

# Mount Tamar School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113649
<b>Local Authority</b>	Plymouth
<b>Inspection number</b>	325851
<b>Inspection date</b>	23 June 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mick Megee

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>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	77
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Barrie Heaton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Barry Jones
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 March 2006
<b>School address</b>	Row Lane Higher St Budeaux Plymouth PL5 2EF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01752 365128
<b>Fax number</b>	01752 351227

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<b>Age group</b>	5–16
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the impact of the school's initiatives to improve pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour
- the quality of academic guidance given to pupils and the use of assessment to inform teaching and learning
- the impact of leadership and management at all levels in driving forward school improvement.

Evidence was gathered from: visits to lessons; a scrutiny of pupils' work; discussions with pupils, staff and a member of the governing body; the views of parents; and a scrutiny of the school's documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Mount Tamar provides education for pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties who live in the City of Plymouth, Devon, Cornwall, North Somerset and Swansea. A few pupils have other complex special needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders. A very small minority of the pupils are girls. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or are undergoing assessment. The main school site houses both the primary and secondary provision. The school also manages a satellite class of pupils in Years 1 and 2 who are based at a local primary school four miles away as well as a secondary unit based in the Devonport area of the city.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Mount Tamar is a good school that has made good progress since its last inspection. The school has improved its methods of tracking pupils' progress and staff now use more appropriate strategies when teaching pupils with complex needs. In addition, school leaders and governors have ensured that there is a wide range of examination options open to all students in Years 10 and 11. Senior staff lead and manage the school well and have a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development. For example, the reasons for the dip in the 2008 examination results were analysed carefully, with firm action taken to reverse the picture in 2009. The school's checks on pupils' progress show that they are on course to do better this year in an even wider range of subjects. This improvement shows that the school has good capacity to do even better in the future. The school enjoys a strong partnership with parents and carers. Nearly all parents are highly positive about the work of the school and consider that the school has been a key factor in bringing their children's education back on track. They feel that their children once again enjoy school and are making good progress. Inspection evidence supports their views. Typical comments from parents and carers include, 'My child has never been happier', '...has made huge progress' and 'Mount Tamar has been the best thing that ever happened to my grandson.'

The pupils' chequered educational history includes significant gaps in schooling and poor experiences of learning. As a result, standards are generally below average. Nevertheless, pupils achieve well during their time at school. They make good progress in all subjects in the primary department because of consistently skilful teaching. There is quite an influx of pupils with lower literacy skills into Years 7 to 9, so that achievement is less strong at this stage, particularly in English. The school responds to this well, by ensuring that teachers carefully track these pupils' progress and deploy a good range of intervention strategies and support. As a result, by Year 10, pupils have more or less caught up and go on to achieve the examination results they need to gain mainstream college and training places. In 2008, all Year 11 pupils successfully transferred to such places.

The effective care, guidance and support pupils receive, as well as the school's positive ethos, contribute well to their good personal development and well-being. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. As a result, pupils clearly enjoy school, which is reflected in their good behaviour and improving attendance. Typical comments from pupils include, 'It's heaven here.' Attendance is excellent in the primary department, but many of those who join the school in Years 7 to 9 have already established a pattern of low or non-attendance. The school does its best to improve attendance and is successful for most pupils. However, a very small number of pupils continue to be absent frequently, despite the school's best efforts. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the activities the school provides, including the good variety of sports and outdoor education activities.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe. Pupils have a sound understanding of how to stay healthy and this has been recognised by external awards such as Healthy Schools and Activemark. However, many pupils continue to smoke despite the constant advice and counselling sessions that they receive. Pupils say that they trust all of the staff to assist them if they have any worries or concerns. They behave well in most lessons and around the school, and conform well to the school's behaviour code. This is helped by the adults' consistent use of an effective reward system and their non-confrontational approach when pupils are experiencing difficulty.

Pupils have good opportunities to undertake responsibilities in the school, for example in interviewing new staff and as peer mentors for younger pupils in the primary department. The school council plays an influential role in contributing to the school's development, and provides an opportunity for pupils in democratic decision making. Pupils regularly raise money for different charities, and contribute well to the local community, for example by welcoming senior citizens to the harvest festival. They are prepared effectively for their future lives through regular, timely support by Connexions, good acquisition of basic skills and a good range of work and college experiences.

Teaching and learning are good. Relationships between pupils and staff are respectful and considerate. Staff manage pupils well and have established consistent classroom routines. Lessons always begin with a clear statement of what the pupils will learn, and end with an evaluation of whether the learning has taken place and how well the pupils have behaved. There is good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants, and this provides the pupils with a good model of what can be achieved by courtesy and cooperation. Most teachers provide pupils with a good range of interesting activities that motivate them to work hard. These activities are carefully selected, based on good assessment information, to meet the needs of all the pupils in the class. A few teachers, however, are not so skilful, and set work that may be too easy for some, and too hard for others, holding back their progress. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology, for example in their use of interactive whiteboards, to support teaching and learning.

The staff have to work extra hard to provide good educational experiences in accommodation that is becoming increasingly shabby, even though it was judged unsatisfactory in the previous inspections. Parents and students rightly complain about the poor condition of the school. One typical comment was, 'The children's education is restricted by the facilities, size and age of the building. Although the staff do their best, my son's learning experience could be much enhanced by more appropriate facilities.' Nevertheless, the school continues to offer a good curriculum that gives the pupils a broad range of experiences, mainly taught through discrete subjects. The school has introduced further opportunities this year for pupils to achieve accreditation for their efforts, for example through diplomas, a new functional skills programme and 'Step-Up' qualifications. There is good provision throughout the school for the teaching of the creative arts and foreign languages, and for educational visits. Until recently, a Buddhist monk taught religious education in the secondary department. These opportunities, as well as the school's personal, social and health education and citizenship programme, contribute well to pupils' personal development.

Pastoral support is strong. When pupils join the school, their self-esteem has often been fractured by their experiences. The staff provide very good personal support that enables them to feel secure, to recover their spirit and to make good progress. One typical comment from a parent was, 'Since moving to Mount Tamar, my son's behaviour, understanding and thirst for knowledge have improved beyond all recognition. He is now understood.' The arrangements for safeguarding, child protection and health and safety fully meet requirements. The school has good links with a range of external agencies, such as the youth offending team and the educational psychologist, who provide important additional specialist help, particularly to vulnerable pupils. Class teachers and senior leaders track pupils' academic progress carefully to ensure they meet their challenging targets. Teachers set short-term targets for individual pupils in priority areas such as literacy and numeracy, but not all pupils have a clear understanding of what the targets are and so do not always know what they need to do next

to improve. This is because individual targets are not always sufficiently emphasised in lessons and tutorials.

Senior leaders and subject leaders undertake effective regular monitoring of staff and pupils' performance and so have a good understanding of what needs to be done. Strategies for improvement are effectively encapsulated in the school's improvement plan. The governors give good support to the school and to the leadership team, and regularly visit the school to take their own independent view of the quality of the provision. The school promotes community cohesion well and has carried out a thorough audit. It is currently implementing its action plan to remedy any identified shortcomings, such as increasing the frequency of student questionnaires.

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

- Ensure that teachers always match activities to meet the varying needs and capabilities of the students.
- Ensure that students have a good understanding of the next steps they need to take by a greater emphasis on individual learning targets in lessons and tutorials.

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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	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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	2

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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**

24 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mount Tamar School, Plymouth PL5 2EF

Thank you for welcoming me when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed meeting some of you and your parents. This letter is to tell you what I found out.

- You attend a good school, which helps you to become confident and well prepared for the future.
- You make good progress at school, and this means that you are able to go on to be successful in training or at college.
- You enjoy coming to school and you like the staff and the good curriculum.
- You work well with one another in the classroom and you feel safe.
- You have a good understanding of the need to keep healthy but some of you still smoke.
- The teachers do a good job and all the staff look after you well.
- Those who run the school know what needs to be done to improve the school and work hard to make sure the school is successful.

We have asked the school to do two things in particular to help the school get even better.

- Make sure that the teachers always give everyone work at the right level.
- Make sure that you know what your targets are and how you can achieve them quickly.

You can help by attending as well as you can and those of you who smoke could stop or at least cut down.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Mick Megee Lead inspector