

Inspection of a good school: Mountjoy School

Tunnel Road, Beaminster, Dorset DT8 3HB

Inspection dates:

20 and 21 October 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Mountjoy is a school where pupils are well cared for and feel safe. Staff know individuals and their families well. They are respectful and kind towards pupils.

Pupils with different special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get along well with each other. Bullying is very rare. If it does happen, it is quickly dealt with. Pupils behave well. If a pupil has difficulty managing their own behaviour, staff manage this consistently so that the behaviour improves.

The school provides a wide range of interesting opportunities such as theme weeks, beach school and residential trips. This means that pupils have opportunities to broaden their horizons. They practise the skills they have learned in lessons and become more confident.

The new headteacher is ambitious for the pupils. She has made some important changes, for example to make sure that the teaching of reading and the sixth-form offer are better. It is very early days. There is more work to be done to make sure that the curriculum is systematic and coherent so that pupils develop sufficient knowledge and skills for their adult lives.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Staff, parents and pupils set individual targets based on education, health and care plans. Everyone works on these through the year. The targets are monitored closely and reviewed annually. As a result of this work, pupils at Mountjoy develop academically, personally and socially.

Pupils behave well. From the early years, there is a focus on pupils managing their own behaviour so that they can learn effectively. Staff work hard to understand what a pupil's behaviour might be communicating and respond sensitively. Parents appreciate the level of trust that staff develop with their children. They say that their children learn to understand the world better. Children's behaviour improves and their anxiety reduces.

Leaders have strengthened personal, social and health education (PSHE) throughout the school. It now has more coherence. There is a strong focus on relationships, personal safety, and physical and mental well-being. Pupils learn to understand their own needs and those of others, focusing on respect and consideration. Older pupils explore diversity. They build respect, appreciation and understanding. Staff ensure that pupils have a wide experience of sporting, musical and cultural experiences during their time at Mountjoy.

Recently, leaders have improved the school's approach to the teaching of reading. Staff have been trained so that there is more consistency. New books have been purchased. Pupils are grouped depending on their phonic and reading knowledge. In the early years and in those classes for pupils with multi-sensory needs, the teaching of reading is closely linked with pupils learning to attend and communicate. Teachers take every opportunity to highlight sounds, words and books throughout the day. Pupils learn to focus better. Some are developing knowledge of sounds and letter names. Some are becoming more confident readers. Leaders recognise that there is still work to do to ensure that staff have high expectations in all classes. Materials and approaches are not yet precise enough to meet the particular needs of all pupils.

Pupils are developing their understanding of number. They are beginning to solve mathematical problems. Older pupils in the sixth form use their knowledge of money to buy ingredients for their cooking. Teachers assess pupils' knowledge of mathematics regularly. They are clear what they need to teach and what gaps pupils have in their knowledge. However, the mathematics curriculum is not sufficiently coherent across different classes and pathways. It is stronger in some classes than others.

Leaders have made recent important changes to improve the quality of education and ensure that pupils are ready for the next stage. Leaders have created different curriculum pathways so that pupils with similar needs learn together. They have opened a new provision in Beaminster. Sixth-form students practise their skills in the community. Leaders have increased the number of qualifications on offer to pupils. This will mean that pupils will have more choice of college courses when they leave. Many of these changes are new. The curriculum is not yet sufficiently coherent and sequenced so that pupils are developing the skills and knowledge they need for future learning, employment or supported living.

Many members of the governing body are new. They are committed to the school. Governors are becoming more knowledgeable. They share the vision of the headteacher that pupils at Mountjoy are well prepared for adult life. As yet, governors do not hold leaders to account sufficiently for the quality of education.

The new headteacher has been an important appointment for the school. Staff say that morale has improved, their well-being is looked after and they feel supported.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that the way in which the curriculum is implemented and leads to pupils systematically gaining the necessary knowledge and skills they need for the next stage of their education and adult life may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders give high importance to understanding the needs of pupils and their families. This underpins the school's approach to safeguarding. Family support workers are in close contact with families. They help them and signpost them to different services.

Staff are well trained. Policies and procedures are strong, including staff pre-employment checks. Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including online. Leaders make sure that pupils have a voice, whatever their level of communication.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is insufficient clarity about the intent of the different curriculum pathways. This means that pupils do not gain the knowledge and skills they need in all subjects. Leaders need to build on the start they have made to ensure that an ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum is in place across the school that meets the needs of all pupils and enables them to succeed.
- The mathematics curriculum is not well planned across the school. This means that resources and approaches are inconsistent and do not support pupils' learning effectively. Leaders need to strengthen the mathematics curriculum so that the approaches used are coherent and reflect the school's intentions for the subject.
- The approach to reading is not yet systematic across the school. Expectations are not high enough in some classes. Some pupils are not learning to read well enough and are not well prepared for the next stage. Leaders should build on what they have already started in implementing the new phonics programme so that all pupils, whatever their SEND, make sufficient progress through the curriculum.
- Governors do not have enough confidence to establish a clear vision and a strategy for implementation. They do not have enough knowledge and understanding about the quality of education that the school provides. Therefore, they are not able to hold school leaders to account. Governors need training so that they are clearer about the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school. They need training on how to use self-evaluation to ask relevant questions and offer challenge to school leaders.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	113957
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10199640
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	100
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Gillian Acton
Headteacher	Gillian Howard
Website	www.mountjoy.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 and 25 February 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. There is a new chair of governors. Several governors are new.
- The school has increased its roll significantly. It has pupils with a wide range of SEND, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe and moderate learning difficulties. A number of pupils have autism spectrum disorder.
- A new provision for sixth-form students has been opened in Beaminster.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with governors, senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector spoke with the local authority's challenge partners by telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and PSHE. They met with subject leaders, visited lessons, talked to pupils and teachers, looked at pupils' work and listened to pupils read to adults.
- Inspectors looked at the policies and procedures used to keep pupils safe. They also reviewed the checks carried out by leaders on the suitability of adults who work in the school.
- Inspectors considered 16 responses to Ofsted Parent View, the online questionnaire, and 13 free-text responses. They also considered 32 responses to the student survey and 57 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Stephen McShane, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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