

Mountjoy School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113957
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311429
Inspection date	23 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	38
6th form	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ivan Kent
Headteacher	Pam Stewart
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2004
School address	Flood Lane Bridport DT6 3QG
Telephone number	01308 422250
Fax number	01308 458664

Age group	2-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small special school that caters for pupils who have severe and multiple or complex needs, including autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). All pupils are White British. Pupils come from a wide catchment area across rural West Dorset.

Pupils enter school with skill levels that are well below those expected at their age and, because of the nature of their special needs, standards are very low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mountjoy School is a good school that enables pupils to make outstanding progress in their personal development. The excellent links that exist between established with other agencies do much to contribute to pupils' welfare and are a key element of the excellent care, guidance and support for pupils provided. There is overwhelming support from parents for the school and its staff, and its work is greatly valued by them. Their comments can be summarised by one parent who said, 'I cannot express strongly enough my support of Mountjoy School or my admiration for the teachers and staff who work there. Our children are challenging to teach and diverse in age and ability – yet the teachers manage to find the time and energy to give individually to each and every one, according to their specific needs. No mean feat.' This very much reflects the commitment of staff to the pupils and the very good knowledge they have of pupils' special needs.

Pupils thrive in the happy atmosphere of the school and develop confidence and independence. As a result, pupils' achievements are good. They make a good start in the Foundation Stage and by the time they reach the Post 16 department they are confident young adults who communicate to the best of their ability and are well prepared for life when they leave school. Their enjoyment of lessons is very evident and they benefit from good teaching. Whilst the curriculum is satisfactory overall, the school day is not planned effectively to ensure there is sufficient teaching time for all pupils. This has the most impact on those pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9, where progress is slower than in the rest of the school.

Because of the very hard work of staff and their ability to be flexible, pupils' achievements are not affected by the poor quality of the accommodation. Every effort is made to ensure that pupils have a wide range of opportunities and very good use is made of mainstream schools to provide opportunities for pupils to experience science, design and technology, and physical education. The lack of space both internally and externally, the state of repair of the buildings externally and the lack of specialist teaching areas prevent the school from providing all the opportunities it would wish for its pupils. Governors, parents and senior staff are working hard to find a solution but this is the third inspection report that has highlighted accommodation as a key issue.

Senior staff, in particular the headteacher, have done much to develop the school and leadership and management are good. The headteacher is seen as a motivator and as one parent commented, 'She has brought about change and widened provision.' The headteacher has a clear vision of where she wants the school to be and this is shared by staff and governors. All have a clear understanding of the school's effectiveness and what needs to be done to improve the school even further. As a result, the school has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Leadership and management of Post 16 are good and enable pupils to make good progress and achieve well. Staff are constantly looking at ways to improve provision. This is exemplified by the fact that, although there is good evidence to show that pupils achieved well last year, staff were concerned that the curriculum could be improved further to meet the diverse needs of all pupils. As a result, a new curriculum has been established and pupils are now getting a wider range of opportunities. Pupils benefit from good teaching and planning is detailed.

Occasionally time is not used well and opportunities are missed to develop pupils' skills effectively, such as after physical education sessions.

Although space is limited and there are not the facilities expected for Post 16 pupils, such as specialist teaching areas, staff have adapted the accommodation as well as they can. For example, a kitchen area enables pupils to learn to cook and there is a very good focus on encouraging them to become independent. Opportunities for work experience are good and pupils are well prepared for when they leave school. Parents are very positive about the support they receive in choosing the next stage of education for their children. Very good use is made of the community to support pupils' learning and well-planned activities enable pupils to make excellent progress in their personal development. They develop into mature, sensible young adults who enjoy opportunities to take on responsibility and who benefit from the excellent care and support provided by staff.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start school with very limited skills and because of good teaching, they make good progress and achieve well. The Foundation Stage is well led and there are clear, well-established routines that are understood by staff, children and their parents. As a result, children develop confidence and parents comment on the change they see in their children. One parent commented, 'His behaviour has got much better and lots of family and friends have all seen the change in him.' There are very good links with parents and this, together with the excellent partnership with external agencies, ensures that pupils' needs are well met. Good use is made of assessment to develop children's skills, particularly in communication, language and literacy. Staff are refining the systems for checking the progress children make in their learning to ensure that these give a clearer picture of the progress children make.

Staff do all they can to make the most of the poor accommodation. The outside play area is very limited and, although the school is extending this, it is still too small. It does not effectively meet the needs of the children.

What the school should do to improve further

?Improve the quality of the curriculum by:-

- oMaking better use of time during the school day for teaching and learning, particularly for those pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- oImproving the accommodation so that pupils can have access to a range of specialist teaching rooms and more space for activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

From very low starting points, pupils make good progress in their learning and achieve well. By the time, they reach Post 16, pupils successes are reflected in a range of passes in AQA (assessment and qualifications alliance) courses. From the moment they start school, staff focus on enabling pupils to develop their communication skills and as a result, pupils make good progress in learning to communicate. They use symbols and signs and their communicators well and all pupils are able to respond to staff. Improving pupils' reading skills has been an area for development and has resulted in pupils making good progress in developing their literacy skills.

Progress in mathematics is not as effective, particularly in using and applying numeracy skills, but the school is already taking action to address this.

Primary-aged pupils progress at a good rate but this slows for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 and their progress is satisfactory. This is partly because pupils do not have ready access to the specialist teaching facilities needed in subjects such as science and design and technology. It is also because the amount of teaching time is much lower than that recommended. When they move into Years 10 and 11, progress picks up again because they benefit from a wider range of experiences, and a more flexible school day ensures time is used more effectively.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils clearly enjoy school and this is reflected in their smiling faces. They are cheerful as they move around school and behave extremely well. In lessons they listen very well, are attentive and participate well, especially in practical activities. Pupils are very proud of the support they give each other and talk about how they look after each other and play together at lunch and break times. Pupils say there is no bullying and comment about how very safe they feel in school. Their attendance is very good and there has been no unauthorised absence.

Pupils' involvement in a school council has been successful in improving aspects of school life and increasing awareness of the current drive to help the school promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils have a very good understanding of keeping healthy and are very enthusiastic about all the opportunities they have to keep fit and healthy. They are very clear about what is good for them to eat and what is not. Pupils contribute extremely well to the community and are involved in a number of activities in the local community such as bell ringing. Their good achievement and good development of independence skills prepare them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils benefit from teachers' very good understanding of their special educational needs. Staff's knowledge and understanding of pupils ensure that activities are linked well to pupils' abilities and pupils make good progress. Signing and symbols are used well, although occasionally opportunities are missed to extend pupils' skills further by being more consistent in the use of these. Teachers ensure that pupils are fully involved in lessons, often by making them practical. Staff frequently remind pupils about what they have learnt and recaps at the end of lessons enable pupils to show off their knowledge, such as recalling technical terms at the end of a physical education (PE) lesson. At times, the pace of lessons slows when staff work on a one-to-one basis whilst other pupils wait. Also on occasions planning does not ensure that time is used effectively, such as at the end of morning sessions, before lunch. There is excellent teamwork between teachers and support staff that ensures that all know their roles and responsibilities during lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

There are strengths in the curriculum, particularly in the developing 14–19 curriculum. This is providing pupils with a wider range of experiences and opportunities. Throughout the school, good use is made of the community to make up for the inadequate accommodation. Mainstream schools are used well to support the curriculum. They provide opportunities for pupils in Years 7 to 11 and Post 16 to experience lessons in science and design and technology but this is only on a limited basis and has to be fitted in around the mainstream's own use of its facilities. This also means that pupils have to travel sometimes up to half an hour each way, and for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 this cuts into the already limited teaching time. Good use is made of local leisure facilities and specialist staff are brought in to support pupils' skills, for example, in cricket. Pupils clearly enjoy these opportunities and talk enthusiastically about their involvement in sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care and welfare of pupils is given a very high priority by all staff. The systems for ensuring pupils' safety are excellent and checks on staff are rigorous. The excellent links with outside agencies and with parents enable the school to provide a very high level of care and support to pupils. Parents are very positive about the opportunities they have to come into school and the fact that they feel they are extremely well informed about what is going on in school.

There are good processes for ensuring that pupils are guided and supported academically. Pupils are aware that they have targets and there are good systems in place to help them to improve their work. Close monitoring of the progress of each pupil enables the school to support pupils' learning well. The school recognises though that the targets set in individual education plans need to be monitored more closely so that where pupils are achieving well, new targets can be established more promptly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Through the drive and determination of the headteacher a great deal has been achieved in ensuring that the school develops and improves. There is a sense of a school that is continually looking at what it does and trying to do it better. It achieves this through good teamwork and the fact that pupils' well-being is at the heart of everything staff do. It is a credit to staff that, despite the very cramped teaching environment, they have ensured that pupils make good progress. Information on pupils' achievements is being used well to analyse their rates of progress and effective action is taken where individual pupils are not making the progress they should. The school is constantly refining these systems and is looking to develop them further. It has a clear understanding of its overall effectiveness and has accurately identified key areas for development within the school improvement planning. It is also taking action to improve

some subject areas, including mathematics. These more detailed aspects, however, do not appear in whole-school improvement planning and the school recognises that this has made it more difficult for governors and other interested parties to monitor such progress. Governors are very supportive, particularly in helping the school address key issues such as accommodation.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ 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 disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
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?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making Graham and I so welcome and talking to us during the inspection. We especially enjoyed the discussions we had with you during the day. Your school is doing a good job and is ensuring you all make good progress in your learning. Here are some of the most important parts of the inspection report that we thought you might like to know about:

- You make excellent progress in your personal development and are very well prepared for life when you leave school.
- Teaching is good, lessons are interesting and you enjoy them a lot.
- You do lots of different activities and enjoy going to the mainstream school and sports centre.
- The school has excellent links with different people who make sure, together with your teachers, that you are extremely well looked after.
- The headteacher and staff work very well together to make sure that you learn as much as possible.

To improve further we believe the school should now:

- Make sure you all have enough time for lessons during the day.
- Make the accommodation better so that you do not have to go off site for some lessons and have more space to move around and play in.

We wish you well for the future and hope you will continue to work hard.

24 April 2008



Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mountjoy School, Bridport, Dorset DT6 3QG

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Yours sincerely

Sarah and Graham
(Lead inspector and team inspector)