

Meadowfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134783
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	381740
Inspection dates	5–6 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Robert Ellis HMI

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	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	214
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	46
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ray Hollis
Headteacher	Jill Palmer
Date of previous school inspection	9–10 June 2009
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Age group	4–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. They observed 18 lessons taught by 18 different teachers, and held discussions with groups of learners, staff, parents and carers and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at development plans, curriculum planning, the school's tracking data showing learners' progress, teachers' lesson plans and pupils' work. In addition, they analysed the questionnaire responses of 64 parents and carers, 53 staff and 66 learners, and took their views into account.

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

- The performance of different groups of learners including those with autism, moderate or profound learning difficulties and those who have complex needs.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels in securing improvement and identifying where support should be focused to raise standards further.

Information about the school

Meadowfield School serves the Swale area of Kent and provides for learners with a range of disabilities related to profound, severe and complex needs. Its specialism is to provide for learners who have communication and interaction difficulties related to autism and severe cognitive impairment. The school has provision for younger children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and a 16 to 19 sixth form unit that caters for students who are above compulsory school age. There are more boys than girls. Around one in three learners are known to be eligible for free school meals and all have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of learners who come from minority ethnic backgrounds reflects the community that the school serves and is below the national average. Few learners speak English as an additional language. A relatively high proportion of learners are looked after by the local authority. The headteacher joined the school at the start of this academic year and, at the time of the inspection, had only been leading the school for a few weeks.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

- Meadowfield is a good school where learners are looked after very well and kept safe. The positive relationships between staff and learners contribute to learners feeling extremely safe and making good progress.
- Learners behave well and enjoy school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well and most learners attend as regularly as they are able to.
- Teaching is generally good and sometimes outstanding. Skilful use of assessment information ensures that tasks and activities are pitched at the right level for learners. In the best lessons teachers and teaching assistants work closely together as an effective team. However, some lessons, although satisfactory, are too focused on the activities of the teacher.
- The high quality curriculum is extremely responsive to the needs and aspirations of individual learners and it is reviewed regularly. A broad range of good enrichment activities makes a strong contribution to learners' progress and enjoyment.
- Learners are cared for extremely well. Well-organised care and support ensure that all learners are treated equally and are able to participate fully in lessons.
- Senior leaders have an ambitious vision for the school. Leadership and management at most levels are good and the senior team is supported well by the staff and the governing body. Improvements since the last inspection demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement.
- Very productive links with parents, carers and other agencies support learners extremely well in both their learning and in their personal development.
- The school has very effective arrangements for ensuring learners are safe and are able to recognise unsafe situations and act accordingly.
- The school is at the heart of its community and leaders and managers have been successful in creating a cohesive school community where individuals or groups are not subjected to discrimination. Learners' contribution to the community is outstanding.
- All aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good and children are well cared for and enabled to make good progress in their learning and development.
- Students in the 16 to 19 unit make satisfactory progress and provision is developing to meet the changing needs of sixth form students. Leaders and managers in the sixth form have not been consistently effective in communicating their vision for the sixth form. The monitoring, evaluation and planning cycle in the 16 to 19 unit is not fully embedded and therefore not an

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effective tool for driving improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for students in the 16 to 19 unit by:
 - clarifying and communicating the vision for the sixth form effectively
 - establishing rigorous and systematic monitoring of the work of the unit in order to better inform improvement planning.

- Improve teaching and learning by:
 - developing the role of the teaching assistant as a major contributor to learning
 - developing the role of the teacher as facilitator for the learning team in each activity.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Many learners have complex medical needs and/or profound or severe learning difficulties. Consequently, since the cognitive abilities of the majority of learners are severely restricted, inspectors did not make a judgement for attainment. Scrutiny of the school's assessment information and learners' work shows that most learners make good progress in relation to their starting points and abilities, including those with autism, moderate or profound learning difficulties and those who have complex needs. The different groups of learners were observed to enjoy school and make good progress in lessons due to their positive attitudes and the personalised approach to learning and care adopted by the school. The level of engagement in most lessons is high and learners respond well to the challenging tasks and activities that they are presented with in the majority of lessons. Most attend school regularly but medical needs sometimes limit the attendance of some learners. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and learners generally require little more than gentle prompting from staff. Good practise in meeting safeguarding and health and safety requirements, combined with excellent relationships and mutual respect, ensure that children in the school feel very safe.

Learners willingly take on responsibilities and there is an active school council through which learners can be consulted and contribute to making decisions that affect them. Excellent links with the local community provide the opportunity for learners to make an outstanding contribution to both the school and wider community.

The school has a strong focus on developing the core skills of communication, literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology. Good transition arrangements ensure that learners are prepared well for the next phase in their education. Learners' moral and social development is promoted very well and their spiritual and cultural development is good.

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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	*
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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and teaching assistants know the learners extremely well and they are able to ensure that tasks and activities are closely matched to the needs and interests of each individual learner. Good teaching ensures that learners enjoy lessons and make good progress in their learning and personal development. Questioning is used to effectively gauge learners' understanding and good use of visual symbols, manual signing and electronic devices enhances communication and makes lessons very inclusive. In the best lessons teachers exploit opportunities for learners to develop their senses and motor skills using a multi-sensory approach to learning. Teachers use assessment information well to identify the next small steps in learning and in most cases they provide learners with good feedback so that they understand the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve their learning.

Teachers and teaching assistants generally work in partnership to meet the very individualised needs of the learners. In the best lessons, teaching assistants are used effectively as supporters of learning and the teacher facilitates the team rather than dominating the lesson for much of the time.

The curriculum is carefully designed and very relevant to the learners' diverse needs. It is particularly effective in promoting learners' personal development. Specialist provision for learners who have particular needs, including those who have visual or hearing impairment, ensures that they are not disadvantaged. There is a good range of enrichment opportunities that include use of the local environment and a variety

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

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of school clubs. Learners value the opportunities to undertake practical activities and particularly enjoy growing plants as part of the 'green fingers' project. Learners have the opportunity to participate in a broad range of challenging physical activities which include swimming, sailing and gliding.

Excellent arrangements for the care and well-being of learners make a strong contribution to their enjoyment of school and the good progress that they make. The school is a very calm and welcoming environment where all learners, regardless of their background or ability, are valued and enabled to achieve. Learning and development are closely monitored and reviewed regularly and the school adopts a very effective multi-agency approach to supporting learners and to help overcome barriers to learning. Learners are kept safe and there are comprehensive risk assessments for the many different aspects of the school's work including therapy, physical handling and the impact of medical conditions. Learners say that the adults who care for them are very approachable and that they are able to make informed choices because they get the excellent advice and guidance that they need.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders provide good leadership and management. They are supported by a strong team of capable teachers and support staff who share a common sense of purpose and who feel that their contributions are valued. Systems and procedures implemented to monitor the school's work provide senior leaders with a clear picture of strengths and areas for development. The school takes a lead role in developing partnerships, which not only benefit its own learners but also support teachers and learners in other schools and settings. For example, the recently opened MIDAS Centre, (Meadowfield Inclusion Development and Support Centre) is a new initiative based at Meadowfield that makes training for parents, carers and practitioners in the Swale area more accessible.

Relationships with parents and carers are excellent and they are encouraged and enabled to be fully engaged with their children's learning. The governing body supports the school well and ensures that statutory duties are met. Although governance is good overall, members of the governing body accept that in the past they have not been sufficiently focused on learners' progress and this has limited their ability to rigorously challenge the school to improve further. This is a very

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inclusive school where effective steps are taken to promote equality of opportunity. Leaders have been particularly successful in promoting community cohesion within the school and its local community and this has resulted in a very cohesive community. A good example of this engagement with the local community is the community mentors who work closely with the school.

The school regularly reviews its exemplary safeguarding arrangements and ensures learners and all those who work at or visit the school are kept safe.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in relation to their starting points and abilities. Teachers and teaching assistants closely monitor progress in all areas of learning and personal development. They use assessment information to plan suitable activities that enable children to explore their own senses, abilities and their environment. There is a good mix of child-initiated and adult-guided learning so children develop the ability to make choices and cooperate with others. Adults are diligent in ensuring children’s safety. Policies and procedures to promote well-being and personal development are applied consistently and effectively. Assessment is accurate and children’s experiences and achievements are recorded systematically and communicated to parents and carers regularly. The Early Years Foundation Stage is well organised and provision is regularly reviewed. Leaders and managers have been successful in creating a positive atmosphere for learning and development.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

The sixth form is experiencing a period of change. Students generally make satisfactory progress from a wide range of starting points. They develop mature and sensible attitudes to the life-skills development opportunities they receive. Although students make a contribution to their own and the wider community, opportunities are missed for them to adopt leadership responsibilities and be good role models within the school.

Provision in the sixth form is responding to the changing needs of students and the school has sought to establish courses that lead to appropriate accreditation. Planning and development for these changes are good but implementation is not fully embedded and there remains some variation in how assessment information is used to monitor progress on the different courses of study. Consequently, some students know what their targets are but are unsure about their current progress. Leaders and managers have worked hard to create an ambitious vision for the sixth form but they have had limited success in communicating this vision effectively. Although monitoring of the sixth form takes place it is not sufficiently robust to ensure that leaders and managers have an entirely accurate view of performance. It is not evident that there are sufficiently strong links between monitoring, evaluation and development planning.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire were very pleased with their child’s experiences at the school. Those

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who provided written comments spoke very highly of the quality of support that they and their children receive. A few parents and carers felt that they would like to have more help in supporting their children's learning and a similar proportion expressed concerns about sixth form issues. Inspectors explored these concerns and their findings are included in the report above.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Meadowfield 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 64 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 214 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	45	70	17	27	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	47	73	15	23	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	42	66	19	30	2	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	59	19	30	4	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	43	67	15	23	3	5	1	2
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	41	64	15	23	7	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	56	22	34	3	5	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)	33	52	20	31	5	8	1	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	38	59	21	33	4	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	58	20	31	4	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	55	23	36	5	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	34	53	24	38	4	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	37	58	21	33	1	2	1	2

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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:	<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 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.

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.



7 October 2011

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Meadowfield School, Sittingbourne, ME10 4NL

Thank you for being so kind and helpful when we visited your school. My particular thanks go to all of you who took time to fill out our questionnaire or to talk to us about your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and seeing how well you work. We found that yours is a good school. You work hard in lessons and make good progress in your learning and development. We were pleased to see that you enjoy school and you told us you feel very safe. The school is particularly good at making sure you are well cared for. It was good to hear about all the different activities you are involved in. Your teachers and the other adults who help you know you very well and they work very hard to make your lessons interesting and relevant.

We have asked the school to do some things to make it even better.

- We would like the adults who run the school to let you know exactly how the 16 to 19 unit is going to change and develop. We would also like them to make sure that they check carefully and regularly so they know what is working well and what needs to be improved in the unit.
- We would like the teachers and the teaching assistants to work even more closely as a team to make sure you get exactly the right help and support that you need.

I am sure that you will want to help make your school an even better place for learning.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector

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