

Mill Water School

Bicton, East Budleigh, Budleigh Salterton, EX9 7BJ

Inspection dates 10–11 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires Improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires Improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Requires Improvement	3
Early years provision		Requires Improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires Improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The improvements in the quality of teaching are relatively recent and pupils have not yet fully caught up after the period of under-achievement prior to the last inspection.
- In a small number of lessons, teachers do not set precise enough targets to help pupils build on what they know already.
- The class groupings for the youngest and oldest pupils cover too wide an age range. Students in the sixth form are not given opportunities to see themselves as a group that is separate from the younger pupils.
- Governors have only recently approved a new staffing structure for the school and the role and impact of middle leaders in the school is currently underdeveloped.
- The governing body does not evaluate and challenge all of the aspects of the school's work that it should. It does not have a clear enough view of the impact of the pupil premium funding on pupils' achievement.
- Revised arrangements for leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage have not had enough time to make an impact on pupils' progress.
- While standards in the sixth form are improving rapidly, it is too early to judge the success of this first group of students on nationally recognised courses.

The school has the following strengths

- The acting headteacher and senior leaders provide the school with strong leadership and a clear vision for how it can be improved.
- Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are good. In almost all lessons, they are eager to work hard and make progress.
- The new school building provides an attractive and safe learning environment. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good.
- Teaching is good and improving. Staff know the pupils exceptionally well and in the majority of lessons are able to provide learning activities that challenge and interest all pupils.
- Relationships across the school are excellent and help to make it a very happy place in which to work and learn. Morale within the staff team is very good.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the school, including in 14 lessons, of which 10 were jointly observed with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors held discussions with the acting headteacher, senior leaders, governors and pupils. Three of the governors spoken to were also parents of pupils at the school. Discussions were also held with parents on previous monitoring visits.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including information on how teachers plan their teaching, how they evaluate pupils' progress and how they plan to improve the school further.
- Inspectors considered the views of 18 parents and carers as expressed through the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Information gathered from previous monitoring visits made since the last full inspection was also considered.

Inspection team

Andrew Penman, Lead inspector

Associate Inspector

Andrew Redpath

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- Mill Water School provides education for pupils with a range of learning difficulties, including moderate and severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and profound and multiple learning difficulties. A small number of pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportions of pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are both much lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school receives funding to develop sport in the primary phase.
- The additional government grant in Year 7 to provide additional support for pupils who had failed to reach expected standards at the end of Year 6 applies to all pupils. Its specific impact cannot therefore be measured.
- All children in the Early Years Foundation Stage attend the school full time.
- The school uses one off-site provider, Running Deer in Moretonhampstead, Devon.
- The school relocated to new, purpose-built accommodation in January 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement by:
 - arranging and planning more effectively for class groups to ensure that learning activities are appropriate and more suitably challenging for the age of all pupils and students within them
 - enabling those students who are in the sixth form to see themselves as a distinct group so they can better understand and celebrate their journey into young adulthood
 - ensuring that alternative educational provision used by the school meets the academic needs of the few pupils who use it.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders, and giving them the time and resources they need to effectively monitor and drive improvement in pupils' achievement in the subjects for which they are held accountable
 - ensuring governors continue to develop their ability to robustly hold school leaders to account for such things as the school's use of pupil premium funding.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership is not yet good because the development of middle leaders' skills to monitor and drive improvement in raising pupils' achievement has been relatively slow. Senior leaders carry too many roles and responsibilities, and the potential of other staff to contribute to the progress of the school is underdeveloped.
- Middle leadership roles have only recently been identified, although appropriate plans are in place to fill vacancies. It is too early to see the full impact of this initiative on raising pupils' achievement. The acting headteacher is aware that, if this initiative is to be successful, the middle leaders will need to be given the time, resources and authority to lead and manage more effectively in their area of responsibility.
- The acting headteacher provides determined and focused leadership for the school. Although she has only been in post for a relatively short period of time, the school has made rapid progress while she has been in charge.
- The two assistant headteachers have provided strong support for the acting headteacher and, together, they have created a culture of high expectations within the school. Inspection evidence shows that they have been notably successful in reviving the morale of the staff team since the last inspection and their skilful blend of both challenge and support has been appreciated by all, including parents.
- The impact of successful leadership by the senior team can be felt across the school. They have established systems for tracking pupils' progress, and for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's work. The transition of the school to its new accommodation, described by the Chair of the Governing Body as 'seamless', is an example of effective school leadership.
- At a time of rapid change and significant challenge, senior leaders have rightly maintained a clear focus on the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Both formal and informal observation of teaching have enabled them to offer support and challenge to teachers. As a result, they have improved swiftly the quality of teaching in the school.
- The curriculum is broad and appropriate for the pupils' special educational needs. With the school now co-located on the site of an agricultural college, senior leaders are planning an expansion to the curriculum, particularly in areas such as outdoor activities and work experience. Currently, it is too early to judge the impact of this work.
- The school develops pupils' understanding of British values throughout the curriculum. Activities such as singing carols in a home for the elderly reinforce pupils' empathy for other people and visits to local churches support their understanding of the Christian religion. All members of the school community treat each other with dignity and respect.
- Teaching of personal, social and health topics covers the required areas but is in need of further development. The curriculum for social, moral, spiritual and cultural learning also requires improvement. Pupils' understanding of other cultures and religions is currently underdeveloped. The school is aware of this weakness and has plans to increase the pupils' first-hand experience of other cultures and faiths through visiting a wider range of different religious places of worship.
- Pupils and their parents receive effective independent careers advice and guidance from Year 9 onwards. Consequently, pupils understand the choices available to them after they leave school and take up appropriate opportunities and training in local colleges.
- Systems for managing staff performance, with clear links to salary progression, have been established throughout the school. As a result, weak teaching is identified and plans for improvement are quickly implemented.
- Pupil premium funding received by the school is used in a number of appropriate ways. For example, recently introduced small-group work in literacy and numeracy is already accelerating pupils' achievement in these areas.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding its pupils are effective and meet statutory requirements. Attendance and the progress that pupils make at the alternative provision is appropriately monitored and evaluated.
- The alternative provision provides a more appropriate learning environment for a small number of pupils that need a greater range of outdoor activities that are not currently available at the school. As a consequence of learning away from a school setting, their behaviour settles and attendance improves. However, the school is aware that the current provision does not fully meet their academic needs and is in the process of exploring supplementary alternative provision.
- The school continues to receive good support from the local authority, although this is reducing as the school improves.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance has improved significantly since the last inspection. Governors make good use of a range of appropriate skills and experiences to support the development of the school. They are committed, conscientious and passionate about the school and its future. The governing body has been strengthened by recent changes to its make-up and it has responded well to a review of its work conducted after the last inspection.
- Governors have been successful in monitoring the special measures action plan and most actions identified in the plan either are completed or are well under way.
- The previous system to monitor the progress that pupils made was inadequate. The school now has good systems to help governors effectively monitor pupils' progress.
- Governors have improved their monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school and there is evidence of senior staff being held to account for the quality of their work. They receive information on the quality of teaching in the school from senior leaders and support the acting headteacher in taking action when required. However, there is more to be done and some aspects of the work of the school, such as evaluating the impact of pupil premium funding, have not been sufficiently challenged.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good, both in lessons and around the school. The new school building provides a calm and spacious environment in which to learn and behaviour has improved because of the move.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good in almost all lessons. They are eager to learn and try hard to ensure that lessons are successful and enjoyable for all.
- Informal times during the school day, such as playtimes and lunchtimes, are happy occasions. Pupils play well together and appropriate levels of staffing ensure that a good balance is struck between supervision and pupil independence.
- The few incidents of anxious or challenging behaviour are well recorded and staff analyse them to work out ways in which they can be avoided in the future.
- All parents who expressed a view in the online questionnaire (Parent View) feel that behaviour is good in the school and that their child is happy to attend. Inspection evidence supports their views.
- In a very small minority of lessons, pupils' attention wanders when the work is not set at the right level for them and when adults get too involved in activities that the pupils should be doing for themselves.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The school is a safe place for pupils to learn. The acting headteacher is actively following up a very small number of areas in the new school building where site security could be improved further.
- Attendance for the last school year was nearly 95% and figures for the current year to date are similar. This compares well with attendance in mainstream schools. Absences are followed up rigorously and the school can demonstrate the impact of this in the improving attendance patterns of individual pupils.
- Risk assessments are in place for all school activities that require them, including off-site and adventurous activities.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching across the school has improved significantly since the last inspection. It is now good. Lesson planning has improved and pupils are enjoying more interesting and informative lessons. This makes them want to learn and their progress has improved. For example, in a mathematics lesson for older pupils, there was an appropriate emphasis on the practical use they would make of measurement in their adult lives and a good range of resources available to support their learning. They enjoyed the challenge of working out if a tape measure or a trundle wheel better measured their heads.
- The needs of more-able pupils for learning activities that challenge them are well met by recently introduced changes to teachers' lesson planning. Teaching in English continues to improve from a relatively strong base. Recently instituted small-group work in literacy is already proving effective in raising standards.
- The use of assessment information to inform future planning is becoming established, although this is not yet consistently good across the school. Teachers have worked hard to ensure that their assessment of

pupils' work is accurate. They have carefully checked the accuracy of their judgements with other teachers, both within the school and in other schools. This is good practice. However, in a small minority of lessons, insufficient attention is given to what pupils can do now and what they are expected to have learnt by the end of the lesson. Because of this, the learning of a few pupils slows.

- Expectations of how teachers will mark pupils' work are generally well established across the school. Most pupils' books contain accurate information on levels of achievement, helpful suggestions as to how the work could be improved and what it will lead on to.
- Senior leaders have established effective systems for observing the quality of teaching and for making suggestions for further improvement. Where teaching has not met expected standards, effective support programmes have been put in place, and in almost all cases, teaching has improved.
- The quality of relationships and the staff's knowledge of their pupils are strengths of the school. Staff treat pupils with dignity and respect. Consequently, pupils are motivated to work hard in lessons and to please their teachers.
- Teachers are typically effective at supporting pupils' learning and the targets they set for pupils are challenging yet achievable. Pupils generally make good progress in lessons as a result of recent improvements in teaching across the school.
- A more focused use of teaching assistants has led to the setting up of small groups to support pupils in numeracy and literacy, including phonics (the sounds letters make). Pupils who receive this support make accelerated progress as a result.
- The emphasis on reading as a homework activity contributes to the good progress that students make in this area. There is a good range of reading texts in the school and they are well used. In a class of 14 to 19 year olds, for instance, one student read fluently and with good expression from her reading book, while other students around the table listened with enjoyment.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The school's recently introduced systems for tracking pupils' progress show that the majority of pupils are now making accelerated progress against their challenging targets. However, this is from low starting points and is set against a recent history of underachievement. Reliable progress data does not extend over a long enough period of time to demonstrate that pupils' achievement over time is securely good.
- The school does not enter students early into external examinations. Students in the 14–19 phase of the school are now entered for courses that are nationally accredited. This was not the case at the last inspection. Teacher assessment shows that they are currently on track to be successful in these courses by the end of the school year, but as the courses are still in progress it is too early to judge the outcomes for these students.
- Support staff are increasingly skilled at judging when to intervene in a pupil's learning and when to encourage independence by stepping back. However, there are still occasions when a pupil's progress is slowed by an intervention from an adult that they do not need. For example, in a mathematics lesson, an excellent summing up of the learning during the lesson by the teacher was made difficult for pupils to follow by the unnecessary additional explanations offered by support staff while the teacher was talking.
- Primary pupils receive a good programme of activities in physical education and additional funding received by the school to support primary sport is well used to support the physical development of the pupils.
- There is no significant gap between the achievement of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding and of those for whom it does not, based on the pupils' individual starting points.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- The Early Years Foundation Stage is not yet good because it is too early for recent improvements to be firmly reflected in the progress children make.
- The Deputy Head has held temporary responsibility for developments at this key stage, prior to the appointment of a permanent Early Years Foundation Stage leader from Easter.
- The school's policy about which pupils should be in the Early Years Foundation Stage class and when they should move on is currently not set out in writing. On occasions, this can lead to pupils receiving teaching that is designed for younger children.
- The children are generally set suitable targets for their learning, with phonics being taught where appropriate. At times, however, a more precise focus on what each child will learn during each lesson

would lead to more rapid progress.

- Children are enjoying the extra space and opportunities provided by the new school building. The classroom is safe and well resourced. The range and quality of resources for learning and play have been significantly improved since the last inspection. However, more could be done in the outside areas to support the development of literacy and numeracy.
- Children behave well in the Early Years Foundation Stage class and show interest in their learning. Staff provide an appropriate balance between the learning activities that they direct and those that the children initiate for themselves. The improved accommodation supports this very well. At times, the role of support staff needs to be more carefully defined in teacher planning to ensure that all interventions are clear and effective.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Provision in the sixth form is not yet good because reliable information on how well students are doing in their learning is only available from the beginning of this school year. It is therefore too early to describe their achievement as securely good.
- Sixth form students are currently taught alongside Key Stage 4 pupils. Classes are arranged in three groups, with students aged from 14–19, according to ability and where they will move on to after school. While this makes for a manageable range of learning needs in each group and helps teachers to focus on how best to prepare students for life after school, it also means that students can stay in the same class group for up to five years. There is a lack of distinction between students in Year 11 and Year 12. Clearer emphasis is needed to identify those students who are in the sixth form as a distinct group. This is needed to help students understand and celebrate their progress through the phases of the school and their journey from being a teenager to a young adult.
- Teaching and learning in the sixth form are improving rapidly. Lessons and other learning activities are calm and purposeful. Teachers have a good understanding of what their students need to learn and ensure that the curriculum is based around preparation for life after school. Literacy and numeracy for adult life, independent living skills and preparation for the workplace are central in students' programmes of learning.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good. Students work with interest and commitment. They are happy to work in small groups and support each other well.
- Students in the sixth form enjoy their learning. In a physical education lesson, for example, they thoroughly enjoyed the space afforded by the new school hall and worked with energy and good humour through a series of circuit training exercises.
- The sixth form is well led and managed by the 14–19 cluster leader. She has a clear view of how she wants the provision to develop and she has moved towards it well in the short time that she has been at the school.

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	113635
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	454352

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Foundation 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	90
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patrick Roberts
Headteacher (Acting)	Sarah Pickering
Date of previous school inspection	26–27 November 2013
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