

# Mill Water School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113635
<b>Local Authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	325847
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 February 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sarah Mascall

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	94
Sixth form	5
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Royston Williams
<b>Headteacher</b>	Alan Sheppard
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17 October 2005
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Honiton Bottom Road Honiton EX14 2ER
<b>Telephone number</b>	01404 43454
<b>Fax number</b>	01404 43402

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<b>Age group</b>	3–19
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Mill Water School provides for pupils with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities including moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. A small number of pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are a small number of pupils who are looked after by the local authority. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.

The school takes a very small number of children under the age of five and last year, as this year, there were no more than three children in this age group.

Pupils enter school with skills that are well below those expected of their age and because of the nature of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, standards are very low.

The headteacher was appointed on a permanent basis in September 2008.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school where staff work well as a team and have a strong commitment to providing the best for pupils. Parents and pupils are very positive about the school and recognise all that it has done for them. Their views can be summarised by a parent who wrote, 'My child continues to grow and prosper in ways I never thought possible due largely to this fantastic school and its team of dedicated, caring and talented individuals.' Pupils' happy, smiling faces as they come into school in the morning are a reflection of how much they enjoy school. Their regular attendance and outstanding behaviour support their learning well. As a result, pupils achieve well. Their start in the Early Years Foundation Stage class is satisfactory and throughout the rest of the school progress is good. For those pupils in Years 10 to 12, consistently strong teaching enables pupils to achieve very well. Teaching and learning have many strengths and are good overall. A good knowledge and understanding of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the effective teamwork between teacher and support staff enable pupils to learn well. Teachers, though, do not always make best use of their knowledge of pupils to ensure that work is well matched to their different abilities. The school has recognised this and is putting in place systems to provide a more focused approach to each pupil's learning needs and provide more specific and challenging targets to help pupils improve.

The good curriculum and strong care, guidance and support procedures contribute greatly to the pupils' excellent personal development. The vast range of opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social skills ensures that they are extremely well prepared for life when they leave school. Pupils have a very good awareness of staying healthy and the many good opportunities to experience the world of work and college life are much appreciated by the pupils. The excellent links with parents, carers, local schools and outside agencies support pupils and their families very well.

There have been a number of improvements to the school over the last year and staff and governors give credit to the headteacher for these positive changes. He has been very effective in drawing staff together into an effective team and as a result, the school is a pleasant, calm and happy place for staff and pupils to work. Good leadership and management have provided staff with a clear direction for their work. The headteacher's ability to delegate and empower staff is leading to more effective leadership at all levels. While senior managers have quickly taken on additional responsibilities, subject leaders have only recently had the opportunities to develop the skills and confidence necessary to lead and manage in their areas of responsibility.

The accommodation is poor and has been a key issue in a number of inspections. The lack of specialist facilities in science, art and music impacts on the school's ability to ensure pupils receive as good a range of opportunities as in other subjects. This has been addressed to some extent by older pupils travelling to local mainstream schools for science lessons and temporary classrooms being put in place to support music and art. However, the problem of very limited storage space and lack of administration rooms and staff facilities remains an issue. Plans to build a new school have not yet come to fruition.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

Students in Years 12 and 13 make good progress and achieve well. They benefit from a well-planned curriculum which supports their learning well. Although they are educated with

pupils in lower years, the students are very aware of their age and the fact that they will be moving on to college. They are mature, sensible young adults who talk positively about what they will do when they leave school and how much they have gained from attending Mill Water. Their personal development is excellent. They have a very good understanding about the importance of healthy eating and many are developing the skills to prepare their own meals. Students talk positively about the opportunities to keep fit and have a very good understanding of how to stay safe. One student talked about how he has been supported to travel independently and is proud of the fact that he can catch a train to Exeter and go shopping there. The systems for supporting students' personal development are very good and the excellent links with parents and carers and outside agencies support students very well.

Students appreciate the good teaching and the opportunities to attend college courses. They gain a range of accreditation within the 14 to 19 curriculum that recognises well the achievement they have made. The school is looking to develop further opportunities for accreditation to ensure that all the skills students gain can be recognised through external qualifications.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. There is a strong commitment to ensure that students get the best possible deal and the coordinator has ensured that teaching and staff expertise are good. Effective self-evaluation ensures a constant review of provision to consider how it can be improved further.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 3**

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. There is a good focus on preparing children for starting in the main school and staff are successful in this. Children learn to sit and listen well and to play together. They have good opportunities to develop their social skills through visits out into the community. As a result, they make good progress in aspects of their personal and social development. Curriculum planning is generally secure. There is, however, insufficient focus on ensuring that all aspects of the areas for learning are covered effectively each week. Occasionally, this results in an insufficient allocation of time for children to develop their skills in numeracy and literacy. As a result, children make satisfactory rather than good progress in their learning. Their communication skills are promoted appropriately and there is good use of sign and symbols to help children communicate and understand what is going on.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Appropriate procedures for recording children's progress are in place, but are not always used consistently by all staff. There is good annotation in children's work to show the level of support children receive. The system for recording children's achievements each day, though, is not always used consistently by all staff. The accommodation is limited. The outside space enables children to play outside in all weathers but the environment in the classrooms is not always stimulating or well planned. Staff are very aware of keeping pupils safe and good procedures are in place to ensure children's welfare is a high priority.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve planning of the curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage class to ensure that children develop their skills in all areas of learning and so make better progress.
- Improve planning so that teaching meets the needs of each individual pupil and their targets for learning are more specific.

- Build the capacity of subject leaders to monitor provision in their areas of responsibility and ensure all pupils fulfil their potential.
- Maintain efforts to improve and develop the accommodation, including ensuring better provision for the teaching of science.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

From very low starting points, pupils, regardless of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress in their learning and achieve well. Progress for the small number of pupils in Years 1 and 2 is good. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 and in Years 10 and 11 make particularly good progress and this is evident in the gains they make in their numeracy and literacy skills. While pupils make good progress in many areas of learning in Years 7, 8 and 9, the school is in the process of improving achievements in mathematics for this age range as these are satisfactory rather than good. Progress for pupils in science is satisfactory because it is limited by the fact that they do not have access to specialist facilities.

Pupils in Years 10 and 11 gain recognition for their work through the Accreditation for Life and Learning courses. More able pupils attend mainstream schools and colleges and are taking qualifications in a small number of GCSEs and in a social skills programme.

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

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils are very enthusiastic about school and enjoy all that they do during each day. One carer commented, 'The child we care for loves it and waits all weekend to get back to school on Mondays!' Pupils have a good understanding of the environment and explain that they keep vegetable cuttings from cookery lessons to be recycled. Pupils show a very good understanding of keeping healthy and are particularly proud of their achievements on the football pitch.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to behave and know the difference between right and wrong. Those pupils with more challenging behaviours learn to control their behaviour and develop techniques to talk about what is worrying them. There is a real sense of care within the school and pupils are very supportive of each other. They say they feel safe and know who to go and talk to if they have any concerns. Pupils are also involved in fund raising for their local and wider communities. The school recognises that more needs to be done to improve pupils' awareness of different cultures and closer links are being developed with schools in other areas of the country. However, pupils show a good understanding of different religions and have established links with schools in Africa. They are very involved in their own school and local community and make good use of the local facilities.

Parents comment on the way their children grow up and mature. This is very evident amongst the older pupils who communicate very well and have a very good understanding of how to behave in a range of social settings. Their growing independence and very sensible attitudes ensure that they are exceptionally well prepared for life when they leave school.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching has a number of strengths which support pupils' learning well. The good understanding and experience of staff in working with the range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities in each class are effective. This, together with the strong team work between teachers and support staff that exists in each class, ensures pupils make good progress. Lessons are often lively and practical enabling pupils to be actively involved in the learning experiences. Teachers' knowledge is used well to match support staff and pupils together and allow group work to take place. Hence, in one lesson there were groups of pupils improving their literacy skills while others worked on computers developing their skills in moving files around. Humour plays a strong part in lessons and lots of laughter reflects the enjoyment all have in lessons. Occasionally, time is not used well. This is most evident at break and snack times which sometimes go on for too long and reduce the amount of teaching time.

Although teachers know pupils well, they do not always use this knowledge to ensure tasks are matched to ability, and that targets are set which challenge pupils to fulfil their potential. In one numeracy lesson for example, groups of pupils worked on different worksheets, but for some, these were too easy and did not provide sufficient challenge. In a few lessons, worksheets are used too frequently and this was raised by pupils as the one area of change they wanted.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

A strength of the curriculum is the vast range of experiences on offer to pupils that support their personal development extremely well. These include those with a very good focus on pupils' social skills, for example cookery and independence training sessions. The very good opportunities offered to nearly a third of pupils to attend mainstream schools is being extended further to enable all pupils to have similar opportunities. Work experience, college placements and opportunities to attend agricultural and horticultural facilities all support pupils extremely well. The provision for multi-sensory work, including the use of symbols and signs, is good. The school rightly recognises the need to take stock of what is being offered in order to ensure that the academic skills pupils are developing are being built upon in a structured way. Not all teachers' timetables, for example, provide an accurate outline of all the work that goes on during the week. Senior staff have recognised this and are in the process of initiating an audit to ensure a more secure understanding of provision across the school.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

Considerable importance is placed on providing high quality care and welfare for pupils. Very good links with a range of agencies ensure that pupils' medical and health needs are well supported. Very effective action has been taken to keep pupils safe and this encourages pupils' own very good understanding of staying safe. Pupils' behaviour is managed well. The behaviour coordinator is effective in supporting both staff and pupils in developing their skills to manage behaviour. Procedures for the vetting of staff and child protection are secure, as are risk assessments.

Teachers track pupils' progress well but this information is not always being used to ensure work is appropriate and that targets are used to support learning. As a result, it is not clear to pupils what they need to do to improve. The school has recognised this and is putting in place more rigorous assessment procedures which ensure that there is a better focus on each individual pupil.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Strong leadership has brought about positive changes within the school. Most importantly it has empowered staff to take responsibility and be involved in decision making. This has been much appreciated by staff and governors. Senior staff have responded well to new responsibilities and are very positive about the changes. They feel valued and appreciate the fact that their views are considered. Subject leaders have not, in the past, had a specific role in developing their subjects and this is a focus for improvement. They are beginning to develop their monitoring so that, for example, they can be clear about how much time is given to their subjects across the school. The school has a clear direction of how it wants to develop. The headteacher and senior staff have a good awareness of the strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, the school's judgements about its effectiveness are accurate. Key areas for development have been identified, but the targets for success of these developments are not sufficiently well focused or measurable to enable staff and governors to be clear about how well they have been achieved.

The school continues to develop its role in the community and beyond. The range of activities it is now involved in, including putting on an opera, is having a positive impact on both staff and pupils. Very good use is made of the local community to extend pupils' experiences and senior managers have a good understanding of how they will develop community cohesion. Governors are very supportive and are working successfully to increase their involvement in school. Recent initiatives such as linking each governor to a teacher and regular visits to the school are ensuring that governors have a better understanding of what goes on. The commitment of governors and staff to ensure that the school provides the very best for its pupils, together with strong leadership, ensures that the school is well placed to improve further.



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**Annex A**

**Inspection judgements**

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</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>	2	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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

<b>How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?</b>	3	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3	

**Achievement and standards**

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

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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>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2	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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
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	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	2	
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**

16 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mill Water School, Honiton, EX14 2ER

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when we visited your school. We agree with you and your parents and carers that Mill Water is a good school. We were pleased to see how happy you are in school and how good you are at deciding what is healthy to eat and how to stay fit. You all seem very sensible and have a good understanding of how to stay safe. Many of you are able to go to the shops and travel on your own to places and that is a great achievement. There are good systems to make sure you stay safe and you say you know who to talk to if you have concerns.

You make excellent progress in your personal development and your behaviour is extremely good. You told us about how you enjoyed all the different things that go on in school and we feel that you have lots to do. Teaching is good and you work hard in lessons. We have, though, asked teachers to make sure that the work you do is matched to your ability so that it is not too easy for you and you know what you have to do to improve. Although nearly all of you make good progress in your work, the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage class make satisfactory rather than good progress. We have asked the school to look at this to make sure the children make as good progress as the rest of you.

As you know, the buildings and classrooms are not very good and although the school has done as much as it can to make it better, there is still not enough room for you and your teachers. The school works hard though to give you lots of chances to learn and links with other schools are very good. The excellent links with other people and your parents and carers support you very well to ensure you are well looked after.

The new headteacher has made some good changes in the school and teachers are helping him to make improvements in the school. The teachers in charge of subjects are beginning to look at what goes on in school and we have asked that they check the work in lessons more closely to make sure you make even better progress.

We wish you all well for the future and hope you continue to contribute to the community in the way that you do now.

With very best wishes

Yours faithfully

Sarah Mascall Lead inspector