

# Mill Ford School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113651
<b>Local Authority</b>	Plymouth
<b>Inspection number</b>	357386
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15–16 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Denise Morris

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	95
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Angela Hooper
<b>Headteacher</b>	Pam Greenwood
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 June 2008
<b>School address</b>	Rochford Crescent Ernesettle, Devon Plymouth PL5 2PY
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by 14 different teachers. Meetings were held with senior managers, staff, pupils and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' work, school planning documents, governors' minutes, and assessment data. The inspection questionnaires returned by 36 parents and carers were analysed by inspectors.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- It looked at how data is used to check progress and monitor pupils' achievements.
- It looked at the impact of procedures to improve attendance.
- It looked at whether pupils are fully involved in setting their own targets.

## Information about the school

Mill Ford School is a special school for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism. Almost all pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are few pupils from minority ethnic groups but none is at an early stage of learning to speak English. The majority of pupils live in Plymouth, with some from Devon or Cornwall. A small number of pupils are in public care.

The school is based on two sites. There are two classes of Key Stage 2 pupils based permanently at the nearby primary school. Mill Ford has gained the Active Mark and the International Schools' Intermediate award. It has Healthy School status. There have been several changes in leadership over the past few years. The current headteacher has been acting for the past year and a half and a new headteacher has been appointed for next term. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children from the age of three. They share their classroom with some pupils from Years 1 and 2. Sixth-form provision is provided in four classes for older pupils from Years 12 to 14.

**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: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. Parents and carers, rightly, believe that their children are safe and secure. They are pleased with the school and say that their children enjoy their time there. 'My children love coming to this school. They have formed lovely relationships with the other pupils and the teachers', commented one. Another wrote 'I am very happy with the school, at the moment I would not change anything.' The school has several strengths. It provides good quality care, support and guidance for pupils. As a result, pupils feel safe and behave well. They get on well with their peers and are polite to staff and to visitors. Their good contribution to the school and community is supported through effective partnerships. Links with other schools and local facilities, such as the local garden centre, help to engage pupils in learning and provide opportunities for work experience for older pupils. Two classes are based permanently at the local primary school where excellent facilities enhance learning considerably. The accommodation at Mill Ford is much less effective and some aspects are unfit for their purpose. Many pupils, for example, have to do cookery in their classrooms because the cookery room is too small. Children get off to a sound start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage and continue to make satisfactory progress throughout the school. They make the best progress in communication and language skills, although limited use of modern technology impacts on the abilities of a few pupils, particularly those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Pupils with autism, as well as those in care, achieve as well as other pupils. Teachers provide some exciting activities and visits that regularly engage and motivate pupils so that they enjoy their learning, for example the challenging Ten Tors expedition annually for older pupils, horse riding, gardening and theatre performances for the community. Students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress on their Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) courses. However, in some lessons across the school, expectations are too low and the pace of pupils' learning dips. Too little attention is sometimes paid to planning the next small steps of progress for individual needs and abilities.

Leadership and management have been through a difficult period over the past few years with several changes of personnel. The headteacher and the acting senior management team have worked hard to lead the school through this period. They have been ably supported by the governing body. There is now a trend of improvement in key areas, particularly in the quality of care for pupils, the rigorous attention to improving attendance, which is now good, the close links with local schools, parents and carers, and accurate self-evaluation which shows that leaders and managers are aware of what needs doing to bring about improvements. Although the use of assessment throughout the school remains inconsistent and not all pupils are fully involved in setting and measuring their own targets, new assessment and tracking systems have been introduced. These are in the early stages, but are just beginning to have an impact on pupils' achievements in

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several classes. The governing body is supportive and regularly challenges leaders about their decisions. It is already working extremely hard to improve the accommodation. There has been sound improvement since the last inspection. Given the trend of improvement in areas like attendance and the quality of care for pupils, the school has a satisfactory capacity to continue improving.

About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next inspection.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
  - improving the pace of learning in lessons
  - improving planning to meet the different needs and abilities of pupils fully
  - increasing the use of modern technology to enable pupils to contribute more fully in lessons by making choices and decisions.
- Improve the use of assessment to show how well pupils achieve from their starting points by:
  - embedding the new assessment and tracking system fully into practice so that pupils' achievements are regularly checked and dated
  - using assessment data to plan the next small steps of learning
  - helping pupils to learn their targets so that they can help to check how well they are doing.
- Work with the local authority to improve the accommodation so that it is fit for its purpose.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is extremely low as a result of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. For this reason, attainment is unlikely ever to rise above low, compared to pupils nationally, and attainment is not graded in the report. Despite this, pupils make at least satisfactory progress, particularly in communication and language skills. They make good progress in their personal development because of the high focus placed on personal, social and health education. For example, in Years 3 to 6, pupils made good gains in speaking and listening as they responded to an interactive story about Jack and the Beanstalk. The use of the animated story, including music and symbols helped pupils to understand the concept of 'growing things' linked to their science topic and to learn new words. They had lots of fun also because of the wide range of sensory experiences offered showing that pupils enjoy their education. Similarly, in Years 10 and 11, pupils developed good understanding of 'anger management' through the story of The Secret Garden. The use of drama and the way that the teacher linked anger to a volcano erupting helped pupils to understand their own behaviours. As a result, they used words and symbols well to describe their feelings. Pupils with additional special educational needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders, behavioural and emotional difficulties, medical needs and/or sensory impairments, make similar progress to their peers, although the lack

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of use of communication aids and technology limits their opportunities to make decisions about their own learning.

Pupils keep fit and healthy by taking part regularly in sports activities, including swimming, riding and through sports activities with other local schools. Pupils' social and moral development is particularly good, resulting in their very positive behaviour and attitudes. Pupils enjoy working with the community and regularly raise funds for different charities. The productive school council eagerly talks about its contribution to improving the lunch menu and the range of sports activities. Pupils work very well with the local community, with older pupils helping at the local donkey sanctuary and visiting 'the music zone' on a regular basis. Pupils talk enthusiastically about how they take part in the Lord Mayor's carol service each year and regularly raise funds for charities, such as Jeans for Genes and Children in Need. Pupils show their good social skills in the way they get on well with each other. Older pupils help with younger ones regularly, as well as helping pupils who are less able. Most pupils have a more limited awareness of the mix of cultures and lifestyles in the wider United Kingdom.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

\* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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## How effective is the provision?

Strong relationships are evident in lessons and result in good behaviour by almost all pupils. Teachers manage lessons well and make appropriate use of teaching assistants to support learning. In some lessons, planned tasks are not linked to individual pupils' abilities well enough. As a result, all pupils are expected to do the same tasks and some, particularly those with autism or those with profound difficulties, find it difficult to maintain interest. In the best lessons, pupils are able to make use of signs, symbols and the picture exchange communication system (PECS) to be actively involved in decision making and questions. Assessment procedures are new and are not yet fully embedded. As a result, practice is variable and not all teachers check and date pupils' achievements regularly.

Pupils benefit from many exciting activities, including a wide range of visits to places locally, which contribute well to their learning. Strong sporting links and joint working practices with other local schools enhance the curriculum. There are several examples of pupils using their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects such as science, geography and history, but the use of information and communication technology is more limited and, as a result, opportunities for pupils to be independent, make choices and show initiative are not always evident. The curriculum is enriched through the use of topics that help pupils to learn about the wider world. For example a recent 'Spanish Week' helped pupils to develop greater understanding of the different language and food of people in that country. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 enjoyed making Spanish food, for example, and tucked in with relish to their own tapas while practising a few Spanish words. A similar topic on Africa enabled pupils to develop greater awareness of the wider world. The curriculum does not provide enough planned opportunities for pupils to develop their information and communication technology skills or to use these skills in other subjects. Planning for the use of modern technology, to improve pupils' communication skills, is weak. ASDAN accreditation for older pupils is used appropriately to extend their skills.

Pupils are cared for well. Their personal needs are met effectively and welfare arrangements are thorough. Good-quality guidance and support have a positive impact on pupils' personal development. Teaching assistants play a valuable role in the support of those with additional needs, particularly pupils with autism or profound learning difficulties, although occasionally too much is done for pupils and they are not always encouraged to try things for themselves. Transition and induction arrangements are good, helping pupils to settle quickly. Procedures to support potentially vulnerable pupils are good because of good links with support agencies.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

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## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders have worked diligently to improve the school through a difficult period. They have embedded their ambition and started to drive improvement by successfully introducing rigorous procedures to improve attendance. A new assessment and tracking system has been established and this is just beginning to show how well pupils are doing. The governing body supports improvements and is proactive in the drive to secure better accommodation for the pupils. Members are regular visitors and support school leaders effectively. They have secure systems for monitoring the school's provision and statutory responsibilities are fully met. A satisfactory strategy for community cohesion has been developed and, as a result, strong local links are having a positive impact on provision and outcomes for all groups of pupils. There are many productive educational and sporting links with local schools. International links are developing through partnership with a school in Africa and are helping to extend pupils' awareness of the wider world. Relationships with a school in another area of the wider United Kingdom are emerging. Links with parents and carers are good. Regular coffee mornings help them to learn about their child's education, enabling them to talk about common issues and seek advice. The school works hard to promote equality and is rigorous about tackling discrimination by ensuring that all groups of pupils have equal access to activities that promote their academic and personal skills. Safeguarding, including child protection procedures, meets current government requirements. There are clear management responsibilities to safeguard pupils with staff appropriately trained in child protection procedures. All staff are vetted fully before working in the school.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>



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## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enjoy their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage class and benefit from the positive role models provided by their older peers. Children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development because of the careful support and good attention to safety, ensuring that effective welfare arrangements are in place. Children make mostly healthy choices of food and play happily together with their peers. Many have limited ability to communicate and signs and symbols are used appropriately by staff to encourage understanding and give children choices. Children make sound progress in communication, language and literacy. For example, they were able to find their own photograph and stick it on the 'attendance board' at the start of the day. They were happy to wait for their turn and enjoyed choosing a toy to play with. In literacy sessions, adults mirror actions and sounds so that children have positive models and respond well.

Evidence of past work shows that children benefit from a broad range of sensory activities. Photographic evidence shows children, happily, trying on the hat and jacket of a visiting policeman, celebrating Divali and joining in with playing drums during a performance of 'The Little Drummer Boy'. Occasionally, children sit for too long, waiting for a turn, and the pace of their learning dips.

Sound leadership is evident in the way that the classroom is presented, with a broad range of activities and toys. The outdoor area, however, lacks creativity and is not used successfully or regularly enough to foster independence and give children choices about their play. Children are looked after well and their achievements are noted regularly. Their learning journals are of good quality and provide a positive record of past work. They are used appropriately to plan the next stage of learning.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	3
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

## Sixth form

Students enjoy their time in the sixth form. As one parent wrote of a student in the sixth form, in response to the inspection questionnaire, 'Our daughter has been amazingly happy at Mill Ford. She has achieved beyond what we thought possible.' The appropriate range of ASDAN accreditation ensures that students develop good awareness of work. They complete a range of different modules and more-able students benefit from a range of options as part of their 'Towards Independence' module. There are good links with the local college, so that students are able to attend 'taster sessions' before making decisions. Students are positive and say that they enjoy their courses. This is evident in the harmonious way in which they work and socialise together. Students benefit from effective support and guidance, which help them to find the right path for their futures and make

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satisfactory progress on their courses. They eat healthily and the vast majority choose to participate in sport, including extended school activities. Students learn how to stay safe through their curriculum and about the importance of avoiding drugs and alcohol. They are provided with guidance on sex and relationships. Students take their responsibilities seriously. They are diligent about their jobs and engage eagerly in work experience in the sixth form, both in the school and in the community.

Sound leadership and management ensure that students' achievements are assessed informally on a regular basis, but there is a lack of rigour in the assessment and monitoring process. Although evidence of past work shows an appropriate range of activities, completed tasks are not always marked or dated. As a result, it is difficult for the school to measure how much progress students make over time. Leaders have made the best of challenging accommodation and the sixth form is very welcoming. It provides a bridge to further education by preparing students appropriately for their futures.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

The number of questionnaires returned was broadly in line with that found nationally. Parents and carers are pleased with the school. All of the parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaires said that their children enjoy school. The vast majority feel that their children are safe and secure and that the school helps them to make progress. The parent of a child with complex and challenging disabilities commented, 'My son has blossomed at Mill Ford, he has been helped to learn, how to behave appropriately and communicate effectively. He is now able to live life to the full.'

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mill Ford school to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 36 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 95 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	78	8	22	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	24	67	10	28	2	6	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	27	75	9	25	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	69	11	31	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	30	83	5	14	1	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	72	8	22	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	64	11	31	1	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	44	16	44	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	78	6	17	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	67	10	28	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	69	11	31	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	25	69	10	28	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	75	9	25	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**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.**



17 March 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Mill Ford School, Plymouth PL5 2PY**

Thank you for your help during our recent visit to your school. This letter is to tell you some of the things we found out during our visit.

- Mill Ford provides you with a sound education.
- You behave well in and around the school and get on very well with your peers.
- You have a good understanding of how to stay safe and how to keep healthy.
- You are coming to school more often than you used to, well done.
- You make sound progress in your lessons.
- You have some exciting visits and activities. We were impressed with the photographs of your Ten Tors expedition.
- Your teachers and leaders take good care of you.

We are asking your school to do three things to help you do even better. You can help by learning your targets and working hard to achieve them.

- Make sure your work is assessed regularly and make sure you all know your targets and are involved in setting them.
- Check lessons regularly to make sure teaching is good.
- Improve the accommodation at your school.

Thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Denise Morris

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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