

Mill Ford School

Rochford Crescent, Ernesettle, Plymouth, PL5 2PY

Inspection dates 15–16 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- During their time at the school, pupils achieve well, making good progress in communicating, reading, numeracy and in their personal development.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a good start at the school, and students at post-16 achieve well in their national qualifications.
- Teachers receive lots of relevant training so that teaching is good.
- The school cares for the pupils well and keeps them safe. Behaviour is good and pupils attend well.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through the carefully planned curriculum and through good opportunities to mix and integrate with mainstream pupils.
- The recently appointed headteacher is committed to improving the school and has inspired both staff and pupils and reinvigorated the school.
- Governors and senior managers have an accurate view of the school's performance which has improved significantly since the last inspection.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Not all staff are equally skilful in teaching to pupils the sounds that letters make.
- Pupils are not always clear about their individual learning targets.
- Occasionally teachers do not move the pupils on to interesting activities quickly enough in their lessons.
- Teaching assistants sometimes forget to make their meaning clear with signing and symbols.
- The accommodation does not enable post-16 students to socialise easily.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 10 lessons, all of which were jointly observed with the senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and managers, other staff, members of the governing body, a local authority representative, and three parents and carers.
- Inspectors had discussions with pupils, both individually and as a group.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information about pupils' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and pupils' books and files.
- Inspectors took account of the 13 responses to the online survey (Parent View). Inspectors also took account of 34 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mick Megee, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kim Bishop

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mill Ford is an all-age special school for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties or autism spectrum disorders.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from other groups) is high.
- A small number of pupils are in the care of the local authority.
- Apart from the main site, the school has additional classroom accommodation within the neighbouring primary school for its nursery and primary-aged pupils. There is no other off-site provision.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher and senior management team have been appointed.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve all teaching so that it is as good as possible by making sure that:
 - all staff are consistent and equally skilful in teaching to pupils the sounds that letters make
 - all pupils know their individual targets and the next steps they have to take in their learning
 - all staff keep up the pace in lessons by moving quickly on to the planned interesting activities
 - all staff, especially teaching assistants, make full use of additional communication cues such as signing and symbols throughout the day
 - the accommodation for post-16 is improved so that students have areas in which to socialise and gain independence skills.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- All groups of pupils achieve well at Mill Ford. Parents and carers are rightly very pleased with their children's progress, as are the pupils themselves. Many pupils make better than expected progress in their communication, literacy and numeracy skills and in their personal development.
- Although pupils join the school with poorly developed literacy skills, they make generally good progress in their reading. However, a small number of pupils with higher ability are held back because a few staff are not fully skilled in using a phonics (letters and sounds) approach to make sure that pupils read and understand new words accurately.
- Most pupils make good progress in numeracy because teachers provide enjoyable practical tasks, for example dancing to disco music while counting up to 100.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage start their education well alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2, because of careful and detailed planning and a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities.
- Pupils make strong progress in physical education because of the high priority given to sports by the school. The school uses its primary sports money to employ a coordinator for lunchtime sports clubs, so that all pupils can participate and develop more healthy lifestyles. Pupils work hard to receive celebratory awards and medals for sports achievement at the end of each half-term.
- Pupils do very well in the creative arts because the school provides a range of high-profile visiting artists and because there are many musicians on the staff as well as a specialist dance teacher.
- Students in the sixth form do well, gaining national qualifications through their AQA Pre-entry and Entry Level courses. They take on work experience both within the school and locally at the Donkey Sanctuary. Their cramped accommodation, however, holds them back from making faster gains in social skills and independence, offering little space to 'hang out' and relax together.
- Pupils with autism participate fully in their learning and so make good progress because the teachers make skilful use of individual work areas and visual aids to communication.
- Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties make very good progress, benefiting from high-quality resources such as the light room, where they learn quickly to show preferences and improve their eye-gaze and motor skills.
- The school's information and lesson observations reveal no differences in the achievements of different groups of pupils, such as girls and boys. Those pupils known to be eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up money achieve as well as, and sometimes better than, other pupils in English and mathematics because the extra funding is used to provide additional activities and resources and to employ additional support to meet these pupils' needs.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Within the small class groups, staff get to know their pupils very well and in every lesson readily identify and assess any small steps forward. This means that they are able to plan work that is at the right level for everyone, despite the often wide range of needs and capabilities in the class.
- All classroom staff use very precise individual targets, based on high expectations, in assessing pupils' progress, although not all pupils know what these are or their next steps in learning. This is often because staff do not openly refer to the targets often enough throughout the day.
- Teachers use questioning well to encourage pupils to respond, but occasionally teachers spend too long talking to the whole group, rather than in enabling the pupils to engage quickly in their

exciting tasks and activities. This slows the pace of learning.

- Staff and pupils clearly enjoy each other's company showing mutual respect that is often healthily seasoned with good-humoured banter on both sides.
- Teachers work hard to enable pupils to understand what is expected by using simple words and a calm tone of voice. They use additional cues such as gestures, signs or symbols to make their meaning clear, although some teaching assistants are not quite so adept and occasionally forget to give these important additional prompts.
- Generally, though, staff teams work well together, modelling good behaviour and productive teamwork, with teaching assistants encouraging pupils and redirecting their attention if they lose concentration.
- Reading is generally taught well, although a few staff are not as skilful as others in the teaching of letters and sounds. As a result, a few higher-attaining pupils are not making as much progress as they could.
- During the inspection, pupils in Years 4 to 6 benefited from some outstanding teaching in music which extended their knowledge of pentatonic scales and useful links were made to learning about pentagons in mathematics.
- Teachers make use of a wide range of tactics to accelerate pupils' learning. Classroom staff working with pupils with autism skilfully deploy the required specialist approaches for communication and arrange the room environment. These approaches lead to calm lessons and productive learning.
- Teachers in post-16 provide a distinctive, more adult, feel to lessons, with language and content that are appropriate to young adults.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is carefully planned and learning is accurately assessed. Staff listen and respond well to children helping them to remain engaged in their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils like their school very much and really enjoy coming in every day. This can be seen in their good behaviour and enthusiasm for learning. One pupil, with the agreement of others present, told the inspector, 'The last 11 years have been the best times of my life: I am now successful.'
- Pupils do their utmost to behave well because they know what staff expect of them. The school records, observations and pupils' comments show that very few lessons are interrupted through poor behaviour, although occasionally pupils become restless when they are not given enough to do to keep them interested.
- All staff have received training in managing behaviour so that the school is a peaceful place in which to learn. Pupils, parents and the school records show very little bullying and few exclusions. No bullying was seen during the inspection, although a few pupils strike out randomly when upset.
- Pupils trust the staff and say they know who to talk to if they have a problem. During the inspection, pupils reported that they feel safe at school and that staff act swiftly to resolve any problem. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils attend well and as one parent or carer, typical of others, said, 'When my daughter sees the bus coming she says "Get off me mum, I'm off to school"'.
- The school provides well for a small number of pupils who have unusually serious behaviour needs. The school has appointed a senior leader who is very experienced in managing such pupils. He has introduced tight monitoring and support procedures which have led to striking improvement over time.
- The pupils are assisted to develop healthy lifestyles through participation in activities such as boccia, water polo and tennis.
- The school promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through the curriculum but also through its class organisation. Pupils are provided with an increasing number

of opportunities to learn in mixed-ability groups, or in mainstream classes in the neighbouring primary school where the satellite provision is based. One parent or carer said how this had worked very well for her son, who has profound learning difficulties: 'The mixed-ability groups have really sparked his learning. He now learns with able-bodied pupils, and last year he was invited to an ordinary birthday party. That was the first time ever. He's no longer isolated.'

- Students in post-16 are given the chance to have a go on courses at local colleges, so they can sample and choose which course they would like to move on to. It also gives them a chance to rub up against mainstream students, and see what the wider world has to offer.

The leadership and management are good

- Since the school was last inspected, the school has moved forward rapidly and is now on an upward trajectory. The key issues from the last inspection have been tackled well and fully resolved and new procedures have improved the provision and personal and academic outcomes.
- Much of the credit for this goes to the recently appointed headteacher who has inspired and reinvigorated the staff team with her astuteness and clear-sighted commitment to making the school the best it can be. As one parent or carer put it, speaking for others, 'She's pulled the school up by its boots.'
- The staff are fully behind the headteacher and the new ways of doing things. They recognise how important it is for the pupils' well-being and progress that they do the very best job they can. Staff at all levels speak with pride about the work they do and with enthusiasm about how further improvements can be made. There is clearly good capacity for the improvements to continue.
- The school has made training a high priority for all staff so they can move forward in their work at the school and in their careers. Teachers' performance is closely checked and the senior leaders and governors have a clear idea of which members of staff require additional support.
- The school and the local authority work well together. The link officer provides effective assistance in helping the school to recognize what is working well and what needs improving, and in identifying sources of specialist help.
- The school recognises that there are weaknesses in the accommodation for students at post-16 which hamper the development of students' independence and social skills. Staff in the satellite provision are fully involved in life on the main site and attend all the school's meetings.
- The middle managers, such as the subject coordinators, feel empowered and are enthusiastic about their own roles. They are given time to check up on learning in their own areas of responsibility and do this skilfully and conscientiously.
- The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The department leader is very strong on assessment and record-keeping, and this information shows that children are successful and making good progress.
- The school fosters strong relationships with parents and carers, local schools, support agencies and a growing range of work-related providers, for the benefit of the pupils. One parent or carer said that she was taken into hospital recently and, knowing she was concerned about her child's annual review, the school arranged for a live internet conference so that she could participate fully.
- The staff regularly meet up with staff from other special and mainstream schools to check that their judgements about pupils' progress are as accurate as possible.
- The excellent relationship with the neighbouring primary school, which provides Mill Ford with its additional accommodation, has led to first-rate opportunities for pupils from both schools to learn and play together. The school is planning to link with a mainstream secondary school for further integration opportunities.
- All pupils are able to make equally good progress and this reflects the school's commitment to equal opportunities and forestalling discrimination.
- **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body provides very good assistance and support to the school and the headteacher, and sets out a clear direction of travel. Governors regularly visit the school and hold discussions with staff. Added to written reports from the senior leaders, these provide them with a good insight into how the school is doing and what needs improving further. They are aware of the accommodation issue for post-16 students. Through attending a wide range of training, they have a good handle on how to judge whether teaching and achievement are going well. Governors make sure that the performance and salary progression of staff are checked regularly and thoroughly. Governors know what finances are necessary for the school to drive its priorities forward. They make sure that money allocated to support pupils attracting the pupil premium is used effectively to support individual learners in their lessons. They have made sure that safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements.

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	113651
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	405476

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	96
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Jarvis
Headteacher	Claire Wills
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 March 2011
Telephone number	01752 300270
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