

Milton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106969
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	309278
Inspection dates	1–2 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr John Doyle
Headteacher	Mrs Brenda Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2004
School address	Storey Street Swinton Mexborough South Yorkshire S64 8QG
Telephone number	01709 570246
Fax number	01709 570547

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school for pupils with moderate or complex learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, primarily for moderate learning difficulties. In addition to this, approximately half have autistic spectrum disorders. A small number of pupils have additional behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The proportion of pupils with complex difficulties has increased since the previous inspection. Last year, nearly one in five pupils joined the school at other than the usual time for admissions, some of them during Year 11. Nearly all pupils are White British.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The headteacher's conviction that Milton's pupils deserve the very best education underpins every aspect of the school's work. The quality of teaching is outstanding and leads to pupils' exceptional progress and achievement. Pupils start learning from the moment they join the school. Teachers use their detailed knowledge of each pupil's needs and stage of development in order to help them take the next step forward. As a result pupils often make great strides in their communication skills. They report that lessons are interesting and that teachers 'like a laugh'. The fun they have is one reason why pupils enjoy school so much. They like many things about it such as using computers, school dinners and break times. Pupils also say they are pleased when they receive rewards and certificates for their efforts and achievements. Staff consistently go out of their way to boost pupils' self-esteem and give them confidence to tackle new learning and experiences. This contributes to their outstanding personal development. They are sure that this is a healthy school. They respond with great enthusiasm to the many and varied opportunities to be physically active, recognised by the Sportsmark award. Younger pupils throw themselves with great enthusiasm into their regular 10 minutes of exercise during morning lessons. Moving up the school, pupils take increasing responsibility for themselves and others. Their training in first aid enabled Year 11 pupils to react calmly and correctly to a recent playground accident. The exceptionally good curriculum offers a host of similar opportunities for pupils to develop into well rounded young people. A significant strength is the way the school responds to individual needs including making arrangements for those with special talents or particularly challenging circumstances. Older pupils follow an ever increasing range of accredited courses. They all leave Milton with, as a minimum, awards for units of their work in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology and French. Occasionally, a particular course does not acknowledge the full extent of every pupil's achievement, because it is designed to cater for those working at lower National Curriculum levels.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided is outstanding. Consequently behaviour is good in spite of a minority of pupils needing considerable support to enable them to meet the school's very high expectations. For the most part, pupils behave in an exemplary manner. Importantly, pupils who join Milton with a history of exclusion from other schools or poor attendance often show remarkable improvements as a result of the school's unremitting efforts. This is one aspect of the school's success in preparing pupils for the next stage in their lives, as is the programme of work-related learning. This is extremely comprehensive and includes work experience and enterprise activities which are supported by the school's extensive links with the community.

This flourishing school is led and managed extremely well. The headteacher insists staff share her commitment to enabling all pupils to achieve their potential. Exhaustive arrangements ensure that each aspect of the school is monitored rigorously. They provide a very accurate picture of strengths and areas that can be developed even further. The most recent analysis of pupils' progress has led the school to revise its opinion of its own effectiveness. It now judges this to be outstanding, a view confirmed by the inspection. Although one parent observed that I would 'hate to see the school changed in any way', the school does have an outstanding capacity to continue to move forward.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that accredited courses allow for the achievement of all pupils to be fully recognised.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

A very small number of pupils reach average and sometimes even higher standards in subjects where they have particular aptitudes. Several are currently following courses such as GCSE in mathematics and science at mainstream schools or college. The majority of Year 11 pupils gain three or more entry level awards. They also receive certificates in topics such as food hygiene, sex and relationships education, and first aid. Some pupils achieve accreditation in cookery, arts and craft, and building.

Outstanding progress and achievement is reflected in the very high proportion of pupils who achieve and sometimes exceed the challenging targets set for them both as individuals and as groups. Pupils make particularly good progress in learning to communicate, reading, number, and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The school's tracking systems show that no groups of pupils progress less well than others, reflecting the school's commitment to equal opportunities. For example, those with the most complex learning difficulties tend to move forward in very small steps but their achievements are just as impressive as those of the most able pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Pupils enjoy a wide variety of cultural activities, including visiting ballet and theatre performances, dancing and making music. All, including those with autistic spectrum disorders, develop their social skills and become confident to meet new people and learn in different contexts, such as during a visit to a supermarket. They become increasingly independent and aware of how to keep themselves safe, for example, as pedestrians or when using public transport. The school and wider community benefit from pupils' ability and readiness to take on responsibility. Jobs such as looking after the class fish lead gradually to the oldest pupils maintaining the sensory garden and helping younger children. Through enterprise activities, pupils raise significant funds for the school and to support a number of charities. They willingly face personal challenges such as taking part in adventurous pursuits - abseiling or stream walking - and residential visits.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers choose activities, methods and resources very carefully, in order to make them highly relevant to pupils' needs, interests and ages. For example, in one lesson, Key Stage 3 pupils with significant autistic spectrum disorders were successfully challenged to apply their numeracy and problem-solving skills to a practical task - counting seeds and labelling plant pots.

Throughout the school, teaching assistants work in close partnership with teachers, making considerable contributions to pupils' learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. As a result, pupils are happy to attempt new skills such as sawing wood or repeating a word for the first time. They are praised for trying hard as well as for succeeding. Pupils'

behaviour is managed very effectively within the calm learning environments teachers establish. Teachers set out their expectations very clearly and are infinitely patient. Systems to assess and record pupils' learning are very well organised. A wealth of accurate and relevant information is collected and used to ensure that tasks are pitched at the right level for all pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is reviewed regularly to ensure that it meets the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. For example, 'talking partners' provide additional support for those whose communication skills need an extra boost. The school has gained the Leading Aspect award for the effectiveness of its provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. There is a clear and very relevant focus on English, mathematics, PSHE and physical education. These subjects all contribute significantly to pupils' academic progress and personal development. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is very wide ranging, supporting very successfully pupils' transition to the world of work or further education. A variety of links with colleges and mainstream primary and secondary schools enhance the opportunities for individuals or groups of pupils. For example, a small number of higher-attaining pupils follow GCSE courses. On other occasions, for instance in science, some Key Stage 4 pupils at Milton reach levels that cannot be endorsed by the accreditation available to them. The curriculum is enriched in a host of enjoyable ways. For example, visitors include sports players, musicians and artists. Pupils are very enthusiastic about the lunchtime and after school clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils' safety and well-being are given the highest priority. Very clear, comprehensive and effective systems are in place, for example with regard to child protection. Potential risks are assessed very thoroughly and steps then taken to minimise them. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They all have someone they could talk to if they had any concerns. 'Staff would do their best to sort things out.' Particularly vulnerable pupils are supported with skill and compassion. Special arrangements enable some to continue in education when they have been excluded from other schools. A very wide range of professionals and agencies enhances the school's work. Good attendance is pursued vigorously. Pupils are made aware of their individual learning and social targets. They have opportunities to discuss their progress and are helped to understand what they can do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

A strong framework of systems and structures in each aspect of the school ensures that staff roles and responsibilities are very clear. Senior staff take on significant tasks and fulfil these extremely well, for example ensuring that virtually all pupils always have the curriculum and support they need. Procedures for analysing the information from teachers' assessments of pupils' learning are rigorous. Targets are used exceptionally well to raise achievement. For example, steps are quickly taken when any pupils are not doing as well as anticipated. The outcomes of these interventions are monitored carefully, revealing that they invariably result in improved progress. Subject leaders play their part in monitoring and planning actions to improve what is provided and pupils' achievement. The governing body provides valued, very

knowledgeable support. Governors are all involved in personally checking on the work of the school. The school has very high aspirations for its pupils and itself, hence its current determination to achieve Specialist School status in the area of communication.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
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

Inspection of Milton School, Mexborough, S64 8QG

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when I visited your school. This letter is to tell you what I found out about Milton during my short visit.

I know about all the exciting things you do and so can understand why you enjoy school so much. I was very pleased to see how well you behave, in lessons and during breaks and lunchtime. You told me that you feel safe in school. That is because you are looked after extremely well. All the staff do their best to make sure you are able to learn and have fun, without any worries. They give you lots of chances to mix with others and to grow into confident young people, ready to move on to work or college.

You make outstanding progress because your teachers make sure that the work you do is just hard enough. The oldest pupils leave school with lots of certificates. Sometimes, the certificates do not really show exactly how well the pupils did. I've asked the teachers to see what they can do about this.

Your headteacher, the staff and the governors all work very hard to check that the school is doing everything possible to help you learn. They are always thinking of new ways to make the school even better. You are very lucky because you go to an outstanding school.

I want to send my best wishes to each one of you.