

The Milestone School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131557
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	341163
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Jeffery Plumb

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	285
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kate Hawkins
Headteacher	Lyn Dance
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 24 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, pupils, parents, health professionals and the school's family worker. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of evidence, including data on pupils' progress, pupils' individual education and care plans, teachers' planning, curriculum documents, risk assessments, information about the school council's activities, information on the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, the plan to eradicate a small deficit budget, four case studies and 112 parent questionnaires. In addition, they observed the transport arrangements at the end of the school day and the on-site café for parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The progress of different groups of pupils and the extent to which all are enabled to enjoy and achieve.
- The quality of teaching across the school and how well assessment information is used to plan lessons.
- How the curriculum is planned to meet a wide range of very complex pupils' needs.
- How the school's specialist status benefits pupils and teachers beyond the walls of the school.
- The school's plan to claw back its small budget deficit.

Information about the school

The Milestone School is a special school providing education for pupils with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with an autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils, except for those undergoing assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage, have a statement of special educational needs and the majority are boys. Almost all pupils are of White British origin and a very few come from families where English is not the home language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is in line with the national average. Pupils are drawn from a wide catchment area within the county of Gloucestershire. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of nine classes which include Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 children. The school provides extended services which include: a breakfast club, a summer play scheme, parent workshops, training and counselling, a siblings group and an after-school club. Outreach work includes partnerships with local primary, secondary and special schools with expertise offered by three advanced skills teachers, particularly in supporting pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and physical difficulties. The school was granted specialist status for communication and interaction in July 2008 and is a 'leading edge' school with specialist schools and academies trust consultant school status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The Milestone School provides an outstanding quality of education and care. The 'magical' ingredient in its success is its very effective partnership with parents, the community and a wide range of support agencies to ensure pupils achieve their full potential and acquire the skills required to be as independent as possible when they leave school. The development of pupils' life and work-related skills is excellent. Parents and carers are thrilled with what the school achieves for their children and comment on its flexible and innovative practice. The school uses its specialist status for communication and interaction to provide high quality outreach support for pupils of families with special educational needs and/or disabilities who attend mainstream schools. It provides very high-quality training and development for adults working with learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Standards are very low, reflecting pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. They make good progress measured against their starting points and the vast majority meet or exceed the challenging targets they are set at their annual review meetings. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have extremely complex needs, but make outstanding progress because of the high-quality educational provision and care they receive. As they move up through the school they develop as independent young people and make rapid gains in self-confidence. The vast majority of pupils improve their communication skills at a rapid pace. They make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school and the wider community. The first-rate curriculum enables pupils to gain an excellent understanding of how to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle. By the time they leave school, the vast majority of pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next phase of education.

The quality of teaching is good. Although there are pockets of outstanding teaching a few teachers do not make consistently good use of assessment information to plan appropriate work to raise pupils' achievement. On these rare occasions, pupils are insufficiently challenged and this impedes the progress they make in these lessons. Arrangements for monitoring teaching are outstanding and make a valuable contribution to targeted professional development in the areas of the school's work where it is most needed. The headteacher knows that there is a very small amount of teaching in the school which needs to be improved to match the vast quantity of good and outstanding teaching.

Accurate self-evaluation has contributed to very appropriate development priorities being recognised and acted upon. Outstanding leadership has resulted in significant improvements to key aspects of the school's work and performance since the last inspection. Detailed and thorough analysis of pupils' performance triggers decisive action

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to raise their achievement. For example, analysis of performance data in 2008 showed that fewer pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties met their achievement targets compared with other groups of special educational needs pupils within the school. This led to a new approach for setting targets for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and to adjustments in curriculum planning for these pupils. Pupils' progress records for 2009 show a significant increase in the number of these pupils reaching and/or exceeding their targets, particularly in communication. This is one reason why the school has an outstanding capacity for further improvement. In addition, it has maintained highly successful partnerships that benefit pupils very well.

At the time of the last inspection the school had a very significant budget deficit. The vast majority of this deficit has been clawed back, but a small deficit remains. Again the school has worked effectively to produce a new plan, agreed with the local authority, to recoup this deficit and is on target to do so. Based on pupils' outcomes in the context of very stringent and constrained financial planning, the school provides outstanding value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that all teachers consistently use assessment information to plan small learning steps that are suitably challenging for all groups of pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

All pupils, except for those with severe medical needs, make good progress with their learning in lessons and achieve well. Given very low starting points, their academic achievement is good. Achievement in personal development, viewed by parents and carers as of mountainous significance, is outstanding. Pupils' achievement in communicating their needs independently is a significant strength. The majority of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties communicate, through eye pointing and gesture, who they want to meet their bathroom care needs. The vast majority of pupils with severe learning difficulties have the confidence, by the time they are ready to leave school, to shop independently and purchase the items they require for preparing and cooking a healthy meal. Excellent use is made of the local community to support pupils in gaining confidence when mixing safely with members of the public. The school works extremely hard to include all pupils. For example, the vast majority of pupils with autism enter the school with very challenging behaviours, but, because of an excellent programme that meets their individual needs, by the time they leave most of them are able to interact calmly and maturely in shops and community leisure centres. By the time Year 11 pupils leave school, they have the necessary life- and work-related skills to equip them for post-16 education. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and supported in overcoming their frustrations associated with their needs, such as autism, and go on to excel in their areas of interest, such as mathematics and sport. There are good opportunities for pupils to be included in mainstream schools to accelerate their

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learning and raise their achievement in a number of subjects, such as design and technology and French.

Through an excellent enterprise programme, pupils acquire important mathematical and life skills including, for some, an understanding of opening and maintaining a bank account. Overwhelmingly, pupils enjoy coming to school, and this contributes to their good attendance. Their involvement in decision making and raising awareness of the needs of people with a disability is outstanding. They have contributed, through the vociferous voice of the school council, to improved safety in the movement of vehicles on and off the school site. Pupils have been actively involved in discussing their needs with the local bus company because of the frustrations they experience in travelling independently from their homes into the centre of town. A few pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties make very good gains in feeding. Their increased confidence and growing independence are aided by the very appropriate use of modified equipment such as eating utensils, as well as the expert knowledge of staff who consider essential aspects such as how to position the individual so as to make eating easier. Gains in independent movement are also excellent for targeted pupils who have the potential to improve. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by rich sensory experiences which evoke surprise and joy and by participation in dance and music activities from a wide range of cultures.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	IE ²
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Lessons are well planned to meet the needs of pupils and so accelerate their learning and development. Teachers and assistants work together very effectively to engage the interest of all pupils in the class and so ensure they achieve their very best. For example, in an outstanding 'wake and shake' lesson for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, the dedicated staff team ensured every pupil was stimulated and successfully evoked a form of communication response from each one. The vast majority of teachers use their knowledge and understanding of what pupils in their class can do when planning their lessons so as to improve pupils' learning. This results in pupils making small but very significant gains in the areas most relevant to them, such as communicating a choice independently, feeling comfortable about getting their hands messy in a practical activity or reading and writing for practical purposes. However, in a few lessons, insufficient use is made of the knowledge of pupils' prior attainment to plan activities that are sufficiently challenging, and consequently progress slows. Pupils' behavioural difficulties are very skilfully managed and this accelerates their learning. Their communication skills are enhanced in a 'total communication' environment as they respond to effective questions using signing, pictures, switches and electronic communication aids. However, there is always choice. For example, where needed, pupils with autism can use pictures to communicate a choice but they are also given the opportunity to make their requests known using words.

Flexibly planned and innovative, the curriculum meets the needs of pupils exceptionally well, and makes an effective contribution to their achievement and personal development. Tailored programmes are structured to support pupils' differing needs or disabilities. Specialist programmes to improve pupils' mobility and to support pupils with autism improve their challenging behaviour and develop their skills to interact with each other. Strong features include the sensory curriculum and the emphasis on work experience. The curriculum is enriched through visits, visitors to the school and residential visits. The outdoor environment is used imaginatively to make learning fun and exciting for pupils and to develop the communication and mathematical skills they need to enable them to function as independently as possible in adult life. The school is currently reviewing its Key Stage 4 curriculum and range of accredited opportunities to better meet the more complex needs of pupils moving up through the school.

Highly effective communication and planning between health professionals, educational staff and pupils' families and carers ensure that the care needs of pupils are exceptionally well met. Workshops for parents and carers and a regular parents' café help families to support their children's development in the home environment. Parents

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are trained and equipped to manage their children's challenging behaviour, to promote their children's independent mobility and to accelerate the development of their children's communication skills. Outstanding intimate care plans ensure that all pupils are treated with dignity and respect. Teachers and assistants are trained in moving and handling techniques so that the pupils are kept safe, for example when lifted in and out of the hydrotherapy pool. Outstanding arrangements are in place to help pupils settle in when they join the school and to support them in planning for suitable destinations for when they leave.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and her dedicated staff team share a clear vision which focuses on removing obstacles to learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and promoting successful learning for them. Evidence confirms that the school is highly successful in realising this vision. Equality of opportunity for all pupils lies at the very heart of this school. Cognitively able pupils with physical difficulties are fully included with able-bodied peers. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are fully included on shopping trips and other outings with more-able pupils. Traveller families and families of asylum seekers are treated with the utmost dignity and respect. There are very effective procedures and systems to ensure pupils are safe and secure. At the time of the inspection, child protection procedures met government regulations. Risk assessments, including of pupil behaviour, are thorough and detailed. Community cohesion is good. Many opportunities exist to raise pupils' awareness of the different religious and ethnic traditions of people who live in their local community. There are national links in place to benefit pupils and an informal international link with a school in Norway. There is also a very robust approach to ensuring that the community cohesion plan promotes the raising of awareness of physical disability. This has involved action with a bus company in the locality, as well as liaison with parliamentary representatives at the national level. However, the strategy and plan to promote community cohesion is at an early stage of implementation and its full impact on pupils has not yet been evaluated.

Governance is very effective and ensures that all statutory responsibilities are met. Governors provide a good balance of support and challenge. They visit the school regularly and have identified key stage, subject and special needs responsibilities. The

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support provided by governance in the area of financial planning and monitoring is a particular strength.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with extremely complex needs and challenging behaviours. A significant number are undergoing assessment to determine the best provision to meet their educational and medical needs. Children make outstanding progress, particularly in their personal and social development. This is due to the very effective use of pictures and signing to help them make choices and express their needs. As children develop communication skills, so their anxiety reduces and their enjoyment of learning and behaviour improves. The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum continues through Key Stage 1. By the time pupils enter Key Stage 2, the vast majority are more competent in movement, significantly calmer and much better able to interact and share with each other than when they started out. Adults make excellent use of assessment to identify children's strengths and interests. This information is used very effectively to accelerate their learning. A sensory environment, both indoors and outdoors, captures children's attention and accelerates their learning. Leadership and management are outstanding. Detailed and analytical self-evaluation ensures that the dedicated staff team are aware of the next steps for development. As with the whole school, very effective communication with parents and a wide range of supportive agencies ensure that the children's widely differing needs are met.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

There was a very good number of returned parent questionnaires. Parents and carers are delighted with what the school achieves for their children. The vast majority of parent questionnaires received during the inspection contained very appreciative comments on how the school supports families and helps them in managing their children's behaviour. Many expressed delight about both the standard of care and the progress the children make. A typical comment was, 'The staff are caring, supportive, professional, dedicated and understanding of children and parents.' Inspectors found that the school works very closely with parents and carers and is constantly striving to improve this aspect of its work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Milestone School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 112 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 285 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	88	79	22	20	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	90	80	21	19	0	0	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	75	67	36	32	0	0	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	63	56	43	38	4	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	82	73	28	25	1	1	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	71	63	37	33	2	2	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	68	61	41	37	0	0	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	69	62	32	29	2	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	76	68	30	27	2	2	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	74	67	32	29	2	2	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	72	64	35	31	1	1	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	82	73	28	25	0	0	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	87	78	22	20	1	1	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 September 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Milestone School, Gloucester, GL2 9EU

We enjoyed our recent visit to your school. We think your school is a very happy place to be. Thanks to those of you who took the time to talk about your work and life at school.

Here are the main points we found:

- Your school is outstanding and provides you with lots of exciting things to do, both in the classroom and the wider community.
- You are helped to make good progress in expressing yourselves and making choices on your own.
- You love coming to school and your behaviour is excellent.
- Adults run your school outstandingly well and ensure that you are kept safe and that your medical needs are fully met.
- Adults use signing, pictures, symbols and switches to help you make your views known.
- The school works very closely with your parents and carers, who are delighted with how the school helps you learn.
- You are helped to develop important life-skills, like how to shop and cook a healthy meal and how to read a bus timetable so that you get on the right bus and at the right time.

To help your lovely and caring school to get even better, I have asked your teachers to make sure that you are always given challenging work in lessons, based on what they know you need to learn.

Please help by always trying your hardest.

Thank you once again for your help during the inspection.

Yours faithfully

Jeffery Plumb

Lead inspector

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