

# Inspection of a good school: Mill Ford School

Rochford Crescent, Ernesettle, Plymouth, Devon PL5 2PY

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Inspection dates: 4 and 5 May 2023

## **Outcome**

Mill Ford School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils love coming to Mill Ford School. Each day starts with warm, happy greetings between pupils and staff. The trusting relationships staff build with pupils and their families form the foundation for pupils' positive experiences at the school. Pupils' development, well-being and happiness are at the centre of everything that happens.

Leaders and staff have high expectations for pupils' learning and achievements. Staff expertly support pupils' communication skills. They skilfully adapt what happens in the classroom. As a result, pupils thrive. They gain confidence, learn new skills and develop independence.

Staff manage pupils' behaviour well. Leaders ensure that staff are well prepared to support pupils with complex needs. For example, if a pupil needs a break from class, staff use carefully considered strategies to help pupils re-engage quickly.

Pupils are confident that staff will quickly help them to resolve any disputes that may arise. They know there are members of staff they can talk to if they have concerns about something or if someone is being unkind.

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

Leaders and staff share a determination that every pupil develops the independence and knowledge they need to enable them to succeed. The education and care that pupils receive is of a high quality.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn an individualised, aspirational curriculum, which meets their needs well. Staff work closely with parents and carers of children with the most

complex needs in the early years. This helps these children learn to communicate well at home and at school, as well as building their independence early on.

Students in the sixth form gain the knowledge and skills they need for adulthood. They benefit from work experience opportunities and a wide range of projects. For example, they work with staff at Dartmoor National Park. Pupils across the school are very well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Staff skilfully plan well-sequenced learning. This helps pupils build their knowledge in small steps, linking each new piece of knowledge to what they already know and can do. Leaders set personalised goals based on each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan. This links the school's curriculum to individual pupil targets and results in fine-tuned personalised learning across the school.

Teachers' use of assessment is highly effective. They routinely check what pupils remember and adjust their teaching when pupils need more support. This ensures that pupils do not fall behind.

Reading and communication are a strength of the school. Leaders have put in place a well-planned phonics programme. Staff benefit from the training they receive to enable them to teach reading effectively. As a result, pupils at an earlier stage of reading development, including those in the early years, gain confidence with the key sounds that they need to start to read.

If required, pupils use alternative means of communication. Skilled staff ensure that pupils become confident in using their communication aids. This helps all pupils to be able to communicate with staff and each other.

Pupils' wider personal development is integral to the school's work. Leaders design the curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) with care and in accordance with pupils' needs. Pupils build knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy and lead safe, active lives. They show their understanding of different cultures, faiths, types of families and relationships. Through their personal development, pupils learn to respect each other's right to be listened to.

Older pupils help to run clubs during the school day. This helps pupils to develop leadership skills. There are further leadership opportunities in the sixth form, where students can apply for posts linked to running the school council. Staff encourage all pupils to try new experiences. This helps pupils to build confidence and resilience.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils realise these expectations. They are polite and courteous to each other and to staff. They enjoy their learning. Staff encourage pupils and students to aim high and adopt a can-do approach.

Leaders, including governors, know the school well. They accurately understand the school's strengths, areas for improvement and the pressures that staff face. Staff enjoy working at the school. They appreciate the way in which leaders consider their well-being.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Effective arrangements are in place to identify pupils who may be at risk and provide the support they need. Staff are well trained and know the procedures they must follow to help keep pupils safe. Leaders ensure they complete all required checks before adults work in the school.

Through the curriculum, pupils are taught about the risks involved in various aspects of life. They learn about healthy relationships and how to stay safe in everyday situations. For example, they learn how to stay safe online and when travelling.

## 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2013.

## 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

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| <b>Unique reference number</b>                    | 113651   |
| <b>Local authority</b>                            | Plymouth   |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                          | 10226913   |
| <b>Type of school</b>                             | Special  |
| <b>School category</b>                            | Community special  |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                        | 3 to 19  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                           | Mixed  |
| <b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>   | Mixed  |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>        | 125  |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b> | 15   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                      | The governing body   |
| <b>Chair of governing body</b>                    | Jan Georgeson  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                | Claire Wills   |
| <b>Website</b>                                    | <a href="http://www.millfordschool.co.uk">www.millfordschool.co.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                | 31 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005             |

## Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with complex needs, including severe and profound needs, multiple learning difficulties, complex medical needs and autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school has three classes, which are located at nearby Ernesettle Community School.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not use any alternative education providers.

## 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 met with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. The lead inspector met remotely with the chair of the governing body and four other governors. The lead inspector also had a remote meeting with two local authority representatives.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication (including early reading), PSHE and mathematics. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector also spoke to leaders about the curriculum for science.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements. They spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding. The lead inspector met with the designated leader and reviewed the school's systems and single central record.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and considered the results of the Ofsted staff and pupil questionnaires.

### **Inspection team**

Mark Burgess, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Paula Marsh

Ofsted Inspector

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