

Mill Green School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131022
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	315701
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Eric Craven HMI

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	81
6th form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alan Griffiths
Headteacher	Mr Colin Myers
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2004
School address	Mill Lane Newton-le-Willows Merseyside WA12 8BG
Telephone number	01744 678760
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Age group	2-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Mill Green provides for pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a small number of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders. There are very few pupils in the Foundation Stage and 40% of the pupils are in the school's post-16 provision. The pupils come from across the borough and some from other local authorities. Almost half of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. Five pupils are looked after by the local authority and the vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. All but a handful of pupils are transported to school in minibuses and taxis. The school has a number of external awards including the National Healthy Schools Award. The local authority has begun to consult about proposals to change the age range of pupils at the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a school which is performing satisfactorily overall and in some areas it is performing well. This is also the judgement of the school in its self-evaluation. There is a relatively new senior leadership team who together are beginning to make a positive difference. Their strengths include their dynamism and the support they show for each other and the staff. There is an agreed vision for the school, although the school development plan lacks a sharp focus on pupil outcomes.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and improving, but still variable. There is a reasonable proportion of good teaching but little that is outstanding. There are inconsistencies in lesson planning: the best includes clear learning outcomes for individuals and different groups of pupils. The progress made by many of the pupils is satisfactory although for some it is better. A good example of the best teaching is in science where the specialist teaching excites and stretches the pupils and their progress is good. To the school's credit staff have agreed what they consider good progress might look like and use this as a yardstick to judge pupils' achievements. However, for some pupils this expectation is not high enough.

The pupils' personal development is good and notably their attendance and behaviour. They enjoy coming to this school and their parents present an extremely positive view as well. One parent encapsulated the views of others when saying, 'Staff go out of their way to ensure that each child receives the individual attention they require'. The relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and reflect the good care staff provide and the detailed knowledge they have of each child. Pupils make a valuable contribution to the school and wider community and this helps them understand that they can make a difference to the world around them and that they have responsibilities as citizens. Their preparation for future economic well-being is outstanding by the time they leave the school as a result of the school's impressive focus on preparing them to be as independent as possible.

The curriculum is good because it is very relevant and life-skills oriented to align with pupils' increasing maturity as they get older. For example, enterprise work and external accreditation feature highly in their teenage years. The school takes safeguarding very seriously and has robust systems to ensure the health and safety of the pupils. The school has dealt effectively with the area for development from its last inspection. As the school knows its own strengths and weaknesses and the new senior leadership team is beginning to make a difference, the capacity for the school to improve further is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The post-16 department promotes students' independence and learning effectively. Students gain accreditation in courses designed to prepare them for their next phase of adulthood, such as preparing meals and personal safety. The more able students achieve a range of externally accredited vocational and academic qualifications as a result of relevant and interesting activities that build upon their previous knowledge and understanding. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students are well cared for and supported, and make good progress in their personal development and life skills, gaining confidence and self-esteem through their successes. Students who join the post-16 department from other schools are made very welcome. Students benefit from work-related experiences and effective links with colleges and local businesses

which help to prepare them for life after school. The 'all about me' student passport provides valuable advice and supports them well at times of change. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

There are few pupils in the Foundation Stage and they enjoy the education they receive. The school suitably provides a discrete Foundation Stage curriculum for Nursery and Reception age pupils even though this is largely alongside pupils in Year 1. The Foundation Stage is effectively managed on a day to day basis by the class teacher. The school introduces the pupils to their first taste of education well; their introduction to school is gradual and sensitively managed. There is effective communication with parents aided by home-school diaries. The progress made by the two pupils in the Foundation Stage last year was good. The school has improved the resources for the Foundation Stage since its last inspection and has gained the local authority's kite mark for early years provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is good and better.
- Ensure school development planning includes measurable outcomes, particularly in improving pupils' achievements.
- Improve the school's monitoring and evaluation arrangements so they are consistent and systematic.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

As a consequence of the pupils' severe and profound learning difficulties the standards they achieve are well below those of pupils of similar ages in mainstream schools. Nevertheless, from their own starting points the pupils achieve satisfactorily overall and some achieve better than this. The progress of pupils in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and in science is good and for some pupils receiving additional support in literacy and numeracy their progress is also good. The school's analysis of its achievement data shows that there are no discernible differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils; for example, girls and boys make similar progress from their starting points. The reasons why the achievement of some pupils is not better than it is are because teaching is not consistently good; work to ensure the consistency of assessments between teachers is embryonic; and the analysis of data and the subsequent matching of additional support to pupils who need this is also at an early stage of development. All older pupils gain external accreditation and some achieve Entry Level awards, which are equivalent to the early levels of the National Curriculum. The personal and social development of the pupils is good because the care and support provided by the school for this aspect of their development is very effective.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Parents say that their children love coming to school and this is reflected in their good attendance. Pupils' achievements are actively celebrated which contributes to their enjoyment of school. The healthy schools initiative has helped to raise their understanding of the importance of physical exercise and eating healthily. They learn about keeping safe and know who to turn to if they have difficulties, although not all feel that situations reported from the playground are satisfactorily resolved. Pupils' personal safety is enhanced as they learn to travel and move around the school safely and independently. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Assemblies, circle time and religious education lessons encourage all to be thoughtful and reflect on their actions. There are fewer opportunities taken for pupils to develop spiritual awareness. Multi-cultural themed weeks and festival celebrations, together with visitors such as 'Zulu Nation' who encourage ethnic singing and dancing, promote other cultures effectively. The school council is effective and contributes to decision making. The new climbing wall is the result of recent debate by council members. Pupils accept responsibility readily and have raised funds for Comic Relief, taken part in the national 'Best Buddies' initiative and the school's project with senior citizens. College placements, visits to mainstream schools and work experience promote independence, and pupils learn to make their views known. Students in the post-16 department are particularly successful in their work experience placements and these prepare them well for work or college.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school records show that the quality of teaching is improving although not enough is good or outstanding. Regular assessment and continual record keeping is a good feature of teaching and in the best lessons this helps teachers plan specific and appropriate outcomes for pupils. However, this is not consistently the case. Teachers are generally making good use of resources such as interactive whiteboards and everyday objects to make lessons meaningful and relevant for the pupils. Where teaching is less successful it lacks vibrancy and the use of interesting and exciting activities to maintain the interest of all pupils throughout the lesson. There is improving and suitable provision for pupils who have additional needs. However, the liaison between staff providing additional support for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and class teachers is not consistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has a good curriculum that is relevant and carefully planned to meet the needs of all pupils. For the younger ones it has a strong focus on establishing their ability to relate to, and communicate with, others and be able to settle to their learning. A strong emphasis on individualised learning in the subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and

communication technology is supported well through practical and multi-sensory experiences and investigative play. Pupils' personal development is extended through PSHE lessons and reinforced through the rest of the curriculum. Opportunities for accreditation are extensive, highly motivating and accessible for pupils of all abilities. The work-related curriculum for older pupils is very effective and enterprise projects such as 'Roots and Shoots', in which they grow and sell fresh vegetables, contribute well to their independence and preparation for future life. A personal adviser from Connexions works with all secondary age pupils. Visits into the community provide a good range of relevant learning experiences and effectively enrich the curriculum. The school is planning to improve the very limited range of extra-curricular activities offered at lunchtime and after school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides good quality care, support and guidance for pupils of all ages. Arrangements to ensure health and safety are clear. Risks are carefully assessed and suitable action is taken to minimise them. Procedures for child protection are well established and understood by staff. The school works very closely with a wide range of agencies and therapists to ensure that procedures are in place to support all pupils. The work of the teaching assistants is sensitive, well coordinated, and very effective in promoting the well-being of pupils. Teaching assistants are a much valued part of class teams and their contribution is central to meeting individual pupils' needs. The school works closely with parents. This link is significantly enhanced by a designated member of staff with responsibility for family liaison. There are effective procedures to identify any pupil who needs extra support or help. Monitoring of individual pupil behaviour and academic progress is a good feature of the school's work. Individual targets for pupils are clear and precise and provide relevant and challenging small steps for them to succeed. However, they receive limited feedback about how well they are doing and only a small number of pupils know their targets and what they need to do to make progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and governors have assembled a relatively new senior leadership team which is beginning to have some impact and shows much promise. The headteacher has spent time since his appointment in establishing systems and structures but generally this has been at the expense of a focus on outcomes. However, these systems now put the school in a position to move forward more rapidly.

The headteacher has a good view of the school's strengths and its weaknesses, although the plans to deal with these need to be more focused on the differences the actions will make to the quality of teaching and learning and to pupils' achievements. Some senior leaders have recently embarked on national leadership training and are already applying this to their work in school. Subject leaders have clear roles and responsibilities but are not sufficiently influencing the quality of teaching of their colleagues, although the school recognises this is a next step for development.

Good use is made of the views of parents and students in identifying priorities for the school. For example, the pupils' council made a valuable contribution to the appointment of the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The school monitors and evaluates some of its work but this is not sufficiently consistent or systematic. Data on pupil progress is gathered and analysed but data on pupils' behaviour is only recorded at an individual level and is not collated and interrogated for patterns and trends.

The governing body is developing its role as a critical friend to the school and encouraged by the headteacher is providing more challenge where appropriate. Links have been made between individual governors and subject leaders but these have been slow to develop and have stalled in some cases. The school's accommodation is restricted and cramped on the site but staff have made good use of the building to make the accommodation as attractive and useful as possible. The school has a large budget surplus this year but this is already committed or earmarked for specific projects. The school provides good value for money.

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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	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?	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	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?	2	2

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?	3	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
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	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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 Mill Green School, St Helens, WA12 8BG

It was lovely to spend time in your school earlier this week. Thank you to the members of the school council for meeting with inspectors and giving their views of the school so clearly.

We spent time looking at lessons and lunch and break times and we talked a lot with staff about how the school works. These are the main things we found.

- you and your parents really like the school
- staff care for you and look after you well
- your behaviour is good and when someone does need the help of staff to control their behaviour staff do this well
- the things you learn about are very useful to you and, especially as you get older, these things are helping you get ready for leaving school
- teaching is satisfactory and some of it is good but we don't think enough of it is as good as it should be
- senior staff are now starting to help the school improve even more.

We think the school is doing fine overall and is good in some parts of its work. However, we do think there are a few important things it should do to improve more. These are:

- to make more of the teaching better than it is
- for senior staff to make the plans for improving the school better
- for senior staff to check more carefully how well the school is doing.

Do keep enjoying school and keep trying as hard as you can.