

Mercenfeld Primary School

Oakfield Avenue, Markfield, LE67 9WG

Inspection dates 10–11 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Early years provision	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Most pupils make good progress at the school in developing reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their social skills and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They are proud of their school and enjoy learning there.
- Different group of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress.
- The quality of teaching is good and there are examples of outstanding teaching in the school, particularly in Years 5 and 6.
- The school is well led and managed and continues to improve. A comprehensive range of additional clubs and activities enhance pupils' learning and provide good breadth to the school's curriculum.
- Pupils behave well and come to school regularly. They are well cared for by staff and feel safe in school.
- Almost all parents and carers are very positive about the work of the school.
- Children in the early years make good gains in their learning. They learn in stimulating indoor and outdoor learning environments.
- School governors have an accurate overview of the school's performance. They effectively challenge leaders to continue to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement.
- Systems to keep pupils safe at the school are effective, and meet statutory requirements.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not yet consistently outstanding. Teachers do not always ask the most-able pupils challenging questions to make them think hard and accelerate their progress.
- Some pupils, particularly those in Key Stage 2, lack the confidence and skills to spell more complex words accurately.
- Leaders and managers do not always check rigorously enough whether actions to improve the school are making enough impact. School action plans lack strategies to help them to do this efficiently.
- Leaders of English and mathematics do not contribute to the improvement of the early years as well as they could do.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed children learning in each class across the school. Two observations of learning were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also checked work in children’s books and listened to pupils as they read from their reading books. They held formal interviews with two groups of pupils and spoke with a number of pupils informally at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors gathered the views of parents and carers through the analysis of 115 responses on Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also spoke to a number of parents and carers informally as they brought their children to school. Inspectors analysed responses on 21 staff questionnaires.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body and members of staff, including the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents including information about pupils’ achievement, records of their attendance and behaviour, documents relating to safeguarding and the school’s plans for improvement.

Inspection team

Jeremy Spencer, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Louise Minter

Additional Inspector

Rachel Garrett

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mercenfeld Primary School converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2013. When its predecessor school, also called Mercenfeld Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be satisfactory overall. Although this is an academy, leaders continue to refer to it as a school. It will be referred to as a school in this inspection report.
- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are from a White British background.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is lower than average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly average.
- Children begin the school, on a full-time basis, in the Reception Year. Prior to the current school year, pupils left the school at the end of Year 5. From the current school year onwards, pupils will leave the school at the end of Year 6. A number of pupils joined Key Stage 1 other than at the usual times during the course of the last school year.
- As there were no pupils in Year 6 in the 2013/14 school year, the school cannot be measured against the government's floor standards for primary schools.
- In September 2013, one classroom was completely destroyed and another suffered water damage as the result of a fire.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that:
 - the most-able pupils are asked more challenging questions by staff to make them think harder and accelerate their progress
 - more effective strategies are developed to improve the accuracy of pupils' spelling, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that leaders' improvement plans hold staff to account more effectively by:
 - stating who will be checking that actions are completed and who will be evaluating their impact on pupils' achievement
 - making closer reference to how leaders of English and mathematics will contribute to the development of the early years.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, well supported by his deputy headteacher and leadership team, has created a positive learning environment in which pupils feel safe and can thrive. A broad and exciting curriculum, with many visits, visitors and after-school clubs and activities, ensures that pupils enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic learners. The curriculum successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- School leaders have an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Plans for improvement focus on the right areas. However, the plans do not outline how actions will be checked to see if they have been completed and to evaluate their impact on raising pupils' achievement.
- Leaders have played a key role, in partnership with leaders in other schools, in devising plans for a new system to assess pupils' progress. The school's assessment system provides a clear overview of the achievement of different groups of pupils in each year group. It is well understood by staff and helps to ensure that most teaching is pitched at the right level for pupils.
- Subject leaders for English and mathematics (middle leaders in this school) make good use of their dedicated leadership time to help improve the quality of teaching. For example, the leader for English identified that some staff lacked confidence in teaching grammar skills to pupils. He addressed this through additional training, which was well received by staff. Teachers were observed teaching grammatical skills effectively during the inspection. However, the leaders of English and mathematics acknowledge that they could do more to use their knowledge and skills to contribute to the development of the early years. This part of the school does not feature on their improvement plans currently.
- The leader with responsibility for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has highly effective systems in place to track the progress of individual pupils, and uses the information skilfully to devise bespoke programmes of intervention and support. Programmes of intervention, often led by teaching assistants, make a positive impact. As a result, these pupils make good, and often very good, progress from their starting points.
- Leaders use performance management systems effectively to help improve the quality of teaching. Leaders make regular and effective checks on the quality of teaching. Information from their observations of teaching is used to help set performance management targets for staff, alongside a range of other appropriate evidence. Teachers are rewarded for their good performance, and development targets are set for them in line with the school's priorities and the national Teachers' Standards. Newly qualified teachers receive good support from more experienced members of staff.
- Additional funds from the pupil premium are used effectively to ensure that disadvantaged children receive access to teaching in smaller groups when they need extra help or support. This helps to accelerate their progress in developing reading, writing and mathematical skills. School leaders check on the achievement of these pupils to ensure that their progress at least matches that of other pupils. Leaders successfully ensure that there is equality of opportunity for pupils. They also successfully foster good relations and tackle discrimination. This supports pupils' good behaviour and their positive attitudes to learning.
- A very well-stocked trophy cabinet in the school's main entrance area demonstrates that the national primary physical education and sport funding is making a strong impact on pupils' achievement. Many of the trophies are very recent and include district winner trophies for football, cross-country running and hockey. The increased use of expert coaches, together with a wider range of clubs on offer, have enabled more pupils to access sporting opportunities and to participate in competitive fixtures. The funding has also helped to improve equality of opportunities for pupils. For example, a girls' football team has recently been established.
- Pupils are well prepared to live life in modern Britain. They have a strong respect for democracy. For example, pupils told inspectors that it was 'really important that everybody should have a say' when

making decisions. Pupils also have a good understanding of, and tolerance for, others from different cultures, despite reporting to inspectors that they have few opportunities to engage with others from different backgrounds.

- Parents and carers are very supportive of the work of the school. Many parents reported to inspectors that leaders communicate with them very effectively through letters and the school's website. One parent commented, 'I wouldn't change anything here, I am happy with everything.' A number of other parents and carers made similar comments.
- Arrangements to keep pupils safe are effective. Leaders and governors ensure that all of the government's statutory safeguarding requirements are met. Procedures to recruit members of staff who are suitable to work with children are robust and the school's single central record of staff suitability checks is completed in line with requirements.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governance of the school is effective. Governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They make frequent visits to the school to see how it is operating, have a good understanding of data on the school's performance and are determined to help the school to improve. However, governors' monitoring and evaluation of the school's work is not as rigorous as it could be because leaders' action plans do not define which governor will check which aspect of the school's work, and when and how they will do it.
- Governors have an accurate overview of the quality of teaching in the school and ensure that performance management systems hold teachers and leaders to account for their work. They understand how teachers' progression on the pay scale is dependent upon successful outcomes for pupils and on the quality of teaching.
- Governors make sure that the school's finances are managed effectively. They know how extra funds, for example those from the pupil premium, are spent and the impact this has on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Governors also challenge the school's leaders effectively. For example, they have asked for an even more detailed breakdown about how pupil premium spending is being used at individual pupil level.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Almost all parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, or who spoke with inspectors during the inspection, believe that the school ensures its pupils are well behaved. Inspectors agree. Pupils were observed behaving well in classrooms and in different areas of the school. They told inspectors that this was typical at Mercenfeld. As a result of pupils' good behaviour, teaching is very rarely interrupted and teachers are able to focus their attention fully on supporting pupils' learning.
- Most pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They listen attentively to others during lessons, respect the views of others, and show the confidence and enthusiasm to contribute their own ideas to discussions. 'What do you think about my opening paragraph?' a Year 6 pupil asked of her friend during a lesson observed by an inspector. 'Is it good enough? Does it really hook you and make you want to read more?' The warm, friendly and constructive discussion that followed this was indicative of pupils' well-developed social skills and positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils enjoy taking on a range of responsibilities to support the school. For example, during break times older pupils enthusiastically sell fruit and drinks to other pupils to help raise funds for school trips and activities. A school pupil council is also active and pupils have worked together to raise funds for a number of charities.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. All pupils spoken to during the inspection told inspectors that they feel safe in school. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of what constitutes bullying and the different types of bullying. Discussions with pupils and school records indicate that

bullying is not an issue in the school. Pupils report that, on very rare occasions, they witness some name calling. However, they say that staff resolve any of these incidents very quickly.

- Pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of fire safety awareness. Pupils also demonstrate a good understanding of other risks to their safety, including road safety awareness. Pupils in Key Stage 2 have a very good understanding of e-safety and how to stay safe when using the internet. The school's leaders have recognised that pupils in Key Stage 1 have a less secure understanding of e-safety and are addressing this.
- Pupils are punctual to school. Their attendance has been consistently above average in recent years and continues to be so. This is reflective of their positive attitudes to learning and school life.
- School leaders ensure that suitable background checks are made on new members of staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. They also work effectively with other professional agencies and the local authority when required to share information to help keep pupils safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers ensure that lessons are well planned to meet the different needs and abilities of pupils in their class. Pupils who find learning more difficult are given effective extra support. The most-able pupils are usually moved on to more difficult work quickly, if they are ready. This approach helps to ensure that almost all children make good progress in their learning in reading, writing and mathematics. Some teaching in the school is better than good and is outstanding, particularly in Years 5 and 6.
- Teachers question pupils' knowledge and understanding carefully by asking them frequent questions. However, on some occasions they do not ask questions of the most-able pupils which really make them think hard and help them to make outstanding progress.
- Teaching assistants support pupils' learning skilfully. They observe pupils carefully in lessons, use their initiative well, and help to clarify pupils' understanding if required. They also give pupils sufficient space to think and learn for themselves without intervening too early. This helps to build pupils' confidence.
- Teachers' marking is helpful to pupils and identifies what they have done well and how they can improve their work. Pupils respond to their teachers' comments and also make comments in their books to express their own views on they have performed. This shows that pupils are engaged and interested in learning, and are trying hard to achieve as well as they can do.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' effort, presentation of work and behaviour. They foster good working relationships with pupils. Almost all pupils respond to their teacher's high expectations.
- Staff ensure that classrooms are bright and stimulating places to be in. Displays on classroom walls and in corridors show examples of high quality pieces of work. They also provide reminders to pupils about how to produce work of high quality.
- An overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire believe that their child is well taught at the school.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress across Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. This is confirmed by school data and inspectors' checks of work in pupils' books. Consequently, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Almost all (99%) of parents and carers who responded to Parent View believe that their child makes good progress at the school.
- Different groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and pupils supported through the pupil premium, currently make the same good progress as other pupils. Staff

maintain detailed records about individual pupils in both of these groups. If they begin to fall behind in their learning, they receive additional support to help them to catch up. Inspectors saw evidence in pupils' books to show that the additional support they receive is effective. The very small number of pupils supported through the pupil premium in each year group is small; inspection evidence confirms the school's view that the gaps in attainment and progress between these and other pupils are closing.

- Pupils make good progress in developing their early reading skills. This has improved significantly during the current academic year. Pupils now work in smaller groups and learning is pitched at just the right level for them. In the past, there is evidence that some pupils did not make as much progress as they should do in developing skills in phonics (the sounds that letters make). As a result, the proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 1 in 2014 was slightly below the national figure. Results in the phonics check and end of Key Stage 1 assessments in 2014 were depressed by the arrival of a number of children to the school late in the academic year, working at lower levels.
- In Key Stage 2, pupils make good progress, particularly during Year 5 and in the newly formed Year 6 classes. They read confidently and often demonstrate writing skills above the level expected for their age. The school has worked hard to improve the quality of pupils' handwriting since the last inspection and staff regularly assess pupils' progress in this area. The hard work has paid off and almost all pupils quite rightly take great pride in the quality of their handwriting. However, some pupils, particularly in lower Key Stage 2, lack the skills and confidence to spell more complex words accurately. The school has implemented some strategies to help them to improve and to develop confidence. However, there are some inconsistencies between classes in the ways in which these strategies are implemented.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils demonstrate good problem-solving skills in mathematics. Their efficiency in solving mathematical problems is underpinned by a confidence to recall number facts rapidly and to calculate numbers mentally. This represents good progress from their starting points at the school.
- Teachers and other staff successfully ensure that the most-able pupils make good progress. For example, a group of pupils in Year 6 is taught separately by the headteacher, which is helping them to make good progress towards reaching Level 6 in mathematics (a level well above their chronological age). The proportion of pupils who attained the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key Stage 1 in 2014 was broadly average. This represented good progress from their different starting points.
- Work in pupils' books and observations of pupils' learning during the inspection indicate that they make good progress in other areas of the curriculum. For example, in a physical education lesson in Key Stage 2, boys and girls demonstrated excellent skills in executing overarm bowling techniques in cricket. Pupils are also given frequent opportunities to write at length in different subjects. This provides them with valuable opportunities to help reinforce their writing skills.

The early years provision

is good

- Children get off to a good start in the school's Reception classes. Children join the school from a number of different settings and providers. Children typically begin the year with skills in reading, writing and counting that are below their skills in other areas of learning. Most children make good progress from their different starting points. The proportion of children who end the early years with the expected skills in key areas of learning is broadly average and is improving. As a result, children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Staff understand the different needs of children well because they check their learning frequently and effectively. Staff have also developed good working relationships with parents and carers, which helps to build up a detailed understanding about what children can do away from the school environment. Staff use this combined knowledge effectively to plan teaching which enthuses children, is pitched at the right level for them, and makes good use of both indoor and outdoor learning areas.
- Children behave well in lessons and develop positive relationships with each other. Adults act as strong and positive role models for children and have taken care to establish day-to-day routines which help children to feel secure.

- Leaders ensure that children are well supervised and safe. They have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the early years in the school. However, this understanding does not always translate into clear and comprehensive action plans. As a result, other members of staff, including representatives of the governing body and English and mathematics leaders, do not have a clear overview of how they can make the most of their expertise to support the development of the early years.

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	139441
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	449921

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	310
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqui Williams
Headteacher	Andrew Kitchen
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01530 243 151
Fax number	01530 245 708
Email address	ad.min@mercenfeld.leics.sch.uk

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