

Mersey Park Primary School

Elm Road, Higher Tranmere, Birkenhead, CH42 0PH

Inspection dates 26–27 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils' achievement has risen rapidly since the school's last inspection. Pupils now make speedy progress, often from very low starting points, and they reach nationally expected standards by the time they leave the school in Year 6.
- Pupils are doing well in every year group because teaching is consistently good; an increasing proportion is outstanding.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage gives children an excellent start and helps them to develop extremely positive attitudes to school.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary; pupils are happy and secure and keen to do well. The school cares for them very well and keeps them safe. There is a strong partnership between parents and the school.
- The headteacher is an extremely effective leader. She is ably supported by the senior and middle leaders and by a well-informed and active governing body. Everyone shares her high expectations for the pupils and the school. The school is well placed to continue to improve.
- Leaders make regular checks on teaching and provide very good guidance for staff; this has helped to raise the overall quality of teaching from satisfactory to good in a relatively short time.
- Pupils' progress is checked extremely carefully and regularly to ensure that everyone is given the support or challenge they need.
- A small but growing number of pupils, across the school, are working at levels above the usual expectations for their age.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not yet enough outstanding teaching to accelerate pupils' progress even more and to take the school to the next level.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics is below average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 21 lessons; three of the lesson observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors listened to pupils read in Years 2 and 6 and discussed with them the books they have enjoyed and those they are currently reading.
- The inspectors met with three members of the governing body, with senior and middle leaders, with a group of pupils and with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took into account 17 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They took account of the school's most recent survey of parents' views. An inspector also met with a group of parents during the inspection to hear their views about the school.
- The inspectors took into account the views that staff expressed in the inspection questionnaires they returned.
- The inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at the written work in pupils' books and also reviewed a wide range of documentation, including safeguarding documents, the school development plan, records of pupils' attainment and progress and documents related to pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Diane Auton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Fann	Additional Inspector
Frances Farnworth	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than most other primary schools.
- Most pupils are White British, with a small proportion from a range of other heritages and backgrounds. Currently, nearly all of the pupils in school speak English as their home language, with a very small number at an early stage of learning to speak English.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is a little below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through pupil-premium funding is considerably above average. This additional government funding is provided for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching, so that the rising trend in pupils' achievement is sustained, by keeping thorough checks on teaching and providing effective guidance and ongoing training for all staff.
- Keep regular checks on the progress of the school's most able pupils to make sure that they are given the support and challenge they need to enable them to fulfil their potential and to reach the higher levels by the end of Key Stage 2.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most children's skills are considerably below the expectations for their age when they start school in the Nursery class, especially in their speech and language and often in their self-help skills. Children make rapid progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. By the end of the Reception Year, a large majority are much closer to the expected levels for their age in all of the areas of learning and all of the children have developed extremely positive attitudes to learning, which they take with them as they move up through the school.
- Over the last two years, achievement has risen rapidly across the school in response to effective leadership and improved teaching.
- Standards were low at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2013 but attainment has risen steadily over the last three years. The school's records show that pupils in Year 2 in 2013 made good progress from their starting points in that year and that they are continuing to do well in Year 3.
- Pupils in Years 1 and 2 this year are on track to reach nationally expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1.
- Attainment is rising quickly in Key Stage 2. The large majority of pupils in Year 6 reached the nationally expected level in reading, writing and mathematics in 2013. School data and inspection findings show that attainment is continuing to rise across the Key Stage 2 classes in all three subjects in the current year.
- Pupils are making good progress across the school. Pupils in Key Stage 1 are doing well, after making a flying start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Progress is consistently good in Years 1 and 2, with some pupils making exceptionally rapid gains from their individual starting points.
- In Key Stage 2, teachers are successfully closing gaps in pupils' learning and have set high expectations for their achievement. In 2013, the majority of pupils in Year 6 made at least the expected rate of progress in reading, writing and mathematics and many did even better than this. Evidence in lessons, in pupils' books and in the school's progress records show that this good rate of progress is being sustained across the classes in the current year.
- In all of the year groups, a growing number of pupils are operating above the expected levels for their age. This is the result of improved teaching; but the school knows there is more to do to make sure that all of its most able pupils do as well as possible. The proportion of pupils who reached the higher Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013 was greater than in the previous year in all of the three subjects but, nevertheless, was still below average in writing and mathematics.
- Standards in reading are rising quickly. Letters and sounds are taught successfully and a majority of pupils met the required standard in the Year 1 screening assessment for reading in 2013. By the time pupils leave the school in Year 6 most can read at the expected standard for their age, using their skills confidently in research activities, and many are mature and capable readers. Pupils of all ages show a genuine interest in books and an enjoyment of reading.
- The attainment of pupils supported by the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, was about a term behind that of the other pupils in writing and mathematics in Year 6 in 2013. There was no gap in reading. Actions have been taken to address these issues. Across the school in the current year, gaps between the attainment of those eligible for the pupil premium and that of other pupils are closing rapidly in all three subject areas because all of the pupils in school are making good progress. This reflects the school's strong commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for every pupil.
- Further evidence of this is seen in the excellent achievement of pupils with special educational needs, who often make very rapid gains as a result of the very effective support they are given.
- The very small number of pupils who are learning to speak English achieve well and make good progress from their individual starting points.

The quality of teaching is good

- The significant improvements that have been achieved in teaching have resulted in ongoing improvements in pupils' achievement.
- Activities in lessons provide levels of difficulty that are usually matched well to pupils' differing needs and abilities. Lessons move along briskly so that pupils' interest is fully sustained all the way through. Teachers give clear explanations of what pupils are expected to learn and do so that they fully understand the purpose of the lesson. All of these features are consistently present, contributing well to pupils' good progress.
- A lively curriculum and excellent teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage mean that children become deeply absorbed in their activities and progress very well. The strong emphasis on developing their basic skills in literacy and numeracy is giving them the tools they need to become increasingly confident learners.
- Where learning is good rather than outstanding, some tasks do not sufficiently stretch the most able pupils. This means that, although they make good progress, they could do even better. Sometimes pupils do not have enough time in lessons to complete or extend the tasks they have been set and this, too, means that they do not always achieve as well as they could.
- Where learning is outstanding, teachers use questioning very skilfully to explore how much pupils have understood so that they can identify and tackle any uncertainties quickly. For example, in a challenging Year 6 lesson on fractions the teacher's incisive questioning in the introductory part of the lesson ensured that, before they started on the tasks they were being asked to complete, pupils were very clear about how to proceed. As a result of this and also because of the finely balanced measures of challenge and support they were given throughout, pupils were able to work accurately and with improved understanding and confidence.
- Positive relationships between pupils and adults in the classroom contribute strongly to pupils' good learning and progress.
- The school groups pupils according to their ability for English and mathematics lessons in Key Stage 2. This strategy provides smaller-group teaching for pupils across the ability range, which is contributing well to everyone's good and improving progress.
- Teachers and skilful teaching assistants work together well to support the learning of pupils of all abilities. The school uses a wide range of effective additional strategies, including individual support in lessons, for those pupils who need extra help.
- Teachers provide good guidance for pupils when marking their work. Marking methods have recently been reviewed to ensure they are effective and this is giving pupils an increasingly clear understanding of how well they are doing and what the next steps in their learning should be.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils behave extremely well throughout the school day, be it in lessons, around the school, at lunchtime or in the playground. They greatly enjoy coming to school and they show care and consideration for others. They are rightly proud of their school and of their achievements.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes in lessons contribute strongly to their good learning and progress. They need only minimal direction in organising themselves in class because they know and understand the routines. They are alert and responsive in lessons, listen well to instructions and work productively with a partner or in a group. The work in their books is presented well, showing how hard they try to do their best always.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is excellent. Pupils say that staff look after them well and describe trusting relationships with the adults in school. Parents express great confidence in the care the school provides for their children.
- Pupils have a very clear understanding of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying. They say that bullying incidents are very rare in their school and are always dealt with swiftly by staff. They spoke approvingly of the 'bother box', where they can write about any concerns they have, in the certain knowledge that someone will help.

- Pupils enjoy many opportunities to contribute to making the school a happy place for everyone, including acting as play leaders or as influential school councillors. Older pupils act as reading buddies for younger ones in weekly sessions, taking their responsibilities seriously and providing valuable help and support for their young partners.
- Pupils with additional learning, health, social, emotional or medical needs are included in everything on offer and are supported extremely well. The school provides very sensitive and caring support for pupils and families whose circumstances might make them vulnerable. Staff work very well with a range of agencies to ensure that support is targeted appropriately.
- Attendance has continued to improve. It is in line with the national average, reflecting the school's strong partnership with parents and its effective work to support families at risk of poor attendance.

The leadership and management are good

- The last inspection report described the good start made by the headteacher in her first year in post. She has built on this most effectively in the last two years, achieving impressive improvements both in teaching and in pupils' achievement and lifting the school's overall effectiveness up from satisfactory to good. Most of the inconsistencies described in the last report have been ironed out and the school is in a strong position to continue to flourish.
- The deputy headteacher and the middle leaders also demonstrate effective leadership skills and play an active part in driving improvements forward; they are positive role models, leading by example.
- The systems introduced by the headteacher for checking on pupils' progress and on the quality and effect of teaching are now firmly established. This means that leaders and staff have clear and regular information about how well every pupil is doing so that any underachievement can be spotted and acted on. So far this has had the strongest impact on helping pupils of lower or average ability to make better progress. Work is under way to make sure that all of the most able pupils are identified at an early stage so that the school can be sure they are given the support they need to reach the higher levels of attainment. The impact of this work is yet to be felt.
- Senior and middle leaders help the headteacher to check regularly on teaching and all staff work together well, sharing the best practice. An ongoing programme of training for all staff, including teaching assistants, helps to keep skills sharp and up to date. This good leadership practice has moved the overall quality of teaching up to good. Leaders know that it now needs further implementation to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching in the school.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Subjects are brought together into topics that engage pupils' interests well. Visiting specialists and visits to places of interest, including residential trips, enrich the curriculum well. The school has ensured that its curriculum meets the requirements of the new 2014 National Curriculum.
- The school uses its primary school sports funding effectively to provide specialist coaching and tuition in a wide range of additional sporting activities; this also provides ongoing training for staff. Pupils of all ages enjoy good quality sport and physical education activities in lessons and after school.
- The local authority provides light-touch support for this good school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors regularly review both school and national data about pupils' progress so that they have a clear overview of pupils' performance and of the quality and impact of teaching. They are well informed and able to hold the school to account. They make sure that systems to check the performance of staff are thorough and that leaders and staff are set challenging targets linked to pupils' progress and school priorities. Governors are fully aware of the link between the achievement of these targets and salary progression. Governors make sure that safeguarding policy and procedures are fully in place. They are fully informed on how the pupil-premium funding is spent and the difference it is making to this group of pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105042
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	431004

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	440
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Kenny
Headteacher	Margaret Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2012
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