

Mersey Vale Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106059
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	336610
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Mrs Sarah Drake

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community School
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	213
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jackie Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Jayne Mullane
Date of previous school inspection	March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors, one of whom looked specifically at the school's safeguarding procedures. The inspectors spent around 40% of the time looking at learning, visited 12 lessons and observed eight different teachers. They held meetings with governors, staff, pupils and parents as well as speaking informally with many pupils and staff. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation such as data about standards and progress, monitoring and development planning, policies and record keeping. They also took into account the responses to questionnaires completed by 65 parents, 19 staff and 91 pupils.

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

- the provision for and achievement of different groups of pupils
- standards and progress in mathematics
- attendance levels and the school's actions to improve these
- the effectiveness of leadership at all levels.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average school. The proportion of pupils eligible to receive a free school meal is below average. Three quarters of the pupils belong to minority ethnic groups, the majority of whom are of Pakistani origin. The proportion that speaks English as an additional language, some of whom are at an early stage of learning English, is also high. Above average numbers join or leave the school partway through their primary education. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average. In most year groups there are considerably more boys than girls.

Since the previous inspection, the numbers on roll have increased significantly. The school gained the Activemark in 2008. In 2009 it achieved the Basic Skills Quality award for the fourth time and the Inclusion Quality Mark. A new deputy headteacher joined the staff in September 2009.

Since March 2008 the school has been designated as the host site for the Heatons Children's Centre. This provision did not form part of this inspection.

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? 1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement 1

Main findings

This school has gone from strength to strength since the previous inspection and continues to offer its pupils an outstanding quality of education. Excellent leadership at all levels creates a very strong sense of teamwork, dedication and determination among staff to provide each individual with the opportunities and skills to help them reach their full potential. Pupils' comments such as, 'My school is kind and caring, they help me when I am stuck on my work and they are always there for you.' confirm the consistently high quality of provision that underpins the school's success.

Children's skills when they join the Nursery are well below those expected for their age in all areas of learning. By the end of Year 6 standards are similar to the national average, with a consistent strength in English. This is particularly impressive taking into account the high proportions of pupils who speak English as an additional language or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders' rigorous monitoring and analysis of pupils' progress mean that the school is fully aware that standards in mathematics could be higher. The leadership's reflective self-evaluation, constant quest for improvement and effective response to areas identified for development confirm the school's excellent capacity to improve further.

Integral to pupils' first-rate academic progress is their outstanding personal development. Excellent relationships create an atmosphere of harmony and tolerance in which each individual is valued for themselves. This means that pupils are eager to contribute to lessons and confident of others' support. Through the school's exceptional work to promote community cohesion, these positive attitudes extend well beyond the school gate. Excellent partnerships with parents and the wider community, such as consultation with all interested parties to ensure acceptable wording for the new school prayer, add vibrancy and individuality to the provision. It is unsurprising that parents make comments such as, 'I think my children are privileged to be going to such an excellent school.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in mathematics, to at least similar to those in English by:
 - increasing the proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to develop their learning independently
 - ensuring that marking consistently guides pupils on how to improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

At both key stages, all groups of pupils make excellent progress from their starting points. A notable strength is the standards achieved in English by Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils, those for whom English is an additional language and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. More than half the pupils in Years 2 and 6 in 2009 had special educational needs and/or disabilities or spoke English as an additional language; around one third joined the school during Key Stage 2. They did very well to reach broadly average standards overall, although fewer achieved the higher levels expected for their age in mathematics than did so in English. Pupils' current work shows similar, broadly average, levels of attainment.

In lessons, pupils' enthusiasm for learning, which is fostered by the high quality provision and is at the heart of their rapid progress, is palpable. They pay attention, are keen to ask questions and to expand on their answers, and they take care with the drafting and presentation of their work. Excellent behaviour means that there are no interruptions, that pupils engage sensibly in practical activities and that they discuss their work fruitfully in pairs or small groups. Such behaviour extends throughout the day, creating a very happy community in which pupils demonstrate high levels of self-esteem and respect for others. They have a very well-developed understanding of right and wrong, great interest in the differences and similarities of different cultures and deep sensitivity to others' need, as exemplified by their request to have an own-clothes day to support the victims of the earthquake in Haiti.

Pupils happily take on responsibilities and they know that their views count in school. For example, their suggestions and reasoning have led to improved access to the Nursery so that the youngest children and their carers are safe from older pupils' energetic lunchtime play. Pupils appreciate the importance of a healthy lifestyle to their current and future well-being, thoroughly enjoying the healthy food and daily, pupil-led wake up shake up sessions. Attendance levels are satisfactory, with those of older pupils generally better than for younger ones, as they take more responsibility for their own arrival at school. Extended holidays have a significant impact on overall figures and, more importantly, on the continuity of some pupils' learning. The school's concerted efforts to improve attendance and punctuality are having a positive impact.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1

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

The extent to which pupils develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

High quality teaching throughout the school, based on a thorough knowledge of individuals' needs and abilities, captures pupils' attention and ensures that they relish working hard. Careful preparation and planning create an excellent working environment in which lessons move at a good pace and pupils are very clear about what they are expected to do. Skilled use of information and communication technology provides, for example, clarity about how to set about problem-solving, inspiration for writing, or the opportunity for pupils of different abilities to carry out work at different levels. There are not always enough opportunities for pupils to extend their learning even further, independently, in mathematics. Teaching assistants play a full part in lessons, working with small groups, noting individuals' progress and ensuring all work productively. Adults use questioning very effectively both to support those who find learning more difficult or who are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language, and to challenge pupils to think more deeply. When pupils are working individually or in groups, teachers sustain the momentum of the learning by monitoring their progress closely, offering encouragement and guidance. They mark pupils' work supportively and provide some pointers as to how it could be improved but these are less common in mathematics than in pupils' writing books.

The rich curriculum is extremely well adapted to the specific needs of the pupils in Mersey Vale, including the unusually high proportion of boys. The emphasis placed on developing pupils' communication skills and their emotional well-being, including their mental and physical health, pays great dividends, as evidenced by their attainment in English and also through the sense of harmony and contentment that pervades the school. Whenever possible, learning is based on real-life activities, such as using data about temperature to decide where to go on holiday. Outside expertise, such as speakers to raise pupils' awareness of disability, teaching of keyboard skills, or lunchtime sports coaching, adds breadth to the curriculum, as do the very popular theme weeks and visits to, for instance, art galleries or a local mosque. The reason that the teaching and curriculum are so well adapted to pupils' needs is that staff identify these at a very early stage after an individual's arrival and ensure that suitable provision is put in place. At all levels, all adults build excellent relationships with pupils, confirming that the school's main purpose is to enable them to flourish. Comments such as, 'I love my school and the teachers make learning a joy.' eloquently encapsulate the outstanding care, guidance and support it provides.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management of exceptional quality create an unusually strong staff team in which each member is highly valued, clear about their responsibilities and determined to provide the best quality education for each and every pupil. Pupils, parents, staff and governors are united in their praise of the highly skilled headteacher who combines rigorous monitoring and analysis with sensitivity and encouragement to nurture individuals' strengths and make them want to give of their best. Leadership is very well distributed throughout the staff team with excellent organisation and communication, ensuring there are strong support mechanisms as well as consistency of approach. Constant reflection on the impact of the provision leads to very well targeted action, such as the current emphasis on developing pupils' mathematical vocabulary.

Governors fulfil very well their role of critical friend to the school but have not ensured that all paperwork is fully up to date. The school is very open to new ideas and also generous in sharing its excellent practice with others. Inclusion and equality of opportunity are at the heart of all its work. Procedures to ensure the safeguarding of children are of top quality, ranging from rigorous checks when staff are recruited, to the care of vulnerable pupils. Work to promote community cohesion began many years ago and extends to links with Lesotho and Uganda. Its impact, particularly in promoting harmony in the local community, is impressive and regularly reviewed. Parents are seen as genuine partners in their children's education. As one commented, 'The school is like a jigsaw, everyone does their bit.'

These are the grades for the leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Many children who join the Nursery class use body language or one word responses when communicating with others and still choose to play alone rather than share with others. For many this is their first extended exposure to learning English. Early analysis of individuals' aptitudes and needs combined with detailed planning and, in particular, highly skilled interaction between all staff and the children mean that, over the past two years, children have joined Year 1 with broadly average skills in all areas of learning. Staff ensure every part of the accommodation provides items that entice children to experiment and explore. Through excellent relationships and open

questioning, they are also quick to help children grow in confidence, build on their interests and take the next step in their learning, whether this is noticing how cogs interlink or listening to the different sounds in a word.

Staff maintain careful records of individuals' progress and use these well when planning future provision. Excellent partnership with parents and carers encourages the extension of children's learning into the home and ensures school staff know about children's individual circumstances. Knowledgeable, committed leadership and good communication have created a strong, confident staff team. Since the previous inspection, the outdoor provision has been greatly enhanced so that children have opportunities to extend their learning in all areas in the open air, despite the weather.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are extremely positive about the school. They are highly appreciative of all aspects of the school's work, particularly the quality of teaching, the ease of communication with all staff and their children's enjoyment and feeling of safety in school. Typical of their comments is that, 'The school offers a first class service to our family.' Inspectors agree whole-heartedly with these very positive comments.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mersey Vale 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 inspector received 65 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 213 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	49	75	14	22	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	44	68	21	32	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	36	55	25	38	4	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	63	21	32	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	45	69	20	31	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	52	22	34	5	8	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	45	69	18	28	0	0	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)	30	46	34	52	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	57	28	43	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	35	54	27	42	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	45	31	48	1	2	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	42	65	19	29	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	45	69	17	26	2	3	0	0

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 all 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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>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 pupils' 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.



20 January 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Mersey Vale Primary School, Stockport, SK4 2BZ

Thank you all very much for the extremely warm welcome that you gave the other inspectors and me when we visited your school recently. It was a pleasure to see so many smiling faces and to be treated with such politeness. Particular thanks to members of the school council who gave up some of their precious lunch time to talk to the inspector. Many of you told us that your school is 'fabulous', 'great' and 'the best'. We agree with you and have used the word 'outstanding' to describe it.

We were particularly impressed by how well you all get on together and show respect for other people. We were also delighted that you really enjoy learning and almost always try your best to do well. As you told us, your teachers make lessons fun and are very good at helping you, whether you are finding something difficult or if you need it to be a bit harder. They also take great care of you and adapt things to suit your individual needs so that, starting from your time in Nursery, you feel safe in school and make excellent progress. The adults in school pay very good attention to what you say, such as your request for the new fence in the playground, and we are pleased that they ask for your views when appointing new staff.

The reason that your school is such a good one is that the headteacher, other senior teachers and all staff think very hard about what they are doing and are always seeking to improve things so you can do even better. They are fully aware that at the moment your standards in mathematics are not as high as they are in English. We have asked them to make sure that you do equally well in both subjects. You can help with this by concentrating hard and making sure you only miss school if you absolutely have to!

With my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Sarah Drake
Lead inspector

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