

Mill Hill Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121330
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	292083
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Clive Petts

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sarah Glahome
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Lonsdale (Acting) /Mr Huddleston (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	24 June 2002
School address	Crosby Road Northallerton North Yorkshire DL6 1AE
Telephone number	01609 772382
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Mill Hill Community School is an average-size primary school in the centre of the large market town of Northallerton. The vast majority of children are White British, with no pupil whose first language is not English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average though the proportion with a statement of special educational need is a quarter of the national average. Leadership of the school is currently provided by two experienced headteachers as a job share, on a part-time basis in the absence of the substantive headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education, and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement. Consequently, the school provides poor value for money.

Standards have been in decline since the last inspection, notably in Years 3 to 6. Although this decline has now halted, standards in English, mathematics and science remain too low because for a long period not enough was done to tackle underachievement. Progress in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory, with standards in line with national expectations by the end of Reception. In Years 3 to 6, progress is inadequate and many pupils continue to underachieve. Recently introduced rigorous methods of tracking and assessing pupils' work and progress have revealed the extent of this underachievement. The school's self-evaluation identifies main strengths and weaknesses but judgements of how well it is doing are too generous. Despite the strengthening of leadership and teaching, with effective local authority support during the last year, there has not yet been enough impact on the exceptionally low standards in English, mathematics and science in Key Stage 2. Governors are not fulfilling their role effectively in holding the school to account for all that it does. Although the job-share acting headteachers have added purpose, calm and direction to the work of the school since September, this part time and temporary arrangement means that the school has inadequate capacity to improve.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. A committed team of staff make sure that pupils are happy, enjoy school routines, feel safe, keep healthy and play an active part in the life of the school and local town. Pupils behave well and are well cared for, which is why many parents are appreciative of the quality of care and support children receive. The pupils are careful and considerate towards one another, for example when playing pavement games in the playground. Although there is a growing desire to learn amongst pupils, many lack the confidence to think for themselves.

Teaching has had an inadequate impact upon pupils' learning and progress since the previous inspection. The effective support of the local authority and focus given by the acting headteachers have led to several strategies being implemented that are having some influence on improving standards, for example successful whole-school approaches to raising standards of writing. Regular monitoring of teaching is starting to bring about greater consistency but there is still a considerable way to go, for example, in ensuring a high quality of presentation in pupils' work and in raising the level of challenge, particularly for more the able pupils, who are not being stretched sufficiently in their learning. Classrooms and corridors are lively and bright with good quality displays of pupils' work and learning prompts linked to current topics. They are a reflection of an improving curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure long-term stability in leadership and management in order to provide a secure foundation for improvement.
- Raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve teaching, particularly by raising the level of challenge, especially for the more able pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Children arrive in school with varied pre-school experiences; a small number have not received any pre-school provision. Their standards are generally below average, with particular weaknesses in listening and speaking. Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage but writing lags a little behind other aspects of learning. In Years 1 to 6 there is significant underachievement in core skills and many pupils should be doing much better. In Year 3, underachievement is more marked, made worse by unsettled staffing, and has caused a number of parents concern. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly similar to other pupils; it is inadequate as a result of insufficient challenge in teaching and in learning support.

Over the last three years standards in national assessments at the end of Year 2 have been variable. They are now broadly average in reading and mathematics and significantly above average in writing. Current carefully moderated teacher assessments support this view. Recent test results at the end of Year 6 reveal exceptionally low standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and a legacy of underachievement. Too few pupils reach higher levels in any of these subjects. This is because teaching has not had enough impact upon the achievement of these pupils. Inspection evidence shows that achievement is beginning to improve though standards still remain exceptionally low in Year 6. This improvement is largely the result of stronger teaching coupled with more positive attitudes to learning. Yet those pupils who could learn more quickly are not always sufficiently challenged. Additionally, teachers are not always fully aware of what individual pupils should be expected to achieve, as a result of the inconsistent use of data to guide lesson planning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. In class and around school pupils behave well, reflecting the high expectations of staff. However, in lessons pupils can be passive when asked to find things for themselves and work independently. At playtimes pupils take care to adopt safe approaches in all activities and good use is made of the 'huff and puff' arrangement, when pupils in Year 6 act as play leaders. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their very good attendance. They are developing an understanding of other cultures and religions although they are less convincing about what it means to live in a multicultural society. Pupils have responded very well to their role on the recently established school council and value the opportunities they have to contribute to school improvement. Underachievement in basic skills and poorly developed skills with information and communication technology (ICT) mean that pupils are not sufficiently prepared for later education and the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate because teaching has had insufficient impact upon standards and achievement since the previous inspection. Pupils have not learned enough to ensure adequate progress. Overall, teaching seen during the inspection was generally

satisfactory and characterised by a consistent approach to lesson planning, with adequate use made of learning objectives and success criteria. Relationships in lessons were good and amongst pupils there is a growing enthusiasm for learning. 'More learning is fun' one member of the school council remarked although another observed that much work was 'too easy'. There is now a much sharper focus on assessment but information from this is not always used to match tasks with all the levels of ability within the class. Consequently, higher attainers occasionally find work too easy. Too little teaching is imaginative and exciting enough to ensure pupils understand difficult ideas and concepts. As a result, fewer pupils than expected achieve higher levels in assessments and tests and this helps to explain why overall standards are still too low. An emerging strength of teaching is a developing sense of teamwork and the determined fashion in which staff have embraced and implemented new practice and initiatives. Although teaching has recently improved it is still not strong enough to give pupils the boost that they need to catch up in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and has undergone some improvement since the last inspection. Increasingly it is better adjusted to providing for the differing abilities in all years but does not take full enough account of the needs of the more able pupils. In Reception, secure approaches are adopted to encourage personal and learning development. Carefully planned personal, health and social education contributes well to pupils' personal development; for example it sets the tone for their good behaviour. There has been a strong emphasis on improving provision in literacy and numeracy to address low standards. However, the school has been forced to prioritise its needs and this has brought about some imbalance in the curriculum. Though all statutory requirements are met there is insufficient work of a practical nature and too few opportunities to develop collaborative skills and show initiative. ICT is not used regularly enough to enhance the quality of pupils' work. Enrichment programmes being developed to provide a much better match to pupils' talents and interests. These include music sessions and residential visits for older pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. In the Foundation Stage, parents value the quality of support and the approachability of staff. Procedures for safeguarding children are in place and good attention is paid to managing risk. Pupils report that bullying is rare and they have confidence that any incidents will be dealt with quickly. The school has a great deal of information on pupils' progress which is used to set individual targets. All of this is contributing to the push to raise achievement. However, not all pupils are sufficiently aware of exactly what they need to do to make their work better. Marking is systematically undertaken and, although it provides positive encouragement, pupils do not receive enough information to aid their progress. Effective support systems are being developed to ensure that all staff are aware of the individual needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate. Unsettled leadership and staffing over an extended period has had an adverse influence on the school's effectiveness. The school has been through a period of considerable turbulence since the last inspection due to the absence of key staff. Recently the local authority has taken decisive action and provided intensive support to bring about improvement. Currently two experienced headteachers are sharing the headship role in the absence of the permanent headteacher. They understand the issues facing the school but have an over-positive view of how well it is currently doing. Their constructive efforts since September have brought about the halt in the decline of standards. Despite this success, the leadership and management of the school are inadequate because the current situation is only a short-term, part-time solution dependent upon considerable input from the local authority. The headteachers are not in school every day and there is no deputy headteacher. This does not guarantee the school's future capacity for improvement. A significant number of parents have expressed concern about the situation and are anxious to see its early resolution.

In spite of the difficulties facing them, staff have remained positive and determined to move forward. The leadership team are thriving on the new responsibilities they have been given and are beginning to take effective action to bring about improvement. While this has strengthened leadership and management, too many pupils continue to underachieve and standards remain too low. Until the issue of leadership is resolved and the school demonstrates it can drive forward improvements itself, without substantial help from the local authority, it remains in a fragile position.

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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
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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

On behalf of the inspection team I wish to thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school and for being so considerate, polite and helpful when you met us. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and joining you in lessons and assembly. We also enjoyed joining the school council for lunch. We would like to share with you the judgements we made about your school.

You behave well and obviously enjoy school, judging by your good attendance. You feel safe and have confidence that staff will help with any problems or worries. You made clear to us that you especially enjoy the range of after-school clubs available to you but could be made to work harder in lessons. You know how to follow a lifestyle which keeps you healthy and fit.

For a number of years, the standards of work, particularly of older pupils, have not been good enough and many of you have not done as well as you should. We feel that your school needs extra help to bring about much-needed improvements. So we have decided that it needs 'special measures'. Although your acting headteachers have worked hard to bring about improvements we believe it is very important that a permanent headteacher is found as soon as possible. We want the headteachers and teachers to make sure that you learn more and make faster progress to raise standards in English, mathematics and science. We also want those of you who learn quickly to be given more challenging work.

Inspectors will come and visit the school regularly to check how much progress the school is making in achieving these improvements.

We hope that you will continue to enjoy school, work as hard as you can and do as well as you can.

We wish you well in the future.