

Inspection of Mountjoy School

Tunnel Road, Beaminster, Dorset DT8 3HB

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 November 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

'The child is at the centre of everything the school does'. This is the view shared by many parents and characterises what it is like to be a pupil at Mountjoy. Pupils love to attend and appreciate everything adults do for them. Pupils spoke in detail about the work adults do to ensure they become as independent as they can.

Pupils enjoy their learning and aspire to become the best they can be. They talked with enthusiasm about the learning opportunities adults provide. Pupils appreciate the range of additional activities, such as orchestra and choir, which they attend with excitement. A wide range of trips and visitors to the school complement and enhance the curriculum.

Adults have high expectations of behaviour. Pupils respond to this and behave well. They say that bullying is rare and if issues occur, staff sort them out quickly. Pupils say there is always an adult in school they can talk to.

Leaders place a high priority on pupils' personal development. Adults know each pupil exceptionally well. They are quick to spot any changes in their well-being and take swift action. Pupils are safe and well looked after.

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

Staff, parents, pupils and agencies work together to set targets based on pupils' education, health and care plans. Targets are checked frequently to ensure pupils can develop academically, personally and socially. The development of pupils' independent skills is central to the curriculum. Pupils build their independence and communication skills through cooking, shopping and planning travel.

Leaders have crafted an ambitious and well-planned curriculum. It is bespoke to the needs of the pupil. However, in some subjects leaders do not make regular checks on how well pupils are learning. This means pupils are not learning the knowledge and skills in the depth they need.

Pupils follow clear pathways from Reception Year to post-16. Leaders ensure pupils receive independent careers guidance from Year 8. This ensures pupils are well prepared for their next steps.

Leaders and adults share the aspiration that, where able, pupils will become at least functional readers by the time they leave school. Pupils start phonics early. They use this knowledge well when they read. Staff receive training in the teaching of phonics and early reading. Leaders provide regular support and guidance. Staff appreciate this supportive approach; it gives them the knowledge and confidence to teach early reading with skill. Pupils who struggle have the additional help and support they need to improve their reading skills. Those pupils who are unable to learn to read enjoy books every day through sensory stories such as 'Kofi and the Magic Shaker.'

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is threaded throughout the curriculum. There is a focus on relationships, personal safety and physical and mental well-being. Older pupils know how to keep their bodies safe and that 'banter' is not acceptable. Starting in early years, pupils and teachers work together to create a rights-based charter. They agree on how they can respect each other such as 'being kind' and 'listening to each other'. Pupils are encouraged to express their personalities and celebrate differences. Leaders use 'My Voice, my choice' project work to ensure that pupils have a say in school decisions.

Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of diversity. They build respect and appreciation of other faiths and cultures different from their own.

Pupils behave well. From the early years, adults focus on pupils being able to manage their own behaviour. Staff are skilful in spotting any changes in pupils' demeanour. Staff respond to these changes with sensitivity and care.

Adults in the school are rightly proud of the nurture and care they provide. This is seen from the moment pupils arrive at school. Pupils are greeted with a smile and a warm welcome. 'Excellent, supportive environment' and 'Marvellously gentle, kind and nurturing' were typical comments made by parents.

Adults love working at Mountjoy. They appreciate the training which develops their own knowledge and skills. They appreciate the focus leaders place on their mental health and well-being, such as yoga and mindfulness breathing. Leaders are conscious of staff workload and consider ways to help them manage this.

Governors know what is working well and what needs to improve. They hold leaders to account for the quality of education and care.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff are well trained to notice and report any signs of concern. Leaders respond swiftly to support pupils and families in need of help and do not hesitate to escalate concerns when required. Leaders carry out the required checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. Leaders provide a curriculum that teaches pupils to understand age-appropriate risks, including road safety and healthy relationships. Pupils know that adults will listen to them if they have any concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some leaders have not had the opportunity to monitor the subjects they lead. This means they do not know if pupils are acquiring the knowledge and skills they need. Leaders need to ensure that subject leaders are able to check the quality of provision to assure themselves pupils are learning the intended curriculum.

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.

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	10240136
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	102
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Helen Farmer
Headteacher	Gillian Howard
Website	www.mountjoy.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 – 21 October 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school 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.
- The school does not use any alternative providers for their pupils.
- There is a new chair of governors.

Information about this inspection

The inspector(s) carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other school staff, five members of the governing body and the education challenge lead from Dorset local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors listened to pupils in Years 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9 read to an adult. Story time was visited.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation, including the safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school. They considered how well the designated safeguarding leader acts on concerns about pupils' welfare and safety. Inspectors talked to pupils, staff and governors, about how the school keeps everyone safe.
- Inspectors considered key documentation, including school self-evaluation and school improvement plans.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. An inspector met with the leaders to discuss how they respond to behaviour incidents and pupils' attendance.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text replies. They also took into consideration the responses to the survey for pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Leanne Thirlby

His Majesty's Inspector

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