



Mount Tamar School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113649
LEA Plymouth
Inspection number 279209
Inspection dates 13 March 2006 to 13 March 2006
Reporting inspector Charles Hackett AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Row Lane
School category	Community special		Plymouth
Age range of pupils	5 to 16		Devon PL5 2EF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01752 365128
Number on roll	83	Fax number	01752 351227
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Barrie Heaton
Date of previous inspection	23 February 1999	Headteacher	Mr Barry Jones

Age group 5 to 16	Inspection dates 13 March 2006 - 13 March 2006	Inspection number 279209
-----------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

Two Additional Inspectors carried out the inspection.

Description of the school

Mount Tamar is an all age special school for pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. A few pupils now admitted have other complex special needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The majority of pupils come from Plymouth, many from the socially deprived areas of the city. Pupils' attainment on entry is below average, often as a result of previous disrupted periods of education. Almost all are of White English backgrounds and there are far more boys than girls on roll. The school has a hostel on site where up to 16 pupils can stay for two or more nights each week.

When the school was last inspected, it was found to have serious weaknesses.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mount Tamar is an effective school for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. It successfully gets the majority of its pupils back into learning mode after periods of difficulties in their previous mainstream schools. Pupils achieve well, not only in the classroom but also in their personal development. Pupils make good improvements in their behaviour and their attendance. However, in striving to provide pupils with opportunities to follow different courses, the school is not ensuring that all Year 10 and 11 pupils have the same equality of opportunity in the subjects and courses they can follow.

Much has been achieved since the previous inspection and the school's view of its effectiveness matches that of the inspectors. Senior staff, with good support from governors, have worked together effectively as a team to bring about improvements and as a result, all of the issues judged to be unsatisfactory at that time have been addressed. This is particularly so with regard to the quality of teaching and learning in the secondary department, which is now of a similarly high standard to that found in the primary. Teachers, however, are not always confident in working effectively with those pupils being admitted with more complex needs. Improvements have been made in the collection of data on pupils' achievements and their behaviour but the school is not using these to set challenging whole-school targets to raise pupils' achievements even further.

Support and guidance systems are effective, although systems to assess and analyse pupils' progress in the secondary department are not as well organised as those in the primary. Throughout the school, care arrangements are very good and, through excellent links with other agencies, pupils are well supported to deal with the many difficulties they face out of school. The hostel provides outstanding support for pupils, giving them a structure to their lives that enables them to focus on their learning when in their lessons.

The accommodation in the secondary department is unsatisfactory. However, staff make best use of it, and an ongoing programme of refurbishment is improving the present facilities. Improvements have been made in the use of the financial allocation to the school and the school shows it has the capacity to improve further. Because of the good quality of education now being provided, the school is able to demonstrate it offers good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 9

The quality of the boarding provision is outstanding. A recent social care inspectorate (CSCI) report confirmed the very high standards of care. The report judges that all aspects of the required national boarding standards are met and that many are exceeded. The head of care manages the facility very well and leads by example in the excellent quality of her interactions with the pupils. Together with her colleagues, she ensures that all pupils benefit from their time in the unit. Each evening is carefully

planned and pupils have the chance to step back from their often-chaotic lives to relax and enjoy the many activities organised. Much has been done to improve the décor of the building, which is now warm and welcoming. Pupils themselves say they very much enjoy staying, one pupil enthusiastically declaring, "It's the best sleeping place ever".

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the systems in place in the secondary department to analyse students' progress and use the information gained to set whole-school challenging targets for achievements.
- Respond to the increased number of pupils being admitted with complex learning difficulties by making appropriate adaptations to teaching strategies.
- Ensure that students in Years 10 and 11 have equality of opportunity in the courses and examinations that they can follow.
- Continue with current efforts to secure more suitable accommodation for the education of secondary pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils are able to achieve standards that match the national average and, given their difficulties, this represents good achievement. A reflection of this good progress is the high number of pupils in the primary department able to reintegrate back to mainstream education. In this part of the school, samples of pupils' work are collected and staff agree the standards these meet. This is good practice and helps the school know that pupils are making good progress. In the secondary department, pupils achieve well in examinations, although the number of subjects they can take these in is reduced because of the school's efforts to provide a wide range of activities for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Achievements in science, judged to be unsatisfactory two years ago, are now good.

The school has made a good start in the collection of data on pupils' achievements; however, it is not analysing these sufficiently to show strengths and weaknesses. Information gained is then not being used to set challenging targets for pupils' achievements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development of pupils is good. The most significant area of improvement is in their behaviour. Most pupils respond well to the behaviour management systems and are keen to earn their points and the rewards that go with them. Because most pupils are more settled and more responsive to teaching, they are able to access learning. Pupils feel that they are safe and if there are incidents of bullying, these are quickly dealt with. Their social and moral development is supported well but there is a more limited emphasis on spiritual and cultural aspects.

Discussions with pupils reveal that they enjoy being in the school, like the activities and have good relationships with staff. Many pupils improve their attendance

considerably, although a few persistent non-attenders reduce overall attendance rates to satisfactory.

Pupils are able to make a contribution to the school community through the school council. Representatives met were keen to say how their views are listened to and that they have had an impact on the running of the school.

Pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. They regularly take part in physical activities and a clear emphasis is placed on providing healthy options at mealtimes. Fruit and salads are regularly available for pupils. Pupils' economic well-being is well supported through the teaching of basic number and literacy skills and for older pupils through opportunities to undertake work experience placements and take part in a mini-enterprise project.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is now good throughout the school. Teaching and learning in Years 7, 8 and 9, which were identified as weaknesses at the time of the last inspection, have been improved and have benefited very much from increased levels of staff support in each lesson. This means that the emphasis in lessons is now on pupils' learning rather than managing their behaviour.

A key strength of teaching is the consistent structure of lessons. Interesting starter activities settle pupils and successfully encourage them to engage in the main teaching and learning activity. Good use is made of information and communication technology. For example, staff have become familiar with the use of interactive whiteboards and data projectors and are making effective use of these not just for the teaching and learning, but also to remind students of the behaviour points they are earning as the lesson progresses.

Lesson planning is effective for the majority of pupils but the school is aware that it needs to consider a wider range of strategies to ensure that the few pupils it is now admitting with more complex needs achieve as equally well as other pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is now good throughout the school. This is a significant improvement from the time of the previous inspection where a number of weaknesses were identified. Statutory curriculum requirements are being met as religious education is now offered to all students. Appropriately, a good emphasis is placed on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. For example, in the teaching of all subjects, key words are highlighted. A primary science lesson observed was a typical example of this. Important scientific terms were brought to the attention of pupils at the start of the session and constantly referred to throughout the lesson.

There is a good emphasis on providing older pupils with work-related experiences and courses designed to meet their needs. These arrangements, however, do not ensure that all students have the same opportunities in relation to the examinations they can take and the time that they have to study subjects. Comments from a parent confirm this weakness, particularly for a few pupils who, because of behaviour concerns, do not attend the main school building.

Much thought has been given to offering activities that help pupils settle into class. For example, in the primary department, pupils often take part in activities such as 'peer massage'. This activity is very effective at improving pupils' social skills and ability to follow instructions, as well as helping them become calm after having a break.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support for students is good, with outstanding features. A very impressive needs analysis is undertaken of every student and much is done to try to ensure that his or her needs are being addressed. High quality procedures are in place to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. These include effective child protection systems, health and safety arrangements and appropriate sex education programmes and advice. Excellent multi-agency links have been established; a particularly strong link is that with the local police liaison officer, who is a regular visitor and has established positive relationships with the pupils.

The school has a very clear understanding of how it is trying to address all of the aspects of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda and, through a recent audit, has identified areas that it wishes to improve. Good support is given to ensure that pupils improve their behaviour and pupils are encouraged to analyse for themselves how well they are behaving.

Guidance is provided for students in their academic work through the use of targets in their individual education plans. However, this is best in the primary department. In the secondary department, assessment and recording methods vary and it is not always clear that pupils are given sufficient guidance to achieve to their maximum potential and teachers' assessments are not checked to ensure that they are accurate.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The senior staff team, under the supportive leadership of the headteacher, have between them a balanced set of skills, which they combine well to operate effectively as a team. This ensures that all aspects of the school's provision are carefully monitored. In particular, since the previous inspection, senior staff have increased the focus on teaching and learning considerably and this is enabling pupils to achieve to a much higher standard. However, insufficient analyses of pupils' achievements are being made to help set challenging targets for further improvement. Senior staff and the local authority recognise that many

improvements have been made to the school's provision and accurately judge the school to be effective.

Governors have played their part in supporting the school's development. For example, the curriculum committee hold teachers to account through requiring them to report on the subjects they have responsibility for. Financial monitoring has been improved and the previously large school underspend has been used well to improve resources and staffing.

Good work has been undertaken to develop those subjects described as having weaknesses at the time of the previous inspection. Science is an example of this and the new subject co-ordinator has made many improvements to the quality of provision, which is now good.

The accommodation in the secondary part of the school is unsatisfactory. Many rooms are very small and can restrict the actions teachers can take, for example creating separate areas for ASD pupils to use when required. Staff seek to make the best use of the building and a good ongoing programme of refurbishments is improving the facilities.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

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

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

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

Thank you for making Mr Byrne and myself so welcome in your school. We have written a report about your school and a copy will be available for your parents and carers. This report says that we think your school is good and that all your staff work very hard to do their best for you.

The most important comments we have made are:

- you are making good progress in your learning and for many of you in the primary department this means you can return to a mainstream school
- since being at the school, for most of you, your behaviour, attitudes and attendance have improved a lot
- all staff care and support you well, making sure you are safe and receive good advice on issues that affect you as you are growing up
- the hostel is excellent and helps many of you become more settled and ready to learn in school.

To make your school even better we think there are a few things that should happen. These are:

- improve the way staff find out the progress all of you are making and set challenging targets for even higher achievements
- find as many different ways as possible to help those of you with learning difficulties
- ensure that those of you in Years 10 and 11 have equal opportunities in the courses and examinations that you can follow
- continue with current efforts to secure more suitable accommodation for the education of those of you in the secondary part of the school.

Once again thank you for being so helpful and polite to us.