

# Mill Green School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131022
<b>Local Authority</b>	St. Helens
<b>Inspection number</b>	360192
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Brian Padgett HMI

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>	8–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	70
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	34
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Marie Quirk
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Colin Myers
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 October 2007
<b>School address</b>	Mill Lane Newton-le-Willows Merseyside WA12 8BG
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**Age group** 8–19  
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. Thirteen lessons were observed taught by 12 teachers. Meetings were held with parents and carers, a group of learners, members of the governing body, staff and representatives of the school's partnerships and consultants. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including that related to safeguarding. The responses to 28 parents' and carers' questionnaires were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- To what extent the school provides personalised programmes for its pupils and students that meet their complex learning needs, especially in the college section, where students are prepared for life beyond school.
- How well pupils and students enjoy school and gain from all it offers.

## Information about the school

This is a school for learners with severe, complex, profound and multiple learning difficulties, including those on the autistic spectrum. It is situated in Newton-le-Willows but draws its pupils and students from across a broad area of St Helens and beyond. All learners have a statement of special educational needs. The majority of learners are boys. Nearly all learners are of White British heritage. A large proportion are known to be entitled to free school meals and many also receive social care. A small number of learners are in the care of the local authority.

The school is in transition. At the time of its last inspection, Mill Green was a school for learners between two and 19 years of age. Following a local authority review of provision for young people with complex learning difficulties, the school is moving

towards providing for 14 to 19 year-olds with the most complex learning difficulties. At present, it provides for learners who are eight and older.

The school has many local and nationally recognised awards including for art, information and communication technology (ICT), sport, sustainability, for teaching basic skills, promoting healthy living, and as an Investor in People. In September 2010 it was awarded Specialist College status for the Arts.

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**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

This is an outstanding school. It has improved considerably since its previous inspection. All areas show improvement, especially in the quality of teaching and in the development of the curriculum, both of which are now exceptionally good. The impact on learners of all ages is that they are very happy at school and make outstanding progress in relation to their starting points. Parents and carers support inspectors' findings. One parent wrote to inspectors, 'My child has been at the school for just over two years. In that time I have seen the school make great leaps in developing and improving all aspects of both my child's education and their aspirations for him.'

The leadership and management of the school are exceptionally effective. The headteacher and the deputy headteacher set the very welcoming tone for the school that is so appreciated by parents, carers and visitors. They provide high levels of support and challenge for staff, including rigorous oversight of outcomes for learners. They have recruited and developed an outstanding team of senior leaders, teachers and

support staff. Staff love their work. They are innovative and dynamic and, at all levels, take on significant responsibility for ensuring learners achieve all they can and are fully prepared for life beyond school. The breadth and quality of leadership and the successful record of innovation mean the school has an outstanding capacity for sustaining improvement. It provides outstanding value for money.

The care, guidance and support for learners are exceptional. The school is highly successful in welcoming and settling learners who join from other schools. This is hugely reassuring for parents and carers, who are naturally anxious about transition from one school to another. The school is the very effective focus of a network of support, taking a lead role in coordinating the health and social care services vital to the learners' well-being.

The school's plan to move from its existing, awkward site to new, purpose-built accommodation will not now take place because of the reduction in public spending. This has disappointed the school community but morale is not impaired. The change in plans provides the governing body and staff, along with the school's partners, with the opportunity to take stock and reconsider the direction in which the school should develop in order to continue to provide so successfully for learners with such complex difficulties.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Following the decision not to build a new school, the governing body and staff should, in consultation with the local authority and other partners, review and re-work its strategic development plans to make best use of the school's outstanding strengths in the provision for learners with severe, complex, profound and multiple difficulties.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

1

Learners' starting points and lengths of stay at the school vary considerably. Some learners joined as very young children. Most now join at Year 12 or at any point from Year 4 on. Most learners from mainstream schools arrive with additional social and emotional issues deriving from being unable to cope within mainstream. Challenging behaviour and a lack of trust in adults are common issues overlaying these learners' learning needs on entry.

Learners of all backgrounds and disabilities make outstanding overall progress in learning and in overcoming their barriers to learning. Their learning, emotional and social needs are quickly established. From this baseline, the school's records show that as many as half make two full levels of progress over a key stage, despite the complexity of their needs. Within the core subjects, their progress in recent years has been better in English and mathematics than in science. However, there is clear improvement now in science. For many learners, progress is erratic, especially for those with the most complex disabilities and severe autism. It is never inadequate. Parents' and carers' responses to inspection questionnaires contained such comments as 'unbelievable' in relation to progress and one parent wrote 'My son has achieved far more than I thought he was capable of.'

Learners' enjoyment of lessons is easy to see. Attendance is very high, above that of mainstream schools, despite absences for visits to see doctors and health professionals. Most learners have very good attitudes to learning and love to share what they have learned with others. They feel safe and have complete faith in their teachers and teaching assistants, with whom they have close relationships. Their personal skills develop exceptionally well. Food is an important consideration for many of the learners. Their appreciation and practice of healthy eating are advanced, for example, in taking a healthy break during the morning sessions. Learners' contribution to the development of the school, especially through the school council, is significant and well illustrated in the design and development of the school's playground. Here, exercise is promoted through the provision of bicycles at break and the playground has its own sound system; both innovations were introduced by the learners. The school's excellent record in helping learners develop independence and in preparing them for adult life has been maintained. This was extremely effectively illustrated during the inspection when Year 11 learners exercised all the real-life skills and preparation required for a visit to Blackpool, including making arrangements on the telephone directly with the Tower.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

\* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

## **How effective is the provision?**

The excellent care, guidance and support for learners underpin all aspects of the school's work. All staff, at whatever level, are dedicated to the welfare of the learners. This is a close community. All staff know all learners extremely well. The school has the atmosphere of a good, caring family. One of its particular strengths is the effectiveness with which it supports parents and carers. They are involved each day through home-school diaries that promote two-way communication. The central role of the family liaison coordinator is discharged outstandingly well. She acts as advocate for the families and is the point of reference for the whole host of agencies involved in learners' health and social care. All transitions into and out of the school are managed exceptionally well, with the school taking the lead role in ensuring learners' welfare.

The school has placed great emphasis since the last inspection on improving the quality of teaching and on the development of the curriculum, both with exceptional success. The majority of lessons seen were outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants work together in cohesive teams. Planning to meet learners' needs is exceptionally thorough and based on a detailed assessment of each learner's individual progress and learning needs. Learners are fully involved in evaluating their gains in knowledge and skills. Tasks are finely differentiated and often very motivating, and teaching assistants play a full part in teaching individuals and groups. In every lesson there is humour, enjoyment and a celebration of achievement in well-structured closing sessions. Communication is an issue for most learners and teachers make excellent use of a wide range of pictorial symbols, signing and modern technologies to communicate effectively. Behaviour management is highly developed so a learner who is having difficulties is helped and others can get on with their learning.

The school has developed, and continues to refine, a curriculum that is highly relevant to learners and which motivates them strongly. All learners have lessons aimed at

promoting their personal development. In Key Stages 2 and 3 an extended core of subjects is taught separately and key skills are practised through well-designed, meaningful projects. The curriculum for autistic learners caters very well for those with severe autism, who require a discrete curriculum, and for those autistic learners who spend most of their time in mixed classes. The school is well on its way to gaining national accreditation for its work with autistic learners. A major development since the last inspection has been the award of Specialist Arts status in 2010. The visual arts have a major impact on the curriculum and on learning. Art is hugely popular with the learners. Standards are rising. Learners have already staged their own exhibition to high acclaim and at least one learner is on track to achieve a GCSE in art this year. The school's plans to develop the curriculum to suit the 14-19 age range, its college phase, have resulted in an innovative and successful approach to learning in Years 10 and 11 that is continued into Years 12 and 13. The school provides a rich range of extra-curricular activities and a regular series of residential visits that add considerably to learners' enjoyment of school. Visits out of school into the community are frequent. The school has a high profile within the community.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

The promise for school improvement noted in the previous inspection has been fulfilled. The school's leaders and managers are responsible for this improvement. The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide excellent oversight of the school, maintaining its ethos, evaluating its effectiveness, challenging and supporting teachers and, most crucially, enabling teachers and teaching assistants to take on leadership roles for themselves. Senior and middle leaders are highly successful. A culture of innovation has developed that has raised teaching and the curriculum to the highest levels. Higher-level teaching assistants fulfil significant leadership roles. The pace of improvement and enthusiasm for change show no sign of abatement. Professional development opportunities are a key element in the improvement and development for

all staff. The school is increasingly taking leadership roles within an extensive range of partnerships in education, and frequently impresses the consultants and representatives, some at national level, who evaluate its new developments.

The work of the school is monitored and evaluated very effectively. Learners' progress is tracked extremely thoroughly. Governance has improved its oversight of the school through training and monitoring visits. The governing body is very well informed and fully involved in self-evaluation. It is rightly proud of what is being achieved. The school has strong procedures for safeguarding learners. It is recognised within the local authority as an exemplar for the promotion of equality and the dismantling of prejudice. The partnership with parents and carers is very strong. Mill Green is outward looking, and keen to help learners place themselves within a community and within the world. Whatever it does, it does thoroughly, such as developing all aspects of community cohesion, particularly through its partnership with a special school in Germany.

Despite the disappointment of losing the opportunity to move into a new building, the school is in an exceptionally strong position to continue providing outstanding education and care for its learners. The change in circumstances provides leaders and the governing body with the opportunity to reflect and reconsider the strategic direction for the school.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

## **Sixth form**

The post-16 provision at the school extends to age 19 in what the school calls 'Year 14'. As part of its curriculum development the school has implemented a 14 to 19 curriculum of particular relevance for learners, including, for example, Business Enterprise and the use of new technologies. The provision runs from Years 10 to 13, with Year 14 aimed at enabling learners to prepare successfully for further education and adult life. Credits for learning acquired during this time are transferable to further education college courses when learners leave. At Year 12, existing Mill Green learners are joined by learners from a neighbouring special school, where there is no sixth-form provision. Despite the apparent complexity, arrangements work very well. Learners refer to their 14 to 19 provision as 'the college' and this seems highly appropriate because of the degree of responsibility they are given, and the mature way in which they approach their preparation for adult life. The teaching in the college is of a uniformly high standard and learners continue to make excellent progress, outstripping the expectations of their parents and carers. Learners acquire qualifications at appropriate levels, generally from entry level 1 to 3, fulfilling their potential. About a half of learners go on to some form of further education. A particular strength of provision for older learners is seen at its best in Year 14, when transitions to day centres, for example, are managed extremely well. The school's excellent care and guidance extend beyond the school as staff ensure learners are well placed when they move into adult provision. The 14 to 19 provision is exceptionally well led and managed.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

## **Views of parents and carers**

The parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school and what it achieves. Parents who spoke to inspectors talked of the positive changes in their children when they started at Mill Green and how

welcome they were made. They firmly believed Mill Green had transformed their children and by doing that had helped the whole family.

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## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mill Green 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 29 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 70 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	97	1	3	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	90	3	10	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	23	79	6	21	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	72	7	24	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	79	5	17	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	66	9	31	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	62	10	34	0	0	0	0
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)	21	72	4	14	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	72	8	28	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	55	12	41	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	55	12	41	0	0	0	0

The school is led and managed effectively	21	72	8	28	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	83	4	14	0	0	0	0

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7

Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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: 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.

- 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 pupils' 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.

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**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.**



25 March 2011

Dear Learners

Inspection of Mill Green School, Newton-le-Willows, WA12 8BG

You may remember that inspectors visited your school recently to see how well you were learning. When I talked to a group of learners during the inspection I said I would write a letter to all of you to let you know what the inspection team had decided. This is that letter.

There is good news to tell you. First, we judged that Mill Green School (and, of course, this includes the college) is an outstanding provider. This is our top grade, so well done to everyone! Mill Green is a great place to be. It is a very friendly school where you

achieve your best and enjoy school life no matter what learning difficulties and disabilities you have. Teachers make sure that the work you do is fun and exactly at the right level. You have top-quality support from people who really care about you.

We felt you were learning important skills. These included reading, writing, mathematics and science and also ICT skills and social skills that will be vital when you leave the college. We were impressed by what the school council had achieved. It showed us that the school listens to you. There are very few schools that have a sound system and bikes in the playground!

We believe Mill Green will go from strength to strength. It is in very good hands. Your parents and carers were full of praise for it. When you are happy, they are too. We know that you were disappointed when you found out that the plans for the new school had been dashed. But your headteacher remains positive. He knows that a school is more than a building, that the staff and learners and what goes on inside are more important. We think it is a good time to stop and think about new plans for the future. We know Mr Myers will ask for your views.

We congratulate you on all you have achieved. Good luck with your next art exhibition and with your Learning Pathways. We hope the Year 11s planning their day in Blackpool have a great day out. They have earned it.

With our best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett

Her Majesty's Inspector

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