

# Merriott First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123654
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	314660
<b>Inspection date</b>	13 September 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rowena Onions

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	112
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mike Fox
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sarah Wellman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 January 2003
<b>School address</b>	Church Street Merriott TA16 5PT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01460 72547
<b>Fax number</b>	01460 72547

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school is smaller than average and serves the village of Merriott and the surrounding district. Almost all pupils are of White British origin and all speak English as their first language. Few pupils have free school meals. A below average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and no pupil has a statement of special educational need. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Merriott First School is providing a satisfactory education for its pupils. The headteacher and staff are working hard to improve this education and the school is developing an increasing number of good features. Children in the Reception year make a good start, progressing well and by the beginning of Year 1 have above average skills. Pupils in Years 1 to 4 make satisfactory progress overall. Standards are rising in Year 2 and in 2007, were above average in reading, writing and mathematics as a result of the good progress made in that year. The rising standards in the earlier years in the school have not yet fed through into Years 3 and 4. Standards attained by pupils in Year 4 in 2007 built on their average standards in Year 2 and were broadly average overall. Throughout the school, girls make better progress than boys, especially in writing. Because there is carefully targeted intervention work for pupils who are experiencing difficulties, lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well.

Pupils' personal development is good. They greatly enjoy school and are friendly, confident and relaxed. Behaviour is very good and pupils try hard to succeed. Because there are lots of activities that promote health and well-being, pupils know how to keep themselves happy, safe and well. This aspect of the curriculum is good, as is the use of the particular skills of teachers and teaching assistants to provide specialist teaching in subjects such as music and French. The curriculum overall is, however, only satisfactory as it does not yet ensure there are sufficient activities that promote the good progress of all pupils, especially boys. Teaching and learning are also satisfactory. There are a number of good elements, such as the management of pupils, the good use of the skills of teaching assistants and the choice of activities, which mean that pupils describe their lessons as 'fun'. There are, however, inconsistencies in practice that are reflected in the inconsistency of progress. Teachers plan what they want pupils to learn, although they do not always focus pupils' attention on this, so pupils cannot use their efforts to best effect. The quality of information given to pupils through marking is also very variable.

The overall care, guidance and support provided for pupils are satisfactory. There is, however, very strong personal care. Pupils are valued and nurtured. Procedures for keeping them safe and well are strong and there is a high level of trust for teachers by pupils, so that personal guidance is good. These factors underpin the pupils' good personal development. Academic guidance, however, is not as strong. Pupils are now being set targets for improvement, but teachers' practice and the understanding of pupils are inconsistent and this, together with the inconsistent marking, means pupils do not always know how to improve their work.

The school has a strong ethos for improvement. The headteacher and senior staff share a vision and a determination to develop practice and its impact and initiatives are already paying dividends in the improved progress of many pupils. Senior staff have correctly identified areas for improvement and the impact of development work is already evident in the rising standards in Year 2. However, their monitoring, in particular their use of the data they have about pupils' progress, is not yet sufficiently fine-tuned to be having maximum impact. Parental opinion is somewhat mixed. The large majority are very positive about the school, writing comments such as 'the school is always striving to improve facilities and provide a positive environment for learning'. A minority, however, have been upset by some of the changes that have been made. Examples are the use of teaching assistants to teach subjects such as physical education and French and the discouragement of the taking of holidays in term time. They feel that these changes might have been communicated in a different manner. Inspectors feel that the changes made have had positive impact. Some parents are also unhappy about the sharing of a classroom

by Years 1 and 2. Building work has already begun to resolve this. Pupils are very clear that they love their school.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

Provision in the Reception class is good. Teaching and learning, and the curriculum, are good, promoting the good progress of the children, especially in important early reading, writing and mathematical skills. The majority meet national goals identified for children of this age. Children are provided with a warm, secure environment with a wide range of different types of activity that help them develop independence as well as academic skills. Even at this early stage, however, differences are apparent between the skills and progress of boys and girls. The headteacher and class teacher manage the provision well and standards are improving.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the progress made by boys, especially in writing.
- Ensure that pupils are clear about what they are learning and how to improve their work.
- Improve the use of data to assist school improvement and evaluation.

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**

Standards in Reception and in Year 2 are rising. Standards in Reception are now above average especially in communication, language and literacy and in mathematical development. In Year 2 in 2006, they were broadly average but they improved in 2007, when they were above the 2006 national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards in Year 4 are broadly average, which represents satisfactory progress for these pupils.

Achievement throughout the school is satisfactory. Some pupils make good progress, especially in Years 2 and 4, and many girls do well throughout the school. Despite a school improvement drive, boys make significantly less progress than girls in English, especially in writing, where the gap between their achievements is greater than that seen nationally. In mathematics, pupils achieve well over Years 1 and 2 but progress in Years 3 and 4 taken together is only just satisfactory. Progress in science is good throughout the school. The progress of higher attaining pupils mirrors that of most pupils, but lower attaining pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, do well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils report that they 'really like school' and, as a result, they are keen to attend and work hard. Their very good behaviour enables lessons to be relaxed and friendly, providing a good environment for their learning. Pupils are very knowledgeable about how to keep healthy and safe. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community. They become aware of their responsibilities to each other through, for example, the very proactive student council and they show good capacity to work and play together harmoniously. They are developing satisfactory skills to ensure their future economic well-being through, for example, the student

council raising money to help buy playground equipment as well as through their satisfactory progress in gaining skills in English and mathematics. Pupils are kind and considerate of each other. Overall, their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good, but they have limited understanding of the differing cultures of others living in Great Britain.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

There are a number of consistent strengths in teaching and learning throughout the school, but also some inconsistencies that make them no better than satisfactory overall. All teachers manage their classes well and build very productive relationships with their pupils, ensuring that they are willing and able to learn. The skills of teaching assistants have been carefully developed and are utilised well by teachers when they work together as a team in a class. The skills of teaching assistants ensure that pupils learn appropriately when they take lessons by themselves. Inconsistencies lie in the way that pupils are helped to focus on what they are learning and the way they are helped to consolidate and review their learning at the end of lessons. This means that they are not always making the most of their efforts. Teachers try hard to vary activities and this means that pupils describe their lessons as 'fun', although the activities chosen are not yet having full effect on the learning of all pupils, especially that of boys.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum provides a sound basis for steady progress. There is appropriate emphasis on the gaining of skills in numeracy and literacy, although curriculum improvements in writing and mathematics have yet to have full impact on standards. Although the school has tried hard to encourage boys to learn better, activities do not always motivate them as well as they do the girls. The curriculum provides well for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils receive a good quality programme of personal, social and health education and have opportunities to contribute to and have responsibility for the school community. Provision for information and communication technology is good. The basic curriculum is enriched well. The use of the particular skills of staff and teaching assistants to teach different groups throughout the school in the afternoons provides pupils with more specialist teaching than would otherwise be the case in subjects such as music, French and physical education. Good use is made of the grounds and local environment to broaden pupils' experiences.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

The pastoral care and guidance of pupils are good, and are major factors underpinning pupils' good personal development. The atmosphere of the school ensures pupils feel valued from the time they start in Reception. All staff work hard to make pupils feel safe and confident. Great care is taken to ensure the health and safety of the pupils. Initiatives such as the provision of healthy lunches from a local restaurant and the very popular 'walking bus' are particularly effective. The well-established procedures for identifying low achievers help ensure their progress and well-being. Procedures for the academic guidance of pupils are satisfactory, but marking is inconsistent and does not always inform the pupil whether they have completed the

work satisfactorily, nor tell them what they need to do to improve. Targets are set for pupils but these are not well understood and pupils are unsure of how they help them to learn better.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The purposeful leadership of the headteacher has provided the school with a clear direction for long-term improvement. Much has been done to improve school effectiveness and this is evident in the raised standards in Reception and Year 2. Actions to improve attendance by actively discouraging term time holidays, for example, have had good impact. There is a common purpose and a shared responsibility that makes senior staff feel valued. Self-evaluation involves all staff and is effective in identifying areas of weakness and in trying to tackle them. The school has begun to collect a great deal of very pertinent data about pupils' progress but is currently not sufficiently precise in using this information to ensure that actions taken are sufficiently targeted or the outcomes precisely monitored. Thus, efforts are not always bringing results. For instance, the school has focused on raising the standard of boys' writing, but planned interventions have yet to have a significant impact. The school has secure links with others, for example with those who provide for pupils before and after school. Links with parents are generally positive and are promoted well through initiatives such as the emailing of newsletters to ensure their safe arrival.

The headteacher and governors understand the need to restore the confidence of the minority of parents who still have worries about some of the new initiatives. Governance is good. Governors are knowledgeable about the school and although supportive, are ready to question and challenge where necessary. Financial management has been very prudent and has provided for small classes and a very significant amount of improvement in the school accommodation. The success in raising standards in the Reception class and Year 2, the shared staff vision about where further improvements are needed and the developing systems for self-evaluation all demonstrate that the school has a good capacity for moving forward.

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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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	3

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	3

<sup>1</sup> Grade 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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 September 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Merriott First School, Merriott, TA16 5PT

Mr Muirhead and I really enjoyed our visit to your school and would like to thank you for the friendly way in which you talked to us. We think that your school is a satisfactory one and that it is getting better all the time. This letter is to tell you what we found.

- Your headteacher, teachers, teaching assistants and governors are working hard to make your school better.
- You behave very well and you know how to keep yourselves healthy and safe.
- Although many of you make good progress, some children, especially boys, could be doing better.
- You get on well with your teachers who try to make your lessons interesting and fun.
- Children in Reception settle into school quickly and do well during the year.
- The adults in the school take good care of you.

We have asked your headteacher and teachers to do three things to help you make better progress.

- Help some of the boys to make faster progress, especially with their writing.
- Help you to know what it is that you are learning and how you can improve your work.
- Use what they know about the progress you are making to help you do better.

We are very glad that you like your school and think you are right to do so. We think that you could help your teachers to make your school even better by working with your student council to say what would help you to know how well you are doing and how to improve your work.

Yours sincerely

Rowena Onions Lead inspector



14 September 2007

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