

Mount Tamar School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	113649
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	378734
Inspection dates	29 February – 1 March 2012
Lead inspector	Melvyn Blackband

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	90
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Embleton
Headteacher	Barry Jones
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2009
School address	Row Lane Plymouth PL5 2EF
Telephone number	01752 365128
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Social care unique reference number	SC038087
Social care inspector	David Kidner

Age group	5–16
Inspection date(s)	29 February – 1 March 2012
Inspection number	378734



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Introduction

Inspection team

Melvyn Blackband

Additional inspector

Kaye Palmer-Green

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 10 lessons and 10 teachers, covering over six hours of teaching time. Meetings were held with staff, governors and a group of pupils as well as informal conversations with pupils as the inspection progressed. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at documentation regarding the school's safeguarding procedures, curriculum and development planning, behaviour monitoring reports, teachers' records and the school's tracking of the pupils' performance. The inspectors also took into consideration the views of parents and carers in 23 returned questionnaires, and those questionnaires returned by 32 pupils and 35 staff.

Information about the school

The school provides for pupils with a statement of special educational needs, primarily for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are an increasing number of pupils with complex learning difficulties, for example autistic spectrum disorders and communication difficulties. A very small minority of pupils are girls. The main school houses both the primary and secondary provision. A small proportion of pupils are able to stay in the boarding provision from Monday to Thursday. The school also manages classes of primary-aged pupils in a local primary school as well as a secondary unit based in the Devonport area of the city. Almost all pupils are White British in origin. There is a substantial proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school which has maintained consistent improvement in standards of teaching and the pupils' performance since the previous inspection. It is not outstanding because of some inconsistencies in teaching and the monitoring of pupils' behaviour in the school. Within the boarding provision all national minimum standards are met and the provision is of an outstanding quality.
- The great majority of pupils make good progress and some make outstanding progress. Pupils with additional complex needs, for example autism or communication difficulties, make good progress as do pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, including pupils in public care.
- Teaching is mostly good throughout the school. Progress is good in literacy and numeracy and these skills are effectively integrated into the broad and balanced curriculum. Lessons are interesting and well adapted to the needs of the learners. On a few occasions however, there are inconsistencies in the recording of small steps in learning and in providing feedback to pupils on how to improve.
- Behaviour overall is good and pupils feel very safe and secure at school. This greatly helps to maintain a calm and productive learning environment. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good as a result of the high quality of support and guidance and emphasis on their personal development in school and outstanding provision in the boarding part of the school. Excellent records of the pupils' behaviour over time are maintained but these are not always used to the best advantage in monitoring improvement or any gradual deterioration.
- The leadership and management are good. The headteacher and leadership team robustly monitor and seek to improve on each area of the school's provision and the pupils' performance. They are aided by an effective governing body. There is strong leadership of teaching including rigorous monitoring and effective performance management. The leadership and management of the boarding provision are outstanding.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the attainment and progress of pupils by:
 - ensuring that teachers always assess and record the small steps in learning which pupils make
 - ensuring that oral and written feedback to pupils helps them understand more precisely how to improve their work.
- Monitor behaviour records on pupils more rigorously to evaluate more clearly improvements or any gradual deterioration in conduct.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The school maintains detailed and accurate data which demonstrate convincingly that pupils make good progress throughout the school. The pupils housed in the local primary school and the secondary unit make equally good progress. Pupils achieve well irrespective of their disabilities and special educational needs. Since the previous inspection, the great majority of pupils have made progress above national expectations and a minority have made outstanding gains in English and mathematics. Although there is a very small number of girls, they make equally good progress and enjoy school.

The pupils generally enter the school with below average standards of attainment but as they move through the school the gap narrows with mainstream pupils and Year 11 pupils leave with a range of GCSE and Entry Level qualifications, albeit at lower than average grades. Older pupils benefit from a good programme of work-related learning and gain a range of vocational qualifications. These qualifications, along with their skills in English and mathematics, open the door to suitable further education opportunities. The pupils make good progress in reading, particularly in the primary department. Attainment in reading is below average at the end of Key Stage 1. By the end of Key Stage 2 attainment is much closer to the average, although still below. Their improving reading skills give them the confidence to learn new things as they move through the school. For example, in a Year 11 English GCSE lesson the pupils wrote responses to a complex publicity article on the dangers of landmines in emerging African countries. This required close reading and a highly developed comprehension of textual clues and inferences. The pupils tackled the activity with confidence and made good progress. Pupils also make good progress in mathematics, often using information and communication technology to enhance their work and learning. Pupils confidently tackled GCSE practice papers and in several lessons made good use of computer technology to research and improve their work. The older pupils, in alternative accommodation, follow a developing curriculum based around vocational qualifications, and results show a rapidly

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improving picture of accreditation.

The school's increasing population of pupils with additional communication needs and autistic spectrum conditions are well catered for and make good progress. They develop their social and communication skills well and other pupils display a high tolerance and understanding of the particular needs of the pupils with these additional needs. This gives the autistic pupils confidence and contributes very positively to their enjoyment of learning and to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the general school population. Parents and carers overwhelmingly support the school's efforts in helping their child develop academically and in personal skills and are of the view that achievement is good; this view is endorsed by the inspection findings.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good throughout the school. Teachers and support workers work in effective teams to support each individual pupil. This is found also in the off-site primary and secondary provision. Classes in all settings are small and each pupil receives a high degree of personal tuition and help. This gives pupils the confidence to try new things and to make mistakes. Relationships are good and lessons generally proceed in a calm and harmonious atmosphere. Activities are geared effectively to the pupils' learning needs. The curriculum is well structured and relevant. Where possible, activities mirror those found in mainstream schools with an added emphasis on basic skills and personal development. Lessons are invariably well planned and interesting and teachers make good use of resources to stimulate the interest of the overwhelming number of boys in aspects of writing, a subject they find difficult and to which initially they are resistant. This was seen to very good effect in an outstanding Year 6 English lesson where pupils wrote letters home after imagining they had been evacuees as part of their history topic on the Second World War. All the pupils, including those with autism, took part in a lively discussion about each other's work which they took turns to read out. Their writing was well constructed and they used excellent expressive language which showed a high degree of both literacy skills and understanding of the context. In this lesson, their development of spiritual curiosity and understanding along with social and cultural skills was outstanding. Parents and carers are very confident that teaching is good for each of their children. This was confirmed during the inspection. One parent echoed the views of many when commenting, 'He has come on in leaps and bounds since joining Mount Tamar.'

Assessment is good overall and teachers have a good understanding of the pupils' abilities. In a few cases, the pupils' targets lack precision because each small step in learning is not recorded. Occasionally, work is not focused specifically enough on the needs of each pupil and the pupils do not receive sufficient feedback on their performance. As a result, the pupils are unsure how to make their work better.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

The pupils' behaviour in school is good overall although on occasion there is a small amount of challenging behaviour. This good behaviour is confirmed by parents, carers, staff and pupils. Behaviour is outstanding within the boarding provision, including improvements made by individual pupils. Lessons proceed calmly. Pupils in the playground behave sensibly and lunchtime is a friendly social occasion where pupils sit around large tables chatting happily. The school's detailed behaviour records show a substantial reduction in fixed-term exclusions in recent years and behaviour has shown sustained improvement over time. Pupils understand and respond well to the established 'traffic-light' system of warnings and rewards. Records of behaviour and attitudes include those maintained for each lesson and to which pupils contribute their own impressions of their conduct. These are stored centrally but as yet, the data are not always used regularly enough to monitor trends in individual or group behaviour over time. However, they do confirm inspection findings that behaviour overall is good and improving consistently. Pupils learn effectively to take responsibility for their own behaviour both in the school and in the boarding provision. When pupils do exhibit challenging behaviour it is extremely rare for other pupils to respond. Adults deal calmly and sensitively with pupils' difficulties and use the incident as a learning opportunity for the pupil. Pupils in the off-site primary and secondary provision in local schools also behave well.

Pupils report there is very little bullying of any type. Parents and carers and staff confirm this. Isolated incidents are dealt with effectively and to parents' and pupils' satisfaction. The school maintains clear and comprehensive records of all incidents. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure in the school and this is fully supported by parental views. The well-planned curriculum in personal, health and social education gives pupils a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe and to avoid unsafe situations. They also feel safe and secure in the boarding provision, where standards of safety and care are outstanding. Attendance is satisfactory overall and has improved consistently and convincingly since the previous inspection. It is just above the average rate of attendance found in similar schools nationally.

Leadership and management

The school has been effectively led by the headteacher who has been well supported by an energetic and able senior team. Effective leadership and management have ensured good provision and outcomes for pupils in school and outstanding boarding provision and outcomes. Communications between the school and boarding provision are excellent and add significantly to pupils' progress both academically and socially.

The senior team in school monitors and evaluates each element of the pupils' performance and all aspects of the provision. It rigorously monitors teaching standards and as a result, these have risen consistently since the previous inspection. Effective performance management of staff and a systematic programme of regular training accompany this monitoring. The improvements to teaching, along with highly effective tracking of the pupils' performance, have been pivotal in raising

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achievement. School leaders and staff ensure that all pupils, including those with additional learning difficulties, have equal access to the curriculum and an equality of opportunity to make the best progress that they can. Leaders and staff ensure there is no discrimination and the school is a cohesive community where diversity is embraced wholeheartedly.

Self-evaluation is a strength of the school and is supported by an effective governing body which challenges and supports the school from a well-informed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Given these factors, including consistent improvement over time, there is a good capacity to improve further. Governors and leaders ensure that the school's procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust and exceed statutory requirements. There is regular training for staff in child protection.

The curriculum is good. The skills of literacy and numeracy are taught well and emphasised in a broad and balanced programme where learned skills are developed and practised consistently across the range of subjects. Work-related learning for older pupils is well planned and managed and there is a growing range of outside providers who supply courses leading to vocational qualifications. Consequently every pupil has gone on to college over the past five years. Pupils in all classes take part in a range of cultural activities as part of the planned curriculum, for example theatre visits and working with visiting artists. These experiences, together with residential trips, enhance the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development further.

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Boarding provision

The school provides excellent outcomes for boarders. The boarders establish excellent quality relationships, encourage and support one another and feel very safe in the accommodation. All the boarders refer to the provision as 'fantastic' and that it makes you feel 'just like being at home'.

The boarders behave very well. They are very well supported to overcome personal difficulties. This promotes their self-esteem and a sense of achievement. A real strength of the provision is in the way boarders are supported in managing their own behaviour and as such to make some outstanding improvements. They are provided with excellent leisure and recreation opportunities which provide them with stimulating new experiences and which adds greatly to their personal skills. The boarders are enthusiastic about all the activities provided for them.

Care is outstanding. There are excellent pastoral arrangements and resources which support the boarders' academic and personal progress. Communication in each of these areas between the boarding provision and the school are excellent. The head of care and the staff place the well-being of each boarder at the heart of all they do. Placement plans are comprehensive and detailed and have a highly beneficial impact on outcomes. There is excellent practice in safeguarding the pupils. All staff receive training in child protection on a regular basis. The use of restraint is extremely rare, recorded in great detail and boarders report that they feel very secure with the adults in charge of them. The boarders are very well protected from bullying. The staff work hard to establish an anti-bullying culture and the boarders do not identify bullying as an issue within the provision. There are very good procedures for ensuring the premises are safe although the school is aware of the need to improve some of the decoration and soft furnishing.

Leadership and management are outstanding. There are consistently high expectations of staff and boarders to ensure the best possible standards of provision and care. Routines are very well thought out and consistently managed and applied. The boarders all speak highly of the adults in the provision and interaction between pupils and staff is relaxed, friendly and extremely supportive of each pupil's needs. There are excellent relationships with parents and carers and the placing authorities who all work together in the pupils' best interests. Comments from parents include, 'The hostel is extremely well run and is an invaluable asset to the children who stay there. The staff are outstanding.'

All recommendations from the previous inspection have been fully met.

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National Minimum Standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding provision.

These are the grades for the boarding provision.

Overall effectiveness of the boarding experience	1
Outcomes for boarders/Outcomes for residential pupils	1
Quality of boarding provision and care/Quality of residential provision and care	1
Boarders' safety/Residential pupils' safety	1
Leadership and management of boarding/Leadership and management of the residential provision	1

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

2 March 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Mount Tamar School, Plymouth PL5 2EF

Thank you for making my colleague and me welcome in your school. We really enjoyed meeting you and seeing how well you behave and make progress. You go to a good school and the boarding provision is outstanding. These are some of the best things about the school.

- You all make good progress, especially in your reading, writing and number and this helps you to make good progress in all your other work.
- Your behaviour is generally good and this helps you to learn also because nobody is disturbing you as you work. We could see that you have all made big improvements in learning how to behave from the 'traffic-light' system you use. In all the lessons we watched you were well behaved and concentrated well.
- You all get on well together and look after those of you who may have some extra difficulties in learning and making friends.
- Your teachers work hard to make sure all of you have work to do which is interesting and helps you to learn at your own pace.
- Mr Jones and his senior staff manage the school well.
- Those of you in the boarding provision receive excellent care and a very high standard of provision for your needs.

There are two main things which we would like the school to improve on.

- We want the teachers always to write down each bit of progress you make and we want them also to give you a clearer idea of how to make your work better either through marking your work or by talking to you about it.
- We want the school to look more carefully at the records of your behaviour so it can help you even better to improve how you behave and look after yourself.

You can help of course by always working hard and behaving as well as you can.

Yours sincerely

Melvyn Blackband
Lead inspector

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