

Inspection of a good school: Mill Water School

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

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 March 2023

Outcome

Mill Water School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff know their pupils well. As a result, pupils feel valued and like attending school. They enjoy their time in class and enthusiastically participate in learning. They do not give up easily when tasks are challenging. Pupils understand how to live up to staff's high expectations. Consequently, they make progress from their own starting points.

The school environment is calm and orderly. Staff help pupils to behave well. Pupils treat each other with kindness. Bullying hardly ever takes place, but if it does happen, it is dealt with quickly. Pupils trust the adults in the school. This makes them feel safe.

Governors and leaders have invested in new leisure and play facilities at the school. Pupils use the new outdoor gym equipment, trampoline and bikes. They really enjoy these and say that they are fun. They help to develop pupils' confidence, communication skills and physical fitness.

Many trips and events enhance the curriculum, which widens pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world. These include visits from authors, illustrators and artists. Pupils enjoy these events and can remember and describe what they have learned from them.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have given close attention to the development of the curriculum. In several subjects, the curriculum is well structured and sequenced to meet the needs of pupils at the school. As a result, English, mathematics and the teaching of reading, including phonics, have become strengths of the school. Pupils make good progress through the curriculum in these areas.

Pupils at the school have a range of complex needs. All pupils are supported through education, health and care (EHC) plans. Staff are skilful at assessing pupils' needs and responding to them. This results in pupils behaving well in lessons. Disruption to learning

is rare. However, in some areas of the curriculum, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Leaders have not set out the important knowledge and skills that they want pupils to learn and by when.

The curriculum in the sixth form is broad and achieves a good balance between academic subjects and the need for wider development. Teachers focus on preparing students for their next steps and supporting them to their destinations. For example, students learn to recognise and understand the key vocabulary used in the wider world. The curriculum supports students' communication skills and helps them learn wider knowledge.

In early years, the curriculum is well matched to the developmental needs of the individual children, and leaders have given much thought to the teaching of reading. A well-structured phonics programme is in place. There is a whole-school approach to the development of language and reading. Adults read to children, and children's reading books match their phonics knowledge. There is a focus on building vocabulary. Visiting authors and illustrators work with pupils, and theatre groups bring stories alive through drama. Classrooms have book collections, and pupils read a wide range of materials. These many actions have made reading popular with pupils. They are developing their confidence as readers.

Leaders plan the pupils' wider curriculum with care and sensitivity. They are ambitious for pupils' future and want them to be as independent as possible. Careers education is in place throughout the school. There are close links with a range of employers. They visit the school and make a significant contribution to pupils' understanding of the world of work. Pupils meet with a careers specialist, and students in the sixth form undertake work experience to prepare them for their next steps.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils' personal development. The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education is well sequenced and matched to the needs of the pupils. Staff provide lessons that explore issues that are relevant to the pupils, such as how to manage themselves in different social situations. This helps pupils to behave appropriately in a range of settings and supports their personal development.

Physiotherapists and occupational therapists work alongside school staff to put the right support in place for pupils. This supports their health and well-being across the school.

Staff feel well supported by leaders. They enjoy working in a positive and open climate. Staff appreciate the support they receive for their professional development.

Governors are frequent visitors to the school. This means that they know it well and have first-hand evidence of what the school does well and what needs to be improved. They are supportive of leaders and hold them to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well informed about safeguarding. They receive effective safeguarding training. Staff know how to report concerns and what to expect when they have done so. They feel well supported by the safeguarding team. Leaders seek early help and work closely with their safeguarding partners. Staff work together to keep pupils safe.

Pupils know whom to go to in school if they have any concerns. They feel safe in school and form trusting relationships with adults. Governors are well informed and meet their responsibility to recruit staff who are suitable to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum, in some subject areas, needs further development. Leaders' curriculum thinking does not identify the essential knowledge that pupils should learn and when. This means that some pupils do not make consistent progress through the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is well structured in all subjects and sets out what pupils should learn and in what order.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in April 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	113635
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10241766
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	120
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	6
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Paul Charlton
Headteacher	Sarah Pickering
Website	www.millwater.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 April 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Mill Water School is a foundation special school for pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties.
- The school is part of a cooperative educational trust, SENTient Trust, in Devon.
- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan.
- The percentage of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.
- All children in the early years provision attend school full time.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for its pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, English, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and held discussions with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors met with curriculum leaders and looked more widely at documentation in other subjects.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors examined the school's arrangements for safeguarding by meeting with the designated safeguarding lead. They also scrutinised policies, procedures and record-keeping and reviewed the safeguarding checks made on staff when they are recruited.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils around the school site and held meetings with boys, girls and a mixed group of pupils.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the local authority's school adviser.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including policies and record-keeping for behaviour management, exclusions and attendance.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, the online inspection questionnaire, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Malcolm Willis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tonya Hill

Ofsted Inspector

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