

Inspection of an outstanding school: Mill Green School

Lansbury Avenue, Parr, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 1BU

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 May 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Mill Green is a caring place where pupils, and students in the sixth form, thrive. They are happy and settled at school. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are adept at understanding these needs. They build strong, nurturing relationships with pupils. This helps pupils to feel listened to and valued.

The school is in the process of strengthening its curriculum. This reflects the school's ambition for pupils to achieve as highly as they can. Most pupils strive to meet these high expectations of their academic and social success. Typically, they gain the qualifications that they need to move on to further education, training or employment. However, some of the changes to the curriculum have not gone far enough to ensure that pupils experience the depth of learning that they should.

The school provides pupils with opportunities that prepare them for their future lives. For instance, pupils learn how to go shopping, cook simple meals and use public transport. They gradually increase their independence. This helps them to develop into confident young adults, ready to live fruitful lives in society.

Pupils learn how to recognise and manage their emotions. This helps most pupils to behave well around school. Staff are quick to notice when pupils experience distress. Staff manage any incidents of challenging behaviour effectively. This enables pupils to learn in a calm, safe environment.

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

In recent years, the school experienced a period of instability in leadership, compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This combination hampered governors' work to maintain the strengths identified at the previous inspection. Since 2022, the school has

acted quickly to bring about necessary changes. Many of these changes have already had a positive impact. For example, the school has adapted well to cater for pupils with a wider range of SEND than in the past.

Some other changes, such as improvements to the curriculum, have been slower to take effect. The school has designed an ambitious curriculum that allows pupils to study a broad range of subjects. In most of these subjects, the end points of the curriculum have been well thought out. Pupils follow individual pathways which typically lead to a range of recognised qualifications and vocational awards. However, in some subjects, the school has not set out clearly enough what pupils should learn, and when this subject content will be taught. This makes it difficult for staff to design learning that builds on what pupils already know. As a result, pupils sometimes do not learn and remember the content of the curriculum as well as they should.

Staff know their pupils' additional needs inside out. Teachers use information about these needs to adapt the delivery of the curriculum. They set small, achievable targets for each individual. This helps pupils to make progress towards the objectives in their education, health and care (EHC) plans. Pupils with the most profound and complex needs experience a curriculum which meets their needs well.

Communication and language development is a high priority in the school. Expert staff support pupils who use symbols to communicate. This enables these pupils to have a voice, make choices and socialise with their peers. Many pupils develop into confident, accurate readers during their time at school. However, a small number of pupils at the early stages of reading do not receive the help that they need. The phonics programme is in its early stages of development. Staff are awaiting training. They are not well-equipped to deliver the programme confidently. As a result, some pupils do not read as well as they should.

Around the school, there is a positive and calm atmosphere. Pupils typically conduct themselves well. Pupils are polite to staff and welcoming to visitors. The school's recent actions have led to a reduction in more serious instances of disruption to lessons.

Most pupils attend school often. The school is working closely with the families of a small number of pupils who are persistently absent. Staff have a detailed knowledge of the barriers that these pupils face to their regular attendance at school. This helps the school to provide effective support to pupils and their families. These pupils' rates of attendance are increasing.

The school has a clear focus on preparing pupils and students for adulthood. Pupils experience a carefully constructed programme of opportunities designed to ready them for their next steps in life. This includes effective careers guidance and thoughtful opportunities for work experience. Pupils also learn about life in modern Britain and what it means to have a positive relationship.

The school ensures that its wide-ranging enrichment programme is accessible to all. Pupils enjoy taking part in DJ workshops, drama productions or following the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme.

Experienced governors provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support to the school. They pay close attention to the well-being of leaders and staff. This helps staff to feel valued as part of a close-knit team. Staff are proud to work at the school. They appreciate how the school has reduced their workload, for instance by removing the expectation for written lesson plans.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the school has not given sufficient thought to the subject-specific knowledge that pupils should learn, and when this should be taught. At times, this hinders staff in designing effective learning. Consequently, some pupils do not experience the depth of learning that they should. The school should clarify the knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn in each subject and the order in which this should be taught.
- The school is in the early stages of implementing a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics and early reading. In addition, some staff have not had suitable training to deliver the recently introduced phonics programme. As a result, a small number of pupils have gaps in their reading knowledge which are not being addressed. They do not learn to read with fluency as quickly as they should. The school should ensure that staff receive training and support to confidently deliver the phonics curriculum in a systematic and effective way.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 outstanding in October 2014.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	131022
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10321387
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	134
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Marie Quirk
Headteacher	Sean Lenahan
Website	www.millgreen.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	1 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils have EHC plans. The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and autism. Some pupils have additional sensory and physical disabilities and complex behavioural needs. Some pupils also have medical conditions.
- Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils on roll has grown considerably.
- The school provides some vocational aspects of its education at an additional site. This is located at the Mill Green Centre, Sankey Street, WA9 1QF.
- The headteacher was appointed in April 2022. Since then, several other new staff have also been appointed.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provider for a very small number of pupils.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical-education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector also met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. He also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including communication and reading, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school and their views of behaviour and bullying.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document, leaders' improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils, and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils and for staff.
- An inspector visited the school's additional site and considered the education that pupils receive there.

Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Pippa Jackson Maitland

His Majesty's Inspector

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