

Merton Junior School

Romsey Close, Popley Way, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG24 9HB

Inspection dates

15–16 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has taken concerted and effective steps in the past year and a half to increase rates of improvement in the school.
- Marked developments in the quality of teaching and assessment during the past 18 months have improved pupils' learning significantly across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. As a result, standards are rising rapidly across the school.
- Pupils make strong progress from their starting points. However, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could, particularly the most able pupils. This is because teaching does not yet deepen and extend pupils' learning consistently well enough.
- Pupils behave well throughout the school day. They are polite, friendly and welcoming.
- Pupils get on well together and feel safe in school. They welcome visitors warmly and politely and speak enthusiastically about their learning. One pupil said, 'I have learned so much in this school. I feel that my future is improving every day.'
- Most pupils attend regularly and punctually. However, some disadvantaged pupils do not attend regularly enough to achieve well.
- Governors provide effective support and rigorous challenge for school leaders. They have an accurate view of the school's work and share the headteacher's determination to secure further improvements.
- Middle leaders' roles in the school's development are at an early stage of development. They do not yet make a sufficiently strong contribution to securing improvements in teaching.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that teaching enables pupils to learn at a deeper level, particularly the most able pupils.
- Ensure that middle leaders make better use of information about pupils' progress to evaluate the quality of teaching and to identify priorities for improvement.
- Improve disadvantaged pupils' attendance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors have increased the pace of development substantially in the school during the past year. They have secured considerable improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in all year groups.
- Numerous changes in teaching staff since the previous inspection have made it difficult for leaders to sustain improvements in teaching and learning. However, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have maintained a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching throughout this unsettled phase. Their determination to secure good-quality teaching, and their clarity about the steps needed to improve the school's performance, have ensured rapid developments in the quality of teaching in the past 18 months.
- Leaders and governors were shocked and disappointed by the low outcomes at the end of Year 6 in 2016. They took immediate and effective action to ensure that similar results are not repeated this year. Leaders looked closely at the way pupils had answered test questions, identified aspects which pupils had found particularly difficult and made significant changes to address weaker aspects of teaching, particularly in reading and mathematics. As a result, pupils currently in Year 6 tackled this year's national tests much more confidently and successfully than was the case in 2016.
- Leaders make good use of coaching and training to support teachers in developing their practice. For example, the deputy headteacher and subject leaders have worked alongside teachers to help them to plan learning. Leaders have also provided regular opportunities for teachers to learn from highly effective practice already in the school. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved rapidly.
- Leaders check pupils' learning more rigorously than at the time of the previous inspection. They have regular discussions with teachers to consider whether pupils are making sufficiently rapid progress and to identify ways of supporting pupils who need extra help. Teachers are keenly aware of their accountability for the achievement of all of their pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, and make good use of advice and guidance to improve their practice.
- Leaders have improved the use of pupil premium funding since the previous inspection. For example, they plan extra help to support pupils' individual needs more carefully than before, so that disadvantaged pupils of all abilities make strong progress and learn well.
- Leaders ensure that funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well spent. The special educational needs coordinator has developed an effective team of teaching assistants who work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils of all abilities learn well.
- Leaders design the curriculum with care to make learning relevant and enjoyable. Regular trips, visits and visitors help to make learning interesting and meaningful.
- Pupils appreciate and value different ideas and beliefs. They express their own thoughts and convictions with increasing confidence as they move up through the

school. For example, some of the older pupils have completed some sensitive and compelling written work during the year about how they believe the world was created.

- The school's values underpin pupils' good behaviour and their positive attitudes to learning. Teachers and leaders regularly celebrate and promote British values as a fundamental part of the school's work, linking work, wherever possible, to current events. For example, pupils in all year groups learned about democracy when participating in a recent mock 'general election'. This event gave them the opportunity to discuss and consider each of the main parties' manifestos and to vote for their preferred choice.
- Leaders make good use of sports premium to ensure that pupils of all abilities and backgrounds regularly participate in physical activity during lessons, through clubs after school and in sports tournaments with other schools. Leaders have strengthened the use of funding this year to ensure that teachers are supported to improve their practice. The teaching of physical education is already improving as a result.
- Staff morale is high. All members of staff who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire say they are proud to work in the school and feel they are treated with respect.
- Parents are confident that the school will continue to ensure that their children are happy, safe and achieving well.
- While middle leaders' roles are at an early stage of development, their contribution has strengthened during recent months. For example, during the past year they have successfully supported teachers in improving the teaching of subjects including reading and mathematics. However, they do not yet have a sufficiently clear overview of future development priorities to ensure that teaching and learning continue to improve at the current rapid rate.

Governance of the school

- Governors hold leaders to account much more rigorously and effectively than at the time of the previous inspection. The establishment of the rapid improvement group has ensured that governors and leaders are able to focus more sharply on school development than was the case previously. Minutes of governing body meetings indicate regular, high-quality discussions between governors and leaders about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and about future priorities.
- Governors visit the school more frequently than at the time of the previous inspection. They combine meetings with subject leaders with visits to the classrooms so that they can see the school's work at first hand. This approach has given governors a much clearer view of developments in the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders give pupils' safety an appropriately high priority. They make sure that recruitment and safeguarding checks are completed promptly and fully and that records are rigorously maintained.
- Leaders ensure that the school's safeguarding policies reflect the most recent national guidance and that all members of staff are fully aware of any changes in requirements

or procedures. As a result, staff are well qualified about safeguarding issues and know how to respond should a safeguarding incident arise.

- The school's effective approach to safeguarding is characterised by strong teamwork and a shared understanding of safeguarding responsibilities among all members of staff. Senior leaders meet regularly to consider any concerns about individual pupils' safety and well-being. They liaise closely with parents and agencies, such as children's services, and provide good-quality support wherever needed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching has improved rapidly during the past year and a half, and particularly the teaching of reading and mathematics. As a result, pupils make better progress than at the time of the previous inspection.
- The quality of mathematics teaching has improved substantially during the past year. For example, teachers make better use of practical equipment to demonstrate aspects of mathematics and to strengthen pupils' understanding of number. They give pupils frequent opportunities to solve mathematics problems, including more complex calculations, so that pupils are required to think hard about how to use their mathematical knowledge.
- Improvements in the teaching of reading have ensured that pupils read and discuss a wider range of texts than previously, including poetry, plays and biographies. Teachers make good use of high-quality texts to catch pupils' interest and imagination during lessons. They use questioning well to encourage pupils to think critically about their reading.
- Teachers make sure that pupils have frequent opportunities to write for a wide range of purposes in a variety of subjects. As a result, pupils learn how to write effectively for different audiences.
- The teaching of science builds pupils' scientific knowledge and understanding securely and equips them with key skills to enable them to carry out science investigations successfully.
- Teachers regularly and accurately assess how well pupils are learning. As a result, they are clear about their pupils' needs. They use questioning well to check and develop pupils' understanding during lessons. Teachers in all classes follow the school's marking policy consistently. As a result, pupils know how well they are doing in their learning.
- Teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils of all abilities, including those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They teach pupils how to use a range of different strategies to help them to complete tasks successfully. For example, during the inspection a teaching assistant used questioning very well to help pupils to use their knowledge of number to solve mathematics problems on ratio.
- Marked improvements in teaching during the past year and a half ensure that most pupils make strong progress. However, teaching does not always deepen and extend pupils' learning consistently enough, particularly for the most able pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are keen to do well and work hard. They work carefully and neatly in their books. Pupils speak clearly about their work and about the next steps in their learning.
- Pupils have a sensible view about some of the steps they can take to ensure that they stay safe and secure. For example, they understand how to reduce the risks of using the internet by not providing any personal information. Pupils say that assemblies, visits and visitors provide them with helpful reminders about safety issues during the school year.
- Pupils say that bullying is rarely a problem and that teachers sort out any incidents of misbehaviour quickly. School records confirm this view. Pupils say that they feel confident about speaking to adults whenever they have a question or a concern.
- Almost all parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire feel pupils are safe and well behaved.
- Pupils demonstrate increasing resilience and perseverance when completing work, particularly when tackling activities which they find more challenging. However, some pupils are too easily put off when they find tasks difficult, preferring to wait for adults to help rather than having a go for themselves first.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well during lessons, playtimes and when moving around the school.
- All members of staff who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire say that pupils' behaviour is good. They feel well supported by leaders in managing pupils' behaviour and consistently follow the school's behaviour management procedures.
- The school's overall attendance rates are consistently in line with national averages. However, while most pupils attend regularly, poor attendance hinders some disadvantaged pupils' achievement.
- Leaders are keenly aware of the need to ensure that all pupils attend regularly. They check pupils' attendance rigorously and follow up any unexplained absence promptly. Leaders liaise closely and productively with parents and agencies where appropriate.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Marked improvements in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection have ensured that all groups of pupils learn increasingly well across the school. Teachers' assessments of pupils' progress and the work in pupils' books indicate that the quality of learning has improved substantially. Most pupils make strong progress in a range of subjects, including reading, writing, mathematics and a range of subjects.

- In the three years prior to 2016, pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 had steadily improved, with a marked rise in 2015 outcomes. However, variations in the quality of teaching, combined with the increased demands of the national tests, led to a dip in standards in 2016. Since then, the quality of teaching in the older year groups has improved substantially. Highly effective teaching has ensured that pupils at the top of the school, including the most able pupils, are much more effectively prepared for the next stage of their education. The proportions of pupils currently on track to achieve at least expected levels at the end of Year 6 are much higher than in 2016, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- The work in pupils' mathematics books illustrates considerable gains in pupils' learning, particularly in their ability to use and apply their mathematics knowledge to solve problems successfully.
- Pupils enjoy reading. Improvements in the teaching of reading during the past year mean that pupils interpret texts much more confidently than before. They use examples from reading to support their views about authors and books increasingly well. Pupils' good-quality written work indicates the strong progress they make in the development of literacy skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved substantially during the past year. Effective teaching means that the differences between disadvantaged pupils' attainment and the attainment of others nationally reduce as they move up through the year groups. This ensures that disadvantaged pupils are well placed for the next stage of their education by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. They learn how to use a range of strategies to support their learning with increasing success as they move up through the year groups.
- While most pupils achieve well, teaching does not ensure that all pupils learn as deeply or as fully as they could. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	116001
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10032885

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kate Fowkes
Headteacher	Helen Palmer
Telephone number	01256 326573
Website	www.mertonjuniorschool.co.uk
Email address	admin.office@merton-jun.hants.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 May 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized junior school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is higher than that found in most schools.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 26 lessons or part-lessons, including ten paired observations with either the headteacher or the deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a local authority representative, teachers, parents and pupils. They also spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors met with the chair and vice- chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of 85 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as an email from a parent and views expressed by parents informally during the school day. They also took account of 25 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and considered a range of documents, including safeguarding policies, the school's improvement plan and information about pupils' progress and attendance.
- Inspectors looked at a sample of pupils' work provided by the school, as well as looking at pupils' work in lessons. They listened to pupils in Years 3 and 6 reading.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Steph Fawdry	Ofsted Inspector
Cassie Buchanan	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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