

Mereworth Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118307
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358308
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Robin Gaff

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Bolsin
Headteacher	Diane Moore
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 part-lessons, observing all nine teachers present in the school during the inspection. Inspectors held meetings with staff, pupils, governors, parents and carers. They observed the school's work and looked at planning and evaluation documents. They scrutinised the school's own analysis of pupils' attainment and progress. A total of 112 questionnaires completed by parents and carers were received and analysed, as were questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

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

- The effectiveness of measures taken by the school to reverse the apparent decline in pupils' progress.
- The extent to which teaching and the curriculum meet the needs of specific groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The contribution made by leaders and managers at all levels to driving improvement.
- The extent to which the school is meeting all requirements with regard to promoting community cohesion.

Information about the school

Mereworth is smaller than the average primary school. Children start this school in the Early Years Foundation Stage Reception class. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is much lower than average, as is the proportion of pupils who are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. These cover a range of additional needs. The previous headteacher resigned in July 2009. The school was led by two advisory headteachers until the present headteacher took up her post in June 2010.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Mereworth Community Primary is a satisfactory school. Thanks to the drive and enthusiasm of the new headteacher and the increased effectiveness of the governing body, it has emerged from a period of instability and is improving rapidly. The new topic and skills based curriculum is already beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' engagement and progress. Work done during the summer to enhance the indoor and outdoor areas has provided pupils with a much more attractive and stimulating learning environment. The school premises have been made more secure. The school has introduced a new system for monitoring pupils' progress. This is being used effectively by some teachers to identify potential underachievement and to provide additional support for those pupils who need it. However, the implementation of this system is as yet inconsistent, which restricts some teachers' ability to set appropriate targets for all of their pupils and to ensure they are on track to achieve them. Pupils' achievement has shown a slight decline in recent years. The school has identified the causes underlying this trend and discussions with leaders and lesson observations confirm that the decline has been halted.

Pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make a good start to their learning in the Reception class. By the time they leave the school their attainment is above average and their progress in relation to their starting points is satisfactory. Pupils show very positive attitudes to learning. When given the opportunity to do so, they participate enthusiastically in classroom activities and make good or better progress. However, some lessons proceed at too slow a pace when teachers take too long to explain activities and do not allow pupils sufficient time to learn for themselves and from each other. This results in some pupils becoming bored and limits their progress.

Pupils show an exceptional awareness of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle through their very high rates of participation in sporting and physical activities and their very good understanding of what constitutes a balanced diet. This is enhanced by the excellent opportunities they have to grow a variety of fruit and vegetables in the recently installed poly-tunnel. Pupils feel extremely safe in school. They are not concerned about bullying, which they say is rare and is dealt with effectively when it occurs. Pupils, as well as parents and carers, are confident about approaching staff if they have any concerns.

The school has strengthened links with parents and carers, who confirm that communication is much improved. The comment of one parent who said, 'The school has a strong leader and seems very well managed. Parents feel informed about any news or events,' was typical. Staff and the governing body show an excellent awareness of child protection issues, and arrangements for safeguarding children are now

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outstanding. The governing body has been reorganised and has recruited new members. They have brought a good range of experience and expertise and are more representative of the community the school serves, including parents and carers.

The school has successfully addressed all the areas for improvement identified by the last inspection report. The headteacher and her senior team know what constitutes successful teaching and learning. They are well aware that, until recently, monitoring of teaching and learning has not focused strongly enough on pupils' progress. Teachers have had too few opportunities to observe and reflect upon best practice within and outside of the school. Leaders and managers at all levels are united in their determination to move the school forward. Together with the governing body, leaders have accurately identified the school's strengths and weaknesses and are implementing well-founded plans for improvement. They have put in place measures which are already beginning to bear fruit with the result that outcomes, including pupils' progress, are improving. This demonstrates the school's good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rate of pupils' progress across the school from satisfactory to good by ensuring that teachers:
 - increase the pace at which lessons proceed
 - make more consistent use of the school's new assessment system in order to set all pupils suitably challenging targets
 - give more pupils more opportunities for active and independent learning.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - giving teachers more opportunities to observe best practice in teaching, within the school and elsewhere
 - ensuring that monitoring of the quality of teaching focuses more sharply on its impact on pupils' learning and progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils' attainment, as represented by their performance in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2, has been above average in recent years. Provisional results of the tests held in 2010 showed that attainment in mathematics fell. However, leaders are well aware of the causes for this dip and have put in place measures to reverse it, including specific help for pupils at risk of underperforming. In lessons where pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have plenty of opportunities for practical and collaborative work they learn well and make good progress. For example, Year 6 pupils developed a good understanding of proverbs and sayings such as 'a fool and his money are soon parted' by discussing and finding examples to illustrate their meaning. Their good social development is illustrated by the way in which they are prepared to listen and respond positively to one another's contributions in lessons. Pupils enjoy coming to school and they behave well. They are

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courteous and considerate to each other and welcoming and friendly to visitors. They make a good contribution to the school and wider communities. Many of them take on positions of responsibility, for example as house and sports captains or by helping new pupils settle into the school. The leadership and collaborative working skills they develop, together with their above average attendance and good grasp of basic skills, give them a good foundation on which to build future success in the workplace. Pupils benefit from good opportunities for spiritual and moral development in assemblies, for example when they learn about different faiths. Their good cultural development is evident in the high quality visual displays around the school which pupils have helped to create. Pupils are gaining a good understanding of a very different culture through the school's close and developing links with a school in South Africa.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

While the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, there is good and outstanding practice within the school. Teachers have good working relationships with their pupils and high expectations of behaviour. They plan a range of activities to meet the needs of

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

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different groups in their classes. Teaching assistants are well deployed and ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities can take a full part in classroom activities and make as much progress as their peers. Teachers mark their pupils' work regularly, but their comments are not always sufficiently clear and detailed to help pupils to know what to do next to improve their work. In an outstanding Year 6 lesson on life during the Second World War, the teacher combined the use of incisive questioning and observation of pupils' progress with excellent use of a range of resources and activities. As a result, pupils thoroughly enjoyed their learning and made outstanding progress in their understanding of the emotions and experiences of ordinary people at the time. However, teachers do not always ensure that activities are sufficiently stimulating or give pupils enough opportunities to practise the skills they are learning.

The school has developed its curriculum to provide an increasingly good match to pupils' needs, interests and abilities, although this is not yet fully reflected in their academic progress. Teachers are increasingly linking subject areas to increase pupils' engagement and motivation, using topics such as 'Castles' to develop a range of skills, including writing, measuring, calculation, design and technology. The school provides pupils with good opportunities to develop their information technology skills, for example through the use of networked laptop computers for researching topics. Pupils benefit from a good range of enrichment activities, some of which are organised by local secondary schools.

The school's arrangements for ensuring that pupils settle in quickly when they join the school and are well prepared for the next stage of their education are good. Staff work well together and with other providers, such as nurseries and secondary schools, to ensure that pupils' additional needs are known and catered for. The school takes good care of potentially vulnerable pupils, working closely with outside agencies such as social services. It quickly follows up any unexplained absence and has strengthened its procedures for challenging unauthorised absence. There are clear and well understood procedures for dealing with any rare examples of inappropriate behaviour.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher has succeeded in uniting the senior leadership and the staff in a common purpose to improve provision and outcomes for pupils. Staff morale is high and teachers are keen to develop their practice. The headteacher has strengthened links

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with parents and carers and with the local community, for example by persuading local companies to donate materials, and parents their time and labour, to develop the outdoor area. The governing body's capacity to set the strategic direction for the school and to hold leaders and managers to account has improved markedly since the last inspection and is now good.

The school is strongly committed to and effective in promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination. Pupils are strongly encouraged to value individuals and different groups and there have been no racist incidents in recent years. Staff have received specialist training to cater for the needs of specific groups of pupils, such as those with dyspraxia and autistic spectrum disorder. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support and achieve at least as well as their peers. The school makes a good contribution to promoting community cohesion. The school itself is a happy and harmonious community, and pupils benefit strongly from its links with local organisations such as churches and disability groups. Pupils have good opportunities to learn about life elsewhere in the world, and enthusiastically raise funds for international charities as well as their partner school in South Africa. Their experience of different communities elsewhere in the United Kingdom is more limited, but the school is implementing plans to address this.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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 equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Reception class enjoy their time in school. They make good progress in their learning and development from starting points which are broadly in line with

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age-related expectations. Children develop their emergent writing and drawing skills as they draw and label 'self-portraits' which they proudly show to visitors. They enjoy working and playing safely together. They have good opportunities to learn about different properties and textures in experimenting with 'messy' materials such as spaghetti and shaving foam. Indoor and outdoor areas provide a well-organised, exciting and stimulating environment. Staff provide a good range of interesting resources such as simple musical instruments and pots and pans. Assessment of children's learning and development is accurate. However, staff do not consistently use their observations or the information they receive from other early years settings to plan in detail to meet children's learning needs. The class teacher provides an informative newsletter and interviews parents and carers when their children join the school. She is introducing a home learning book to help parents and carers support learning at home. Parents and carers comment favourably on the way their children settle in and on the quality of information they receive about their children's progress. Leaders show a good understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and are committed to improving the provision still further.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
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 of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire was well above that found nationally. A very large majority are pleased with their children's experience of the school and are satisfied with most, if not all, aspects of the school's work. Most are satisfied with the quality of teaching and with their children's progress, although a small minority disagree. Many parents and carers commented on the school's improvement and the positive impact of the new headteacher. A very small minority of the questionnaires received included adverse written comments. Where appropriate, these were followed up with the headteacher. A few parents and carers are still concerned about communication with the school, but most of those who commented on this aspect reported that it had improved.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mereworth Community Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 112 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 201 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	61	54	46	41	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	73	65	35	31	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	38	34	57	51	5	4	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	38	54	48	8	7	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	51	46	53	47	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	47	42	52	46	7	6	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	47	42	61	54	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	47	42	52	46	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	39	35	59	53	7	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	48	43	55	49	4	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	28	69	62	5	4	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	44	39	59	53	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	67	60	35	31	3	3	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



18 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mereworth Community Primary School, Mereworth ME18 5ND

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspectors when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you and hearing what you had to say.

You enjoy coming to school and you make satisfactory progress from your starting points. You do well in class when you are given opportunities to discuss your work and learn for yourselves and from each other. We think you would do even better if some lessons included more exciting activities and if teachers set you more challenging targets. You behave sensibly in lessons and around the school. You feel very safe there and you are not worried about bullying. You really do know about healthy lifestyles, as we saw from the way you enjoy taking part in sport and growing your own food in the poly-tunnel. Many of you help each other by taking on posts such as house and sports captains. You gain good team-working and other skills which will help you in later life. You make a good contribution to the wider community by raising money for charity and for your partner school in South Africa.

The school is developing interesting ways for you to learn by making links between different subjects and developing the outdoor area. Teachers and other staff help you to settle in well when you join the school. They take good care of you and you know who to go to if you need help.

The headteacher, her senior team, all the staff and the governors are working hard to help everyone to do well. We have asked them to make the school even better by:

- helping you to make faster progress by giving you more chances to learn for yourselves and setting you more challenging targets
- helping teachers to help you make better progress by observing one another and learning more about what teachers do well in other schools.

We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Robin Gaff

Lead inspector

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