



Milestone School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119061
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280452
Inspection dates 14 March 2006 to 15 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mick Megee AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Ash Road
School category	Community		Longfield
Age range of pupils	2 to 19		Kent DA3 8JZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01474 709420
Number on roll	186	Fax number	01322 707170
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Teresa Davies
Date of previous inspection	9 October 2000	Headteacher	Miss Eileen Flanagan

Age group 2 to 19	Inspection dates 14 March 2006 - 15 March 2006	Inspection number 280452
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Milestone School is a special school for pupils, most of whom have moderate or severe learning difficulties. When they enter the school, pupils are performing at a level well below that expected for their age. A significant minority have additional difficulties such as profound learning difficulties or autism, and the proportion of those with moderate learning difficulties is currently small but likely to increase rapidly. All the pupils are being assessed for or already have a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are of White British heritage, although one tenth is from other backgrounds, mostly Indian. Thirteen pupils have a language other than English as their home language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Milestone School is an effective school and gives good value for money. The school reached its own similar judgement prior to the inspection through its self-evaluation process. The school's strengths lie in the great atmosphere and solidly good education, and excellent care and support it provides for its pupils. The effective curriculum and in particular the very good programme of personal and social education, result in the very fast social development which the pupils achieve.

Pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching are good, and the pupils thoroughly enjoy their lessons and their close friendships with each other and the staff. However, a few teachers do not provide sufficiently challenging tasks for the most able learners, and pupils have too many individual targets to be effective. The curriculum is good. Although pupils achieve well, their progress is slowed down a little because there are limited opportunities for them to learn in mainstream schools. Children who come to the school in the Foundation Stage enjoy the very good education on offer and so make very rapid progress. Pupils who transfer to the post 16 provision make good progress and achieve good results.

The school's leaders create a very positive atmosphere in the school and foster very positive relationships with parents. They are effective in their management of the curriculum and in ensuring that teaching is consistently good throughout the school.

The school knows its strengths and has a good understanding of its weaknesses, and has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide all higher attaining pupils with more challenging activities so that they can achieve as well as possible
- Provide fewer specific individual targets so that pupils and staff are able to work towards them more effectively, and more quickly make progress
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to experience learning in mainstream schools.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils perform well below the standards expected for their age when they arrive. This is because of their learning difficulties. Once at the school, the pupils quickly benefit from the good teaching offered to them, and make good progress. Progress is particularly good in the Foundation Stage, where children get off to a flying start. One parent of a very young child said 'I had no idea that my son could make this much progress. I am over the moon.'

A key element in the pupils' good progress is that they join a harmonious school which successfully fosters very good relationships. This allows the pupils to develop really good social skills and gives them the confidence and resilience to overcome any problems they may have. Another key factor in their success is the effective structured support they receive especially for their communication.

There are no discernible differences in the performance of girls and boys, those with additional needs or those from different backgrounds. In a few classes, the higher attaining pupils make slower progress than they could because the teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of them.

The pupils achieve well against their individual targets, and achievement could be even faster if the number of targets was reduced to become more manageable. At present, the large number dilutes their impact and makes it hard for some pupils to know clearly what they need to do next. Achievement would be even higher, too, if the school provided more opportunities for the pupils to learn within more challenging settings such as a mainstream school.

Last year, the pupils in post-16 achieved good results in their accredited programmes, and this year all the pupils in Years 10 and 11 are making good progress in the courses they are taking.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Within class pupils discuss and respond with maturity. Pupils' spiritual development is good. In assemblies they enjoy themselves, knowing when to participate and when to listen. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Around the school they play together well, develop strong friendships and show courtesy to visitors.

The pupils enjoy coming to school immensely and this is reflected in their good attendance. Pupils have very good opportunities to reflect on their lives and beliefs and those of others. The school places great emphasis on developing independence. This helps the pupils to take responsibility for their own actions and develop an understanding that what they do affects others. Pupils develop a clear idea of right and wrong and grow into mature young adults who are both sensitive and determined. Pupils enjoy taking regular exercise, making healthy life choices and eating a balanced diet.

Pupils demonstrate their social and communication skills well within the school council. They have the opportunity to influence decisions, such as ensuring that water temperature within the school is appropriate, and discussing how external play areas can be improved.

From the earliest stages pupils are helped to communicate effectively, listen to instructions and to cooperate with each other. This gives them an excellent basis for developing skills relating to work and life in the adult world. Parents appreciate highly the excellent personal development their children make.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school and they are especially good in the Foundation Stage. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good, and lessons are calm, good-humoured and well managed. Pupils clearly enjoy the relaxed banter which accompanies the activities. In all lessons, teaching assistants help the pupils effectively and sensitively to manage and improve their communication and social skills. All staff make clear communication a high priority, and there is much signing and a rich use of symbols all around the school. The school has introduced good arrangements for all staff to check up on pupils' progress, and so activities can be planned to match everyone's needs and abilities. However teachers do not always plan work that will stretch pupils with higher ability.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provided for pupils is good and all aspects of the National Curriculum are taught. All pupils receive external accreditation before they leave school and gain experience of work and learning within a college setting. At secondary level they undertake a range of rich and appropriate courses related to work and life after school.

The nursery provision is of a high quality and provides a very good education for the youngest pupils, laying a sound basis of social, literacy and communication skills. Recognising the wide range of difficulties experienced by pupils, the school has developed a strong 'sensory curriculum'. This maximises the use of touch, sound and sight for those pupils who respond most readily to these. These techniques overlap into other settings. For example in assembly, teachers used a large sheet to create a breeze that every pupil could feel and respond to. For pupils with autistic spectrum difficulties there is a strong programme of structured work which provides security and success.

There is a strong emphasis on the development of communication throughout the school. Signing, the use of symbols and electronic supports are developing well and assist pupils to understand what is being taught and have an equal opportunity to express their feelings, ideas and views.

The school has a wide range of enrichment activities, including lunchtime clubs, visits and visitors. Residential and foreign visits provide many opportunities to develop new skills and confidence.

At present there are only limited opportunities for pupils to attend other schools for educational experiences. However there are appropriate plans in place to remedy this for secondary pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The way that the school cares for, guides and supports pupils is outstanding. It provides a caring environment for pupils and staff alike.

Pupils see school as a very safe place, with adults they can trust who give them good advice. They are right in believing this. Very strong staff teamwork, close links between health professionals and a rigorous application of health and safety procedures ensure that the site, school visits and pupils' programmes are always planned with individual needs and safety in mind. Arrangements to safeguard pupils are all in place, and regularly reviewed.

Parents are particularly appreciative of the advice and support they receive from the school and especially from the headteacher. They report that their children work within a 'happy, stimulating environment' and that 'everyone at the school has my child's welfare at heart'. Assessment systems that allow staff to monitor both the academic and social progress of each pupil are developing well, although a little more work needs to be done to ensure pupils have as full an understanding of their key targets as possible. Within class there are good examples of pupils' self-assessment, which contributes well to their self-esteem and confidence. For those who experience behavioural difficulties, the planning is particularly effective, ensuring consistent adult response that provides security for the pupil. Close and regular links with home ensure that concerns are dealt with promptly and parents' view regularly taken into account.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school very effectively, and together with her newly formed senior management team, works hard to maintain an environment that ensures all pupils make good progress in learning. One parent said 'We have never had to complain to the school about anything, because the headteacher knows what might worry you, and takes care of it in advance.' The senior management team works well together to ensure that pupils receive a good education, and that they are taught effectively. The leaders provide good role models for the staff and the pupils and as a result the atmosphere around the school is one of enjoyment, respect and calmness. The headteacher is admired and appreciated by everyone in the school and particularly by the pupils' families. The parents say that they feel part of the school's community, and that their views are regularly sought.

The headteacher and governors correctly identified the key strengths and weaknesses in this report, taking into account the views of pupils and parents, and have appropriate plans to address them.

The school has good performance management systems, which are linked to an extensive programme of training. These systems should result in an even more skilful staff and leadership team who will help the pupils make more continuous progress. The headteacher and senior staff have a firm grip on measuring how well pupils are

progressing, although there is some more work to do, for example in comparing the achievement of different groups within the school. The senior staff have ensured that a full range of learning opportunities is in place within the school.

The governing body carries out its duties well. Governors are very supportive of the headteacher in her drive towards improvement, and do not hesitate to challenge the headteacher to make sure that new initiatives have been well thought out and are cost-effective. The good progress, the outstanding personal development the school has achieved, and the determination of the headteacher and staff to help pupils achieve as well as they can, indicate that the school has the capacity to improve further.

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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
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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	2	2
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	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	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	1	1

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	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

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

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making us welcome when Alvin and I came to visit your school this week to see how you are doing. I am writing to you to tell you what we found out about your school.

These are the most successful things about your school:

You love your school, you really like being in lessons and you get on very well with each other and the staff.

You make good progress, especially in communication, because of all the help you get from the staff.

Your headteacher and teachers work hard to make your school as good as it should be.

I have asked the school to do a few things which should help you learn even faster:

Make sure that everyone has activities that will help them learn as quickly as possible.

Make sure you each know the few most important things that you have to do to reach your targets

Give you more chances to find out what it is like to learn in other schools.

Perhaps you could help in this by listening carefully to your teachers and think how you can work towards your own targets in every lesson.

All the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mick Megee Lead Inspector