

# Mill Hill School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 113001          |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Derbyshire      |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 325740          |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 5–6 March 2009  |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Raymond Jardine |

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

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|---|--|
| <b>Type of school</b>                     | Secondary                                    |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Community                                    |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 11–18  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed  |
| <b>Number on roll</b>                     |  |
| School (total)                            | 1178   |
| Sixth form                                | 124  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body                           |
| <b>Chair</b>                              | Mr Alex Wood                                 |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Mrs Sarah Graham                             |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 6 February 2008                              |
| <b>School address</b>                     | Peasehill<br>Ripley<br>Derbyshire<br>DE5 3JQ |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 01773 746334                                 |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 01773 570685                                 |

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|--------------------------|----------------|
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school is larger than average. Almost all its students are of White British origin; a few come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds but none are at an early stage of learning English. An average proportion is entitled to free school meals. The proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been rising and is currently a little above average. The main difficulties are social, emotional and behavioural or moderate learning difficulties. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is typically average, although it varies a little from year to year. The school has been designated a specialist arts and media college since 2004. It has also achieved a number of national awards, including Healthy Schools, Gold Artsmark, Career Mark and Investors in People. At the time of the school's last inspection in February 2008 it was given a notice to improve.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Standards in Year 11 are considerably higher and a momentum of improved achievement has been established since the last inspection, making the school's overall effectiveness satisfactory. The headteacher, supported by a team of senior leaders, provides drive and determined leadership. The school has emerged stronger from a period of considerable staffing turbulence, which was a concern of parents. Staffing is now stable and, importantly, some good new appointments have been made in critical areas, including at deputy headteacher level and in the leadership positions of English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology (ICT). There is also new and effective leadership of the provision for students with learning difficulties. The impact of these changes is already showing through in considerable improvements to teaching quality and in the urgency with which weaknesses in students' progress are being tackled. A key reason why the school is improving is that its performance is now checked more rigorously and expectations are higher. Staff understand that there is much still to do: there is a collective determination to succeed and the potential to improve further is satisfactory.

Student achievement is now satisfactory and standards in Year 11 are a little above average. The improvements are most marked in science and to a lesser extent, in mathematics and English. In these subjects and in others, such as ICT, leaders are monitoring their subjects more rigorously. Lines of accountability have also been strengthened. The gap in achievement between boys and girls in Years 10 and 11 has closed considerably compared to previous years. A revised system for tracking students' progress is being used well by senior leaders to target additional support and mentoring to specific students. The system extends across every year group and is increasingly used by curriculum leaders, but its use is not yet fully embedded across the school and is less developed in Years 7 to 9. In Year 9, standards are average. Improvement has not been as strong as in later years; boys are not doing as well as girls and the proportion attaining higher levels, though improving, is not high enough, as the school is aware. There are strengths in the school's specialist creative arts and media subjects where standards are good and targets have been exceeded.

Pastoral support is effective in improving attendance and behaviour, both of which are satisfactory. Relationships are generally good and most students enjoy school. Some parents expressed concerns about behaviour. Students say that they feel safe and that behaviour has improved. Inspectors also found that most students behave well in lessons and around the school. While teaching is satisfactory overall, there remain a few lessons where weak teaching does not engage interest, students lose concentration and behaviour deteriorates. Much of the teaching is now good and there is some outstanding practice, but in some lessons, tasks are not matched well enough to the full range of students' abilities to ensure that they all progress well. In addition, not enough is done to enable students to learn independently and to review their own work. The curriculum meets most students' needs and is being extended through partnerships with other institutions. Governance is satisfactory, as is value for money. A new chair of governors is leading efforts to involve governors more fully in monitoring the school's work to hold it to account.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. Standards fell slightly in 2008 and were below average, but inspection evidence indicates that good improvement is expected in 2009. The proportion of students expected to achieve the higher grades A and B at A level is still a little below average, but almost all students are on track to achieve pass grades. Students are now more consistently making at least expected progress. Personal development is good, students enjoy their learning and some contribute to the school and wider community. The use of assessment to track progress against targets is good. Care and guidance are good and students speak highly of the support they receive. Teaching is satisfactory overall and improving, and several examples of outstanding teaching were observed. Students have good opportunities for supervised independent learning. Whilst the quality of marking varies, it is good on the whole and often provides very good feedback to help students to improve. The curriculum matches the needs and aspirations of students and is developing well, particularly in vocational courses, and there is a good range of enrichment activities. Attendance is monitored carefully and is good. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Self-evaluation is rigorous and enables managers to prioritise key issues for improvement. This is leading to improvements in the curriculum and standards and achievement.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise students' achievement further, particularly in Years 7 to 9, focusing on boys and the more able.
- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that work is always well matched to students' abilities and building on the existing best practice.
- Develop students' skills in learning independently and in reviewing their own progress in relation to their targets.
- Embed new systems for monitoring and supporting students' progress so that the best practice in Year 11 is replicated across the school.

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

In 2008, standards in Year 11 dipped compared to the previous year and were below average, reflecting some underachievement. Currently standards are showing signs of significant improvement because most students are now making at least satisfactory progress. Those in Year 11 are on track for over half of them to attain five or more higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics in order to meet the school's challenging targets. There have been improvements in several subjects, but particularly in science and, to a lesser extent, in English and mathematics. This improved progress is also evident in most lessons seen. There are strengths in music, art and media studies, reflecting the school's specialist status and the school met its targets for these last year. Drama and ICT are also relative strengths. Students with learning difficulties are now better monitored and supported, and make satisfactory progress.

In Years 7 to 9, standards currently are about average and most improved in science. Although achievement is now satisfactory, there remains a gap between boys and girls and some higher attaining students are not doing well enough.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Most students listen well, are considerate to one another and are welcoming and polite to visitors. They treat property with respect and adopt safe practices. They support various charitable causes and empathise with less advantaged groups. Students state that they feel safe in school, confident that the relatively low incidence of bullying is dealt with promptly and effectively. Attendance is satisfactory, and the rate of persistent absence is declining steadily, although there remains a small core of persistent absentees.

Students understand the principles of a healthy lifestyle, although some do not always make healthy dietary choices. Many take part in a diverse range of sporting, musical and other activities but the school is eager to increase these numbers further. Students contribute effectively to the school and the local community in a number of ways; for example, some are involved with sport in local primary schools. The school's status as a specialist arts and media college is reflected in the imaginative, creative projects undertaken with local primary schools and in the local community. Considerable numbers are involved in an extensive range of voluntary activities in the town and the surrounding community. Students acquire sound basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Together with good work experience placements and careers advice, students are appropriately prepared to take up the challenge of their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most students behave well and their good attitudes make a significant contribution to the learning in lessons. Good teacher knowledge is a strength of the school and is often characterised by very good questioning which requires students to develop their own knowledge and, in the best lessons, to transfer that into new learning. Most lessons are now planned well. The lesson objectives, which are frequently linked to levels and grades, are made clear to the students, but occasionally the objectives are not sufficiently focused on learning outcomes. In some lessons, tasks are not engaging or well matched to the needs of all learners and this slows some students' learning or behaviour wanes. Although there are examples of good practice in students learning both from and with each other, not enough is done to help students to develop the skills of independent learning across the school.

Inspectors found many examples of effective marking and feedback to students, which are helping them to know the standard they are working to and how to improve. However, this practice is not consistent everywhere, as the school is aware. Students in Key Stage 4 are better informed about their levels of attainment and targets than those in Key Stage 3. Homework is not consistently set across the school, a concern expressed by some parents. Rooms have good displays that support learning both in lesson content and in assessment.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum meets the needs of most learners. The range of courses in Key Stage 4 is being broadened to provide better access and choice in work-related learning opportunities, particularly for lower attaining students and those with additional needs. Students have good opportunities for work experience and enterprise activities as a result of effective links with local businesses. All students now choose one of the high achieving specialist media and arts courses in addition to the core subjects of English, mathematics and science to study to GCSE level. The school is working to extend the use of literacy and numeracy skills more fully across all subjects but this is work in progress. The curriculum in mathematics is also being strengthened across year groups to better build on students' skills and knowledge.

There is a range of clubs and extra-curricular activities which take place before school, during lunchtime and at the end of the school day. These include the arts, sport, support lessons for GCSE and for students who would otherwise underachieve. There are some opportunities for residential experiences and foreign trips, including an active skiing programme, which are valued by those who participate.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

Procedures for child protection and for all aspects of health and safety meet current requirements. Communication between pastoral and academic staff is good, and students and their parents are regularly informed about students' progress. Provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved substantially under the leadership of a new coordinator. There is good support for a small number of students who may otherwise be at risk of exclusion. Gifted, talented and more able students are well provided for in a range of extra-curricular activities but provision within lessons is too variable. The school continues to work hard to engage parents and students in order to reduce levels of unauthorised absence. Good careers advice and effective guidance from subject teachers ensure that students are well placed to make choices at GCSE and beyond.

A newly revised system for monitoring students' progress to their targets is proving effective in raising standards. The system is potentially very good. It is at present most rigorously applied in Year 11 and by senior leaders and curriculum leaders, and is not yet fully embedded across the school. Work is being undertaken to involve the directors of learning for each year group more centrally in this role.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Self-evaluation systems are accurate and proving increasingly effective because much training and support has been directed at improving them, particularly the systems to monitor teaching quality and student progress. The school's improvement plan provides a good basis for guiding school priorities; it is detailed and has the necessary criteria and timescales to enable progress to be checked. Even so, governors are not yet centrally involved in checking how well the school is progressing in implementing its improvement plan. Governors meet their statutory obligations and the new chair is determined to ensure that the momentum of improvement is maintained.

Student and school targets are challenging and a revised system for tracking students' progress is proving to be an effective management tool, providing senior leaders with a clear picture of patterns and forecasts on which to act. Middle leadership too, is becoming increasingly adept at using data in this way. The school's specialist arts and media status provides a valuable resource of good expertise on which to build, with strengths in teaching quality and in standards. Such expertise is now being utilised more fully to improve the quality of provision across several other subjects. The school understands the local community it serves, there are some good local links, and its contribution to community cohesion has been audited. It is currently extending its ethnic links to better reflect its local context and broadening the global dimension to students' learning. The school consults with parents in a number of ways, such as about their views of a recent student review day, but it realises that it has more work to do to improve communication further and involve them more fully with the school.



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**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

|   |                       |              |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | <b>School Overall</b> | <b>16-19</b> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|

### 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   | 3   |
| 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?  | 3   | 2   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | 3   | 2   |

### Achievement and standards

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

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<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.

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>       | 3 | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?   | 3 | 2 |

### Leadership and management

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 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  | 2   | 2   |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated   | 3   |     |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?   | 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 | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures?   | No  |     |
| Does this school require a notice to improve?  | No  |     |

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

9 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Mill Hill School, Peasehill, Ripley, DE5 3JQ

Thank you for the welcome that we received when we visited your school recently. Inspectors spoke with many of you and I am now writing to tell you about what we found. You told us that the school has improved since its last inspection and we agree. It is now satisfactory. You enjoy good relationships with your peers and most of you behave well in lessons. You know how to lead healthy lifestyles, although not all of you make healthy eating choices during school breaks. We were impressed by your involvement in the school and local community, including your enjoyment of creative arts projects, reflecting the school's strengths in these subjects.

Teaching quality is now better and much of it is now good, although not all. In some lessons, the challenge of the work is not always right for everyone and in a few lessons, the teaching is still weak. This is one of the key areas that the school will continue to improve so that teaching becomes consistently good or better. Your new teachers in science, ICT and mathematics are also making a significant difference to the education that you receive. Your achievements are now satisfactory, but some of you need to do even better, particularly boys in lower years and some more able students. Year 11 students are expected to attain standards that are a little above those nationally this year and we know that they are working hard and are keen to do well. Their progress has been checked carefully by senior and middle leaders to ensure that they do as well as they can.

The school's system for checking progress towards your targets is working well in some areas but it is not yet routine to the school's work and fully effective in every year. That is why we have asked that the assessment system is developed further. We were impressed that those of you in Years 10 and 11 know your targets and receive some good guidance on how to achieve them, but this is not yet consistent, particularly lower down in the school. Some of you are not yet skilled in reviewing your own work to help you get better.

Inspectors and Mrs Graham want to ensure that you are encouraged to be more involved in learning independently, both in lessons and at other times. You can play your part by continuing the improvement in behaviour, ensuring your good attendance and working with your teachers to agree the next steps you need in your learning.

With all good wishes for your future at Mill Hill School

Ray Jardine

Lead inspector