

Mersey Park Primary School

Elm Road, Higher Tranmere, Birkenhead, Merseyside CH42 0PH

Inspection dates

13–14 March 2019

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| Overall effectiveness | Outstanding |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Outstanding |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Outstanding |
| Early years provision | Outstanding |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The inspirational headteacher, very ably supported by other senior leaders, provides exceptional leadership for the highly committed, well-trained staff.
- All leaders, staff and governors are dedicated to achieving the highest academic outcomes and standards of care for every pupil.
- High-quality, innovative teaching actively engages pupils in their learning. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points in all curriculum areas.
- Disadvantaged pupils receive excellent personal, social, emotional and academic support. Achievement is strong as a result.
- A vibrant, well-organised and enriched curriculum is closely matched to the needs and interests of pupils.
- Leaders use their precise understanding of the needs of each pupil to refine and adapt learning to ensure pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make the best possible progress.
- Teaching assistants' support of individual pupils and small groups is highly effective.
- Parents and carers hold highly positive views of the care and support provided for their children.
- Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are happy and feel safe in this highly inclusive school.
- Pupils of all ages display a thirst for knowledge. They work hard and strive continually to do their best. Many make a real contribution to school life through a range of responsibilities.
- Highly committed governors are closely involved in the life of the school. They use their considerable expertise to provide strong support and challenge for school leaders.
- The school has successfully encouraged a love of reading through many innovative strategies. As a result, pupils' vocabulary has improved impressively and makes a strong contribution to their writing skills.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. An exciting range of opportunities widen pupils' horizons effectively.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are extremely effective. Pupils thrive in the safe, nurturing environment provided.
- Attendance has risen sharply due to the concerted efforts of pupils, parents and staff.
- Children make superb gains in learning throughout the early years due to high-quality teaching. However, the resources in the Nursery learning environment require further enrichment to match those in Reception.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the Nursery environment to match the rich and highly engaging provision in Reception.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher leads the school with passion and determination. Aply supported by the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, she provides strong and very effective leadership for the dedicated staff team. The school's motto, which encourages pupils to 'Be nice, work hard and never give up', permeates all aspects of its work. Pupils thrive at Mersey Park – their achievements and personal development are outstanding.
- Leaders have established a culture of high expectations for all who learn and work in the school. Senior and subject leaders keep a very close check on the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. Information gathered from these checks is used to agree precise areas for improvement. Any required changes are made promptly and followed up regularly to make sure that they are effective. Consequently, the school continues to move forward.
- A well-designed programme of training for leaders, teachers and teaching assistants keeps skills sharp and subject knowledge up-to-date. Teachers readily share their experiences of what works well and strive constantly to develop their practice. Staff feel very well supported. They appreciate the attention senior leaders pay to their well-being and morale is high.
- The well-designed and highly engaging curriculum is a significant strength of the school. Skilful planning ensures that teaching deepens pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in all subjects exceptionally well. High-quality opportunities to develop pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics abound. Consequently, pupils of all abilities make substantial and sustained progress across a wide range of subjects.
- The curriculum promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively. It is well enriched by a wide range of visitors to the school and trips within the local community and beyond. The focus on widening pupils' horizons and raising their aspirations underpins the structure of the curriculum. For example, pupils gain much from their visits to the University of Liverpool. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is spent very effectively. As a result of highly effective support, these pupils make excellent progress from their individual starting points.
- All staff know pupils very well as individuals and ensure that their needs are fully met. Excellent relationships are fostered with parents and outside agencies. Mersey Park is a very inclusive school and all staff ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to excel.
- The leadership of provision for pupils with SEND is highly effective. Well-trained teachers and support staff provide high-quality teaching and support for pupils' specific needs. Pupils make excellent progress from their starting points. The local authority, quite rightly, recognises the good work the school is doing to support pupils' mental health needs.

- The pastoral support of the school is a key strength. The work of the home-school link officer is highly appreciated by parents and staff. Children in the care of the local authority are supported well.
- The physical education (PE) and sports funding is spent very effectively. Additional coaching for pupils, including for those who are sometimes reluctant to join in with activities, and training for staff has resulted in increased participation in a variety of sports. Parents say how much they value the school's decision to provide PE kits for all pupils. Staff report that, following this decision, everyone takes a full part in PE lessons.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. The parent partnership group works with leaders and governors to communicate the views of parents on various aspects of school life.
- The local authority recognises the many strengths of the school and uses the headteacher's skills to provide support for several other schools. Mersey Park is an active member of the local cluster of schools.

Governance of the school

- Governance is highly effective. The governing body knows the school extremely well and governors bring a wide range of skills to their role. Their expertise and commitment provide a high level of support and guidance for the school.
- Governors regularly visit the school to gain first-hand views of school life and receive detailed reports from senior and other leaders. Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. They hold school leaders firmly to account for all aspects of the school's performance.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties rigorously, including those related to safeguarding. Governors ensure that additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND is spent effectively to meet the needs of these pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective.
- Leaders place pupils' safety and well-being at the heart of the school's work. Strong procedures are in place that are understood and followed by all. Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding and are vigilant in looking out for any signs that may indicate a pupil may be at risk of harm or abuse.
- Systems for recording any concerns relating to safeguarding are thorough. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are tenacious in following up any issues that arise.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' health and well-being extremely successfully. Pupils are helped to recognise and manage risks they may face, for example when using new technology. Pupils are encouraged to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle and a highly impressive range of programmes and strategies are in place to ensure pupils' mental health is supported and cared for well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding because of consistently high-quality teaching across the school.
- Teachers consistently use excellent subject knowledge to inspire pupils. Very skilful questioning probes pupils' understanding and identifies misconceptions. Clear explanations reinforce previously learned concepts and develop new learning very effectively.
- Creative and innovative teaching captures the imagination and interest of pupils. Pupils enjoy the way teachers present learning and throw themselves wholeheartedly into their work. For example, teachers link definitions of subject-specific vocabulary to memorable actions, many of which are created by the pupils. Year 6 demonstrated very accurate recall of many aspects of shape and space in a lesson about area.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work as highly effective teams in classrooms and across year groups. They know pupils exceptionally well and use this knowledge when checking their progress. This leads to teachers skilfully setting work that challenges pupils of all abilities. They are prompt to intervene and move learning forward once concepts have been grasped. As a result, learning time is used efficiently and pupils achieve very well.
- Every opportunity is taken to develop the key knowledge and facts of each subject. A key element of each lesson is the focus on developing specific vocabulary for the subjects being studied. Definitions are revisited regularly throughout the lesson to lodge new words in pupils' memories. For example, in a reading session, a group of Year 2 pupils were learning the words 'pristine, splintered and casually', which they had come across in the text they were sharing.
- The quality of support work to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils, including the disadvantaged and those with SEND, is outstanding. Regular reviews check the rate of progress and are adjusted as necessary to ensure that these pupils fully achieve their potential.
- Teachers have very high expectations of how much pupils will learn. They ensure that pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of learning and quickly identify when individuals need additional support or help to catch up.
- Homework is used very effectively. Pupils read regularly and complete the individual tasks set for them. They enjoy using computer programmes to develop reading skills. All pupils are expected to complete the homework set each week. The weekly prize for the class that completes the highest percentage of homework is highly sought after. Some classes are rightly proud of regularly completing 100% of their homework each week.
- The teaching of reading is highly effective. Early reading skills are developed very skilfully and built on well as pupils move from year to year. Leaders have overhauled the stock of books in the school libraries to provide more challenging books that stretch pupils' reading skills. Year 6 pupils told an inspector how much they enjoy tackling these more challenging texts which encourage them think more deeply about the

books they are reading. Pupils' work shows how well this is helping to improve the maturity of their writing skills.

- Teachers are skilful at developing pupils' literacy skills across the school. For example, older pupils demonstrated effective retrieval and inference skills when studying an extract from 'The Tales of Morigan Crow'.
- The teaching of mathematics is superb. Teachers develop pupils' mathematical skills with great consistency in all year groups. Teachers follow a new approach when starting new work. The use of lots of practical resources sets a foundation for learning before moving on to abstract concepts. Pupils enjoy the way teachers develop their understanding and encourage them to share their reasoning by talking to others in the class. Pupils' use of coaching skills is very effective in helping them to learn from each other.
- Pupils value the way teachers make learning fun. They enjoy the way some subjects are brought together in topics. New work in different subjects begins by finding out what pupils already know and what they want to find out. Displays around the school celebrate and value pupils' efforts in all subjects. Pupils' achievement in art is particularly impressive. Drawing skills and the use of paint are developed systematically and pupils have many opportunities to develop their creativity.
- During the inspection, pupils were celebrating Science Week. Great enjoyment was had as visitors to the school brought science to life. Experiments which demonstrated the effect of gravity and chemical reactions created immense excitement and prompted great curiosity and much debate. Work in pupils' books reflects the strengths in teaching science.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders ensure that pupils share a clear understanding of what it means to be a successful learner. Pupils are encouraged to face challenges positively and develop resilience when they find things difficult. As a result, pupils become confident, hardworking, independent learners.
- Pupils of all ages are offered regular opportunities to debate challenging issues in a sensitive and age-appropriate manner. For example, children in Reception were deciding if Jack, of Jack and the Beanstalk fame, was right to take the giant's gold. At the other end of the school, Year 6 debated the issues surrounding the positives and negatives of the use of social media. Pupils are respectful of others' ideas, tolerant of differences and demonstrate an impressive level of empathy for others.
- The school's work to promote emotional well-being makes a strong contribution to pupils' overall health. The pastoral support provided is pivotal in ensuring that pupils and their families receive the support needed to maintain their emotional health.
- Pupils say they feel safe and that any concerns they have are dealt with swiftly. Each year, pupils nominate a member of staff to act as their 'buddy' who they can approach

if they have any worries. Parents are very happy with the care adults in the school give their children.

- Pupils and their parents are adamant that bullying is rare at the school. Leaders' records confirm this to be the case. Pupils are confident that any issues to do with bullying would be quickly resolved.
- Pupils are provided with a wide number of opportunities to develop important leadership skills. They relish the opportunity to help others in roles such as student councillor, play leader, reading buddy and anti-bullying ambassador. All those who take on responsible roles are fully trained so that they know exactly how they can help their fellow pupils.
- Pupils help leaders to check on the work of the school. For example, a group of Year 5 pupils carried out an 'inspection' of the school's work. They visited classrooms to look at learning and behaviour. They met with teachers and leaders to gather their 'evidence' and produced a helpful report of their suggestions about how the school could improve further for senior leaders and governors.
- Leaders help pupils to understand how they can manage risks they may face, for example within their local community or when using the internet. Recently, a group of pupils have worked with Merseyside Police to help motorists who park unsafely outside school understand the dangers this poses to pupils and their families.
- Pupils' views of how well they are doing are listened to carefully by staff. Individual interviews with their class teacher are held twice a year to allow pupils the time to reflect on how well they are doing and decide what they need to improve.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are very proud of their school and are appreciative of all that the staff do for them. Many refer to how they feel they 'belong' to Mersey Park, with one comment summing it up well by saying, 'We are like a family here.'
- Attitudes to learning are highly positive. Pupils are confident, self-assured learners. Pupils work hard and take a great pride in their work and its presentation. The quality of work in pupils' books is impressive and shows that they are rightly proud of their efforts. Pupils' topic books are particularly noteworthy.
- Pupils respond promptly to adults' instructions and pay careful attention in lessons. Disruptions to learning happen rarely. Pupils readily discuss ideas and share resources very sensibly when working on tasks together.
- Pupils show great respect for others. They are unfailingly kind and work and play happily together. The personal greetings between staff and pupils each morning epitomise the high-quality relationships between adults and pupils and get the day off to a great start.
- Leaders' actions have brought about improvements in attendance, particularly for those pupils who find it difficult to attend school regularly. As a result, attendance is now similar to the national average and the number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken effective action to improve rates of progress. As a result, pupils' achievement is outstanding. Pupils make excellent progress throughout key stage 2. The results of national assessments in 2018 showed that, at the end of Year 6, progress in reading, writing and mathematics was substantial compared to that of other pupils across the country. An above-average proportion of pupils reached the expected standard for their age in all subjects. Pupils were well prepared for their move to high school.
- Pupils in key stage 1 make excellent gains in learning from their different starting points. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics is improving year on year. In 2018, standards were higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils in Year 1 who meet the required standard in the phonics screening check is at least in line with the national average. This is because excellent teaching of phonics begins in the early years and is built on very well in Year 1. From a young age, pupils read with interest and enjoyment. As they move up the school, they make excellent progress and become fluent readers who develop a love of reading and read widely and often.
- The most able pupils are challenged very effectively. They make excellent progress and are working at levels above those expected for their age, particularly in mathematics, reading, grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Individual needs are carefully identified, and pupils are provided with excellent support through consistently effective teaching. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND make strong progress from their starting points and achieve very well.
- Evidence shows that pupils write imaginatively in a range of styles and present their work neatly. Pupils use their growing range of vocabulary maturely in their written work. Many show great confidence when applying their number skills to solve problems.
- Pupils' work, inspection evidence and information the school holds about the achievement of pupils show that pupils currently in the school are making strong progress in all subjects, including science, geography and history.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Leadership of early years is highly effective. The early years lead has a precise understanding of the many strengths of the provision, as well as what could be even better. Staff have high expectations of what children can achieve and there is a continual drive for improvement. The provision is outstanding as a result.
- A high proportion of children start school with skills below those typical for their age. Self-help and communication and language skills are often particularly weak when children start Nursery. High-quality teaching ensures that children make excellent gains

in their learning throughout their time in early years. They are well prepared for the Year 1 curriculum.

- Teaching is most effective. Adults skilfully plan activities that are engaging and appeal to children's interests. The curriculum is rich and varied and immerses children in experiences that stimulate their imagination. During the inspection, children were highly motivated by the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. Great levels of curiosity were evident, and much fun was had as Reception children planted beans and retold the story by acting out the roles of characters in the tale.
- Leaders have identified that many children enter Nursery and Reception needing to develop their communication and language skills. To address this, adults take every opportunity to develop children's speaking and listening skills. They are very skilled in talking to children and continually model good language and support children's language development. As a result, children make excellent progress in their acquisition of communication and language skills.
- Children learn and play very well together. They work collaboratively, sharing resources and readily take turns. Through highly effective modelling by adults, children develop social skills rapidly.
- Adults skilfully ask questions and very clearly demonstrate new ideas for children. They check regularly to ensure children understand what they are doing and move learning on quickly. No opportunity is missed, particularly in Reception, to extend children's understanding and skills.
- Excellent use is made of precise assessments to plan learning that builds on what children know, understand and can do. Leaders check children's progress closely and adapt learning to maximise their development in all areas of the curriculum. As a result, children make tremendous gains from their starting points.
- Clear routines, high expectations and warm relationships ensure that children's behaviour is exemplary. Children listen carefully to adults and respond quickly to instructions. They move sensibly and safely around the learning environment.
- The Reception classes are richly resourced and highly stimulating. Children develop great levels of curiosity and benefit from a wide range of opportunities to explore, investigate and apply what they have learned alongside an adult. Leaders are aware that the Nursery learning spaces are not as stimulating as the Reception classrooms. They lack the wealth of attractive and engaging resources as those in Reception.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the care provided for their children. They are made to feel very welcome and many share with staff the things that their children achieve at home.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 105042 |
| Local authority | Wirral |
| Inspection number | 10057954 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 454 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Val Maher |
| Headteacher | Margaret Thomas |
| Telephone number | 01516 478197 |
| Website | www.merseyparkprimary.co.uk/ |
| Email address | schooloffice@merseypark.wirral.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 26–27 February 2014 |

Information about this school

- The school is larger than most other primary schools.
- Children attend the Nursery part time or full time. Children attend the Reception classes full time. One pupil is dual registered with a local authority nurture base.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is more than double the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is high.
- A private provider located on the school site provides a before-and-after-school club. This provision is inspected separately by Ofsted.
- The headteacher provides advice and support for a number of other schools on behalf of the local authority.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. Learning was observed in all classes and when pupils learned in small groups. Inspectors made joint observations and reviewed pupils' books with the headteacher.
- Inspectors checked the safety of the school premises at different times of the school day. They observed arrangements for pupils' arrival at school.
- The inspectors talked with pupils informally as they played at breaktimes. They visited the dining hall at lunchtime and observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around the school. They met formally with four groups of pupils.
- Inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work and talked to them about it. They listened to pupils read and observed the teaching of reading skills.
- Inspectors held a number of meetings with the headteacher to consider her view of the school and the school's plan for improvement. Inspectors spoke with senior and middle leaders and met with subject leaders and other members of the school's staff.
- An inspector met with the chair of governors and three other governors.
- An inspector met with four members of the parent school partnership group.
- An inspector spoke by phone with a representative of the local authority and an external consultant who supports the school.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day. They took account of 29 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and four comments provided for inspectors. Inspectors also took account of 47 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 45 responses to the staff questionnaire, and of the school's most recent surveys of pupils' and parents' views.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents, including information about pupils' progress, the quality of teaching, school improvement plans and external views of the school. They reviewed the contents of the school's website and scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding completed by school staff.

Inspection team

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|----------------------------|------------------|
| Lyn Pender, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Tina Cleugh | Ofsted Inspector |
| Lynne Ryder | Ofsted Inspector |

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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