



# Mount Gilbert School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 132122  
**Local Authority** Telford and Wrekin  
**Inspection number** 293949  
**Inspection date** 27 February 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Julia Coop

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special	<b>School address</b>	Hinkshay Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Dawley
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		Telford TF4 3PP
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01952 387670
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	44	<b>Fax number</b>	01952 387674
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Richard Stud
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Angela Valentini
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 February 2005		

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## **Description of the school**

This school for pupils with complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties serves the large socially diverse area of Telford and the Wrekin. A small number of pupils come from outside this area and travel long distances to school. Increasingly, a significant number of pupils are admitted with additional needs such as mental health issues, specific learning difficulties and autism. All pupils have statements of special educational need. Many arrive throughout the school year having missed substantial periods of schooling. Less than a half of pupils have participated in the national tests at the end of Year 6. Attainment when they start is well below the national average. Significant proportions of pupils have disrupted family lives and a small number are looked after by the local authority. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds and no pupils are new to speaking English. The school has experienced difficulties recruiting staff and there has been long-term staff illness.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Mount Gilbert is a satisfactory school that provides a secure, warm and supportive environment for its pupils. The headteacher sets the tone for the caring atmosphere that permeates throughout the school. Pupils say they are feeling better about themselves and learning better than in mainstream school because most staff are 'fair and helpful'. Although attendance and behaviour are satisfactory, this represents a huge turnaround in the attitudes of pupils with wide-ranging and complex needs to school, adults and each other. As a result of good opportunities to experience success at work and college, they are well prepared for life beyond school.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses because it has harnessed the support of expert consultants and outside agencies well. The positive change in pupils' attitudes has been brought about because of the determined leadership of the headteacher and the hard work and commitment of the governing body and new middle managers. Together they have ensured that the school continues to provide a satisfactory standard of education despite long-term staff absence and difficulties filling vacant teaching posts. Despite the school's best efforts, the staffing situation remains unresolved and is preventing better learning.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory, although the vast majority of pupils have huge gaps in their learning because they have missed a great deal of school. As a result, standards are low. Satisfactory teaching and curriculum is ensuring pupils make satisfactory progress. It is to the credit of the staff's hard work and dedication that all pupils, despite the range and complexity of their needs, become positive about learning, leave school with some form of accreditation and go on to college or work placements. Pupils make much better progress in the practical and vocational subjects but many still struggle with their English and mathematics skills. Boys in particular are well behind the girls in reading and writing. This is partly because they do not find reading and writing interesting and opportunities to develop these and other key skills in more meaningful and enjoyable ways are not fully exploited.

The school has a useful amount of data about pupils' progress and the standards they achieve which it uses to target support where it is most needed. The school recognises that it needs to establish a more detailed analysis of pupils' strengths and weaknesses on arrival. It also recognises that information about pupils' learning could be monitored and analysed more frequently by managers to help further improve pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching. The acting deputy headteacher has made a useful start in developing a computerised tracking system. The school also recognises it could do even more to help pupils understand the next steps in their learning to support better achievement. Consequently, despite good features, overall the school provides satisfactory care, support and guidance.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Work closely with the local authority and colleagues in mainstream schools to resolve staffing issues.
- Improve pupils' basic skills, particularly boy's reading and writing, providing more opportunities for them to develop these skills in more interesting and meaningful ways.
- Develop a more detailed baseline assessment and make a more frequent check on pupils' progress, ensuring this information is used to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve pupils' knowledge of their next learning steps.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory, although as a result of their complex social, emotional, behavioural and other learning difficulties, standards are low compared to the national average. Many pupils have significant mental health issues and some, including pupils with autism, find it difficult to cope in new situations. Many come from pressured home backgrounds and face considerable barriers to learning. From this disadvantaged starting point, all pupils make satisfactory progress because they successfully re-engage in the learning process. Vulnerable pupils in crisis also make satisfactory progress because they receive additional intensive support from the Assessment and Intervention Team (AIT). By the end of Year 11, all pupils attain nationally recognised accreditations and they do particularly well in vocational or practical subjects such as child care or art. Some more able pupils attain a GCSE or entry-level pass in English, mathematics and science. In 2006 all leavers went on to start a college course or gained employment.

Despite this achievement, pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills are still weak. Boys do much less well than the girls, particularly in English. Many boys struggle to gain basic levels of competency in reading and writing. Although pupils say that extra reading lessons help us, boys also say that they find English 'boring' and 'writing too hard', especially spelling because it's tricky. This affects their confidence and ability to access learning in other subjects.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good because they have daily opportunities to reflect on their behaviour and things of personal interest. There is a clear set of moral standards and links with an African and Chinese community school help foster an understanding of other faiths and cultures. Pupils are encouraged to develop a good community spirit and help others who may be less fortunate than themselves. The school council takes pride in raising funds and making decisions about the school such as deciding to build a school pond. Together with college links, work experience placements and opportunities to manage a budget, the pupils are well

prepared for when they leave school. The pupils recognise that the school is helping them to gain control over their behaviour. As one pupil stated, 'you should see my records, I'm much better behaved now'. Attendance is satisfactory; most pupils now attend more regularly and try hard to be polite and respectful to staff and visitors. Others agree that the school is helping them 'not to fight', although some still struggle to listen to staff and maintain good behaviour, especially when lessons don't grab their interest. In addition, because some temporary staff lack confidence to manage challenging behaviour, the rate of one-day exclusions has increased recently. There is some bullying and a few racist comments, but the pupils themselves say this doesn't bother them. The great majority are critical of such behaviour. They know how to keep safe and say that we 'just leave them to it; they use their mouths before their brains'. Consequently attitudes, behaviour and enjoyment of learning are satisfactory, although one parent can't believe the change in her son who is excited about getting ready for school.

Pupils love the breakfast club which helps provide a healthy and sociable start to school. Although pupils are more willing to take advice about health, drugs, alcohol and personal safety issues, a few struggle with their weight and some smoke.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

There is some good teaching in the school, but the quality is not consistent because some staff do not have experience of working with troubled pupils. Although they are receiving timely advice and support, some are not confident to manage behaviour or to use a variety of different teaching approaches that inspire pupils to learn. Pupils themselves say that when this happens 'they get bored' and that's when they 'kick off'. In literacy and numeracy, some teachers rely too much on written exercises which do not always motivate pupils, particularly the boys. There are common strengths in teaching that are exemplified by good support from teaching assistants and youth development workers and good subject knowledge. Pupils are always praised for their efforts and those with more complex mental health issues receive good support from experienced staff. Practical subjects such as art and community cookery are taught well, where the skills of non-teaching staff and unqualified teachers are harnessed well to support learning. In some classes, teachers' planning does not always ensure that activities are matched carefully enough to the pupils' different abilities and this impacts on learning. Pupils say that some teachers don't give us enough work or just ask us to draw a picture but know that others are really helpful and nice' and give them interesting work like writing limericks.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum provides a broad range of learning experiences. The pupils' day starts with the breakfast club that is fully integrated into the curriculum. Its friendly café atmosphere provides an effective vehicle to support improved behaviour and develop an interest in healthy eating and world affairs. Pupils say that 'it helps set them up for the day'. Every six weeks pupils are guided to select a range of different learning activities each afternoon that cover creative, physical, social and vocational/community activities. This personalised afternoon learning programme is a great hit with the pupils, who prefer these activities to the traditional subjects taught each morning. This is one reason why pupils' attendance and attitudes have improved. The school has yet to develop a means to make morning lessons as interesting by linking subjects together so as to support the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Conversely, opportunities for pupils to use and apply their basic skills, particularly reading and writing, in more interesting ways in the afternoon activities are not yet fully realised.

Relevant and pertinent issues, such as bullying, are tackled intensively and well through immersion days. Business mentors, Young Enterprise initiatives and an independence project effectively help prepare pupils for the future. The pupils' graffiti art, adorning the corridor walls, undertaken alongside the resident graffiti artist, is of high quality and has helped develop a pride in the school, while drama recently introduced provides a good forum to develop confidence.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

The school has a positive and caring atmosphere. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Routines are well established and provide a firm and secure foundation for learning and improved behaviour. Pupils like the way that the school provides time to discuss issues in a non-threatening way. Discussions in a circle provide them with 'an equal chance to tell the story' which they say really helps them to 'talk about what's going on and to find a solution'. Together with a 'Drop In' health clinic, strong relationships with a wide range of multi-agencies through the 'Team Around the School' project and counselling sessions, pupils are helped considerably to overcome personal difficulties and to make safer and more sensible lifestyle decisions.

Pupils receive good advice and guidance about future options. They like the regular conferences with staff where they plan their learning programme and they are proud of their 'credit card target cards'. However, these individual learning targets are not yet precise enough to help pupils recognise their next learning steps, particularly in English and mathematics. In addition, marking does not consistently help pupils recognise what they have done well and what they need to work on next.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

The headteacher has worked extremely hard and successfully to maintain the quality of the school provision. She has achieved this with support from expert consultants and advisors. A considerable level of staff absence and inability to attract suitable applicants for vacant posts, including senior management positions, has meant that until recently the headteacher has shouldered much of the responsibility for driving school improvement. However, the school has continued to move forward, albeit at a slower pace, with better links to colleges and improvements to work-related learning providing pupils with improved choices and life skills. The governing body and core of permanent staff show a substantial commitment to the school and the headteacher which has been crucial during this lengthy period of staff difficulties. The innovative use of Youth Development workers has provided a vital lifeline in maintaining and further developing curriculum options which pupils enjoy. Three staff have recently stepped up to take on middle management and acting deputy headteacher posts. They have hit the leadership and management ground running and are already making a difference. Their support and coaching of new but unqualified staff has been vital in ensuring pupils continue to receive a sound education. As a result, despite these difficulties, there is a sound capacity to improve. However, it is vital that the local authority and colleagues from other schools work with the school to resolve staffing issues if the school is to increase the rate of progress made by pupils.

Monitoring of pupils' learning is satisfactory. The school has sufficient data available, but the system is currently too unwieldy. Staff do not have a means by which they can gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of pupils' skills when they start. The acting deputy headteacher has begun to address this and his plans are relevant. However, the school knows there is more still to do to ensure that information about pupils' progress is analysed more frequently and used to set more focused individual learning targets and fine tune teachers' planning.



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## Inspection judgements

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

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

Thank you so much for the friendly way you chatted to me when I visited. I know you like coming to Mount Gilbert more than the other schools you attended and know that the school is helping you to sort out your behaviour. Thank you for telling me about what you like and don't like about the school. I loved your graffiti art on the walls. You must be very proud of it as it makes the school look great. Thank you for letting me share breakfast with you. I thought it was a really friendly, helpful start to the day.

I think Mount Gilbert is a satisfactory school that helps you make satisfactory progress in your learning. This is because of the satisfactory teaching and curriculum and the way the school is run. You receive good care and I know that the staff are helping you to make healthier and safer choices. You told me that your school is a friendly place and I agree with you. Your behaviour is satisfactory, most of you try to behave well and I am really pleased that you now come to school more often. I hope that you keep this up as it will help you when you start work or college.

I know that all of the staff are working hard, but there are four things that I want the staff and governors to do to make Mount Gilbert an even better place to learn and they agree with me:

- help you improve your reading, writing and mathematical skills, especially making reading and writing more fun and interesting for the boys
- check on how you are doing when you start and throughout the year so that they can help you learn even more
- give you better learning targets and mark your work carefully so that you know exactly what you need to do to improve
- try to get some more teachers to work in the school so that you can do well in all that you do.

You can help the teachers by everyone always listening carefully and some of you trying not to lose your temper when things get difficult.