

Inspection of Merton Bank Primary School

Roper Street, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 1EJ

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their school. They told inspectors that they like the changes that the school has introduced, such as the new behaviour policy and 'reading nooks'. The school is a calm, inviting place where pupils feel valued.

Pupils behave well. They listen carefully to adults and to each other. Pupils celebrate the differences between people. They said that bullying and discrimination are not tolerated. If pupils face difficulties or they are upset, staff deal with their concerns effectively. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well and included in all aspects of school life.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of visits and other opportunities to enhance their learning of the curriculum. For example, parents and carers are invited to workshops alongside their children. Staff model the school values of 'respect, care, courage, resilience and empathy' very effectively. They know families well and ensure that pupils are happy at school. Parents reported that 'nothing is too much trouble' for staff.

The school is ambitious for its pupils. It has taken effective action to improve the standards that pupils reach, particularly in mathematics and English. Children in the early years get off to a solid start in reading. However, the wider curriculum is not designed carefully enough for pupils across the school to make sufficient progress. Some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Children learn phonics as soon as they begin in the Reception Year. Staff are well trained to deliver the phonics programme well. Pupils across the school, including those with SEND, use their phonics knowledge successfully to sound out unfamiliar words. The school checks pupils' progress in reading regularly and ensures that staff help pupils to keep up with the phonics programme.

Older pupils enjoy reading. However, some pupils do not consistently know the meanings of the words that they read. This is because, in some subjects, the school has not identified the key knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn. This hinders some pupils from fully accessing the wider curriculum and building on what they know already. It also means that some teachers are not clear about the knowledge that pupils need in readiness for subsequent learning.

In subjects where the curriculum is designed well, teachers typically deliver new knowledge with clarity. In these subjects, the school has effective systems in place to check how well pupils have remembered curriculum content. Staff use this information well to inform future teaching. As a result, pupils increasingly recall and apply what they have learned.

Children's language skills and sense of number develop well in the early years. For example, they told inspectors about their drawings of flowers and counted the stems and petals accurately. Children learn quickly how to hold a pencil and sit at a table correctly

when writing. However, insufficient rigour is given to ensuring that pupils learn how to form letters and numbers accurately in the early years and key stage 1. This means that some pupils struggle with written communication, including writing at length in key stage 2. It is too early to see the impact of the recently introduced handwriting policy on the quality of pupils' writing.

The school identifies the additional needs of pupils with SEND quickly and accurately. Pupils with SEND are supported well. However, these pupils are affected by the same weaknesses in the curriculum as their peers.

Pupils understand the school's values and fundamental British values clearly. They spoke with maturity about their knowledge of democracy and individual liberty. Pupils have an honest and tolerant approach to the differences between people, including religion and race. They spoke with passion about how school inspires them to be 'nothing less than their best'.

Pupils work diligently in lessons. In other activities, for example assemblies, they are attentive and contribute thoughtfully. Pupils show concern for the welfare of others. For instance, during breaktimes, pupil play leaders take responsibility for leading playground games in which everyone can join.

The school has put a range of strategies in place to improve pupils' rates of attendance. However, too many pupils remain persistently absent and miss school regularly. These pupils miss out on important learning and all that the school has to offer.

The school is aspirational for its pupils. Parents, carers, staff and governors spoke of the school's inspirational leadership, which has brought about many improvements to pupils' behaviour and to the quality of education that they receive.

The new governing body is working effectively with the school in order to identify what needs to improve further. As it implements its improvement priorities, the school carefully considers the impact on staff workload. New policies are introduced judiciously, so that staff are not overwhelmed by change. Governors monitor the well-being of staff carefully.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the school has not defined the knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn. Sometimes, this makes it harder for teachers to know what to teach, and in turn, this hinders some pupils from building a rich body of subject knowledge. The school should ensure that teachers are clear about the essential knowledge that pupils should learn so that they can support pupils to build on what they know already.

- The school has not ensured that pupils, including children in the early years, learn to form letters accurately and legibly. As a result, this slows some pupils' writing fluency as they move through the key stage 2 curriculum. The school should ensure that teachers are fully equipped to help children to form letters correctly.
- Too many pupils are absent from school too often. These pupils miss out on vital learning, and this hampers their achievement. The school should support these pupils and their families to improve their rates of attendance over time.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	104784
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10289866
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	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Sue Murphey MBE
Headteacher	Rebecca King
Website	www.mertonbank.st-helens.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 November 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher took up post in September 2023.
- A new chair of governors took up post in February 2024.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider for a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first graded inspection since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and information on the school's website.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading and English, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum documentation, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and to some pupils about their work. The inspector also looked at pupils' work and spoke with staff about the curriculum in other subjects.
- The lead inspector listened to a sample of pupils read.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other leaders and staff.
- Meetings were also held with members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. Inspectors also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. They spoke formally with groups of pupils as well as talking to pupils in lessons and around the school. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

Inspection team

Gill Jones, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Debbie Withey	Ofsted Inspector

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