



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Merton Court School

November 2022

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School's Details

School	Merton Court School			
DfE number	303/6053			
Address	38 Knoll Road Sidcup Kent DA124 4QU			
Telephone number	020 83002112			
Email address	office@mertoncourtprep.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Dominic Price			
Proprietor	Mr Dominic Price			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	304			
	EYFS	75	Juniors	229
Inspection dates	29 November to 1 December 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Merton Court School is an independent co-educational day school, founded in 1899 and situated on the edge of Sidcup. The school comprises the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged 3 to 5 years, juniors for pupils aged 5 to 7 years and seniors for pupils aged 8 to 11 years. The school is run by the proprietor who is supported by an advisory board.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school seeks to inspire a passion for learning through excellent teaching and outstanding personal achievement. It looks to create a family ethos environment of warmth, trust and friendliness. It aims to give each pupil the best start to their life story. The school aims to develop children with clear opinions and a 'go for it' attitude, ready to take their place as global citizens.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from within a five mile radius and a range of backgrounds reflecting the local population. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 11 pupils as having special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include physical, sensory and speech and language difficulties. Nine pupils receive additional support. No pupils have an educational, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for ten pupils who receive additional help in small groups or one to one activities. Data used by the school identifies the most able pupils in the school's population. Their needs are met within the curriculum and through the provision of extra-curricular activities.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 National Curriculum tests in the years 2021 to 2022 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
J1	Reception
J2 – J3	Key Stage 1 (Years 1 – 2)
S1 – S4	Key Stage 2 (Years 3 – 6)

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils are excellent communicators who speak articulately, confidently and informatively about their learning.
- Pupils make excellent progress over time and achieve high standards in their academic studies, particularly in mathematics, English and science.
- Pupils display excellent attitudes to learning from an early age; their ability to work independently and collaboratively is outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy high levels of success across a variety of competitions within the school and at regional and national levels.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils' levels of moral understanding are extremely high. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and know how their behaviour affects others.
- Pupils develop high levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline and resilience.
- Pupils have excellent social skills; they show extremely high levels of self-awareness and a strong sense of belonging.
- Pupils' understanding of how to stay safe and how to maintain good health in all its forms is highly developed.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Enable all pupils to make the best possible progress by ensuring that effective feedback is provided in all subjects and year groups in line with the school's stated policy.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils' communication skills are excellent. They speak articulately and confidently, respond to complex instructions well and listen to others respectfully. This was evident when Year 5 pupils explained the features of narrative writing and what they must include. In the Early Years children listened carefully to the Christmas story, absorbed new vocabulary and compared confidently methods of travel between then and now. Children in Reception successfully communicate words linked with the sounds of the day. Older pupils read for enjoyment at advanced levels and are adept at sourcing information. They write imaginatively, with high levels of creativity in creative writing lessons and produce accurate and informative work when recording experiment results. Pupils display wide ranging, advanced vocabulary and use it in context, such as when naming the bones of the human skeleton in a Year 3 science lesson. Year 1 pupils retold the story of the gingerbread man using a wide range of adjectives and asking questions to reinforce their understanding about the use of commas. Year 6 pupils were highly competent and expressive when discussing various scenarios regarding borrowing versus stealing.
- 3.6 Pupils' progress and achievement over time are excellent, as evidenced in the results achieved in Key Stage 2 tests and senior school entrance examinations. In the pre-inspection questionnaire the overwhelming majority of parents agreed that teaching enables their children to develop skills for the future and all pupils who responded agreed that teachers help them to learn and make progress. Pupils use the advice given by their teachers methodically; however, inspectors found that in some cases, feedback was not sufficiently detailed to enable pupils to make the best progress possible. Pupils thrive on aspirational challenges and move rapidly through demanding tasks in lessons where challenges are matched appropriately to their individual capabilities. This was seen in a very successful Year 5 English lesson where pupils empathised with fictional characters by explaining how they felt and reacting to events in their lives. Pupils make excellent progress throughout the school, supported by effective systems for tracking attainment and individualised support and extension activities. Those with SEND or EAL make excellent progress as they are extremely well-supported by highly experienced specialist help. The excellent progress made by the pupils is in accordance with the school's stated aims to inspire passion for learning through excellent teaching.
- 3.7 Pupils' attitudes towards learning, including their ability to demonstrate initiative and independence are excellent. They are engaged and willing to learn, and enthusiastic about taking leadership in their learning. This was seen in a Year 3 Spanish lesson where pupils used new vocabulary and shared it with others using only the target language. Pupils excel when given the freedom to work things out for themselves. This was observed in a mathematics lesson where Year 4 pupils volunteered their own solutions to co-ordinate problems posed by the teacher. They collaborate well and are highly co-operative learners who seek help from their peers and adults with confidence. This was seen in a Year 3 science lesson where pupils worked in pairs, to calculate the ratio between two body measurements. They display extremely high levels of perseverance and commitment in lessons and use initiative to independently progress their own learning from an early age. Year 5 pupils developed practice drills for others to copy and improve their own skills and demonstrated these confidently to others in a games lesson.
- 3.8 Pupils achieve at high levels in all aspects of school life and enjoy their numerous successes. They have a healthy level of competitiveness and are aspirational in their achievements. They enjoy wide-ranging success in sports and teams compete in all the major sports against local schools. In the local music festival junior and senior choirs have won their respective age groups. In the Primary Mathematics challenge the school has been very successful and reached the national final. This success comes from the learning skills for life programme as pupils are encouraged to follow their passions. Pupils of all abilities perform with confidence and are highly successful in performing in public, as seen during the performance of the Christmas play by the youngest pupils. Scholarship success is enjoyed by a large number of pupils in a wide range of subjects. In interview, pupils spoke positively about the range of

activities available for them to enjoy and extend their skills in the extensive extra-curricular programme. Pupils' excellent academic and extra-curricular achievements owe much to the proprietor's provision of excellent, much-appreciated facilities which offer plentiful opportunities for pupils to develop their talents.

- 3.9 Pupils attain highly in mathematics, English and science by the time they reach the top of the school. The youngest children acquire new skills and understanding at a significantly rapid rate. Pupils in Year 1 exhibited excellent knowledge of habitats within the outdoor learning environment and listed the things needed to build a natural habitat. Pupils show an excellent understanding of historical topics and write informatively about people associated with them, such as in Year 2's letters from Florence Nightingale explaining why she went to the Crimea. An air of eager diligence pervades the school which helps pupils acquire and consolidate new information and techniques. This was evident when Year 4 pupils demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of how electrical circuits work when considering how to create a fair test exploring conductivity.
- 3.10 Pupils attain excellent results in mathematics, making rapid progress in response to the school's effective mathematics curriculum and tracking system. Pupils' understanding of number is excellent by the time they are in Year 6, when they calculate percentages and add and subtract fractions and decimals confidently. Pupils constantly challenge themselves and extend their understanding through discussions and are encouraged to do so. When exploring co-ordinates, Year 4 pupils confidently explained the different elements which needed to be included and discussed the labelling and numbering of axis with excellent reasoning. They have a clear embedded understanding of mathematical conventions and accurately plotted negative numbers in 4 quadrants. The scrutiny of pupils' work and lesson observations by inspectors showed that pupils transfer their skills effectively to other areas in the curriculum. This was seen in a Year 3 science lesson where pupils used various measuring devices competently for different purposes. They understood the different units of measurement and recorded them accurately.
- 3.11 Throughout the school pupils have an excellent, well-developed range of study skills which they use to great effect from an early age. Children in the EYFS are focused and attentive, and confidently choose from a range of activities. In a Year 5 Design Technology lesson pupils hypothesised accurately about the effects of yeast when making bread. Pupils love learning and benefit greatly from the Habits of Mind programme implemented effectively across the school. Pupils work conscientiously, displaying determination and resilience. In a Year 5 English lesson pupils worked together to analyse characters and to devise their own success criteria for their creative writing. They have excellent research skills as seen in the work produced independently on Tudor explorers. Pupils benefit from the excellent use of the next steps in teachers' marking when they are used and followed up. Pupils are not afraid to make mistakes and see this as part of the learning process.
- 3.12 Pupils' understanding of the uses of information and communication (ICT) and the application of their computing skills are excellent. Pupils' ICT skills develop at a rapid rate so that they become highly competent in their use of portable devices and use them to good effect for research and homework. This was evident in Year 4 pupils' use of data loggers, electric thermometers and cameras during their work on the three states of matter. They are competent and confident in their use of software as seen in their podcasts and key ring designs for printing on the 3D printer. Year 6 pupils used their skills effectively to develop an online safety programme using animation and their own voices for the characters as part of a relationships education activity. Pupils are experienced and very able users of the online learning platforms they access in order to further their learning in other subjects.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline are excellent. Pupils demonstrate high levels of perseverance and resilience, and they respond to challenges with

commitment and enthusiasm. Pupils in Year 3 demonstrated excellent resilience when working through challenging fraction problems relative to their ability. Pupils throughout the school show high levels of self-understanding, readily explaining what they are good at and what they need to work at to improve. Pupils apply their confidence in a disciplined manner, as seen in the Christmas production where the narrators spoke articulately and with an awareness of their audience. Pupils are confident in their self-belief. In design and technology (DT), for example, they followed their original plans rather than being influenced by other pupils. The leadership of the school is most effective in creating the space and the time for pupils to develop excellent personal skills and self-awareness. Pupils exhibit high levels of perseverance and can discuss ways in which they can modify their work. In a Year 6 relationships and health education (RHE) lesson pupils worked confidently to respond to questions posed, sharing their thoughts and ideas to improve everyone's understanding.

- 3.15 Pupils' levels of moral understanding are extremely high in response to the high expectations of staff and effective classroom management techniques. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and know how their behaviour affects others. They speak emphatically about there being no bullying or bad behaviour at a serious level. Pupils respond well when the behaviour policy is implemented in class and understand the consequences of their behaviour. Pupils are respectful of the school's 'Habits of Mind' and express them eloquently when discussing those that affect their behaviour such as kindness, patience and respect. Children in the EYFS understand the importance of good manners, and older pupils behave in a considerate manner in lessons, allowing others to learn to their potential. In their questionnaire responses almost all parents and all pupils agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Inspection evidence supports this view.
- 3.16 Pupils' social development and ability to collaborate are excellent. A real sense of community is evident, and relationships are strong with serious thought and humour in equal measure. Pupils are socially aware of other people's feelings and work well together to achieve common goals. They solve problems and grow in confidence when contributing ideas and working together. This was seen when upper school prefects helped younger children in a range of activities, interacting well and eliciting positive responses. High quality relationships exist amongst all children from the earliest age. Those in the EYFS are aware of each other's needs, taking turns and working productively together, as seen in a religious education (RE) lesson where they shared resources and ideas well. Pupils in Year 3 worked effectively together to summarise how animals may feel when faced with deforestation, listening carefully to each other effectively as well as giving their own opinions. In a Year 5 DT lesson pupils shared entertaining ideas with each other and the teacher. There is clear evidence in pupils' books that they relish opportunities for group work and the chance to discuss and respond to a variety of challenges.
- 3.17 Pupils are determined to stay safe and healthy and exhibit excellent knowledge about what this means. During discussions with inspectors, pupils spoke about being well-equipped to make good life choices, including what to look for in a good friend and the importance of exercise and a balanced diet. Pupils in Year 5 showed excellent awareness of food allergies when designing bread. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that they understand how to stay safe online, and inspection evidence supports this view. Pupils know how to make wise decisions about online safety and make positive choices to lead happy and safe lives. Pupils understand the importance of good mental health and know how this affects theirs and other people's lives. They value the support and help of the mental health champions. Pupils spoke eloquently about feeling safe and their confidence that staff will always be available to help them if needed.
- 3.18 Pupils' respect for other members of the school community is excellent. There is an embedded ethos that encourages the acceptance and tolerance of all people. The culture of inclusivity permeates the school and is reflected in the pupils' deep-seated acceptance and appreciation of everyone. Pupils show high levels of tolerance and sensitivity to those from different faiths or cultural backgrounds and talk openly about respecting difference. Pupils know that differences are something to be celebrated and applauded. They speak emphatically about everyone being valued for who they are. An

overwhelming majority of parents, who responded to the questionnaire acknowledged that the school encourages pupils to respect other people and that the school promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of others.

- 3.19 Pupils are extremely clear about the meaning and the expression of spirituality, showing an excellent understanding of the associated vocabulary. Pupils showed a deep appreciation of non-material aspects of life such as friendship and the beauty of nature and music when responding to the question of what is important in life. They have a well-developed sense of reflection and quiet thought. This was evident in a Year 3 registration session when pupils listened attentively to music being played and conducted themselves well when reflecting during the prayer. Pupils demonstrate a high understanding of respect when discussing different people's beliefs. In a Year 3 history lesson on Ancient Egyptians, pupils appreciated that people have the right to believe what they feel is right for them. In a Year 5 RE lesson, pupils chose characters from the Christmas story to describe from a variety of perspectives with great empathy and understanding. Children in the EYFS during a lesson about the journey to Bethlehem children discussed the nativity figures and empathised with Mary when there was no room at the inn for her. They showed understanding and appreciation of the gifts offered by the magi.
- 3.20 Pupils' contributions to the school community are extensive and valued by all members of the school. They enjoy being involved in fund raising and appreciate the fact that the school council listens to their suggestions. They speak empathetically about others less fortunate than themselves and constantly refer to the school ethos of service above self. Pupils are engaged with the local community through harvest festival and the sending of Christmas cards. Their understanding of the challenges that face the world is sophisticated. They discuss their charitable fund raising when litter picking and the money raised for an overseas baby hospital. Pupils discuss the help given to others during covid times, showing a mature understanding for vulnerable people and how they can help them. Pupils display a real sense of community with everyone working together towards a common goal. This is clear from the jubilee celebrations, the challenge weeks in year 6, school festivals and extensive fund raising. Wide ranging opportunities, responsibilities and committees enable pupils to make a positive contribution to the life of their school.
- 3.21 Pupils make decisions effectively and assuredly through the numerous opportunities provided for them to make choices that will affect their progress and impact on others. They make wise decisions based on a clear knowledge of right and wrong and speak enthusiastically about the support they receive from adults in order to do this. In a personal, social and health education lesson in Year 6 pupils made sensible and considered decisions about other people's behaviour in a number of scenarios. They explain their decisions with clarity and advanced vocabulary. Pupils choose wisely when selecting the level of challenge in the extension work available to them. This was evident in a Year 5 mathematics lesson when pupils engaged in advanced work to describe translations and translate shapes across four quadrants. Pupils are very aware that the decisions they make will have an impact on their success both in the short and long term. They show an excellent understanding of decision making and refer to the habits of mind which help them stay focused on positive outcomes.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietor and a group of advisory board members, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Paul Easterbrook	Reporting inspector
Mr Lawrence Coen	Compliance team inspector (Headmaster, ISA school)
Mrs Emma Stanhope	Team inspector (Head of Lower School, IAPS school)