

Millstead School

Old Mill Lane, Liverpool, Merseyside, L15 8LW

Inspection dates 6–7 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Millstead School provides an outstanding quality of education that meets the individual needs of all its pupils exceptionally well.
- Pupils achieve more than parents say they ever dared hope for. Pupils' excellent progress enables them to live their lives to their full potential, whatever their level of disability or special educational needs.
- Teaching is never less than good and is frequently outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and challenge them to achieve their best. Staffs at all levels show the highest levels of dedication to pupils and their families. The partnership with nursing staff and therapists is exceptionally effective.
- Pupils love school and feel welcome, secure and safe. Pupils' behaviour is managed very well. This enables pupils with profound autism, in particular, to improve their communication and social skills. Attention to pupils' health, safety and protection is of the highest order and school staff play a central role in multi-agency safeguarding procedures.
- The leadership and management of the school are outstandingly effective. The headteacher and governing body provide excellent direction for the school. There is rigorous attention to improving teaching and learning linked firmly to pupils' improving outcomes. A clear momentum for further improvement is shared by all staff.
- The school's existing accommodation has many shortfalls. Staff are resourceful in overcoming these. The local authority provides good support to the school and plans to relocate the school to new premises in 2014.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons in each of the classes. They saw 10 lessons in all. Observations were also made of pupils arriving at school, during their breaks and over lunchtimes.
- Discussions were held with staff, therapists, governors and with a representative of the local authority. Documentation provided by the school was examined, including the school's records of pupils' progress, pupils' workbooks, the school's development plans and safeguarding information.
- Parents' views were established by interview, by reference to the returns from the school's own parent questionnaires and from correspondence received from parents. Inspectors looked at Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. However, there were too few responses (5) to provide a representative view.

Inspection team

Brian Padgett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christine Potter

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides for pupils with a range of complex learning and health issues. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The designated categories of need comprise severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. However, a high proportion of pupils, about a third and increasing, have a secondary diagnosis of autism.
- The local authority is responsible for determining admissions to the school. Many of the pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties join the school at two years of age. Many of the pupils with severe learning difficulties and/or autism join the school after a period in mainstream schools.
- Pupils attending the school come from all over Liverpool. Most travel to and from the school using transport provided by the local authority, accompanied by trained escorts.
- The majority of pupils, about two thirds, are boys. A large proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals and a small number are in the care of the local authority. The school is, therefore, in receipt of the additional funding termed the 'pupil premium', provided by the government.
- At the time of the inspection, planning was at an advanced stage to relocate the school into new, purpose-built accommodation in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of education even further by encouraging and enabling staff at all levels to continue to develop their leadership roles.
- Ensure that the opportunities presented by the new school fully resolve the compromises in provision caused by shortfalls in the existing accommodation.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils' attainment is generally very low. Despite making good and often outstanding progress, the most able pupils rarely reach beyond the lowest levels of the National Curriculum by Year 6. Indeed, pupils who are identified as having greater potential are transferred gradually to mainstream schools.
- The school's records show that pupils in each category make good and sometimes outstanding progress in the early stages of reading, writing and mathematics. Progress is often in very small steps; it is rarely linear and requires careful interpretation for each pupil. For example, although one pupil with severe learning difficulties read well, she could not understand what she read. Another pupil undertaking rebound therapy on the trampoline took the hands of the teacher. What appeared an unremarkable act was actually an important milestone for that pupil in his level of engagement with an adult. A number of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties have degenerative conditions. For these pupils, successful progress is seen and measured in terms of maintaining ability levels or in slowing degeneration.
- A major factor in the school's success is just how well staff know their pupils and their learning needs. They are very sensitive to even the smallest sign of progress. Much achievement, with the exception of the pupils with autism, is at the lower levels of recording. However, progress at these levels makes a significant difference to how pupils engage in normal life and improve their ability to communicate. In this context, parents provided convincing evidence of outstanding progress, including those who thought their children would never be able to attend a school and those who had little hope of their children walking or feeding themselves. Learning these fundamental skills, parents say, makes a major impact on home life and children's ability to enjoy a more normal life.
- Pupils with additional needs on the autistic spectrum make exceptional progress. Many arrive at Millstead having experienced failure in mainstream schools. Such is their progress that many are able to work with other pupils in mixed classes, taking turns and communicating effectively with adults, often using technological aids. Teachers are very skilled at finding out the triggers that motivate such pupils, often connected with ICT, and using these resources to unlock the pupils' potential.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers and support staff have high levels of expertise, intimate knowledge of pupils and their conditions and access to specialised resources. They plan for each pupil as an individual, using the pupils' individual education and behaviour plans as a basis and reflecting on what has already been learned. The recording of progress is undertaken by both teachers and support staff, often using photographs. Planning is a shared activity between staff. Early reading, writing and numeracy skills are taught daily but at all times of the school day, including breaks and lunchtimes, staff promote learning, language and develop social skills.
- Teachers have high expectations of all pupils. They regularly challenge pupils in lessons, encouraging them to go small steps further than they have been before, ably assisted by support staff.
- Much time is devoted to getting pupils to a point where they are ready to learn. This is particularly important in the mornings when pupils have been travelling to school for a considerable time. Teachers and support staff apply specialised techniques and procedures, often learned through training with therapists, to relax pupils or to relieve medical conditions.
- Learning activities are tailored well to the needs of each group. As a consequence, the school has three distinct curricula. All have aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage, since almost all pupils work within the development levels associated with young children. There are adaptations for each group. For example, for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties there is a

strong emphasis on stimulating the senses, whereas, for pupils with autism, there is an emphasis on individual work at workstations and in developing social skills.

- A particularly strong aspect of the school's curriculum is learning in the community. One of the uses of the additional funding through the pupil premium has been to buy a school minibus, enabling pupils to get out and about each day. This has a dual benefit of providing a context for pupils to develop life skills and to promote understanding of disability and special educational needs within the community. The school has had notable success with a local garden centre and a local supermarket. In addition, the school has developed partnerships with local primary schools. This is managed imaginatively. Not only do more-able pupils visit other schools but older pupils from the primary schools spend time with young pupils with profound and multiple learning needs. Evidence suggests that mainstream pupils find such contact difficult but, ultimately, exceptionally rewarding.
- The quality of teaching observed never fell below good. Teaching is lifted to the highest level through the staff's outstanding dedication to children's learning and welfare. This goes well above and beyond what is normally seen, and is fully recognised by parents. For instance, staff willingly undertake training with health practitioners and therapists to ensure therapy is available to pupils whenever needed and applied by someone the pupil trusts. They voluntarily give up their time to liaise with parents and provide support for families. They are key workers in multi-agency teams. They provide clubs at lunchtimes and activities during breaks to continue to focus on learning.
- Teamwork is exceptionally strong, within the staff and with a range of health professionals, especially the nursing staff and physiotherapists based at the school. Staff share an excellent degree of dialogue with these health professionals.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are happy at school. They look forward to school and enjoy excellent relationships with staff. Observations of pupils arriving at school provided convincing evidence of the warm welcome pupils receive from staff. It also showed the care with which times of transition are managed.
- Because they enjoy the activities and because the activities are tailored well to their learning and welfare needs, pupils' behaviour is excellent. Where challenging behaviour is a symptom of pupils' conditions, such as those pupils with profound autism, pupils are managed extremely well by staff who know them intimately. Staff are patient and firm, providing the consistency pupils need. Many parents' questionnaire returns described how the positive impact of improved behaviour, communication and social skills learned at school extends to the home.
- Pupils with severe learning difficulties are frequently given independence and responsibility, which they relish. An excellent example of this was seen during a lunchtime when one of the girls helped deliver school meals to classrooms with evident enthusiasm and pride. This was a girl excluded from her mainstream school because of unacceptable behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance is currently below the average of that seen in mainstream primary schools. However, the raw attendance data are misleading, as the attendance level of most of the pupils is improving and compares favourably with those in maintained primary schools. However, several pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties require frequent hospitalisation, which depresses the overall level of attendance significantly. By holding as many clinics and meetings with social care staff as possible within the school, staff limit the otherwise necessary absence from school.
- Staff, particularly senior staff, play a central role in safeguarding, child protection and family support. Staff are frequently nominated as key workers, at the heart of coordinating multi-agency responses to support pupils and their families. In this way the school is central to the broader safety and well-being of the pupils.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school has a warm and welcoming ethos, a direct consequence of the approachability of all staff, with the headteacher setting the example. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership for the school, having a clear vision and sense of direction, focused firmly on the progress and welfare of pupils.
 - Rigorous attention has been given to improving teaching and learning since the last inspection, with a successful resolution of the issues outlined in the last inspection, particularly in improving pupils' learning through ICT. Teaching is now at least consistently good and is improving strongly. Monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work is thorough, especially so in tracking pupils' progress in the early stages of reading, writing and mathematics, and in the development of systems that measure very small steps in learning.
 - Safeguarding is very rigorous, exceeding current requirements.
 - The accommodation has distinct drawbacks. In every instance the leadership has managed to ameliorate the impact of the shortfalls, making the best of the space for learning outdoors, for example, or by travelling to other centres for hydrotherapy.
 - Some of the senior leaders supporting the headteacher are relatively new to their posts but they are making rapid progress and increasingly making their mark. More generally, the level of responsibility taken by staff at all levels is high, including that taken on by support staff. For example, the higher level teaching assistant takes on a much wider role than is normally seen in schools. The level of continuing professional development is high. Despite such strengths, the headteacher has clear plans for additional posts of responsibility aimed at further improving the quality of education the school provides.
 - The promotion of partnerships with parents and with external agencies in health and social care is outstanding. The school works very closely with families. It is clear how highly health staff, based at the school and elsewhere, value the school's work and see it at the heart of things.
 - The local authority provides good support and challenge to the school. It is well advanced in its plans to relocate the school into new, purpose-built accommodation in time for September 2014.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides outstanding support for the school and holds it rigorously to account. The governing body is unwavering in its focus on outcomes for pupils. It judges the performance of teachers and leaders against these outcomes in what are rigorous performance management arrangements, ensuring rewards to staff are equitable. The work of the Chair is key to the success of the governing body, bringing an outside-of-education view to the work of the school and a contribution that has been sustained for more than a decade. Governors have a broad range of skills. Parental views are fully represented, including on the quality of teaching, of which parent governors have first-hand experience. The work of governors is well organised. They are well informed by the headteacher and, increasingly, by presentations from staff with responsibilities.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	104751
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	400735

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul O'Brien
Headteacher	Michelle Beard
Date of previous school inspection	26 May 2010
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