

Mill Green School

Lansbury Avenue, St Helens, Merseyside, WA9 1BU

Inspection dates 21–22 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher is the linchpin in the success of this school. He is highly ambitious and his vision for the future of Mill Green School is the driving force behind the continued exceptional achievement of those students who are fortunate enough to attend the school.
- Without a doubt, students at the school make outstanding progress because they benefit from teaching which is also outstanding.
- From their very low starting points, students across the school achieve well in reading, writing, communication skills and mathematics. Students enjoy and benefit from the emphasis placed on 'real-life' tasks which add purpose to learning. Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. They build life-skills which were 'unimaginable' to many parents before their child joined the school.
- Leaders and governors are resolute in their determination that students will gain maximum benefit from the well-planned and outstanding new build. Opportunities for bespoke vocational training are limited because the extensive outdoor area is not fully utilised.
- Provision for those students in the sixth-form is outstanding. Most students make outstanding progress and achieve nationally recognised vocational qualifications by the time they leave school.
- All adults are highly effective in drawing on their strong relationships with the students to maximise every opportunity for learning to take place. Astute planning, along with accurate assessment of students' progress, ensure that tasks and activities engage students well.
- Leaders and managers check carefully the quality of teaching. Leaders' first-rate feedback to teachers, coupled with a desire for excellence, mean that teachers' skills and students' achievement have improved since the last inspection.
- Highly effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensures that students' personal development is outstanding. The school's ethos, which is built around care, tolerance, respect and appreciation, has been transferred seamlessly into the new school.
- The governing body provides effective support and challenge to the school. However, governors rely too heavily on reports from leaders and, therefore, do not have an independent view of how well the school is progressing.
- All students make outstanding progress in their self-confidence. Over time, those students who have difficulty in managing their own behaviour make excellent improvements and are well prepared for life beyond school.
- Parents are very pleased with the school and they also acknowledge that the progress made by their children is 'unbelievable'.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 12 lessons, two of them jointly with senior leaders. In addition, the inspectors also listened to some students reading during lessons.
- Inspectors spoke to several groups of students. Inspectors also spoke with students at break time and lunchtime. Inspectors spent time with students in their common room and outside on the playground.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, senior leaders, a member of the governing body and a small group of parents.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a range of documents provided by the school.
- Inspectors took account of 10 parent responses to the Ofsted online survey (Parent View).

Inspection team

Drew Crawshaw, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Doreen Davenport

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mill Green School educates students between the ages of 11 and 19 with a range of learning needs, including severe and profound learning difficulties.
- Mill Green School moved into a new, purpose-built, building in September 2014. Plans are under way to change the age range of pupils attending the school to between 14 and 19. The age of students currently in the school is between 12 and 19.
- All the students have a statement of special educational needs, or an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for additional funding, in the form of the pupil premium grant, is high compared to all other schools. (The pupil premium supports disadvantaged pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority.)
- Students are mainly White British.
- The proportion of girls in the school is low compared to that of boys. There are approximately three times as many boys as girls in the school.
- The school has several locally and nationally recognised awards. The school has achieved: National Autistic Society accreditation; Eco-School Green Flag Award; the Quality Award for Work Experience and the Basic Skills Quality Mark, since the last inspection in March 2011.
- Off-site training for Key Stage 4 and sixth-form students is provided by St. Helens College and Wigan and Leigh College.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue the improvements in governance by developing a systematic approach to gathering information about the school, so that governors are even better at forming their own judgement on how well the school is progressing.
- Build on the vision of the headteacher and leaders in order that all students benefit from increased opportunities for bespoke vocational learning experiences by:
 - making sure that the proposed links with the 'new' local community are effective
 - making effective use of the abundant outdoor space now available to the school.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher's uncompromising and highly effective pursuit of excellence has ensured that students across the school have maintained the highest standards of achievement and personal development since the last inspection.
- Leaders at all levels, along with governors, have worked successfully to ensure that the focus on learning has been maintained. Leaders communicate their high expectations and ambition consistently and are fully committed to increasing the rate of progress of even the most severely disabled students. Consequently, the move into a new building has not been allowed to distract any adult from the relentless drive for the best for students at Mill Green.
- Meticulous planning and preparation by leaders has ensured that the impact on students' progress, of opening the new building in September 2014, has been effective and immediate. Students have responded positively to wide corridors, large classrooms and ample outdoor areas. The behaviour of students has improved from what was previously recognised as outstanding, their willingness to communicate has rocketed and, as a result, their self-confidence is beginning to soar.
- Thorough and accurate self-evaluation by leaders, including middle leaders, ensures that policies are well thought-out and effective. Consequently, students across the school make excellent progress in mathematics, reading, communication skills and their overall personal development.
- The broad range of appropriate subjects and opportunities which form the curriculum at Mill Green both engages students and ensures that they want to learn. The good balance between core skills, life skills and vocational studies contributes effectively to the students' academic achievements, their physical development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students benefit from attending local colleges in order to gain vocational qualifications. Leaders are aware however, that they do not yet fully utilise the grounds of the school in order to provide bespoke vocational learning experiences for all students.
- Leaders have developed highly effective systems for checking students' progress. As a result of the frequent monitoring of students' achievements by teachers and leaders, students who fall behind can be identified quickly and are given effective support to improve. Likewise, those students identified as more able in a particular skill are supported effectively to achieve the best they can.
- Leaders check rigorously the achievement, attendance and behaviour of students who attend local colleges to take part in vocational courses, such as floristry and construction. Accordingly, courses are well matched to the individual needs of students. The school's own data show that the qualifications gained, along with careers advice and guidance from agencies such as Connexions, support the success of students in their placements when they leave school effectively.
- Parents are extremely pleased with the school. Those parents spoken with could not praise the school highly enough for the change seen in their children since they joined the school. Parents said that they have seen their children grow in confidence and begin to flourish as young adults.
- Leaders have introduced a rigorous system for the setting of targets for teachers and teaching assistants. Targets are set for both teachers and teaching assistants which match effectively with the school's priorities. As a result, leaders ensure that salary increases are not awarded unless staff have met their targets, based on students' progress.
- Raising the quality of teaching even further has remained a key priority for leaders. Leaders ensure that students benefit from highly trained and effective staff. Leaders ensure that all staff have regular training in aspects such as effective questioning skills, managing behaviour and the safeguarding of students; this ensures consistently good practice across the school.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged students is used effectively by leaders. There is no discernible difference between the progress of disadvantaged students and that of their peers within school. Leaders are effective in promoting equality of opportunity. The school's own data show that there are no groups which perform less well, or significantly better, than others.
- Leaders have made effective use of additional sport funding made available to the school. For example, to use of a cricket coach from Lancashire County Cricket Club has increased the participation rate of students in cricket significantly. The introduction of rebound therapy has ensured that even the most severely disabled students can take part safely in physical activity.
- The local authority has confidence in the school and adopts a suitably proportionate light-touch approach to the monitoring of the school's work. School leaders employ external educational consultants to provide an impartial view of the school's progress.
- Leaders have forged strong links with other similar schools across Merseyside. They are able to check their

understanding of how much progress students make while at Mill Green, by comparing appropriate information about students' achievement with that of other schools. This action is effective in ensuring that leaders' and teachers' assessment of students' progress is accurate.

- Leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures meet current requirements. Leaders have planned well to ensure that the new school building is safe and secure, while still promoting the development of students' independence and life-skills.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance of the school remains good. Records of governing body meetings show that governors, while being highly supportive of the school, provide effective challenge to leaders. Governors make good use of the detailed progress reports provided by the headteacher in order to scrutinise the work of the school, so that they can have a view of what is working well. Governors have a good range of skills which they use to benefit the school, and they have received appropriate training. They understand the use of data and know how the school compares with similar schools. Governors have a detailed and accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and behaviour and link this effectively with data on the school's performance. Frequent monitoring and full involvement in evaluating the students' achievement through the school's own self-evaluation mean that governors know how effective the school is. Governors frequently question leaders about how aspects of the school's work could be improved. There is a culture of fine-tuning so that, for example, behaviour management strategies and teaching methods are constantly tweaked to meet the needs of individual students better. Governors understand the system of setting targets for teachers and teaching assistants well, they ensure that only those staff who have had an impact on improving the outcomes of students are rewarded.
- Governance of the school is not yet outstanding because governors do not verify, for themselves, the information given to them by leaders about the performance of the school.

The behaviour and safety of students are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students, including those in the sixth form, is outstanding. The highly effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is embedded into the ethos and life of the school. In every area of the school students are a true model of British values. When in lessons students work extremely well together, they share ideas, value the opinion of others and act with consideration and tolerance towards those who are different from themselves. At break time and lunchtime students play exuberantly, but remain polite and courteous to one another and also to the adults around them.
- The school's records show that very few serious incidents occur. Some students have challenging behaviour when they join the school. Adults use the whole-school behaviour management strategies effectively in order to enable students to manage their own behaviour. By the time students leave the school, the vast majority are able to enjoy being part of the wider community and many develop life skills which allow them to travel independently and organise activities for themselves.
- Students' impeccable behaviour in and around the school and in the local and wider community is promoted by excellent relationships between staff and students. Those parents spoken with said that the behaviour of their children, especially at home, has been transformed since they joined the school.
- Students were adamant that little, if any, bullying takes place at the school. When falling out happens, it is quickly sorted with the help of adults who encourage students to understand and accept each other's point of view. Students said that the design of the new school has helped them to fall out even less, because there is more space to move around in and different areas to play in at playtimes.
- Students say that they enjoy school very much. The vast majority attend extremely well. Students' excellent behaviour and attitudes are promoted effectively by 'real-life' learning experiences such as the whole-school enterprise week observed by inspectors. Students value the independence they are given and demonstrate maturity beyond their age, for example, at lunchtime when they are free to choose where, when and with whom to eat.
- The promotion of students' personal development is outstanding, due to the positive support that they receive along with the broad range of appropriate, challenging and exciting activities which make up the well thought-out curriculum. As a result, students are very well prepared for their lives after leaving education.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students, including those in the sixth-form, safe and secure is outstanding. Leaders have given careful consideration to the implementation of procedures designed to make the

building secure. Consequently, students are able to move confidently around the building and this supports the development of their independence skills.

- All adults are trained well in how to safeguard children. Students have the confidence to talk to adults if they are distressed or feel anxious about a situation. Leaders act quickly to report any concerns to the relevant authorities and ensure that the appropriate support is given to students in need. Students say that they feel safe in school and this view is endorsed by parents.
- The school's own safeguarding team provides whole-school and bespoke behaviour management training for all staff. All adults are guided effectively to ensure that behaviour management strategies are meticulously matched to the needs of each student. Students who need additional adult help to manage their behaviour are given support which is safe and effective.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Most teaching over time is outstanding and it is never less than good. The high quality teaching in all subjects, including mathematics and English, leads to all groups of students making sustained progress which, in turn, leads to outstanding achievement and the excellent preparation of students for the next steps in their lives.
- All adults at the school are seen as teachers and, without exception, they make every interaction they have with a student a learning opportunity. Adults use the detailed information they have about each student extremely well in order to tailor every contact they have with them precisely to their individual needs. Consequently, students' personal development is remarkable.
- All teachers have unquestionably high expectations of every student in the school. Every event, from the time a student arrives at school in his or her taxi, is thoughtfully planned so that no time is wasted unnecessarily. Students learn extremely well in every aspect of the curriculum.
- Teachers share their planning for lessons effectively with teaching assistants. Adults work together well in order to check, systematically and effectively, students' understanding and progress throughout the lesson. The subsequent tweaking of approach by teachers, along with precise intervention by teaching assistants, ensures that the quality of learning remains first rate throughout lessons.
- The quality of teaching has continued to improve from the previous inspection. Rigorous monitoring by leaders along with a training programme, very well matched to the school's priorities for improvement, have ensured that the teaching of core skills, such as mathematics, reading, writing and, in particular, communication, is outstanding in every area of the school.
- The teaching of reading is effective, because teachers and other adults rarely miss opportunities to build on students' previous learning. Video evidence presented by the school showed one student, with an ability level well below his age, enthused by the contents of a book because he was able to recognise the relationship between characters in the story. This represented outstanding progress for this student.
- Students enjoy their learning because teachers and other adults make it real. For example, sixth-form students are taken out of the school to experience using money in shops and to read time-tables for public transport. In school, all students take part in special events weeks, such as enterprise week. Students take on roles and responsibilities associated with a real business; some students develop their computer skills by using the Internet to research products; others improve their writing by producing marketing materials; still others test their mathematical understanding by working out prices and profit margins. Students are enthused, engaged and committed to learning by this highly effective approach to teaching.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students' attainment on entry is always significantly below that expected for their age, because of their learning difficulties. Students often join the school over seven years behind their peers in mainstream schools. As one would expect, this gap does not close during the time students are at Mill Green School.
- Nevertheless, based on realistic expectations, the rate of progress across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects is consistently above that expected nationally for all students. Evidence shows that the vast majority of students achieve exceptionally well, based on their very low starting points. The school's own data, along with inspection evidence, show that the proportion of students making and exceeding the challenging targets set for them in mathematics, reading and communication, is well above nationally published rates of progress for all students in mathematics and English.
- The school's own data show that the achievement of all groups of students, including those who receive additional funding and the relatively small number of girls, is outstanding. By the time students leave the

school there are no discernible gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers in school.

- Students of all ages and ability levels make exceptional progress because they are expected to make decisions for themselves. For example, when students with more complex needs visit the sensory room they are encouraged to, and do, communicate to adults which activity they prefer. This approach is used effectively at every opportunity and has resulted in outstanding achievement over time.
- Outstanding progress is made in mathematics because more often than not, it is practically based and linked closely to real-life situations. This prepares students very well for life beyond school, for example, when using money or taking public transport.
- In English students develop their reading and communication skills very well. The school identifies the most-able students along with those who need additional support. Specific intervention packages, delivered by the school's own intervention team and which supplement daily reading practice for all students, ensure that the vast majority of students make outstanding progress in English.
- The school's own records, along with inspection evidence, show that the achievement of students who attend off-site alternative provision is outstanding. Students achieve a range of qualifications, for example Employability and Personal Development and Skills for Working Life (Construction). More importantly, the gaining of these qualifications prepares students effectively for their post-19 destination.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The provision for sixth form students is outstanding because it is an integral part of the whole school. Sixth-form students benefit from outstanding leadership and outstanding teaching to the same extent as all other students in the school.
- Sixth-form students, some of whom join the school at the beginning of Year 12, make outstanding progress because of the effective balance between academic studies, vocational experience and opportunities to develop their life skills. Sixth-form students are very well prepared for the next stage of their life.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. The school uses a range of nationally recognised qualifications in a variety of subjects effectively. Students visit local colleges in order to follow vocational qualifications. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their life because their personal development is outstanding and their self-confidence blossoms, due to the highly effective teaching.
- Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding because leaders monitor standards with the same rigour as with the rest of the school.
- The behaviour of students in the sixth form is outstanding, because students have the opportunity to manage their own behaviour in real-life situations on a frequent basis.
- Students in the sixth form are safe and well cared for. Teachers and other adults plan meticulously so that valuable off-site experiences run smoothly and do not expose students to unnecessary danger.

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	131022
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	434602

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	83
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	46
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marie Quirk
Headteacher	Colin Myers
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2011
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