

Mullion School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112058
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	289160
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Stuart

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	521
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	DJL Casley
Headteacher	Mike Sandford
Date of previous school inspection	17 October 2006
School address	Meaver Road Mullion Helston TR12 7EB
Telephone number	01326 240098
Fax number	01326 241382

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Inspection number	289160

© Crown copyright 2007

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

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Mullion School is a small comprehensive school serving the predominantly rural communities on the Lizard peninsula. Pupils come from a wide range of circumstances and about a quarter live outside the designated catchment area of the school. Very few come from minority ethnic groups or do not speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly below average. Standards on entry are slightly above average whilst the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average. Mullion School gained specialist status in Performing Arts in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'This is an excellent well led and inspirational school.' 'It is a happy, friendly and accepting school.' 'Mullion is the best! The staff care about the children, encouraging them to work hard.'

These views of parents are shared by many. The school may not yet be the best but it is a good school with many outstanding features because it is led and managed in an exemplary way. It has an excellent capacity to continue the very good improvement that has been a feature of recent years. There is a sense of common purpose about the place shared by staff and pupils. The pupils are splendid ambassadors for the school, keen to explain why they rate it highly and to express their appreciation of the ways the committed staff prepare them well for their futures.

The headteacher's excellent leadership, supported by highly effective governors, has encouraged leaders at all levels and other staff to strive for improvement in critical but supportive ways. As a result the school is flourishing. The quality of care, guidance and support is exceptional and, as a result pupils', personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with moral and social aspects exceptionally strong. Pupils' horizons are being widened as they mature and develop into fine young people. Standards are high and pupils are making exceptional progress in Years 7 to 9, with their achievement in mathematics and science amongst the best in the country. Progress in Years 10 and 11 does not yet match that in Years 7 to 9 but achievement through from Year 7 to Year 11 has been good and is improving. There are very encouraging signs that the attention that is now being given to monitoring teaching, revisions of the curriculum and a sharper focus on tracking pupils' progress is leading to even better achievement in Years 10 and 11.

The excellent atmosphere of a safe, well disciplined school where adults and young people work harmoniously together in friendly and supportive ways creates a very positive learning environment. This means that teachers have every encouragement to teach well and the quality of teaching is good. The very high achievement in some areas reflects the very high quality teaching that is found in some lessons. A challenge for the school is to capitalise further on the very good knowledge that teachers have of pupils' needs and on pupils' enthusiasm for learning to raise the quality of teaching and learning still further so that achievement becomes consistently outstanding.

It is not easy for a small secondary school to provide as broad a curriculum as might be found in a larger school. However, the curriculum is good with very careful attention given to matching what can be offered to the pupils' needs. Very good cooperation with other partners is extending what is available and the needs of those with learning difficulties and disabilities are catered for particularly well. The school's specialist Performing Arts status is helping to extend and enrich pupils' opportunities. Many valuable developments have taken place but the benefits are not yet being fully felt by all pupils and across all areas of the school.

The extremely high proportion of parents who returned the questionnaire, many with very positive comments, indicates that they also feel an essential part of the school community. The very small number of concerns they raised have been brought to the attention of the headteacher. Most are very satisfied with what the school is doing for their children and recognise the deep commitment of the school to meeting the needs of all pupils whatever their circumstances.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards to match the best that already exists by improving further the quality of teaching and the monitoring of pupils' progress especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Extend the influence of the school's specialist status so that the benefits affect all pupils and all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 9 is outstanding. In mathematics and science it is particularly remarkable as achievement ranks amongst the best in the country. Standards on entry are marginally above average but, because of the exceptional progress made by pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, standards rise to significantly above average by the end of Year 9. There is convincing evidence that these high standards and achievement are being maintained at the present time. The careful monitoring of progress identifies clearly for teachers and pupils what needs to be done to reach these standards. Until now the same rate of exceptional progress has not continued in Years 10 and 11. Nonetheless standards rose substantially in 2006 and progress has been quite sufficient to ensure that virtually all pupils achieve well in their time at the school. Many achieve very well indeed. Standards are above average. However, the potential created by the success in Years 7 to 9 has not yet been fully realised in Years 10 and 11. This has been partly because of weaker performance in a few subjects compared with most and partly because strategies to raise achievement have been less secure in Years 10 and 11. However, intelligent reviews of the curriculum, more methodical tracking of progress across all subjects and strategies to tackle identified underachievers are amongst the measures now in place to improve performance further. There is still some way to go before the rate of progress in Years 10 and 11 reaches that of Years 7 to 9 but the signs are very encouraging that the upward trend will continue.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Year 7 pupils say that coming to the school is like belonging to a large, happy family. The ethos of encouragement to work hard and achieve highly within a safe, well disciplined environment where lessons are enjoyable is the key to pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. Pupils are encouraged to take an active role in the school community and most do so. Some are trained as peer mentors and many become prefects in Year 11. The 'Step Forward' scheme encourages a large number of pupils to become involved with projects outside the school.

Because staff implement procedures, behaviour is nearly always excellent. Pupils say that bullying is not a major concern, with the few incidents that do occur always being dealt with effectively. Pupils are happy to approach an adult if they have any concerns. Attendance has improved and is now good.

Pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. However, although the canteen provides nutritious lunches, the necessity to use classrooms to eat in cuts down the opportunities to socialise over lunch. Similarly the lack of a sports hall reduces the range of physical activities available for pupils to experience. This potentially limits the activities that might sustain their interest in future years.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with moral and social development exceptionally strong. The school very successfully raises pupils' aspirations and broadens their horizons. An effective work experience programme and a sharp focus on developing their independent learning skills contribute to preparing pupils very well for life after school and their future economic well-being. However, although pupils have a good awareness of other cultures, further increasing their awareness of life in a diverse society is an area for development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most pupils are enthusiastic learners. They respond well to the good teaching that is the norm in the school. When teaching is exceptionally good, pupils' learning reaches very high levels. For example, in an outstanding Year 9 Spanish lesson pupils were really challenged to speak fluently and confidently, with a variety of activities in pairs and with the whole class. The pace was very brisk but learning was constantly checked so that substantial progress was made in a very supportive and enjoyable atmosphere. Most lessons are characterised by very good relationships between pupils and their teacher. These create a positive learning environment that enables teachers to employ a variety of methods that capture and keep pupils' interest throughout the lesson. Because teachers know their pupils very well they are usually able to match activities to particular needs, including the needs of those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Teachers are increasingly recognising the need to extend pupils with particular gifts and talents. There are already many activities outside regular lessons that encourage such pupils to develop their thinking further. Within the curriculum there are examples of good practice, especially in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages, but this is not yet as well established in all subjects, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

It is only rarely that learning falls below the expected high levels, for example sometimes when absence of the usual teacher requires alternative arrangements to be made. By further monitoring of teaching, sharing the best practice that already exists, and an even sharper focus on assessing pupils' learning in lessons, there is scope for further improvement in the quality of teaching and learning from the present strong position.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

In a small school there are difficulties in providing the breadth of curriculum that may be found in larger schools. However, carefully considered annual reviews have ensured that pupils are offered a curriculum that meets their needs in the best possible ways and gives sufficient choice in Years 10 and 11. Senior leaders are looking very positively at ways to continue to maximise choice through a period of falling rolls.

There has been improved provision in recent years. In particular, partnerships with colleges and other schools have successfully extended the range of vocational subjects. The introduction of the skills-based Certificate of Personal Effectiveness has been particularly successful. At the Year 9 parents' evening inspectors spoke to several parents and pupils who praised the option system and the processes for arranging the curriculum for Years 10 and 11. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 meets pupils' needs effectively and supports the outstanding results at the end of Year 9.

Specialist Performing Arts status has greatly benefited the pupils that have been involved so far and is raising standards in dance and drama. However, the plans for specialist status to have an impact on all pupils, and to influence all subject areas, are still at an early stage of implementation. There is an excellent range of extra enrichment activities within and beyond the school day: in sport, productions and in the wider curriculum. These opportunities are much valued by the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The outstanding levels of care, guidance and support for pupils are notable strengths of the school. They start with the very effective links with local primary schools for transfer arrangements. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and effective. There is excellent provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The Learning and Behaviour Unit not only provides for those who are having difficulty managing their behaviour but is also a supportive environment that gives vulnerable pupils the confidence and motivation to learn. Additional support is provided through a well organised and multi-skilled team of teaching assistants who are instrumental in ensuring that these pupils make the same progress as their peers. Links with external agencies are strong and support those who are vulnerable or at risk. There is an effective partnership with the education welfare service which has helped to raise levels of attendance in recent years.

Any underachieving pupils in Years 7 to 9 are identified and intervention strategies successfully put in place. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are aware of their GCSE target grades and systems to monitor their progress more effectively are now being introduced.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership and management have spearheaded improvement, fostered a strong common identity amongst staff and pupils and ensured that the school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

Excellent leadership from the headteacher and his team provides a sense of purpose and challenge which is taken up by able middle managers who have high expectations of both their staff and of the pupils. The school knows its strengths and has a clear view of where further improvement is needed. Monitoring of performance is increasingly effective. Regular departmental reviews are now providing a good tool in raising standards and in the training of leaders in observing lessons and monitoring the quality of teaching more effectively.

The governance of the school is outstanding. Governors have a secure knowledge of standards and achievement in the school and they closely monitor the work of departments through their departmental link roles. They both support and challenge the senior leaders. Governors are prepared to make difficult decisions on staffing, resulting from falling rolls, and they have the continued success of the school at heart.

The school uses its funding well but some resources and facilities are limited and dated. Performing Arts status has been well managed although the benefits across the whole school have not yet been fully realised. The strengths of the leadership and management have led to much success in recent years and give the school an excellent capacity for further improvements.

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.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
--	-----------------------

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mullion School, Mullion, Helston, TR12 7EB

It was a pleasure to meet many of you when we visited your school. Thank you very much for your friendliness and warm welcome. Your help was most useful.

Nearly all of you are proud of your school and were keen to tell us how much you valued the education you are getting and the support you receive from teachers and other adults who are deeply committed and caring people. You are right as Mullion is a good school with many outstanding features. Amongst its excellent features are the levels of care, support and guidance available to you. These are an important part of creating what several of you called a large, happy family. They also play a major part in helping to ensure that your personal development and well-being are excellent. Of course that would not happen without yourselves! You contribute an important part to the school's success. You are maturing into fine young people. Most of you behave extremely well and make the most of the many opportunities open to you.

You are also doing well in the subjects you study. This is not only down to your enthusiasm for learning but also because you are well taught by teachers who do their best to make lessons interesting and enjoyable. Some of your achievement is outstanding and nearly all is at least good. The challenge for you and your teachers is to continue to improve to bring everything up to the best. Standards in a few subjects and in Years 10 and 11 do not yet reach the very high levels of the best. So we are asking the school to look at ways teaching can be improved further and how the progress you make can be checked a bit better. As you know the school is now a Performing Arts college. This is bringing many benefits to many of you. The school has further plans to extend what it is doing to involve all of you, and all subjects, and we are asking it to make sure that these plans do benefit everyone in time.

Under the excellent leadership of your headteacher and his colleagues, the school has a bright future ahead of it. We wish all of you every success.

Yours faithfully Ian Stuart Lead inspector