

Mill Water School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113635
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	378731
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Denise Morris

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

Type of school	Special School
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	8
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair	Royston Williams
Headteacher	Alan Sheppard
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 February 2009
School address	Honiton Bottom Road Honiton EX14 2ER
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out two additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in nine lessons taught by nine different teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, a representative of the governing body, members of the school council, teachers and other leaders and managers. Inspectors looked at safeguarding and planning documents, assessment information and pupils' work. Inspectors analysed 25 questionnaires from parents and carers. Responses from staff and students were also analysed.

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

- Achievement of the different groups of pupils to determine whether teaching is sufficiently challenging.
- The impact of assessment and whether pupils are involved in setting their own targets.
- Improvements in provision for science.
- Whether provision for the youngest children in the Early Years Foundation Stage fully meets the needs and abilities of all children.

Information about the school

Mill Water School provides for pupils with a range of learning difficulties, including moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorders and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. A small number of pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are a few pupils who are looked after by the local authority. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The vast majority of pupils are White British. There are twice as many boys as girls. The school takes a very small number of children under the age of five. There are currently six children in this age group.

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. It provides a sound education for its pupils. The school has some strengths, particularly in the good quality of care, guidance and support that it provides for its pupils. As a result, all pupils enjoy school and feel that adults care about them. Pupils say they feel really safe at school. Most pupils are polite and kind to each other and are respectful to adults. They contribute well to the school and regularly work in the community. Parents and carers are pleased with the school. One comment typical of others was, 'My daughter loves the school and I can't think of a single thing that she does not get from Mill Water.'

Pupils' achievement varies across the school. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and those in the primary and secondary departments make satisfactory progress from their individual starting points. Older students in the sixth form make good progress so that by the time they leave the school in Year 13, most attain accredited qualifications and many go on to college. Across the school, pupils who are looked after by the local authority achieve as well as their peers. Teaching is satisfactory, with particular strengths in the positive relationships, the good teaching of English and excellent teaching of music. At times, teaching assistants are not used well enough to support pupils' learning. Assessment procedures have improved since the previous inspection and show a reasonably clear picture about how well pupils achieve. In a few classes, however, assessment is not used regularly enough to track pupils' progress and plan the next steps of learning. Opportunities for pupils to be involved in their own assessment and make choices and decisions about their activities are limited. In most areas of work, tasks are planned to ensure that the curriculum engages pupils and helps them to enjoy school. In mathematics, however, tasks do not regularly build on all pupils' previous skills and, as a result, older pupils sometimes do the same tasks and use the same resources as younger ones. This limits their enjoyment and their progress. Enrichment of the curriculum is good and pupils value the annual residential experiences, the widespread sporting challenges, their regular swimming and some exceptional opportunities through the music curriculum. The accommodation lacks space for practical subjects such as science. Because classrooms are very small, a few pupils with autism spectrum disorders with challenging behaviours cannot work with their peers. Pupils' social and moral development is very effective in improving and fostering their good behaviour.

Accurate self-evaluation means that the headteacher and staff know what the school does well and what needs improving. Along with the senior management team, he has ensured steady improvements of the school, including those in pupils' behaviour

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and attendance, improved links with parents and carers and improved training opportunities for staff. Staff are proud of their school. The governing body are supportive and fully meet their statutory responsibilities, providing appropriate challenge. They are working closely with the local authority to improve the accommodation. The good teamwork and full commitment of staff, along with clear plans for the future and sound improvement since the previous inspection, shows that the school has a satisfactory capacity to continue improving.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted Inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By December 2012, improve pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring full use is always made of teaching assistants to support pupils' learning
 - ensuring that in all classes, teachers regularly and frequently check how well the pupils are progressing, that full use of assessment information is made to inform all lesson planning and that pupils are fully involved in assessing their own work and progress.
- By December 2012, improve the curriculum by making sure that tasks in mathematics build on pupils' previous skills and knowledge.
- By April 2012, work with the local authority to rapidly improve the accommodation so that there is sufficient space for all groups of pupils to take part in practical subjects such as science.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Most pupils' attainment on entry to the school is extremely low as a result of their special educational needs and/or disabilities and, consequently, attainment is not graded in the report. Nevertheless, in the main, all groups of pupils achieve satisfactorily from their starting points and acquire the necessary basic skills to help them continue this progress in the future. Pupils make better than expected progress in English because of clear planning and some exciting tasks. For example, pupils in Year 10 made good progress in literacy as they worked on their Oxford and Cambridge (OCR) accreditation to develop their living skills. The writing task was based on a visit the previous day. Photographs were used really well as a stimulus to engage pupils and promote discussion. Pupils achieve very well in music. They enjoy singing and playing musical instruments. Pupils in Year 7, for example, made particularly good progress in as they practised playing the drums for the Christmas concert. Pupils were confident to perform in front of their peers and, because of skilled teaching, they improved their rhythm during the lesson. Pupils recently helped to write and perform an opera based on the story of Hiawatha.

Pupils' good behaviour is evident in and around the school and is reflected in their

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positive views and polite attitudes. They have a good understanding of keeping safe and staying healthy because of effective provision for social, emotional aspects of learning. The curriculum provides pupils with a clear awareness of sex education and dangers such as smoking and drug taking. In the main, pupils make healthy choices with their food at lunch time and with their snacks. Through their good level of involvement in sports activities, swimming and 'bike-ability training', most pupils maintain a good level of fitness. Pupils contribute well to their school through undertaking simple jobs. For example, one older pupil regularly works with the caretaker to help keep the school safe and secure, and another helps out in the office. Younger pupils help to take registers to the office and tidy their classrooms. Pupils also contribute well locally, for example regularly singing in the community to raise funds for charity. Effective links with local shops are helping older pupils to prepare for work. As a result of the school's good work, attendance has improved to broadly average and is continuing to improve rapidly. Pupils develop cultural and spiritual awareness as they link with other schools in sporting activities and they learn about the wider world through regular residential visits where they often stay in youth hostels.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ 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?

Good teaching in English is characterised by challenging tasks that extend pupils’ skills and very positive relationships. Very occasionally, mathematics lessons lack urgency or extension work to challenge the more-able pupils. In some lessons, too little use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to investigate or present work. Teachers manage behaviour well and the vast majority of lessons are calm and harmonious. Assessment information is not gathered frequently enough in all classes to plan the next stage of learning and, as a result, tasks are sometimes too easy for the more-able pupils and too difficult for others.

In the sixth form, there are good examples of how staff have worked together to create a rich and varied curriculum. Improved practice is now beginning to infiltrate into the Year 10 and 11 schemes. Some good planned enrichment activities and visits help pupils to learn about their own locality and they frequently use the local shops to practise their communication skills as they purchase items to help them with their cooking. Accredited and vocational courses for pupils in Years 10 and 11 help them to interact locally and improve their independence. The satisfactory curriculum in other areas of the school is currently being revised to include wider links across subjects. It is adequately matched to pupils’ needs and abilities.

The school takes good care of pupils. Effective links with a wide range of other agencies and professionals ensure that pupils’ personal needs are well met. Induction and transition procedures are good so that new pupils quickly find their way around, and older pupils transfer smoothly to the next stage of their education. Strategies to support pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and those who are looked after are effective and result in these individuals making satisfactory progress. Procedures to improve attendance are rigorous and good procedures to involve parents and carers in their children’s learning and attendance have been successful.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

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How effective are leadership and management?

Recent accurate self-evaluation has focused the whole-school community on the way forward. The headteacher is appropriately supported by other leaders and staff. He has high expectations and is embedding his ambition by putting new systems and strategies in place to drive improvement forward. Parents and carers are pleased with the leadership team. ‘Fabulous team led by excellent management’ is a typical comment from a parent. ‘I cannot praise the staff enough,’ commented another. New initiatives to the curriculum and to assessment are beginning to improve pupils’ learning, but have not yet had time to embed right across the school. Leaders promote equality and eliminate discrimination appropriately. The vast majority of pupils at the school have equal access to all the opportunities and all groups are appropriately monitored to show that all make at least satisfactory progress. Members of the governing body are eager to be fully involved in the school’s management and meet their statutory responsibilities. Safeguarding procedures meet current government guidelines and keep pupils safe. Members of the governing body have developed an appropriate strategy for community cohesion. Sound local links promote good working relationships with schools, colleges and businesses and are helping to improve the curriculum. Links with schools further afield are developing and pupils have many opportunities to learn about the wider world. Members of the governing body and leaders know that the accommodation is too restricted to enable space for all groups of pupils to work with their peers in practical subjects. They are working closely with the local authority to devise plans to do so. Sound partnerships such as those with support agencies and regular and robust links with parents and carers contribute well to pupils’ enjoyment and attendance.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

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

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Children enjoy their time in the Early Years class, which they share with older pupils in Years 1 and 2. Their attainment on entry to the school varies year by year but is low generally. They make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development because of careful support and appropriate attention to safety. Children behave well and respond to peers and adults eagerly. They play safely and most make healthy food choices. A few have limited ability to communicate, but staff encourage understanding by giving children as many choices as possible. Children make the best progress in communication, language and literacy. For example, during some individually planned activities, children showed that they were able to use Makaton signs, and touch activated switches or the Picture Exchange Communication System effectively to answer questions and make a choice. In other sessions, however, there is too little emphasis on developing social interaction with their peers or encouraging a quick response. As a result, progress becomes limited. This is due to a drop in the pace of their learning because children are required to sit for too long waiting for their turn during taught sessions.

Staff expertise has improved since the previous inspection and, as a result, there are improvements in all areas. The outdoor area has also improved and is now used appropriately to promote physical skills and exploration. Assessments give an accurate picture of each child’s progress, with annotated photographs to explain children’s successes. Leaders are well on the way to improving planning so that it more fully meets the needs and abilities of all groups of pupils and offers more interactive choices. Good leadership and management result in children’s achievements being checked more frequently and although outcomes remain broadly satisfactory, an improving curriculum now meets most children’s needs.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
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	2

Sixth form

The sixth form provision is well led and managed. Some good foundations have been laid in all aspects of provision. Accreditation is built securely into the curriculum and includes activities and opportunities for the development of students’ personal and life skills. As a result, students are well prepared for life at college and for their futures. Good links have been forged with a local college and all students now attend at least one day weekly. Transition arrangements have improved so that regular parents’ and carers’ meetings ensure that they are fully involved in guiding their children’s futures. Records of achievement and past photographs show how students

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are fully involved in assessing their work and deciding on their own courses. Students make good progress in all aspects of their work because skilled teaching meets their needs and abilities well. Students fully understand the importance of leading healthy lifestyles, as shown by the way they eagerly come to school in the morning and start preparing healthy breakfasts for themselves and their peers. They are regularly involved in a wide range of sports, for example fully enjoying the school’s rowing machines. Students take a responsible role in the school and are always ready to help others and join in with whole-school activities. They behave well and show mature attitudes to their daily lives. Records and past photographs show that students achieve well on their courses and that the separate and different approach to that in the main school is beneficial in raising self-esteem and improving students’ preparation for the future. Their accommodation is limited but staff work hard to make the best possible use of it to meet students’ needs.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A small minority of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. Of those who responded, almost all said that their children are safe at school and that the school helps them to lead healthy lives, and inspection evidence confirms this to be the case. Parents and carers are pleased with the way the school helps them to support their children. A few parents and carers do not feel that their children are well enough prepared for the future. Inspection evidence found that pupils are satisfactorily prepared for their future lives.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mill Water 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 25 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 89 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	76	4	16	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	21	84	3	12	1	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	76	5	20	0	0	1	4
The teaching is good at this school	20	80	4	16	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	21	84	3	12	0	0	1	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	76	5	20	1	4	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)	17	68	1	4	2	8	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	20	80	4	16	0	0	1	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	72	6	24	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	64	8	32	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	72	3	12	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	20	80	4	10	1	4	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and 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.

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"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



12 December 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mill Water School, Honiton EX14 2ER

Thank you for your help during our recent visit. Through talking to you and looking at the survey you completed, we know that there are many things that you like about your school. Here are some of the things that we found.

- Your school gives you a satisfactory education, which means you make satisfactory progress.
- Many of you told us that you enjoy your time at the school. We are pleased to see that you attend more often now. Well done!
- You achieve satisfactorily in your lessons and courses and most of you acquire some accreditation by the time you leave in the sixth form.
- You told us that you try to be healthy. We know you do lots of exercise and enjoy the school's rowing machines very much.
- Your school keeps you safe and secure. You told us that you feel safe at all times.
- Almost all of you behave well and you get on well with each other.

We found some things that the school could do to make things better. We are asking your leaders to:

- ensure that you are all fully involved in checking your own work
- make sure that your tasks in numeracy help you to build on work you have done earlier
- improve the accommodation so that you can all do practical activities in science.

All of you can play an important part in helping the school to improve by continuing to work hard in all lessons.

Yours sincerely

Denise Morris
Lead inspector

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