Mill Water School

Inspection Report

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special	**School address**	Honiton Bottom Road
School category	Community		Honiton
Age range of pupils	3 to 19		Devon EX14 2ER
Gender of pupils	Mixed	**Telephone number**	01404 43454
Number on roll	97	**Fax number**	01404 43402
Appropriate authority	The governing body	**Chair of governors**	Mrs Leila Walsh
Date of previous inspection	22 January 2003	**Headteacher**	Mrs Sandie Leath-Lean

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 19	17 October 2005 – 17 October 2005	279206

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Mill Water School is a community special school in Honiton, Devon. Most pupils come from East Devon. All pupils have statements of special educational need and enter the school with learning difficulties. Just under half the pupils have autism, most of the rest have severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and there are seven pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The pupils are all from White British backgrounds. The local education authority (LEA) has informed the governors that it intends to rebuild the school on a new site in 2010.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school and the inspectors agree that Mill Water is an effective school with some outstanding features. It provides good value for money. The accommodation continues to be poor despite being criticised in all previous inspections. Nevertheless, all pupils, including those in the Foundation Stage, have carried on achieving well since the last inspection. Staffing, writing, and the monitoring of the curriculum have all improved since then. This is to the great credit of the staff, under the very skilled leadership of the headteacher, and shows that the school has a good capacity to improve further. The teaching is good and all classroom staff work well together to pinpoint each pupil's individual needs. The pupils achieve well because they receive well timed help and a wide range of rich experiences, especially in sport, art and music. The parents almost unanimously support everything the school does. They are grateful for the many things which the school provides to make life easier for them and their families. Pupils love their school, and are very well cared for. At present, very few pupils have the opportunity to experience life in a mainstream school. Governors carry out many of their responsibilities effectively but do not hold the school to account by providing sufficient challenge to the headteacher and other senior managers.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

•provide more opportunities for individual pupils to attend lessons in mainstream schools work with the LEA to improve the accommodation rapidly •make sure that the headteacher and senior managers are challenged more by the governors to explain how effective the school is.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The pupils achieve well and make good progress against challenging individual and school targets. Pupils enter the school with learning difficulties which have delayed their progress. The headteacher makes it a priority to collect and analyse detailed information on how well each pupil is doing and this is a major factor in securing the pupils' good achievement. Pupils' progress in subjects and their results in examinations are good. These are the outcomes of skilled, individualised teaching and very warm productive relationships with staff. The school regularly checks that no groups in the school, for example, girls and boys, are at a disadvantage or need extra attention. The school has responded well to a recently identified problem with some of the boys' writing by putting in place intensive strategies to address it. The school's work in art and music is simply wonderful: it has been recognised nationally with exhibitions in the Tate Gallery and internationally by a recent exhibition which toured the USA. It is

surprising that up till now very few pupils have been entered for GCSE, especially in art and design, and this is an omission that the school plans to rectify.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This area is a considerable strength. Pupils love the school. They attend regularly and get on very well with the adults and each other. The vast majority behave well in lessons, are proud of their work and the teachers find them a delight to teach. There are a few pupils who have behaviour difficulties, becoming aggressive without warning. Staff manage these pupils caringly, calmly and effectively so they are ready to learn. Pupils talk knowledgeably about keeping safe and healthy, for example, by freely but politely criticising the contents of each other's lunchboxes. Younger pupils learn from senior pupils and from adults a very strong set of moral values and evidence of this is all around the school. The pupils spontaneously help less able pupils to cut up their food. They respond sensitively when another is upset and frown upon any pupil who is careless or unkind. The outstanding provision in the creative arts and the residential experiences give pupils great spiritual and cultural insight. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to engage with their local communities through activities such as shopping and preparing and selling apple chutney at the local market. But there are limited opportunities for individual pupils to experience life and learning in a mainstream school. Pupils from age 11 are well prepared for the adult world, and for work, but younger pupils do not yet have the opportunities to develop skills that will later be useful in the workplace.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The teaching is good and the pupils learn well. Pupils do well in their lessons because staff are constantly checking how well each pupil is getting on and they then use this information to plan future work. Many classroom staff have worked together for a long time and make good use of each other's strengths. They make sure that each pupil receives the maximum amount of adult attention. Lessons run very smoothly, and pupils love their work and the friendly encouragement they receive. At the heart of the teaching is the development of good communication skills. The pupils are given the self-confidence to take risks and to learn from mistakes as well as successes. This is especially true for the pupils with autism who can feel insecure and bewildered if there are sudden changes of routine. A few teachers are not always fully skilled in matching activities or worksheets precisely to pupils' needs, but the school is aware of this and has developmental programmes in place.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. It gives the pupils a balance of activities, from those promoting creative and personal development to those covering more academic aspects. In planning its programmes, the school takes good account of the pupils' different ages or difficulties. It has developed effective specialist approaches to the different groups of pupils, such as those with autism and those with profound learning difficulties. Pupils' lives are significantly enriched by residential experiences in places as far afield as Venice and Paris, and by the exciting artistic and sporting activities that are arranged for them. Pupils in the youngest class do not have the benefit of a well resourced outdoor area and this limits the range of their activities. This problem has already been recognised by the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares for, guides and supports the pupils well. It places the individual pupil at the centre of everything it does. This means that each pupil has a customised plan of activities and targets carefully matched to his or her needs and interests. The school successfully ensures the well-being, happiness and safety of all pupils. The staff, including those from outside agencies such as Connexions, give pupils timely advice and training throughout their time at school. This helps them to make informed choices, including options about their future. There are good arrangements made for parents to agree pupils' individual targets, although the school has rightly identified the need to assist pupils more in understanding for themselves what they should be aiming at.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has good leadership and management. The headteacher is a very skilful, committed and caring practitioner who leads by example in order to get the very best for her pupils. She is well supported by the two senior managers, and this leadership group embodies the school's 'can do' approach, which has been essential in making light of the long-standing accommodation problems. All the staff deserve great praise for continually taking the extra steps to alleviate the burden of working in such a cramped and uncomfortable environment, and for making the school a place in which pupils and parents take such pride and joy. Resources are good and the school provides good value for money.

The school knows itself very well. It regularly canvasses the opinions of pupils and parents through questionnaires, meetings and school gate discussions. It continually gathers high quality data on pupils' achievement and progress and uses this to improve teaching and learning. The headteacher observes lessons and accurately judges how good the teaching is. This process could be further improved by having other senior managers involved as well. The governors are supportive of the headteacher but they

do not hold the leadership group sufficiently to account by seeking explanations and asking tough questions on matters of importance.

The school has done well since the last inspection and improved on nearly all fronts. It is well capable of further improvements.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards[1] reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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[1] Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Mill Water School Honiton Bottom Road Littletown Honiton, Devon

18th October 2005

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making us so welcome and for helping us inspect the school. We really enjoyed talking to you and watching you work. A special thanks to those on the School Council who met with Rowena and who told her what you think about your school and how much you like it.

This is what we found out about your school:

•your school helps you learn quickly and make good progress •you love your school, especially your sport, art, music and residentials •you are very helpful to each other •you do well at school because you get the right help when you need it from people who care about you •Sandie, Vanessa and Ann are good leaders and make sure that the school runs well even though you do not have much space •you ought to have a chance to spend time in ordinary schools.

There are some things which Sandie can do to make the school even better:

•find a way for you to do some lessons in ordinary schools •the school and the local council should get their heads together and sort out your buildings as quickly as possible •your governors need to ask Sandie, Vanessa and Ann some tougher questions about how well you and the school are doing.

Can you try to help the school to put these things right? Perhaps you could invite local councillors in and give them a cup of tea and show them how small your classrooms are.

We hope you agree with us. Thank you again for all your help.

Mick Megee Lead Inspector