school monitors and promotes attendance and punctuality diligently and rigorously. Transition arrangements are good, for example as children join the Early Years Foundation Stage or Year 6 pupils leave to high school. The school has begun to make changes to better support the transition of Reception children to Year 1, but this is less effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The impact of the executive headteacher has been marked and, in a relatively short time, has been pivotal in turning this school around. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and staff morale is now high. Whilst maintaining a very prominent profile in all areas, the executive headteacher has appointed and deployed senior leaders to best effect and has successfully challenged and empowered them. The result is a strong leadership team sharing the same vision and commitment to providing pupils with the very best quality of education and care. Governors, too, fervently share this commitment and have a much greater awareness than previously of the school's work and of how to conduct and balance the roles of support and challenge. These improvements mean that they are now ready to assume the full responsibilities of governance. In addition to improving classroom practice, the continuous programme of well-targeted professional development has begun to be successful in helping middle leaders to adopt a stronger management role in securing improvement. In the last term, targets for improving pupils' standards have become much more challenging. However, it is too soon to determine the impact of these in terms of establishing and sustaining a pattern of rising standards. Leaders monitor rigorously the work of all staff and the effects of the school's practices and initiatives on pupils. Consequently, school self-evaluation is good. Practices to promote equality and to prevent discrimination are effective. The school has worked effectively to promote cohesion within the school community. Other elements of this duty have not been addressed as well due to the emphasis the school has been giving to tackling the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

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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?	3
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

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?	3
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	3
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	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**

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful to me each time I have visited your school, and for chatting so openly to me and to all the inspectors that I have brought with me. On this visit, the inspection team decided that your school no longer needs the extra help it has been getting. We judged that you all now get a satisfactory education and some things about it are good.

We were very impressed with how well all the adults in your school look after you and with the good improvement to your behaviour. You now understand much more about the importance of doing well in school, taking care of yourself, valuing each other and behaving responsibly. Although it is sometimes difficult, remember to keep trying very hard and never stop believing that you can achieve well and 'Shine'!

The children in the Nursery and Reception classes get off to a good start, with lots of activities to help them learn and enjoy school. It was also great to hear from you that you are enjoying lessons more now. We know that this is due to the very hard work of the staff, who teach you well and are always thinking of ways to make your lessons interesting. You are all doing much better in your learning now, but you must continue to try hard so that you will become even better at the things that will help you get on in life, such as mathematics and ICT, which are two subjects that we have asked your school to focus on more.

We also judged that your school is being led and managed very well by your headteacher and other managers. The governors are also playing a key part in making things better for you. So much so, that we have said that they too do not need any extra help with the aspects of their work linked to the school staff and how it manages its money.

Never forget that you have played your part in helping your school to improve. It is really important now that you keep working hard to make Merton Bank the very best school it can be.