

Mill Water School

Bicton, East Budleigh, Budleigh Salterton, Devon EX9 7BJ

Inspection dates

25–26 April 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The drive, determination and energy of leaders have led to significant improvements since the last inspection.
- Staff share the high aspirations of leaders and are unrelenting in their pursuit to provide pupils with the very best learning experiences.
- Relationships between staff and pupils in the school are extremely strong and are built on mutual support and trust. This enables pupils to feel safe and secure.
- Staff are vigilant in all aspects of pupil welfare and safeguard them effectively.
- The quality of teaching is good. This enables pupils to achieve well and make good progress in their learning from extremely low starting points.
- The curriculum is bespoke to meet the individual needs of pupils, complemented by a wide range of enrichment activities.
- Children in the early years provision settle quickly and make good progress as a result of well-established routines and good teaching.
- Students make good progress on the 16 to 19 study programmes. Consequently, they are prepared well for their next steps in education, training or employment.
- The school provides pupils with a range of high-quality therapeutic provision. This makes a positive contribution to pupils' physical and emotional development.
- Behaviour is typically outstanding. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to all that school has to offer and behave well in lessons and around the school.
- The school works effectively with a range of outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the best possible support to meet their academic and emotional needs.
- Leaders have a detailed and accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, development plans do not show by who, how or when checks will be made to identify the impact of actions taken on pupils' progress.
- Governors play an active role in the school. They provide challenge and support to leaders. However, records do not clearly show the impact their challenge has on pupils' outcomes.
- Most parents speak extremely positively about the work of the school. There are, however, a few who are concerned about the quality of communication they receive from leaders.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - development plans indicate precisely when and how leaders, including governors, will check that actions taken are improving outcomes, and who will do the checking
 - the monitoring and recording of the range and individuality of assessed areas of pupils' learning is securely embedded to enable them to make the very best possible progress
 - governors' records show more precisely the impact of their challenge to leaders in raising pupils' achievement and progress
 - communication is improved quickly, especially for parents, so that everyone has a good understanding of what is happening within the school, the rationale behind proposed changes, and the impact it has on the quality of education pupils receive.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders are united in their ambition, determination and energy to ensure that the pupils who attend Mill Water School receive the best possible learning experiences. They have a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of need for each pupil and strive to ensure the needs are fully met.
- Senior leaders are ably supported by a highly motivated team of middle leaders who embrace challenge and share their vision. Leaders at all levels ensure that each pupil benefits from a personalised learning programme. Together, they carefully design these programmes to ensure they meet pupils' complex needs.
- The school makes effective use of special educational needs funding to provide pupils with the correct balance of education, therapy and care. This supports pupils and helps them to achieve well. For example, Lucy, the therapy dog, has an immeasurable impact on pupils' mental health and well-being.
- Leaders constantly monitor the quality of the curriculum to make sure it remains fit for purpose in meeting pupils' needs. They have access to a wide range of subjects, which focus strongly on developing core skills in English and mathematics. Also of paramount importance to leaders is the development of pupils' skills in independence. Such skills are woven throughout each activity, preparing pupils well for the future. Examples include being able to use a bus timetable, handling money and visiting places in the local community.
- Pupils have access to a range of enrichment activities. They spoke with animation to the inspector about the opportunities afforded to them such as horse riding, basketball and visits to the theatre.
- Spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is threaded carefully throughout the curriculum. Staff are highly effective role models in showing pupils, through their own actions and manner, how to work well alongside each other and happily get along. Pupils are therefore, appropriate to their age and stage of development, actively encouraged to play their part. They are able to successfully develop their social skills and the characteristics required to be tolerant and understanding of each other's differences. They are aware of other cultures and religions through visits to religious buildings. For example, older pupils have visited the synagogue in Exeter to gain some understanding of what it is to be Jewish. Links to a special school in New Delhi, India also enhance pupils' understanding of other cultures making them aware that while all should be treated equally, everyone is different.
- Leaders, including governors, ensure that additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is put to good use. They plan for specific activities, and purchase appropriate resources to support learning; for example, additional outside activities to help build pupils' self-esteem. Consequently, there is no difference between the achievement of these pupils and others in the school. Similarly, Year 7 catch-up funding is used effectively to support pupils to develop their early skills in reading and the use of number.

- The sport premium funding is used effectively to enhance pupils' learning experiences. For example, equipment has been purchased to equip the new 'Sports Barn' and outside spaces. Consequently, pupils have been introduced to a more diverse range of sports such as badminton. Pupils' experiences in the playground have also been enhanced; they are able to access a wider range of activities which promotes healthy lifestyles and increases cooperation and teamwork.
- Leaders, including governors, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. School development plans clearly articulate what leaders are striving to improve. However, plans are not explicit in stating by who, what and when actions will be monitored, and how impact will be measured to determine if they have been successful.
- Many parents are extremely happy with the quality of education and care their children receive at Mill Water School. Comments such as, 'an excellent school, can't knock it'; 'the school is almost like another family, home from home and so we have a bigger and brighter future' and 'Mill Water is a fantastic school' are just a few of the many positive comments about the school. Nevertheless, communication was raised as an area of concern by some parents. They comment that they are not always sure of the progress their children are making or given enough notice of changes or events at the school.

Governance of the school

- Governors bring a high level of skill and professional expertise to support the school. They have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's work and share leaders' high aspirations.
- Governors closely monitor finance to ensure that the financial stability of the school continues. For example, they have a detailed understanding of how pupil premium funding is spent and the positive impact it is having on the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors understand the wealth of information leaders present to them and use it to inform school development plans. Governors challenge leaders and hold them to account for the quality of education and care they provide. However, records of their meetings do not clearly demonstrate how the impact of their challenge is effectively driving forward improvements and further raising pupil outcomes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. A strong culture of safeguarding is evident in all aspects of the school's work. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect vulnerable pupils against all possible risks. Staff receive frequent and high-quality training on keeping pupils safe. Controversial issues are not dodged. For example, staff have undertaken training on child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. This ensures that staff, irrespective of their role, have the knowledge and skills to quickly identify any changes in pupils which may suggest they are at risk of harm, and be able to take rapid and confident action.

- Staff fully understand the importance of completing risk assessments personalised to the individual needs of the pupil. Leaders monitor these carefully to ensure they remain fit for purpose. For example, emergency evacuation procedures for pupils who are in wheelchairs are reviewed regularly
- Systems in place at the start and end of the day to ensure pupils are safe are extremely well choreographed and help pupils keep their anxiety levels to a minimum.
- The school's procedures to check the suitability of staff to work with pupils are robust. Leaders, including governors, are well trained in order to recruit safely. All staff are vetted carefully prior to starting employment at the school.
- Safeguarding documents and records are detailed and of high quality. They are appropriately stored and shared. Leaders work closely with a range of outside agencies to minimise risk to pupils and keep them safe.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspector talked openly about how they feel safe in school, reflecting the high levels of care and guidance staff provide. Pupils are confident that they can talk to any member of staff about any worries or concerns, and know they will be supported well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good. Staff create a very positive atmosphere for learning through their passion, enthusiasm and the caring relationships they share with pupils. Teachers show dedication and a strong desire to provide the pupils with the very best learning experiences. Consequently, pupils enjoy their time in school, attend regularly and make good progress from their starting points.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They show resilience and stamina to ensure they get the very best out of pupils. Staff see beyond the disability of pupils and expect them to work hard, be successful and to achieve well, however small the steps of progress.
- Teachers' knowledge of what each pupil can and cannot do is impressive. They use this knowledge to plan learning that precisely meets the needs of pupils, helping them to develop skills and confidently tackle a range of activities. For example, older pupils in a mathematics lesson were able to successfully demonstrate their developing knowledge and understanding of money to solve real-life scenarios.
- Teachers plan learning opportunities across the curriculum to develop skills in speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers provide pupils with many chances to go out into the community to practise and hone these skills. For example, older pupils visit local restaurants and independently order and pay for their purchases. This work successfully prepares pupils for their next stage of their education or employment.
- Interesting and engaging activities are carefully planned to capture pupils' imagination. For example, younger pupils were engrossed in a construction activity and their delight was clearly visible when they were successful, demonstrating their growing skills in coordination and balance.

- Teachers' strong subject knowledge and passion leads pupils to engage quickly in their learning and make consistently good progress. Questioning by staff to check pupils' understanding and make them think more deeply is a strength of the school. This was exemplified during a reading activity with the very youngest children identified as most able. The probing questions asked by the adult resulted in significant progress being made, especially in their understanding of the text.
- Teachers and therapists work well together. They set challenging targets for pupils which help them secure next steps in their learning, personal development and emotional well-being.
- Support staff are well deployed. They develop strong relationships with the pupils and provide effective support which contributes to pupils' good progress.
- Teachers carefully monitor pupils' learning and progress. They quickly spot gaps in knowledge and skills and provide pupils with learning activities to rapidly tackle and eradicate these gaps. However, teachers are aware that work is needed to further enhance the monitoring and range of information gathered to ensure that activities planned enable pupils to make the very best progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils feel safe and secure. They have a good understanding of risks in and out of school, according to their age and stage of development. For example, they have an awareness of who is safe to talk to when out in the community.
- All staff are trained to recognise signs of harm and abuse. They are diligent and act quickly to deal with any concerns. Daily briefings ensure effective communication between leaders and staff. Minibus drivers and escorts also provide staff with updates on pupils' behaviour and welfare following journeys to and from school.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. Attendance is monitored carefully and if pupils' attendance levels dip below an acceptable level, and absence is unplanned, rapid action is taken by leaders to ensure the absence does not continue.
- Pupils, staff and parents are very positive about behaviour and safety. One parent stated, 'The school is brilliant, all the children are happy and well looked after.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour was exemplary, with pupils eager to get on with their learning.
- In lessons, teachers are extremely skilful at encouraging pupils to participate. Pupils respond well to instructions and have a good awareness of the difference between right and wrong. Staff manage any episodes of pupils' complex behaviours well. Physical restraint is only ever used as a last resort. Leaders keep careful records and analysis of such occurrences and these show that the number of incidents of physical restraint is low and continues to fall. This is because staff know pupils exceedingly

well and take rapid action before incidents escalate.

- Breaktimes and lunchtimes are happy, calm and sociable occasions when pupils and adults have the opportunity to chat and eat their lunch together. Adults are good role models for pupils, helping them to develop positive social skills.
- Pupils respond well to the structure of the school day. Following a calm start to the day, lessons start without delay, and clear routines are well established. Pupils find their individualised, visual timetables extremely beneficial and helpful in managing their time in school.
- Pupils told the inspector that bullying and unkind behaviour is extremely rare. They are confident that if there is such an occurrence, it is quickly dealt with by staff. Behaviour logs viewed support this view.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' attainment on entry is significantly below that expected for their age. This is due to their complex needs and disabilities. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and an education, health and care plan.
- The school's records, including assessment information and work completed by pupils, confirm that pupils make good progress from their starting points across a range of learning activities, including their communication skills and personal development. This is as a result of good teaching.
- Pupils face significant challenges due to their complex needs and disabilities. Consequently, many are at the early stages of development as learners. Nevertheless, as a result of the high levels of care and commitment by staff in addition to the wide range of communication tools available, pupils quickly learn how to communicate their needs and requirements; for example, the need to go to the toilet or to eat.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress. There is no difference in achievement between these pupils and others in the school. This is because pupil premium funding is spent wisely to meet the needs of these pupils.
- Those pupils identified as more able achieve well and make good progress. Teachers provide activities which develop pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics. They are able to read with confidence, write simple sentences and use their knowledge of number to solve simple number problems. For example, older pupils were successful in using a calendar to correctly answer questions in mathematics. Acquiring such skills increases pupils' levels of independence, making them better prepared for the future.
- Through skills and their detailed knowledge of each individual pupil, teachers are adept at breaking down tasks into small steps of learning. Consequently, activities planned are bespoke to the needs of each pupil and through these activities, combined with effective teaching, pupils subsequently make good progress.
- Pupils' early reading skills enable them to access a range of books and reading material. Phonics is taught effectively to provide pupils with the necessary tools to support them when facing new vocabulary. Pupils can express which types of books are their favourites and enjoy listening to stories. Pupils who read during the inspection

were confident in their reading. As a result, pupils are successful in using their reading skills in other areas of their learning, for example in their mathematics.

- Pupils' skills in writing vary significantly according to their needs and starting points. Nevertheless, teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to practise their writing across a range of subjects, for example in making lists, writing invitations and writing instructions for making a meal.
- Pupils are encouraged to keep fit and healthy through regular exercise, which many of them enjoy. Staff ensure that pupils undertake the 'prescribed' exercise designed by therapists. For example, the inspector observed pupils using the 'peanut' ball to strengthen their core muscles. In addition, there was great excitement when pupils had the opportunity to try out the new trikes that arrived in school during the inspection. Their delight and joy was palpable when they were successful in riding them independently for the first time.
- Staff help pupils to increase, where possible, their level of independence, for example in intimate care. As a result, pupils are increasingly able to use the toilet for themselves and feed themselves without adult intervention.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start in the early years provision with skills significantly below those typical for their age across all areas of learning. As a result of strong leadership and good teaching, children make good progress.
- Transition arrangements into school are pivotal to the success of this provision. Close partnership working with parents and outside agencies ensures children quickly settle into their new environment.
- Children's learning is organised well. Exciting and engaging activities are carefully planned to match their specific needs. These activities quickly engage children and enable them to concentrate for increasing periods of time. This results in them making good progress. For example, an able child was engrossed in a chosen book, reading simple words and successfully re-telling the story. Such activities instil an early love of learning, developing children's reading and communication skills.
- Adults work well with small groups and individuals. They are highly enthusiastic and share children's delight in activities such as creating a snow scene to heighten children's sensory experiences or successfully balancing blocks to build towers taller than themselves.
- Children behave exceptionally well in and out of the classroom environment. This is because staff have high expectations and well-established routines which are consistently implemented and modelled. Systems are in place and closely monitored by staff to ensure that children feel safe and are safe.
- Leaders are not complacent and actively seek out good practice in their quest to secure outstanding early years provision. For example, they continue to strive to ensure that early assessments of what children can and cannot do are sufficiently rigorous to enable them to make the very best possible progress from when they start school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of this provision is good. There is a clear vision and a strong desire to provide students with the skills and independence to be successful in the next stage of their education or employment.
- Leaders are ambitious for these students. They have high expectations of themselves and their students. As a result, students make good progress. Teachers plan carefully and personalise learning to meet the needs of students. Students have access to a range of accredited courses and formal qualifications. For example, functional skills in English, mathematics and information and communications technology (ICT) are successfully undertaken by students at entry level. Students also have access to an award certificate and diploma entry 1 in personal progress. Courses of study include mathematics skills, communication skills, ICT skills, independent living and supported employment.
- The level of understanding students have of the world around them is often limited by their significant and complex needs. However, leaders show a dogged determination to ensure these students do not miss out on the experiences that other students of a similar age would have. For example, students have access to designated areas where they can independently make drinks and socialise. Students told the inspector that they are delighted about the purchase of a massage chair which they are regularly able to use as a form of relaxation to help reduce stress and anxiety.
- Students have good access to careers advice and guidance. Staff work closely and successfully to help support them identify their next steps. As a result, no student leaves the school without being in education, training or employment.
- Work placements are chosen in close collaboration with each student to reflect their strengths, interests and abilities. For example, students currently attend placements in retail, office administration, hospitality, hair and beauty, and agriculture. These provide students with valuable experience of a range of jobs they may wish to pursue post-19.
- Leaders have actively been modifying and enhancing the curriculum and assessment systems to broaden and enrich students' experiences. These systems are proving highly effective, as reflected in student achievements. Nevertheless, leaders continue to drive forward improvements and are currently working to further develop students' application of skills across all areas of their learning.

School details

Unique reference number	113635
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10024916

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maggie Carter
Interim headteacher	Clive Padgett
Telephone number	01395 568890
Website	www.millwater.devon.sch.uk
Email address	admin@millwater.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 February 2015

Information about this school

- Mill Water School is a foundation special school for pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and/or an education, health and care plan.
- The percentage of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium is above the national average.
- The school receives funding to develop sport in the primary phase.
- All children in the early years provision attend school full time.

- The majority of pupils are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The school does not access alternative provision for its pupils.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited classrooms during the inspection to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment with school leaders. The quality of pupils' work was scrutinised.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the two deputy headteachers, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority. A telephone conversation was held with an independent education consultant who informally supports the school. The inspector took into consideration the responses of 42 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspector met with a group of pupils to listen to their views about the school. The views of other pupils were gathered during lessons, playtimes and lunchtimes. The inspector listened to pupils read.
- A wide range of documentation was examined including the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school's development plan, and information relating to pupils' achievement and progress. Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- The inspector considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 22 text messages were taken into account. Inspectors spoke to a small number of parents informally during the inspection.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017