

Mercenfeld Primary School

Oakfield Avenue, Markfield, Leicestershire LE67 9WG

Inspection dates

24–25 October 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders and governors have not taken effective action to reverse the decline in standards since the last inspection.
- Leaders have not used the additional funds made available to raise standards for disadvantaged pupils effectively.
- Senior leaders have not ensured that subject leadership is consistently strong. The curriculum does not prepare pupils well enough for the next phase of their education.
- Leaders do not have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Their judgements are too generous.
- Teachers' expectations of the standard and presentation of pupils' work are too low.
- Teachers do not consistently use assessment to ensure that learning tasks are well matched to pupils' abilities.
- Occasionally, pupils' behaviour lapses and there are instances of low-level disruption in lessons.
- Standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2 have been below the national averages for at least three years.
- Pupils' progress in writing by the end of key stage 2 has been below the national average for at least three years.

The school has the following strengths

- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils, parents and carers, and staff agree that there is a culture of care throughout the school.
- The newly formed governing body is quickly improving its understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- In 2018, an increased proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1.
- The proportion of children in early years who have gained a good level of development has risen steadily for the past four years as a result of improved teaching in this key stage.
- Pupils benefit from the well-equipped outdoor areas in key stages 1 and 2. They enjoy roles such as those of garden rangers.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of leadership and management to secure sustained improvement, by ensuring that:
 - senior and subject leaders carry out thorough and regular checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including the consistent application of school policies such as on teachers' feedback to pupils
 - senior and subject leaders use the outcomes of their checks to hold teachers to account for pupils' progress and attainment
 - the curriculum is well planned and taught in all key stages, and enables pupils to be fully prepared for the next phase of their education
 - subject leaders are consistently effective across all areas of the curriculum
 - pupils receive effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and that they have a secure understanding of British values
 - standards for disadvantaged pupils rapidly increase through senior leaders and governors establishing clear and precisely targeted plans for spending the additional pupil premium funding.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that pupils attain more highly and make strong progress, by ensuring that teachers:
 - use accurate assessments to set work that is consistently well matched to pupils' abilities
 - have consistently high expectations of the quality of pupils' work and insist on high standards of presentation.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by eradicating instances of low-level disruption in lessons.
- Urgently improve outcomes for pupils in key stages 1 and 2, especially in writing, including for pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Improve the quality of teaching and resources in early years, ensuring that the outdoor learning area effectively supports children's development across all areas of learning.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management should be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders and governors have failed to take effective action to reverse the school's decline since the last inspection. They have not ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been consistently good.
- Leaders do not have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This is because their checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are not thorough or accurate. Leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching are too generous and are not in line with the school's assessment information or the work seen in pupils' books.
- During the previous academic year, there was an unusually high degree of temporary staff absences, including at senior leadership level. Governors did not ensure that the leadership and staffing of the school were sufficiently strong during that period. This had a destabilising effect on the school and has contributed to its decline.
- Leaders have not used the additional funds made available by the government to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils effectively. Leaders do not precisely analyse the impact of previous actions. They do not use what they have learned to establish sharply targeted plans for the year ahead. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 is, typically, well below that of other pupils nationally and their peers in school.
- Middle leadership is not consistently strong. Senior leaders have not ensured that arrangements are in place for subject leaders to carry out the necessary checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, the curriculum is not consistently well planned or taught to ensure that pupils develop an appropriate range of knowledge and skills across a range of subjects.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils receive effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, or that pupils understand British values. Pupils have few opportunities to understand and celebrate cultural diversity. Pupils' appreciation of the arts and other cultural activities is not well promoted.
- The newly appointed leaders for English and mathematics are increasingly effective. They have strong subject knowledge and have used the outcomes of their training to establish appropriate plans for improvement.
- Leaders have taken action to improve pupils' outcomes in mathematics by introducing a new curriculum for this subject. There are early signs that the new curriculum is leading to improved teaching in mathematics.
- Leaders have recently introduced a system for monitoring pupils' behaviour more closely at lunchtime, to assist the mid-day staff in their duties. Behaviour at lunchtime has improved as a result of these changes.
- Recent leadership changes have ensured that there is an improved system in place for assessing the needs of pupils with SEND. The special educational needs coordinator liaises effectively with teachers to plan appropriate support. The improved targeting of additional support has had a positive impact on progress in reading and mathematics

for this group of pupils.

- Leaders have ensured that the primary school physical education and sport funding is used effectively to promote pupils' physical fitness, health and well-being.

Governance of the school

- Until recently, the governing body did not fulfil its statutory duties in holding leaders to account for the school's performance. Governors did not take effective action to ensure that the school maintained a good quality of education over time.
- During the 2017/18 academic year, the governing body underwent significant changes. These changes have resulted in governors' increased capacity to ensure school improvement.
- A thorough audit and recruitment process has ensured that governors have the appropriate knowledge and skills to undertake their role effectively. The joint chairs of governors have taken decisive steps to understand the life of the school. As a result, they have ensured that governors have an increasingly realistic overview of its strengths and weaknesses.
- Governors have sought appropriate external advice and support regarding their roles. They are well placed to hold leaders to account and to put in place the necessary measures required to promote rapid improvement. For this reason, an external review of governance is not recommended.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have made sure that all the necessary checks are in place, in line with statutory requirements.
- Pupils, parents and staff agree that the school provides a safe place to learn. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe at the school and have confidence in staff to care for them well. Pupils showed good understanding of the different types of bullying, including cyber bullying, and what to do if they have any concerns.
- Leaders have made sure that staff training is up to date and comprehensive.
- Leaders responsible for safeguarding have established a thorough procedure for making sure that any welfare concerns are handled promptly and appropriately, involving outside agencies where necessary. Staff who spoke with inspectors were confident in their knowledge of how to report concerns and deal with sensitive disclosures from pupils. There is a strong culture of care and concern for pupils' welfare throughout the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent. Teachers' use of assessment is not effective in enabling them to plan activities that accurately match pupils' needs and abilities. For example, too often, less able pupils struggle to complete work that is too hard for them, whereas other pupils are not sufficiently challenged in

their thinking.

- Teachers do not plan activities that are meaningful to pupils. On too many occasions, teaching fails to make relevant links to pupils' prior learning and experience. Consequently, pupils often do not understand the tasks given and become disengaged.
- Teachers' expectations for the standard of work in pupils' books are not high enough. In particular, the standard of work in pupils' writing books in Years 2, 3, 4 and 5 is often below that which is expected for their age. Standards of presentation, including handwriting, are too variable across the school.
- Teachers do not give feedback to pupils that is consistently effective in helping them understand how to improve their work. For example, teachers do not encourage pupils to use the personal targets that have been set as a focus for their learning.
- The new curriculum for mathematics is leading to improved teaching of this subject. For example, in Year 5, a carefully planned sequence of learning allowed pupils to build their knowledge and skills effectively. There are more opportunities for pupils to practise problem solving and explain their answers. However, these improvements are not consistent across all classes.
- Staff have accurate subject knowledge of phonics and teach early reading skills effectively. Consequently, pupils in Years 1 and 2 read with confidence. An increased proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1, in 2018. However, some pupils in Year 2 still struggle to apply accurate knowledge of phonics in their writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently good and this has a negative impact on their progress. Occasionally, they do not concentrate on their work, disregard the teachers' instructions or disturb the learning of others. When this happens, it is a result of learning tasks that are not well matched to pupils' needs and abilities.
- The work in some books is not consistently well presented and this denotes pupils' lack of pride in their work.
- Pupils speak warmly about their school. Those who spoke with the lead inspector were keen to describe how 'the teachers make learning fun and adventurous'. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about a range of subjects, saying that they especially enjoy physical education, art, computing, and design technology lessons.
- Pupils stated clearly that they feel safe at school and that they have confidence in the staff to provide good care and keep them safe. Staff, and parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, agreed that the school is a safe place.
- The school's spacious outdoor areas for use by pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are well equipped with a wide range of resources to promote pupils' social and physical development. There is ample space for vigorous activity or quiet reflection. Pupils are

justifiably proud of how they help to run the school's large garden, where they act as garden rangers to grow and harvest a wide range of produce, both fruit and vegetables.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that, sometimes, the behaviour of others disturbs their lessons. Pupils also said that lunchtime and playtime behaviour is occasionally too rough.
- Pupils generally move around the school in an orderly manner, with very occasional lapses when they fail to show the appropriate respect to an adult, or to each other.
- In discussion with inspectors, pupils showed that they understand the importance of the school rules. They also showed a good awareness of what constitutes bullying and they know what to do if it occurs. Pupils say that instances of bullying are not common, and school records confirm this.
- There is a small proportion of pupils who display more challenging behaviours. Leaders have ensured that such pupils are supported appropriately and there have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions over time.
- Rates of attendance and persistent absence are typically in line with national averages. Leaders are aware of the small proportion of pupils who are persistently absent and liaise with parents and carers to promote improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Outcomes for pupils in key stages 1 and 2 have declined since the last inspection. Rates of progress in writing by the end of key stage 2 have been below the national average for at least three years. The provisional results for 2018 suggest that rates of progress in reading by the end of key stage 2 have declined from the previous year.
- Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been below the national average for at least three years, in both key stages 1 and 2. This means that pupils in Years 2 and 6 are not well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The school's internal assessment information shows that, in all year groups, not enough pupils reached age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of the last academic year. In writing and mathematics, fewer than half of the pupils in each year group began the current academic year achieving in line with age-related expectations. This was confirmed during the inspection by the quality of what was seen in pupils' work and the impact of teaching on pupils' learning in lessons.
- Pupils with SEND do not make adequate progress from their starting points in writing. They make better progress in reading and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils' rates of progress and standards of attainment are typically below those of other pupils nationally, and below those of their peers in school, in reading, writing and mathematics. The provisional 2018 results suggest that no disadvantaged pupil attained at the expected or higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

at the end of key stage 2.

- In 2018, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 increased to above the national average.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Children enter early years at a stage in their development that is broadly typical for their age. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development has risen steadily over the past four years, as a result of improving teaching in this key stage, but remains below the national average.
- Learning in the outdoor area is not as well planned as in the indoor area. Some of the resources and equipment is 'tired' and uninviting and some of the outdoor activities lack a sense of purpose.
- During the last academic year, changes were made to the early years curriculum and to the way in which staff assess children's progress. This contributed to improved outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics. Children were better prepared for the demands of Year 1. However, less able children did not make as much progress as their peers in writing.
- The early years leader and her team know the children very well. Their accurate early assessments enable them to adapt the curriculum according to the stages of development of groups of children.
- Adults work effectively with individuals and small groups of children. Their gentle but probing questioning enables children to complete learning tasks and persevere with activities they may find challenging. For example, several children were observed being well supported to spell and write simple three-letter words accurately.
- Staff liaise often, and to good effect, with parents and carers. Children are introduced to the school by means of home visits and a structured programme of initial 'taster' sessions. As a result, they settle quickly and make a good start to their learning.
- Safeguarding in early years is effective. The area is secure and staff training is thorough and up to date. Children are well cared for across the provision.

School details

Unique reference number	139441
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	10053354

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	330
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Joint Chairs	Anna Shutt and Sally Collins
Headteacher	Joanna Shephard
Telephone number	01530 243151
Website	www.mercenfeld.com
Email address	admin@mercenfeld.com
Date of previous inspection	10–11 March 2015

Information about this school

- Mercenfeld Primary School is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Since 1 September 2018, a new class structure has been in place. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are taught in three, parallel, mixed-age classes. Similarly, pupils in Years 4 and 5 are taught in three, parallel, mixed-age classes. Pupils in other year groups are taught in single-age classes.
- The school converted to academy status on 1 April 2013, in a stand-alone capacity. The governing body has sole responsibility for the governance of the school.
- During the 2017/18 academic year, there were significant changes in staffing. Four members of staff, including the headteacher, were temporarily absent from the school. The deputy headteacher was appointed as acting headteacher, in the absence of the substantive headteacher, for the whole academic year.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are of White British heritage is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 26 lessons or part lessons, some jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at work across an extensive range of pupils' books and considered the school's assessment information on the progress and standards achieved by current pupils.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and talked with them about their reading.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and leaders with responsibility for English, mathematics, history, science, early years and pupils with SEND. Inspectors met with those responsible for attendance, behaviour, bullying and exclusions, disadvantaged pupils and the physical education and sport premium. They also met with other teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with the joint chairs of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with parents at the start of the school day. The lead inspector considered the 63 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the responses to the online staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation, including the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation summary, minutes of meetings of the governing body, attendance records, behaviour and bullying logs, external reports on the work of the school, monitoring and evaluation records, and a range of documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Christine Watkins, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anne White	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Varnam	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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