



Inspection report

Mount Gilbert School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 132122
LEA Telford and Wrekin

Inspection number 273670
Inspection dates 22 and 23 February 2005
Reporting inspector Ms A Berger HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Community	School address	Hinkshay Road
School category	Special		Dawley
Age range of pupils	11 to 16 Years		Telford
			Shropshire
			TF4 3PP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01952 272473
Number on roll	38	Fax number	01952 272474
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Studd
Date of previous inspection	January 2003	Headteacher	Ms A Valentini

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 16 years	13 April 2005	273670

Introduction

When Mount Gilbert School was inspected in January 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on four occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in February 2005.

Description of the school

Mount Gilbert School provides for up to 50 pupils who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It covers the large rural and urban areas of Shropshire and Telford; many pupils travel long distances to school. All have Statements of Special Educational Need and many have a range of disabilities including autism, sensory impairments, speech and language disorders and mental health problems. The school has been in existence for four years as a result of the amalgamation of two similar types of provision. There are 38 pupils on roll and numbers are steadily increasing. Almost all the pupils are from white British backgrounds and all speak English; 80 per cent are eligible for free school meals, which is average for schools of this type. The level of the pupils' attainment when they are admitted is, for the large majority, below average. Many have missed substantial periods of schooling and only half of them participated in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

Mount Gilbert School is providing a sound education for its pupils. A much-improved ethos and determined leadership from the headteacher and the senior team, better attendance and a motivating curriculum have resulted in rising standards. The school promotes positive relationships and excellent arrangements are made for resolving conflicts; as a result the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are mostly good. The curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to learn; it is broad, balanced and relevant to their needs. The quality of teaching is mostly satisfactory or better and staff have worked very hard to engage all the pupils in learning. However, lessons do not always sufficiently extend the pupils' thinking or take full account of what they can already do. This, along with their low starting points at the beginning of Key Stage 3, explains why many still do not reach their potential.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of January 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with leadership and management, attendance, the quality of teaching and the curriculum. There has been good progress in all areas, though the quality of teaching still requires some further improvements.

Capacity to improve

The school is well placed to improve. The headteacher and senior team have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and they find effective and creative solutions to the problems they identify. There is a thorough programme for monitoring the school's performance, and systems for tracking and analysing the pupils' progress are developing. However, there is a risk to the school's further progress as staff and pupils remain isolated within the educational community and there are too few partnerships with other schools.

What the school should do to improve further

The school's development plan recognises most of the areas where improvement is needed. However the key priorities are to:

- ensure that teaching consistently challenges the pupils to achieve their potential in all subjects;
- establish secure systems to assess and track the progress of pupils;

- develop further the options programme to ensure continuity in learning and progression over time;
- work with the local education authority (LEA) and others to increase opportunities for pupils and staff to work in partnership with mainstream schools.

Achievement and standards

Many pupils face considerable barriers to learning and the school is successful in removing many of these. Though most pupils do not achieve the nationally expected levels at the end of Year 9, most make satisfactory progress given their low starting points and poor concentration. At Key Stage 4 almost all pupils attain GCSE or entry-level passes in English, mathematics and science, though too few pass GCSE examinations at grades A* to C. The pupils achieve higher standards when involved in practical and vocational courses. Many develop appropriate work-place skills, and some achieve nationally recognised qualifications in information and communication technology, catering, horticulture and childcare.

The pupils made satisfactory progress in all lessons. In literacy sessions they identified errors in spelling and punctuation, though they struggled to apply their knowledge and their writing skills were weak. Practical mathematics lessons have encouraged the pupils to develop an understanding of number, nevertheless, many still lack the required basic skills.

The pupils' achievements are limited by the lack of sufficiently high expectations in some lessons. The school is aware that, whilst standards are rising, overall they remain too low.

Personal development

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. The pupils show much greater self-control and confidence than previously. Through the very good arrangements for resolving conflicts they take greater responsibility for their own actions. They have learned to articulate their feelings and thoughts rather than act on them to the detriment of the community.

When the school became subject to special measures the pupils were frequently restrained to ensure they did not damage themselves or others. This is now a rarity. Attendance is good. The rate for last term was 85 per cent and this reflects the pupils' increased interest and enjoyment in learning.

Much of the progress in the pupils' personal development is due to the very effective work of the non-teaching staff. Several have clearly defined and well-developed roles. The school pays good attention to promoting healthy eating and there are many opportunities to develop physical fitness.

The overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good. The pupils have made a considerable contribution to the improvements in the school

through their weekly school council meetings; they discuss their views and ideas about the school and readily take up positions of responsibility. They respect the staff and relationships are very good. The pupils' pride in their school is evident in their positive approach to visitors and the many people they meet and work with in the community. The many visits in the locality and, for example, the school's link with another school in Africa promote an understanding of the pupils' own heritage and that of others.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall; it was satisfactory in almost all lessons and sometimes good. The teachers have risen to the challenges of the new curriculum and plan relevant and motivating activities for the pupils. This accounts for the improvements in pupils' attitudes and the rising standards.

Lessons were well planned and care was taken to ensure that the tasks set enabled all pupils to achieve success. However, insufficient use was made of questioning to extend the pupils' understanding. The teaching assistants used their time well to ensure that the right level of support was available to meet the individual needs of pupils.

The school has begun to establish a system for assessing and tracking the pupils' progress. The information obtained when the pupils arrive is inadequate and much remains to be done to evaluate the progress the pupils make over time in each of the curriculum areas.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a very wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their physical, creative, social and vocational skills.

Valuable half-termly meetings are held with each pupil to review their progress and choose options for the next term. These meetings are highly valued by staff and pupils and provide a very good forum to monitor the pupils' progress and ensure an appropriate curriculum. The options programme is very popular with the staff and pupils as it provides a good variety of learning opportunities. However, continuity and progression are insecure for some pupils when they choose different subjects each half term.

The staff have established good relationships with individual agencies but pupils and staff still express concerns that problems are not resolved through a co-ordinated multi-agency approach. A fortnightly meeting has recently been established with health and social services to improve the way they provide for the most vulnerable pupils within the school. However, this has not yet had a substantial impact on the pupils.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision which has informed much of the developments and she provides good leadership. She has been well supported by the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher, who work together to manage the school well. They have the confidence of the staff and provide a secure and positive ethos for the pupils.

The staff receive good professional development; the training to improve the behaviour of the pupils has been particularly effective. New staff have received some suitable training and support to ensure they are aware of the school's policies and practice but overall the induction programme is insufficiently developed.

Governance is good. The chair of governors is actively involved in the school. He ensures that he is well informed and asks suitably challenging questions when presented with developments.

The LEA has supported the school well in terms of providing additional finance, governors, staff, and consultancy for certain subjects, but their own monitoring lacks rigour.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Mount Gilbert School was inspected in January 2005 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI and Additional Inspectors in September 2003, and in February and June 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of January 2003.

In February 2005, one HMI and one Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Thirteen lessons and one tutor period were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior staff, two teachers and two members of the support staff, and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of January 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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