

Mereworth Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118307
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	312879
Inspection date	12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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 on roll	
School	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alastair Jefford
Headteacher	Susan Greenaway
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2005
School address	The Street Mereworth Maidstone ME18 5ND
Telephone number	01622 812569
Fax number	01622 815537

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: • the impact of the school's actions to raise standards and achievement further • the effectiveness of systems to track and assess pupils' progress • the impact of leadership and management at all levels in driving forward school improvement. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning, discussions with pupils, staff and the chair of governors, the views of parents and a scrutiny of the school's documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized primary school. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school has an Eco Schools (Bronze) award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that is endeavouring to do well for its pupils but is held back by the lack of effective support from the governing body and the anxieties of a significant minority of parents, mostly those with children in Key Stage 2, about the leadership of the school. These factors are inhibiting the school's development and preventing it from being the manifestly good school that other evidence, such as pupils' good achievement, their above average standards and their good personal development, would show it to be. Whilst most parents believe that their children like school and are well cared for, a significant minority do not feel that their views and concerns are listened to or taken into account. The governing body itself does not speak with a unified voice and has not done enough to reconcile parents' differing views. The wide-ranging nature of the parents' concerns has created a negative atmosphere which is affecting the ability of the headteacher and staff to ensure the continued development of the school. Since her appointment almost two years ago, the headteacher has had to deal with some difficult staffing issues, including the retirement and resignations of several staff. This has meant a restructuring of the senior leadership team and the allocation of whole-school responsibilities, including two posts as acting deputy headteachers, to a wider number of staff than usually found. This arrangement has generally benefited the school, especially with its strong focus on Every Child Matters issues, and enabled more staff to contribute to its future development. Under the clear direction of the headteacher, members of the leadership group are developing their roles well and are fully supportive of the changes that are being implemented. However, these restructuring arrangements have given concern to a minority of parents who consider that some staff have been taken out of the classroom too often to undertake their responsibilities, including covering for the headteacher in her absence. The evidence shows that these difficulties are being overcome. However, without better communication with parents to explain why the school has to make changes and greater acceptance by a minority of parents that the changes are necessary, the school's further development will be constrained. In spite of these problems, the quality of education pupils receive is good. The predominantly good teaching helps pupils to make good progress between the Reception Year and Year 6. As a result, standards are above average and pupils achieve well. The national test results in Year 2 and Year 6 have been consistently above, and more often well above, average for the past few years. In 2007, although more pupils in Year 6 gained the higher Level 5 than average, particularly in mathematics, the results overall in English, mathematics and especially science were slightly lower than the well above average results of the previous year. The school attributes some of this decline to the makeup of the cohort, which had a higher proportion than usual of pupils with learning difficulties. The headteacher has analysed the results carefully and has implemented a range of strategies to tackle areas of relative weakness. These have focused on improving achievement and standards in science at Key Stage 2, as well as in writing and mathematics. The school's assessment information shows that the school is on track to bring the results back to their previous levels. Pupils behave well and they enjoy all aspects of school life, as seen in their above average levels of attendance. Other than having 'a few new books, and more shelves to put them on', they have difficulty in identifying anything that they would like to see improved. They feel safe in school, saying 'there are no mean pupils', and are confident that they can turn to an adult if they have a problem. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and wider community, especially through the work of the school council and the 'Eco Warriors'. They also enjoy the responsibilities they have, for example acting as play leaders and monitors, as well as entertaining people in

the local community. They are well prepared for their future lives and have a good understanding of the need to keep healthy, evident in their keen participation in playtime activities and after-school clubs. The good teaching, interesting curriculum and high levels of pastoral care contribute well to pupils' good personal development and achievement. Relationships between pupils and with staff are positive, based on mutual respect and concern for others. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and pupils with additional needs are given the right kind of support to enable them to make good progress. Developments in integrating subjects are providing a meaningful context for pupils' learning. Visits, visitors and other opportunities, including French, Spanish and the strong emphasis on music and links with secondary schools, enrich pupils' experiences well. Typically, lessons are well planned to ensure that pupils are appropriately challenged and that activities motivate and engage them. This was evident in some of the work seen. For example, groups of pupils in a Year 6 class worked enthusiastically to solve a demanding multi-stage mathematical problem. A Year 5 class had great fun in doing a practical activity in science to look at the factors that affect the time taken to launch a 'rocket'. Both activities generated a great deal of discussion, and produced some purposeful learning. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, providing encouraging and supportive comments as well as guidance on how pupils can improve their work. The school has recently implemented a system for checking pupils' progress across the year, which is a positive development. However, it is not sufficiently robust to identify at an early stage pupils who are in danger of not reaching their challenging targets or those who might be doing particularly well so their targets can be revised. The school's own evaluation of its effectiveness is accurate, with areas for improvement clearly identified in the comprehensive school development plan. The plan rightly identifies the need to strengthen home-school partnerships, establish a robust system for checking the school's work and pupils' progress, and to improve leadership and management, including governance. Implementing these priorities is already beginning to have a positive effect. Although it has ensured that most policies are in place, there are considerable weaknesses in the role of the governing body. Some individual governors provide good support, but the governing body as a whole has not contributed enough to the development plan and the school's selfevaluation or provided enough support to the headteacher. Its role in acting as a 'critical friend' to the school and holding it to account for its performance is underdeveloped. As a result, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory rather than good. The chair of governors recognises this and is wisely striving to recruit new governors who could offer a more detached perspective in holding the school to account and setting its future strategic direction.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start school with skills that are typical of this age group. They settle in quickly and make good progress during the Reception Year. By the time they start Year 1, standards are above those expected for their age. Aspects of their social and emotional development and their writing skills are not quite as strong as other aspects of their learning. Parents are pleased with the way that their children settle into school and the progress they make. This is the result of good teaching and the leadership and management of the adults working with this class. Children are polite and friendly and relate well to one another and to adults. Staff monitor children's progress systematically through detailed assessments and observations, and keep careful records of their individual development. Whilst these records are clear and informative, there is no easy system in place to provide an overview of the progress the class as a whole is making against the various strands, or to identify specific areas of relative weakness to inform planning. With the support of the local authority, staff are rightly reviewing the curriculum,

classroom practice and the assessment arrangements to help children, especially the most able, make even faster progress than they currently do.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement a more robust system for tracking pupils' progress throughout the school.
- Sharpen the role of the governing body in checking the school's work and contributing to its further development.
- Improve communications and relationships between governors, staff and parents. 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.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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	4
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

- 13 June 2008 Dear Pupils Inspection of Mereworth Community Primary School, Maidstone ME18 5ND Thank you for welcoming me to your school recently. I enjoyed talking to members of the school council and to some Eco Warriors, as well as to others of you in the playground and in lessons. This letter is to tell you what I found out about your school. The school's overall effectiveness is only satisfactory, as the governing body is not doing enough to help the school move forward and the school's relationship with some of your parents is not yet good enough. There are, however, a number of good things about your school.
 - You make good progress at school and reach above average standards by Year 6.
 - Children in Reception get off to a good start and settle in well to school life.
 - You are polite and well behaved, and relationships between you and with adults in the school are good.
 - Teachers plan some interesting tasks and activities for you to do. I was very interested to see how Year 6 pupils tackled their mathematical problem, and I thought the science experiment that Year 5 pupils did was so exciting. The 'rockets' really did go quite a long way up into the air!
 - You clearly enjoy school and have a good understanding of how to keep safe. You contribute much to the school and local community, especially through the work of the school council and the Eco Warriors.
 - Staff take good care of you and make sure that you are safe.
 - The adults that lead and manage the school know what needs to be done to improve the school further. I have asked the school to do three things to make it better.
 - Track the progress that you make throughout the school more carefully.
 - Sharpen the way the governing body checks the school's work and helps it to improve still further.
 - Work more closely with your parents so that everyone is working together to make the school even better. You can help by continuing to work hard and doing your very best at all times.
- Yours sincerely Mrs J Greenfield Lead inspector

Annex B



13 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mereworth Community Primary School, Maidstone ME18 5ND

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- You are polite and well behaved, and relationships between you and with adults in the school are good.
- Teachers plan some interesting tasks and activities for you to do. I was very interested to see how Year 6 pupils tackled their mathematical problem, and I thought the science experiment that Year 5 pupils did was so exciting. The 'rockets' really did go quite a long way up into the air!
- You clearly enjoy school and have a good understanding of how to keep safe. You contribute much to the school and local community, especially through the work of the school council and the Eco Warriors.
- Staff take good care of you and make sure that you are safe.
- The adults that lead and manage the school know what needs to be done to improve the school further.

I have asked the school to do three things to make it better.

- Track the progress that you make throughout the school more carefully.
- Sharpen the way the governing body checks the school's work and helps it to improve still further.
- Work more closely with your parents so that everyone is working together to make the school even better.

You can help by continuing to work hard and doing your very best at all times.

Yours sincerely

Mrs J Greenfield
Lead inspector