

Merrydale Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120023
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	327176
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Rajinder Harrison

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	315
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	Joan Chadd
Headteacher	Keith Lishman
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Claydon Road Leicester LE5 0PL
Telephone number	01162 767593
Fax number	01162 761116

Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average size infant school. About 40% of the pupils are of White British origin. Other pupils are from a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest being African and Indian. A high proportion of these pupils speak English as an additional language and a significant minority are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very high. These pupils' needs cover a wide range, but are mainly in the category of speech and language, emotional and behavioural, and moderate learning difficulties. A higher than average proportion of the pupils leave or join the school at times other than the start or end of the year.

The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises Foundation 1 and Foundation 2. Children start in Foundation 1 at the age of three.

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. Pupils are very happy at school because they form good relationships and trust all the adults who work with them. They feel safe and secure because the school takes excellent care of them. Pupils' good personal development is reflected in their good behaviour and their enthusiasm to learn and achieve. They are kind to others and enjoy taking on responsibilities. They understand why it is important to stay safe, fit and healthy and enjoy the additional clubs and activities the school organises, that are often open to parents. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. 'This is a really good school and my child loves it here. The teachers are really brilliant,' is a typical view expressed by many.

Achievement across the school is good. Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment levels that are very low for their age. They make a good start because teaching, often involving bilingual support, is good. Fun activities and interesting experiences help the children grow in confidence and independence. By the end of Foundation 2, although overall levels of attainment remain very low, children have a good grasp of social language. Pupils in the current Year 2 are working at standards that are very low. This is because many are still not secure in their basic literacy skills, particularly those new to learning English and those who join part way through Key Stage 1. Standards in mathematics are not as low as those in reading and writing because pupils find it easier to grasp number skills, particularly if they do not have to rely on their low language and literacy skills. Teachers involve pupils well in identifying relevant and realistic targets and most pupils know what they need to do to improve their work. Throughout the school, while most pupils achieve well, more able pupils do not always work to their full capability. Teachers accommodate pupils' differing needs well in most lessons and so learning is good. Occasionally, teachers are not sufficiently demanding of the more able. In these lessons, the overall pace of learning is satisfactory rather than good. Pupils who find learning difficult, or those new to learning English, achieve well because they receive good support. A good curriculum, enriched with many additional activities, enhances learning well. While there is excellent harmony among the school's richly diverse community, opportunities to promote pupils' understanding of the world beyond the immediate locality are less well developed.

Good leadership and management have ensured the school's good improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher involves staff and governors effectively in identifying improvement priorities and reviewing the school's performance. Pupils' progress is monitored very closely and pupils are generally challenged appropriately. Senior leaders recognise that, while overall achievement is good, progress is better in some classes than others. Nevertheless, leaders are accurate in their evaluation of the quality of the school's work and have taken effective steps to raise attainment in mathematics. Governors are very supportive and are involved well in the school's development. The school's leaders have good capacity to make further improvements. The school promotes good links with parents, the local community and nearby schools but pupils do not have enough direct links with people in other parts of Britain and other countries to ensure community cohesion is promoted well.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage because staff plan imaginative activities that encourage independence and enthusiasm for learning. Children work in a safe

and secure environment where they gain confidence quickly, because of the excellent support they receive. They learn the routines quickly because they work alongside older children who are more settled. Sensitive management and timely interventions allow children to grow and thrive. Children who need specific guidance, for example in their social skills or in learning English, receive it promptly. Children are very happy at school and relate well to others. Their behaviour is good. The squeals of excitement as children chased bubbles in the sunshine indicate that children are very aware of each other and play safely. Parents are confident they can discuss any concerns with staff and that staff are very helpful.

Leadership and management are good. Effective teamwork ensures teaching is good. Assessments are generally used well to match activities to children's needs, although occasionally the more able children are not challenged enough to extend their learning. Children select from adult-led activities and those that they select for themselves, and staff check that children explore everything. Children particularly love the outdoor area that stimulates their curiosity and independence. For example, they explore excitedly the sand, water and shaving foam because these are less familiar materials in their experiences outside school. As children's knowledge and understanding of the world and their literacy and numeracy skills are often the weakest areas when they start school, these are taught particularly well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers plan work that challenges the more able in order to increase achievement and raise standards.
- Ensure the promotion of community cohesion is rooted firmly in pupils' knowledge and understanding of communities in other parts of Britain and in the wider world that are very different to the one in which they live.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The good progress seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage is maintained in Years 1 and 2. Teachers know how much progress is expected of pupils in their classes and most ensure this happens. In a few classes, more able pupils are not always challenged enough. In Year 2, pupils are working at very low levels in reading and writing. Standards in mathematics are slightly higher because pupils are not as reliant on their literacy skills to carry out problem solving and calculation tasks accurately. The increased emphasis on speaking and a consistent approach to teaching letters and sounds is beginning to help raise literacy standards, but the improvement rate is slow because pupils' mobility is high and a significant proportion of pupils experience many interruptions to their learning. The irregular attendance of a small number hinders their progress. Pupils who find learning difficult and those new to learning English achieve well because they receive good individual support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and their cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy helping around the school and being school councillors. They organise fund-raising activities and decide on improvements, such as playground equipment. Overall their contribution to community is good but is less well developed outside of the local area.. Pupils play sensibly and safely and understand well the harmful effects of too much sun by making sure they wear sunhats and sunscreen. They know clearly why it is important to adopt

healthy lifestyles and thus many select healthy lunches, enjoy the fitness activities the school offers and cook healthy food at the cookery club. Pupils show kindness and concern for anyone who is upset and say confidently, that if disagreements arise these are resolved quickly. Visits and visitors contribute well to pupils' understanding of the world of work and leisure. Pupils' understanding of the multicultural nature of the community in which they live is good and they are well aware that differences should be respected. Their understanding of the wider British society is less well developed. Most pupils' attendance is good but, despite the school's good efforts, a few miss too many sessions. Although their basic literacy and numeracy skills are low, their good achievement and good personal skills means they are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils learn effectively because teaching is generally good. The good lessons are typically well planned, and include practical tasks that encourage pupils to think and explore independently. For example, pupils particularly enjoy drama and role play tasks and respond enthusiastically to lively question-and-answer sessions at the start of their mathematics lessons. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to present information visually so that pupils, particularly those who find learning difficult, learn effectively. Teachers use assessment information to match work to the needs of different groups and deploy support staff effectively to guide those who need additional help. Pupils find discussions more challenging but teachers encourage 'partner talk' effectively in most lessons. Teachers are especially successful at motivating and engaging boys particularly in their written tasks. Occasionally, teachers keep the class together for too long and direct the learning too much. As a result, a few of the more able pupils are not always extended enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum, enriched well by additional clubs for sport, cookery and art and craft activities, is structured and planned well. Topics and themes, for example 'under the sea' and 'time and space', that pupils have selected, integrate subjects in a way that helps pupils make better sense of their learning. Boys particularly enjoy the factual nature of such themes and the school recognises that there are perhaps not enough topics for girls to respond to equally enthusiastically. Developing pupils' speaking skills is a priority, but occasionally pupils spend too long on writing tasks that limit their opportunities to develop their creative writing. Provision for information and communication technology is good and teachers use it well to support teaching and learning. Curriculum planning includes effective intervention activities and support for pupils who need extra help or who fall behind in their targets. A good programme for personal, social and health education supports pupils' personal development effectively. Many visitors, clubs and visits, such as to the local shops, parklands and places of interest, make learning come alive and relevant for pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support arrangements are outstanding. Child protection, health and safety and safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Pupils' individual needs are considered very sensitively. Staff take prompt action if pupils raise any concerns. The school's excellent links with external agencies ensure pupils, particularly those with emotional and social difficulties and those with specific learning difficulties, receive the right support to participate successfully. Pupils in the 'Nurture Group' benefit from excellent support to help them cope with the particular challenges they face in their lives. Those new to learning English receive good bilingual support that enables them to progress successfully. The school works hard to show parents how to support their children's personal and academic development.

Academic guidance is very good. Pupils' progress is tracked very effectively and the information guides future planning well. All pupils have individual targets and understand what they have to do to attain these. Targets are reasonably challenging for most pupils. Teachers mark work regularly and offer supportive comments.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management by the headteacher, staff and governors ensure that the school is a very happy and vibrant place where pupils, and their families, feel valued. Parents speak very highly of the school, particularly of their excellent relations with the headteacher. The leadership team is determined in its efforts to raise standards. Pupils' progress is monitored rigorously and effective interventions are planned to support their good achievement. Strategies to motivate and engage boys more in their learning have resulted in boys attaining higher standards this year. Promoting pupils' speaking skills is a key priority and leaders ensure teachers plan sufficiently well for this. Governors have a good understanding of the school's work. They question the decisions taken to make improvements and are well informed through their visits to check provision and from the headteacher's accurate reports. Governors' promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. Leaders ensure pupils have a good understanding of and respect for the community in which they live. Links with communities that represent a wider range of ethnic, religious and social backgrounds in other parts of Britain and the wider world are less well developed.

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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?	1
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	4
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	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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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**

3 July 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Merrydale Infant School, Leicester, LE5 0PL

Thank you for the very warm and friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your school and, with your help, we learnt a great deal about your school.

We think you go to a good school. There are many things your school does well.

- Children in the Foundation Stage have fun in their learning and do well.
- Although the standards you attain in your subjects are low, you achieve well.
- Your behaviour is good and you make really good friends at school.
- You have a good understanding of how to keep safe and healthy.
- Your lessons are interesting. You enjoy learning and you are taught well.
- The topics you do, like 'under the sea', help you to learn well and you enjoy other activities like the cookery club which some of you go to with your parents.
- You know your targets and your teachers are very good at helping you to improve your work.
- The staff in your school take excellent care of you.
- All the staff and governors work well to make sure you have a good education.
- Your headteacher is good at leading the school and knows how to make it even better.

In order to help your school become even better, we have identified two key things that your school could do.

- Make sure teachers plan work that challenges you more, especially those of you who could do harder work.
- Help you find out more about people in other parts of Britain and other countries.

You told us how much you like your school and helping your teachers. Perhaps you can ask them to give you harder work in some lessons so that you can achieve even more and help you build links with people in other parts of this country and abroad.

I hope you all do well in all your learning.

Yours faithfully

Rajinder Harrison

Lead inspector