

Merrydale Infant School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	120023
Local authority	Leicester
Inspection number	379936
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2012
Lead inspector	Andrew Stafford

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	340
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joan Chadd
Headteacher	Mark Tipple-Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2009
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Age group	3–7
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Introduction

Inspection team

Andrew Stafford

Additional inspector

Gillian Broughton

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Mary Le Breuilly

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspection team observed 16 part lessons, taught by 12 teachers, of which four were joint observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. They held meetings with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff, and heard a sample of pupils read. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's tracking of pupils' progress; the minutes of meetings of the governing body; safeguarding documentation; the school's self-evaluation; and reports on the work of the school from outside organisations. Inspectors scrutinised 57 parental questionnaires and those completed by staff and children.

Information about the school

This school is larger than the average-sized primary school. An above-average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has a higher proportion of boys than average. An above-average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and a similar proportion speaks English as an additional language. Since the previous inspection a new headteacher has taken up post and five new members of the teaching staff have been appointed. A much higher proportion of pupils join or leave the school mid-way through the school year than is usually seen. The school has gained Healthy School status.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good and improving school. Attainment is rising, pupils' progress has accelerated, all groups of pupils achieve well and their attendance has improved. Despite many strengths, the school is not outstanding because the quality of teaching is not yet high enough to ensure that all groups of pupils reach their full potential.
- Most children enter the school with skills which are very low compared to the age-related expectation. They make good progress as they move through the school and attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils respond well to the good teaching they receive. Teachers know their pupils well and in most lessons work is closely tailored to their needs. Teachers' clear explanations, good subject knowledge and use of interesting resources all contribute to the good progress that pupils make. The pace of learning is slightly slower in lessons where pupils have fewer opportunities to work on their own, where they do not get the chance to practise their literacy and numeracy skills and when marking is not sufficiently clear for them to be sure about how to improve.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Pupils and their parents and carers say that the school is a safe and friendly place. Most pupils behave well, are sensitive to each other's different cultures and opinions, and are kind and respectful to staff and to visitors. Attendance, although showing sustained improvement, is still below average and the school recognises the need to maintain an unrelenting focus on using all possible strategies to encourage parents and carers to send their children to school regularly.
- The headteacher provides determined leadership. He leads teaching well and has a clear vision for improving school performance which is based upon accurate school self-evaluation. Merrydale Infants has good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching so that all lessons are consistently good or better by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to develop their independent learning skills
 - allowing pupils more opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills across all of the subjects and topics they study
 - ensuring marking and feedback are of consistently high quality so pupils are very clear about how to improve their work.
- Continue to use every possible strategy to raise attendance and reduce the number of pupils who are persistent absentees by:
 - working even more closely with parents and carers to ensure they understand the importance of sending their children to school regularly
 - making full use of the expertise available from the local authority and other outside agencies.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

In lessons, pupils achieve well. Most concentrate on the task in hand, answer questions readily and are keen to succeed. Of the high proportion of parents and carers who completed the questionnaire the vast majority felt that the school was helping their child's communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills and that their children were making good progress. This is a view with which inspectors concur. Attainment in reading is improving and by Year 2 is broadly average. Pupils' good progress was confirmed when inspectors listened to pupils in Years 1 and 2 read, looked at their reading records and discussed with them the books they enjoyed. Regular guided reading sessions and skilled teaching of letters and sounds ensure pupils' literacy skills are developed well. In a Year 2 lesson, pupils developed both their confidence and their understanding of literacy as they planned sentences for their stories and wrote them with correct punctuation. Recent successful moves to broaden the curriculum have introduced greater opportunities for pupils to take creative approaches to learning. This has sparked greater interest in learning and demonstrates the school's effectiveness in advancing equality of opportunity.

Pupils' progress is tracked very carefully and there is well-targeted, sharply focused and timely extra help for those who need it. Boys achieve as well as girls. Pupils who speak English as an additional language, those who join school part way through their education and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs all make good progress because they receive skilled intervention in their learning when this is required. For example, pupils who speak English as an additional language made good progress in developing their mathematical skills during a numeracy lesson due to the teaching assistant's clear explanations and carefully targeted questioning.

Children enter the Nursery with skills, particularly in communication, language and literacy, which are low compared to the age-related expectations. They settle quickly into school routines and make good progress in the stimulating environment

provided in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children were enjoying learning outside and developing their literacy skills as they donned wellingtons, explored the pirate's island and wrote sentences about where the treasure was hidden. This good progress continues through Years 1 and 2 so that the gap between the children's skills and the expected levels for their age narrows, and attainment in the national tests is broadly average when children leave Year 2. National data related to pupils' progress, work in pupils' books and that displayed on classroom walls and the school's detailed tracking data all confirm the good and sometimes outstanding progress pupils are making.

Quality of teaching

The vast majority of parents and carers are very pleased with the good teaching their children receive and inspection evidence entirely supports this view. Teachers know their pupils well and successfully ensure that their wide ranging needs are met. Lessons are carefully planned and teaching assistants are well deployed to give skilled bilingual support, particularly to pupils who speak English as an additional language, and for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. In a literacy session, pupils with special educational needs carefully rehearsed sentences orally and then wrote them down using correct punctuation. Teachers make good use of praise and reward to raise pupils' self-esteem and increase confidence. They are clearly motivated by the award of 'Star of the Week' for their achievement.

In most lessons work is challenging and the pace of learning is brisk. In a good mathematics lesson, Year 2 pupils confidently found the three numbers they could use to arrive at a total. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is not as brisk when pupils are asked to listen for too long and have less time to learn independently and find out things for themselves. As part of the school's drive to tackle discrimination, staff acquire a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their pupils. Books are marked regularly and there are examples of high quality marking where detailed feedback ensures that pupils know how to take the next steps in their learning. However, this good practice is not consistent across the school and in some books marking does not give clear pointers for improvement.

Teachers implement the planned curriculum well and use this to develop pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' understanding of different cultures is a strength of the school. Opportunities to celebrate a wide range of different religious festivals, and lessons that incorporate musical and artistic influences all provide an exciting stimulus for pupils' work. However, opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills across all curriculum areas are not yet fully developed.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Typically, in this very inclusive school, pupils behave well in the playground and around school. They are considerate of each other's needs and older pupils willingly take responsibility for those younger than themselves. A small minority of parents and carers were concerned that bullying was not dealt with effectively. Inspectors investigated these concerns and found that pupils said that bullying was rare. This was confirmed by the very few entries in the incident log. Pupils are aware of

different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying but are confident that any incidents of bullying will be quickly sorted out by school staff. Pupils say they feel extremely safe in school. Parents and carers support this view and several commented warmly on the good care and support the school gives to children and their families, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The school has a relentless focus on raising attendance and as a result of its efforts attendance has improved over recent years. However, it is still below average and the number of pupils who are persistent absentees is above average, though this is outside the control of the pupils themselves. It is, rightly, a school priority to raise attendance further by continuing to stress to parents and carers the importance of regular attendance and by making full use of all available expertise from outside agencies. Most pupils' punctuality is good.

Leadership and management

The whole staff team, under the very capable leadership of the headteacher, is committed to further school improvement and firmly focused on raising both attainment and attendance. The work of the school is carefully monitored and accurate self-evaluation assists the headteacher in identifying the right priorities for improvement. The tracking of pupils' progress has improved since the last inspection, interventions in pupils' learning are better targeted and their impact is carefully monitored. As a result of good professional development, teaching and learning have improved and lessons are more tightly focused on pupils' learning, which is checked regularly. On the basis of this track record of improvement, the school has good capacity to improve further.

Members of the governing body are supportive of the school and are effectively involved in determining its strategic direction. Together with leaders and managers at all levels, they ensure that all pupils are given good equal opportunities to succeed which contributes to the good progress they make. Any gaps between the achievement of different groups of pupils are narrowing rapidly because of the successful intervention in their learning and extra help that the school provides. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. Members of the governing body, leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements. Staff are well trained and have a clear understanding of child protection issues.

The curriculum is good. It is balanced, reviewed regularly and meets pupils' needs. Work is increasingly being organised to allow for the study of integrated topics and to give opportunities to practise pupils' basic skills across all areas of the curriculum. However, an appropriate emphasis on the specialist teaching of literacy and numeracy remains. The curriculum is enriched by a range of trips and visits which promote pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, broaden their understanding of the wider world and contribute to their enjoyment of learning. Pupils speak enthusiastically about activities as diverse as visits to the Space Centre, Beacon Hill, libraries, museums and the cinema and how much they enjoyed studying birds and camouflage when visitors brought examples from a nature centre.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 March 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of Merrydale Infant School, Leicester, LE5 0PL

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school this week. A particular thank you to those who read aloud to us, filled in our questionnaire, talked with us and told us so much about your school. Please thank your parents and carers who also filled in our questionnaires.

This is what we have said about your school in our report.

- Yours is a good school.
- Your achievement is good because you make good progress and reach the same levels of attainment as other children your age by the end of Year 2.
- The youngest children get a good start to their education in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- The teaching you receive, the way your school is led and managed and the curriculum you follow are all good.
- Your behaviour is good and you enjoy learning.
- Your school ensures you are kept safe.

This is what we have asked your school to do to make it better.

- Make your lessons even better by:
 - giving you more time to work on your own
 - giving you clear feedback on how to improve your work
 - giving you more opportunities to practise your literacy and numeracy skills across all of the subjects and topics you study.
- Working closely with your parents and carers to make sure you all come to school regularly.

All of you can help your school to become even better by making sure you attend regularly and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Stafford
Lead inspector

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