

The Milestone School

Longford Lane, Gloucester, GL2 9EU

Inspection dates 12–13 September 2013

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Outstanding | 1 |
| | 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.

- Pupils at The Milestone are admitted because of severe and complex learning difficulties. Overall the progress they make is exceptional because of the school's relentless focus on helping every one of them to achieve of their best, despite the increasing complexity of their needs over time.
- The school is a specialist school for communication and interaction and uses its expertise in these fields to support a large number of other schools throughout the local authority. This helps many pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream schools to have their needs met in their local school.
- Teaching is inspirational, and teachers and their learning support workers plan and work together in great detail. This means that all the adults in classrooms are focused on getting the best possible outcomes for the pupils with whom they are working.
- Many pupils enter the school with challenging behaviour patterns as a result of their wider difficulties. The school's detailed and extremely supportive behaviour policy helps them to modify their behaviour over time so that they can become effective learners and full members of the school community.
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- Outcomes are outstanding at every stage from when pupils enter to when they leave the school.
- Links with parents and carers are seen as vital, and strong partnerships are in place. The school understands the importance of such links and seeks to maximise their impact through engaging positively with groups such as fathers, grandparents, Travellers and those who speak English as an additional language.
- Similarly strong and effective links exist with a range of other professionals and organisations that are concerned with the wider development of the pupils.
- The headteacher provides inspirational leadership and is extremely well supported by leadership at all levels. There is a total focus on ensuring that pupils gain the best possible outcomes, and this includes developing staff expertise across the school.
- The governance of the school is effective. A range of relevant professional expertise allows governors to effectively challenge and support. Individual governors with specific responsibilities develop a thorough understanding of the school. Careful monitoring of resources ensures a strong focus on what is best for the pupils so that they can achieve the very best of which they are capable.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons, all of them undertaken jointly with a member of the school’s senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils and informal conversations were held with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views. A group of pupils read to inspectors and case studies were examined that provided detailed information on individual pupils’ progress.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher and other school leaders, other staff with specific responsibilities, members of the governing body, a group of parents and carers and a representative of the local authority. A telephone conversation was also held with another local authority representative.
- A total of 27 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire were taken into account, together with a bigger sample of 142 responses gathered from the school’s own questionnaire based closely on Parent View.
- The views of staff were gathered from discussions throughout the inspection, together with 81 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including information on pupil tracking and achievement, planning for teaching and learning, self-evaluation and school development planning and key policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

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|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Janet Dinsmore | Additional Inspector |
| Jennifer Taylor | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- The Milestone School is a special school for pupils between the ages of two and 16 who have a range of learning difficulties including severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. Many pupils have a complex range of needs.
- Virtually all are supported by a statement of special educational needs, except for a group of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage who are undergoing a period of assessment of their individual needs.
- The proportion of pupils who receive the pupil premium (additional funding for those who are eligible for free school meals, are in the care of the local authority or who have a parent or carer in the armed services) is well above the national average. All three of the eligibility criteria are met at the school by different pupils.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The school has been designated as a specialist school for communication and interaction and as such works closely with a range of other special and mainstream schools across the local authority area.
- The school provides placements for those undertaking training for headship of special schools by the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the planning for the continuous development of the school is fully implemented so that, as younger pupils with increasingly complex needs move into the upper part of the school, the facilities and accommodation remain first class and are able to meet their greater needs equally successfully.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- The achievement of pupils and their progress from starting points is outstanding. Sometimes medical or learning difficulties hinder learning, and for the majority, progress is measured in small steps. However, the proportion exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics, as well as in a range of learning and social skills, exceeds that found nationally for pupils with similar needs.
- Teachers are skilled at measuring pupils' progress and set challenging learning targets. Pupils are supported to fulfil their potential and, because their needs are known and understood, pupils really enjoy coming to school and working hard.
- Throughout the school there is clear evidence of the progress being made by pupils because teachers record and monitor this very effectively. For example, in a reading lesson containing pupils from Years 7 and 8 the teacher made it clear what skills were being worked on and the progress that had been made already. The team of teacher and learning support assistants then worked with individuals or pairs to move their learning on. Even though pupils are working at a low level for their age the input and vocabulary are appropriate and challenging. The teacher's careful recording of progress shows that over the last year nearly all have exceeded their challenging targets.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, high expectations of staff ensure excellent progress in all areas of learning. This drive to maximise pupils' outcomes is maintained throughout the school. By the end of Year 11 pupils are extremely well prepared for the next phase of their lives after school.
- There are no differences in the outcomes for any identified groups, including those from minority ethnic groups or those who speak English as an additional language.
- The use of the pupil premium is very effective and its impact is tracked carefully. This shows that pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those from the other pupil premium categories make outstanding progress from their starting points, similar to other pupils in the school.
- Pupil premium funding provides for an enhanced ratio of staff to pupils, additional sensory resources, support for parents and carers to be able to access workshops to help them support their children's learning and play therapy. Its impact is shown powerfully in case studies for these pupils. One typical case study showed the pupil had developed skills in independence, speech and communication, confidence and social skills. His academic performance improved dramatically, so that his progress was more than twice that expected for pupils of his age in mathematics.
- The additional funding available to support English and mathematics at Year 7 is also targeted carefully. The school has only received this funding since January 2013 and it is early days in judging its longer-term impact on progress.
- There is a wide range of ability in the school, reflecting the range of difficulties presented by pupils. For those who are able, reading is promoted strongly and well supported by the outstanding teaching of phonics (the understanding of letters and the sounds they make).
- The most able are equally well supported in achieving the very best of which they are capable. Where a move can be sustained effectively and meets the best interests of the pupil, there are occasional transfers to mainstream schools with good follow-up support to enable successful reintegration.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is consistently at least good and a very high proportion is outstanding.
- One very important reason why pupils do so well is that teachers and learning support workers work together extremely effectively. In lessons, the whole team is involved with learning,

supporting and helping pupils to increase their understanding.

- In a multi-sensory lesson for Key Stage 3 pupils, for example, the staff team used light and sound very effectively to help develop an understanding of senses. 'Eyes are for looking' led to an exploration of items in a box to work out what lights up, while 'ears are for hearing' led to the playing of kazoos. Adults carefully recorded the outcomes and ability of every pupil to participate and the level of their understanding of how the senses are used.
- Teachers use the information on individual pupils' progress very effectively. The school's leadership monitors progress carefully and uses this to work with teachers on setting challenging individual targets. Since this process goes on throughout the year, pupils not making the expected progress are identified quickly and steps are taken to put this right. The expertise of senior leaders supports classroom teachers, helping create a real team approach to learning.
- This also helps teachers to have the highest expectations for their pupils. Planning enables them to address individual needs, which also reflects the school's strong commitment to equal opportunities. Work is challenging, and the pace of learning and activities during lessons maintains interest, enthusiasm and encourages pupils to do their best across the whole range of lessons.
- Excellent use of technology supports learning and pupils' ability to learn to the best of their ability, whether that is a pupil with profound and multiple learning difficulties who can communicate using computer assisted technology, or the more academically able using hand-held tablets to record their work and discuss it with their classmates.
- High achievement is also reflected in practical and sporting opportunities. The school is rightly proud of its achievements in the sporting field and is planning carefully for the effective use of the new physical education funding for primary aged pupils, including the provision of a new fitness trail.
- In a physical education lesson for pupils who had profound and multiple learning difficulties the excellent teamwork of adults in the gym supported excellent outcomes. Pupils were supported in standing and encouraged to engage in gentle physical movement, staff having a clear understanding of individual limitations and creating appropriate challenges to maximise movement around the physical space in a safe way. They encouraged pupils to maximise their independence and pupils responded positively, for example, by stretching their limbs. All pupils were fully engaged and responded positively to the teacher's hopes and expectations.
- Pupils' work is marked carefully and care is taken to ensure accuracy. This includes working with the staff of other special schools in the county to ensure that all are working to the same agreed standards of assessment.
- Some teachers also work closely with colleagues in mainstream school using their expertise to support the education of pupils in mainstream schools whenever this is in the child's best interests. The number of schools seeking the support of The Milestone's staff is a reflection of the high quality of this support.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Many pupils first enter with very challenging behaviour caused by their wider learning or medical difficulties. The school's effective behaviour policy, well implemented by all staff, ensures that pupils are able to change their behaviour and become successful learners over time.
- In lessons this means that little or no time is lost as a result of poor behaviour and the focus of the school is on learning.
- Staff are given detailed and supportive training in the management of behaviour. While this includes the use of carefully managed restraint on those occasions when it is necessary, which is always logged carefully when used, the overwhelming focus is on de-escalation of potential incidents. This is very effective, helping create a positive learning and social environment.
- Strong support is given to parents and carers so that a common approach to behaviour can be developed between school and home. This has been a focus of the fathers' group which has

proved very successful. Other groups seek to ensure that parents, carers and communities can all work closely with the school.

- Parents, carers and pupils are extremely positive about the behaviour seen around school and the part this plays in creating an enjoyment of school and of learning.
- All are equally positive about safety at the school, particularly considering the vulnerable nature of many pupils. There is a stress on keeping safe and understanding how important this is in life generally. Great care is taken to ensure safety on trips and residential visits which are an important element of school life for all pupils and add so much to pupils' experiences.
- School is a happy place where people get on together extremely well, so bullying is not an issue. Pupils are, however, made aware of what bullying is and why it is not good. This includes an understanding of cyber bullying and the risks of misusing social networking sites on the internet.
- Attendance is high compared to that of special schools nationally, despite the profound difficulties faced by some, and this is a reflection of the great enjoyment of school shown by pupils.
- Part of the school's provision for older pupils is to provide work experience. Detailed risk assessments are in place and great care is taken to ensure that this is a positive and successful part of learning.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher provides inspirational leadership and her clear vision is shared by leadership colleagues. All have clear roles and responsibilities, helping create a learning community that serves the needs of its pupils. Improvements since the last inspection point to a strong capacity to sustain improvement. The focus on meeting the individual needs of every pupil reflects a strong commitment to equality of opportunity.
- Staff show a tremendous commitment to the pupils and school and many say they are proud to work there despite the challenging nature of their work.
- Systems to ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning are detailed. Staff have clear annual objectives to support them in developing their work. These help meet the needs of the school as well as individual professional development. There is a relentless focus on helping pupils to maximise their full potential.
- Links between teachers' performance and rates of pay are understood, together with greater expectations of those who are on the upper pay scales. The annual cycle of performance management begins with teachers assessing their own performance, a good example of the reflective nature of professional life at the school.
- The school identifies its needs effectively and focuses on continuous improvement. Self-assessment leads to the identification of priorities for development. For example, the school has identified that as a result of the changing and increasingly complex needs of students over time there is a need to further develop the available accommodation, particularly for older pupils, if it is to remain fit for purpose.
- Links with parents and carers are exceptionally strong and wide-ranging. In addition to very frequent contact between teachers and home, the school employs family support workers to help and encourage parents and carers to be active participants in the education of their children. Many activities encourage parents and carers to engage fully in the life of the school.
- Similarly there are effective links between the school and a range of other professional services, including health and children's services. Great care is taken to try to ensure an integrated pattern of support that is focused on the needs of the child.
- There are strong two-way links with the local authority. The school uses the expertise available to support the training of its staff and to help ensure the high quality of teaching and learning, for example through joint observations of lessons. At the same time the school uses its expertise to work with many of the authority's schools to train staff and promote best practice.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is outstanding and the governing body has a clear understanding of its role. Individual governors have areas of responsibility, including teaching and learning, and finance. They find information for themselves rather than being reliant on reports from senior leadership. Governors bring a range of expertise that includes education, health, children’s services and finance. They have a clear grasp of what is being taught and the impact of the overall provision. They have established effective policies for the management of staff pay and understand how the effectiveness of teaching is measured, together with the links between this and teacher’s pay, and how underperformance of staff is handled. They know how the impact of teaching and learning is measured, and how this is reflected in the evidence on pupils’ progress. More specifically, they carefully monitor the outcomes of initiatives and of targeted spending such as the pupil premium funding. They are well aware of how the performance of their school compares with that of other special schools. All their legal duties, including safeguarding, are carried out very effectively and it is clear that they are very proud to be part of the team that is responsible for The Milestone School.
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What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| 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

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| Unique reference number | 131557 |
| Local authority | Gloucestershire |
| Inspection number | 403818 |

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

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 2–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 308 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Matthew Peters |
| Headteacher | Lyn Dance |
| Date of previous school inspection | September 2009 |
| Telephone number | 01452 874000 |
| Fax number | 01452 874074 |
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