

Inspection of Mill Ford School

Rochford Crescent, Ernesettle, Plymouth, Devon PL5 2PY

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 June 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Mill Ford School caters for pupils with complex support needs and severe learning difficulties. The school provides exceptionally well for pupils' communication needs. Throughout the school day, pupils use a range of communication aids to make choices and express preferences. This helps pupils to have a voice and develop their confidence.

Pupils learn in increasingly formal ways, as appropriate to their development. Some pupils engage with the world through sensory experiences. Others take delight in learning phonics and go on to become confident and fluent readers. Students in the sixth form have every opportunity to develop skills to thrive as adults. Parents value the wide range of activities that pupils have the chance to do, including in the local community.

Pupils know and trust the staff who work with them day to day. They feel safe at school and attend very well. During lessons, there is a happy buzz as pupils have a go and get involved. They know they are expected to try their best and they do.

The school council plays an important part in improving the school. Pupils on the school council help leaders to solve difficult problems. They make a real difference, for example by helping to set up trips to a local farm and a theme park.

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

The school is highly ambitious for each pupil and takes great pride in their individual achievements. The curriculum has been designed with considerable expertise. It meets a wide range of needs, helping pupils to move to more formal approaches to learning as their development allows. The school recognises that pupils have different starting points in different subjects and sets out to maximise what each pupil can learn. Staff deepen their expertise through ongoing training. As a result, many pupils exceed initial expectations.

Communication and reading form the bedrock of the school's curriculum. The school carefully assesses what each pupil can do. The curriculum addresses gaps, for example in pupils' awareness of sounds. The school rightly recognises that pupils need to build their learning on strong foundations. Through regular repetition, many pupils learn the letters and sounds they need to read successfully. Students in the sixth form continue to practise their reading as they prepare to transition into work or college.

During the school day, pupils enjoy regular access to the local community. This includes work experience, such as in a café. Other examples include a visit to a music festival or local beach, or it might involve swimming lessons. These experiences help pupils to develop confidence and apply what they know in unfamiliar settings and situations. Older pupils, including those in the sixth form, learn to interact in formal ways with the world of work. For example, as part of a

comprehensive careers education programme, pupils write a curriculum vitae (CV) and apply for jobs.

The site supports pupils' physical developmental needs. Outdoor spaces are well equipped and provide memorable experiences; for example, pupils can tend to the goats. Pupils have 'water movement' sessions in the indoor swimming pool, informed by bespoke physiotherapy plans. The school advocates for pupils' physical and medical needs. This helps to ensure that pupils receive the medical and dental care they need. The school provides support to help pupils manage emotions linked to their health care needs.

A wide variety of professionals and services are involved in helping to meet pupils' needs. This helps to create a healthy, open culture that protects vulnerable pupils from harm.

The school consistently plays a leading role, both locally and nationally, in meeting the needs of pupils with complex needs. For example, pupils and staff helped a national charity to develop resources on relationships and sex education that are suitable for use with pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND). There is a strong, shared understanding of the school's approach to relationships and sex education. As a result, the key messages are repeated often. Pupils learn to draw their own boundaries in social situations.

The school is very well led. Leaders pay close attention to any patterns in pupils' behaviour and attendance. They ensure that the school learns from any incidents and adapt the provision in the best interests of pupils. As a result of strong leadership, including governance, expectations of what pupils can and will achieve have continued to rise over time. Pupils and students in the sixth form now reach their full potential by achieving the qualifications they need to access a wide range of destinations, such as college places and supported internships.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	113651
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10322211
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
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	121
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Janet Georgeson
Headteacher	Claire Wills
Website	www.millfordschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 May 2023

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.
- Since the last inspection, the school's sixth form provision has moved to a purpose-built cabin onsite. In addition, pupils who were located at Ernesettle Community School have been integrated into the main school building.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. The lead inspector also spoke with two representatives from Plymouth local authority via video call. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and early reading, creative, including food technology, and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum and considered samples of pupils work in some other subjects, for example in PSHE.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and met with members of the school council. An adult was present when inspectors met with pupils to support their communication needs.
- 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.

Inspection team

Lydia Pride, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gill Hickling

Ofsted Inspector

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